

FI20H 529 Dickie Coursey

BRENT LEWIS: So my name is Brent Lewis. Today is May 7th, 2024. And we're interviewing for the Watermen's Story Swap. Clifton Richard Coursey, better known to everybody as Dickie. This is a special interview for me. He is family. Not only is he Josh's, the videographer's, uncle, he is my brother-in-law, married to my sister Norma. So a special interview. Dickie, do we have permission to record?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:00:27] [both speaking-unclear] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Very good. I might ask you some questions that I know the answer to, but tell me a little bit about your background of when and where were you born?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:00:40] Well, I born in Easton Hospital, but I lived in Buzzardville at first... down in Chester, you know... for, I guess, 15 years. And then we moved in Harborview until I graduated my high school. And then I went to Vietnam. And then after that, it wasn't long after that, I got married to your sister. (laughter)

BRENT LEWIS: Lucky you.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:01:04] Yeah.

M: Why do they call it Buzzardville?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:01:06] I guess always because there's a lot of buzzards around. It was that back in the day.

BRENT LEWIS: Actual real buzzards?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:01:11] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Tell me a little bit about your parents. Who were they? What was your family like?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:01:18] My father, actually he worked on the ferry in the beginning. Then he... then he worked on the Bay Bridge. He was a toll sergeant. And he worked on the water part-time when he wasn't doing that. And my mother, she started out in a shirt factory, and then she went to Nationwide Insurance. I think she retired from there.

BRENT LEWIS: Your dad retired from working on the bridge?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:01:42] Yeah. He retired young, and then he went on the water full-time after that, pretty much.

BRENT LEWIS: Doing... what did he do on the water? Oyster crab?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:01:50] Actually, he went oystering with us some. With me and Mike Gardner.

BRENT LEWIS: So after he retired?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:01:57] Yeah, he caught oysters for us and other people.

BRENT LEWIS: Mm-hmm. You were born after... just before the Bay Bridge was built. Three or four years before the Bay Bridge.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:05] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: So you don't remember a time prior to the bridge?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:09] No, uh-uh.

BRENT LEWIS: Your parents were, like, kind of the last generation to grow up...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:13] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: ... around here without the Bay Bridge.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:15] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: You grew up here on Kent Island. What was the Kent Island of your youth like? What was Kent Island itself like when you were growing up?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:25] It was pretty nice.

BRENT LEWIS: How so?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:28] I don't know. There... we'd all go outside and play together. I grew up with cousins. All the cousins were around, and local friends. Most of them boys were a little bit older than me, but we always got along.

BRENT LEWIS: That was in Chester...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:46] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: ... and in Harbor View?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:48] Well, Harbor View, I was pretty much getting ready to drive it. Yeah, but mostly Chester.

BRENT LEWIS: You were [both speaking-unclear] by the time you were [both speaking-unclear]...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:02:53] Yeah, mostly Chester. Yeah. Outside, like playing ball, and doing all the good things.

BRENT LEWIS: Running around, right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:00] Whatever... where we grew up... where I grew up at, I actually rode my bicycle from my house down to Kent Narrows and seen one car. (laughs) And that's about two miles.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow. Now you can't go 30 feet...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:15] No, you'll get run over.

BRENT LEWIS: You'd get in traffic. So where did you go to school? Here on Kent Island?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:20] First year, there at the little Chester school behind where Rite-Aid is. Then I went up Stevensville, up here. They built the new elementary school then. It's still there, I think.

BRENT LEWIS: The first school you went to, it was in an old school house?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:34] Yeah, the old schoolhouse.

BRENT LEWIS: In Chester there, on...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:37] Right. Right behind...

BRENT LEWIS: ... the corner of Dominion Road?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:39] Uh-huh.

BRENT LEWIS: A lot of generations went to a lot of grades there. Was it just the elementary school when you were there?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:46] Yeah, it was four grades I think. First and second were together, and then third and fourth were together.

BRENT LEWIS: And then you moved to the new school here in Stevensville?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:03:54] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: Any of your teachers stand out? Anybody?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:00] Yeah. Ms. Jones, and Ms. Benton. Ms. Benton spanked me a few times.

BRENT LEWIS: I can't imagine.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:08] (laughs) She was mean.

BRENT LEWIS: [both speaking-unclear] spanked you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:11] Oh, well, you remember.

BRENT LEWIS: (laughs)

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:13] It wasn't nothing bad. We almost thought it was fun. It didn't hurt much.

BRENT LEWIS: To get in trouble?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:18] Yeah. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: Did you go to high school on Kent Island?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:23] Yeah, Stevensville High School
for... till 10th grade.

BRENT LEWIS: And then [both speaking-unclear]?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:27] I went to Queen Anne's two years.

BRENT LEWIS: So you were one of the first classes to graduate
from the...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:33] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: ... the combined school?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:34] I was supposed to be first, but I
failed in the eighth grade because I started looking at
girls and fooling around. That kind of stuff.

BRENT LEWIS: That'll do it.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:41] Yeah. Yep.

BRENT LEWIS: And when you went to school on Kent Island, it
was still segregated?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:47] Yeah, the last year they brought
a couple in. And we all got along pretty well. I think we
got along more back then than they do now. I do, but
that's... that's a...

BRENT LEWIS: No, that's interesting.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:04:59] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: I mean, that's your perception of what it was
like. Even after you... and after schools integrated, even
the last couple years when you went to Queen Anne's?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:05:07] Yeah. Well, you know, it's more news media now than... you know more what's going on, but I didn't see that much problem with it, [both speaking-unclear]...

BRENT LEWIS: Do you think the family connection is also a big difference? And a lot of these kids, both Black and white, had families that had been around for a long while, and kind of interacted...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:05:22] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: ... with each other.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:05:25] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: How did you earn money as a kid or a teenager?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:05:31] When I was probably 11, 12 years old, I used to walk across the highway and set muskrat traps during the wintertime. I loved it.

BRENT LEWIS: What did you love about it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:05:40] I don't know. Just going out in the marsh and being out... you know, finding a good place, and setting a trap and catching one in there.

BRENT LEWIS: What time of year would you go muskrating?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:05:49] From... oh, that was only a couple months. January the 1st till the end of March, I think it was.

BRENT LEWIS: And how many could you catch, like in a season?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:05:57] I start out with a... I got a dozen muskrat traps for Christmas, and I was happy as I could be. And I started out with that. And I think the first night I set them, I had nine rats. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: That's a good way to start.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:10] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: How does a muskrat trap work?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:14] Well, I had foot traps a little bit when I used to go with my father, but most of the time we had what they called conibears. You squeeze it, and pull it out, and set the little trigger on it.

BRENT LEWIS: And where would you set those traps?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:27] In a lead close to where it'd go underneath the marsh somehow or another.

BRENT LEWIS: Mm-hmm. And that would be on the marsh which is the north side of 53 now?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:35] Yeah, Piney Creek.

BRENT LEWIS: So the highway was here.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:39] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: You would cross the highway and go over to Piney Creek?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:41] There wasn't no cars on it at all. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: Even back then?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:46] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: So when you would catch a muskrat, how would you prepare them for market, and who would you sell them to?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:06:54] I used to skin them. And you just take them to Otto Cable, his name was. And Tommy Cable was his son. You know him, I think.

BRENT LEWIS: Mm-hmm.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:07:04] And sell him the hides. And most of the time, the meats, you... we could get rid of them pretty easy.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you remember what kind of money you made for him, or how much?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:07:13] I don't know. I can't remember for sure. Maybe it was five dollars a hide. Something like that.

BRENT LEWIS: And probably that was pretty good money for a kid?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:07:20] Yeah, it was spending money. It was spending money.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you do that all through high school, or did you start working on the water or anything?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:07:27] Yeah. I picked clams for a lot of guys around. My uncle Jimmy was the first one, Jaime's father. I think I was about 12 years old then. I used to

wake up no problem. And he... I'd always wait and see his lights come on, and then I'd walk on over and get in his truck.

BRENT LEWIS: Was he really the first person that kind of introduced you to the sea food... the working on the water?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:07:51] Yeah, I think so.

BRENT LEWIS: And you also, your grandfather, John Coursey, right...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:07:56] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: ... ran a picking... a packing house?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:07:58] A packing house, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah, down the Kent Narrows.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:08:00] Kent Narrows. Right where, you know, United Shellfish is.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you have any memories of that place?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:08:06] A little teeny bit. I told you one time about I snuck in the back of his old truck, and they drove me down there. (laughs) And I... he always had straw or hay in the back of it. And I was hiding in there, and the next thing I know, a big old Black guy come out there and looked at me. Then he walked inside and said, "John, there's a little boy in your truck." (laughs) And he come out and got me and took me.

BRENT LEWIS: What kind of man was your grandfather?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:08:33] Oh, he was... what I remember, he died when I was seven. He was a good, old guy. He wasn't that old, though. He was 59, I think.

BRENT LEWIS: What was the name of his business? Do you remember?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:08:44] He was John W. Coursey.

BRENT LEWIS: John W. Coursey?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:08:47] I have to show you sometime. I got one of his oyster cans.

BRENT LEWIS: Really?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:08:52] It's a big one, four gallon, and it has a bronze plaque on the front and has his name and number and all that on it.

BRENT LEWIS: That's very cool. Where'd you get that from, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:01] Art Oertel.

BRENT LEWIS: From Harris Crab House. Harris [both speaking-unclear]...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:04] Him? Yeah. Well, at his house he collects stuff like that.

BRENT LEWIS: Uh-huh. And that's cool he made sure that you got that.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:10] Yeah, he did. He called me and made sure I got that.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you remember Kent Narrows much? What was that area like when you were a kid?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:19] There was a lot of shucking houses and all back then. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: When he died, did they... anybody carry on the house, with the packing house, or did...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:26] My uncle did for a while.

BRENT LEWIS: Uncle Jimmy?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:29] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: So you used to pick clams. You did that through high school?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:33] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you do anything else, like crab or oyster, with other people?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:38] No, not really. Winter time, I was playing sports in school.

BRENT LEWIS: And you... what year did you grad... what sports did you play?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:47] Soccer and baseball.

BRENT LEWIS: What year did you graduate?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:09:51] Sixty-eight. 1968.

BRENT LEWIS: June, 1968. And when'd you get your draft notice for Vietnam?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:00] I went to Chesapeake College for 30 days. Something like that. And I knew I couldn't do it because it was a class at 2:00 in the morning, a class at 2:00 in the afternoon. I couldn't work. So I quit that, and I got my draft notice come in the mail on Christmas Eve.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:17] Nineteen sixty-eight? Nineteen sixty-eight, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: When did you actually leave for, like, boot camp?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:24] March of '69.

BRENT LEWIS: And you were in Vietnam by?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:29] I guess it was 1st of October of...

BRENT LEWIS: How long were you over there?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:33]... '69. It wasn't... it was over a year, because I extended it so when I come home I could get out. And I would be out...

BRENT LEWIS: So you wouldn't have to do reserves?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:42] Right. You wouldn't have to go home on weekends or nothing like that.

BRENT LEWIS: You counted out the days and...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:46] Yeah, yeah...

BRENT LEWIS: -- that was either 30 days longer here, or 2 years there.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:50] It was, you know, it was over five months I would have had to do time over here.

BRENT LEWIS: You wanted to be done with it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:10:56] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: When you were over there and thought about coming home, did you kind of have a plan or an idea as to what you were going to do, or it was more like, "Just get me home"?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:11:05] Mostly just get me home.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you figure at all that you were going to work, or go back on the water?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:11:13] Well, I did just pick clams for a while, and I wanted to get a boat.

BRENT LEWIS: When you were... you talked a little bit about your mentors, and I want to talk about both those guys. When did you start... I guess Freddie Baxter. You worked for him at some point?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:11:30] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Who is Freddie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:11:32] Mr. B's Seafood. He... we grew up together. I played... we played with each other when we were little kids, and, you know, and I worked for him. When he graduated from high school, he had got a boat, and

he went down... we went down to Potomac. Down around Piney Point down there, and clammed. And I spent the summer down there. That was pretty cool.

BRENT LEWIS: He's a little older than you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:11:54] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And you spent the summer... was that before or after you got home from Vietnam?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:11:59] Before...

BRENT LEWIS: Before, and that was when you were [both speaking-unclear], right.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:11:59]... that was when I was still in high school. I was still in high school, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And Freddie's dad was Billy Baxter, right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:05] No.

BRENT LEWIS: No, he wasn't? It was his...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:06] No, no. That's his older brother.

BRENT LEWIS: That's his older brother.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:10] Joseph Baxter -- Joe Buck.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you know well Joe... well, obviously you worked around Joe Buck, but he was active for a long time.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:16] Yeah... no, he was a character. He was a...

BRENT LEWIS: How so?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:20] Pappy, we called him pappy.

BRENT LEWIS: Was he funny?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:23] Yeah, because he talked real slow. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: Is that where his nickname came from?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:29] I don't know. All the kids called him pappy. That's how I remember.

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, that's funny. And so that was Joe Buck and then Billy was Freddie's older brother?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:36] Yeah, oldest brother. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Oldest brother. How many of them were? Was it a bunch of them?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:40] Two brothers and a sister... and, oh, two sisters. Excuse me. Robin's younger.

BRENT LEWIS: Freddie... and Robin's younger than you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:49] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Or about your age...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:50] No, she's younger.

BRENT LEWIS: ... or a little less. Freddie, what, did he take you on his boat clamming...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:56] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What'd he teach you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:12:59] Well, he'd like to get started early, and I do that, too. The earlier you're supposed to.

Mike Gardner was the same way. They always like to get that little jump.

BRENT LEWIS: The first one out?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:10] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: It's possible. Who is Mike Gardner?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:14] Well, I worked for him. I dove for oysters for him for about five years.

BRENT LEWIS: Definitely want to get into that a little bit.

First, though, what was your first boat that you bought?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:26] I had a Privateer when they first came out. And I used to crab-pot out of it.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you run a lot of crab-pots?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:34] Nah, a couple hundred.

BRENT LEWIS: How long did you do that, Dick?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:37] I don't remember now. Five years or so.

M : [00:13:40] What is considered a lot? Because a couple hundred sounds like a lot.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:43] It's a lot for one person, I guess.

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, right. Because that's a... pretty much a 24/7 job too, isn't it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:51] Not as much back then as it is now.

BRENT LEWIS: Because of the quantity of pots that they fish?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:13:57] Well, somewhat that, but they get so dirty so quick nowadays. We didn't have that much trouble back then.

BRENT LEWIS: Is a lot of work, then, now put into the maintenance of them?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:07] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: More so than it used to be?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:00] Yeah.

M: Wait, is that due to the Bay changes? Like they get more grimed up?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:13] Yeah. I don't know what it is that causes it all, but... because I haven't done it since probably the '80s. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: How many boats have you owned, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:23] Five.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow. What is the current boat that you have?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:30] Norma Lynn.

BRENT LEWIS: Huh, I wonder who that's named after.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:33] Yeah. She said that, "You've had five boats and I finally got one named after me."

BRENT LEWIS: Well, you bought boats probably that already were named. Right? And...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:42] Yeah, yeah. Well, this one was,
too.

BRENT LEWIS: Traditionally, you don't always change the name.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:46] No.

BRENT LEWIS: Right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:14:48] If it's named after a woman, then
you better not... it's not... I guess it ain't good to have
some other woman's name on your boat. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: Makes sense. What is that boat? How long is it?
What kind of motor do you have in it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:15:01] 42-foot by 12.

BRENT LEWIS: How long have you had the Norma Lynn?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:15:06] I've only had it three years.

BRENT LEWIS: Where'd you buy it, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:15:09] Unfortunately, the guy passed.
He had an accident, and I knew about it. And I asked my
cousin if he would... you know, when they get themselves
straight, would he ask to say that I'm very interested in
it. And then, and there it was.

BRENT LEWIS: Where was it? Where was the boat?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:15:27] It was down Wye, Wye Landing.
And they had to bring it up, because he was using it to
oyster in.

BRENT LEWIS: What type of work have you done on the water?

Like, I know you've dove for oysters, I know you've clammed. You've also crab-potted. Have you eeled?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:15:47] No, hm-mmm.

BRENT LEWIS: What's the favorite thing that you've done in your career out of all those things I just named, or...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:15:54] Probably digging white clams.

BRENT LEWIS: Why is that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:15:56] I don't know. I just like doing it. And now, crabbing is right now...trotlining.

BRENT LEWIS: Is part of the fun, like, the catch? Like, I know the money obviously is important, but is there a thrill also when you have a day digging white clams, and?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:16:14] Yeah, if you do good. If you beat somebody else, (laughs) and that kind of deal. But nowadays, I just like it so much when you wait, and when you get out there and you see the sun coming up.

BRENT LEWIS: That's the best part?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:16:25] The older you get, the more appreciate that kind of stuff.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah, because when you're young, you probably aren't thinking about the next sun-up too much, but as you get older...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:16:35] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What's your least favorite thing that you've done on the water?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:16:40] Diving was fun sometimes, but there toward the end, it was pretty... I hated it.

BRENT LEWIS: Why?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:16:46] I don't know, because it was just... I was getting older, I guess, and it was just a lot of stress. A lot of work.

BRENT LEWIS: Tell me about diving for oysters. What's that job like?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:16:56] It's cold. Most of the time during the winter time, the water is cold. We had to go in them old dry suits, and they wasn't dry. They got wet.
(laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: This was like the 1980s? The '80s?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:08] Yeah, that was in the '80s.

BRENT LEWIS: And how long did you do it, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:11] Oh, I don't know whether I did it 10 years or not, but it was close to 10 years.

BRENT LEWIS: So you were mostly with Mike Gardner at that point?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:20] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: You were diving for him. So he's captain of the... he's on the boat, he's up top.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:24] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And you go down?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:26] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And what, do you take a basket with you and pick it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:29] A crate, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And how do you let them know that you've got a crate full and ready to pull them up?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:34] Give them a little extra tug.

BRENT LEWIS: Was that method of catching oysters more productive? Did you catch more oysters doing that than you would have?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:43] Yeah. Yeah, we did.

BRENT LEWIS: Tonging, or?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:45] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Because that's... tonging is the more traditional method of catching oysters yearlong.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:50] We very seldom had any trouble catching our limit back then.

BRENT LEWIS: What would the limit have been?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:54] Fifty bushel.

BRENT LEWIS: Per person?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:56] No...

BRENT LEWIS: For a boat?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:57]... a boat, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: So two of you, 25 per person.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:17:59] Two a boat, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: If he had been alone hand-tonging, he could only catch 25, right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:03] Right, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And so there was no problem every day, all season long, catching [both speaking-unclear]?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:09] I didn't say no problem, but most of the time, it wasn't. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Right. Better days than bad.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:15] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Probably, so.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:17] Some Saturday mornings it was hard.

BRENT LEWIS: Why?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:20] Because I had a hangover sometimes. (laughter)

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, that explains it.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:27] Yeah.

M: Speaking of working on boats, I meant to ask this earlier about your dad. What did he do on the ferry boat?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:35] I'm not really sure.

M: So you never... you didn't get a chance to talk to him?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:38] No, not a whole lot. I'm not really sure.

BRENT LEWIS: Because he was pretty much working on the bridge...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:43] He got...

BRENT LEWIS: ... by the time you were aware of him.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:44] He got on there after he'd come home from World War II, which wasn't that much... that many years. In between that, and I guess it was, what? It was...

BRENT LEWIS: Five, six years.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:18:54]... '45. And then they had the bridge built, and they went there. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: A lot of the guys who worked on the water also worked helping to build the bridge. Right? Did the older guys... the potters?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:19:05] Yeah, I think some of them did. Yeah. Especially the second bridge, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever done anything like that? Like done work with... out on the water that wasn't necessarily working, like, seafood?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:19:16] I done pile driving with McClain Contracting. We built a couple bridges.

BRENT LEWIS: That's a big company.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:19:23] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you remember any of the bridges where you worked?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:19:26] Well, I didn't work all of the new Cambridge bridge, but I worked some of it. And we built a new bridge over Denton there. Two bridges in Denton.

BRENT LEWIS: What was your job with that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:19:40] We'd pick up the pylon and set them in the right place, and then, you know, to get on and drive the bow. A lot of other work, too. Setting steel, and all other kinds of stuff.

BRENT LEWIS: So a crew. A construct...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:19:51] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: A construction crew. You're one of the few guys that we've talked to during this project who has actually had someone in their family younger also go on to work on the water. You said your son Deny works on the water as well?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:04] Yeah, mm-hmm.

BRENT LEWIS: How has your family been involved in your work? Like, you know, did you take Deny out as a young kid?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:16] When I was crab-potting out, yeah, he used to go with me as much as he could. He loved

it. He was, I guess, four or five years old he went and started going some. Not every day then, but the older he got, the more he went.

BRENT LEWIS: Now, you crab in the summer, but you take the winter off. Does Deny crab in the summer? Is that what he does?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:35] Mm-hmm.

BRENT LEWIS: And then oysters in the winter?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:37] Yeah, he hand-tongs it now. Now, that's what he's doing.

BRENT LEWIS: And he, does he have this own boat now?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:42] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What's he working on? What's his boat?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:45] The in upper 30s somewhere.

BRENT LEWIS: It keeps it at the slips at Kent Narrows?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:48] Right now it is, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that where you keep the Norma Lynn as well?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:52] Yeah, uh-huh.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you always pretty much kept your boat at Kent Narrows, or have there been other ports?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:20:56] Yeah. There are... it used to go... be down at Kent Point.

BRENT LEWIS: At the marina down there?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:21:01] Yeah, yeah. When I was clamming
a lot. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Because they had a better location to get out...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:21:05] Closer to the clams, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Right. Who was the... was that John Lasau?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:21:11] John Lasant, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Lasant was his name. I kind of remember him.

Who was he? Did he run the marina, or was he another
waterman?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:21:19] He bought it from little Herman
Thompson, and then he fixed it up to what it is now. He
was a real good guy.

BRENT LEWIS: You guys were buddies.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:21:28] Uh-huh.

BRENT LEWIS: When you look back over the years, certainly
every sunrise is special, but do you have any days, like,
that you remember as your best times working the water?
Either because of the success that you got from working, or
something special happening, or something that comes over
you? Like, "Oh, that was a good day"? And conversely, do
you have any bad days? Do you look back and go, "Damn that
was a bad day"?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:21:58] You make it through them the bad days, and look forward to the good days. I don't know.

There's always some bad days, and always some good days.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you all...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:07] Feast or famine. That's the water business is.

BRENT LEWIS: Feast or famine?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:10] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: You also kind of have to be good at a lot of skills.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:14] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:16] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: You kind of got be a... at least a decent mechanic?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:21] A half-assed mechanic, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Carpenter sometimes?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:24] No, I'm not very good at that.

BRENT LEWIS: That's your... that's one of your... that's where you lack a little bit?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:30] Yeah, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Well, when you have carpentry work that needs done, where do you go?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:36] Down to Sandy Thompson's,
usually.

BRENT LEWIS: Are there fewer and fewer people who work on
workboats?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:42] Yes, it is.

BRENT LEWIS: How does that challenge your job? How does
that...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:46] Well, I don't... I got a
fiberglass boat now. You really don't... I can do probably
everything that needs to be done on it.

BRENT LEWIS: Most guys have fiberglass now?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:22:55] Nowadays, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And so that's hard to find, is somebody who works
on wood boats... wooden boats?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:23:01] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Are there many old boats out there still working?
Like old wooden boats?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:23:06] Yeah, there's some... there's
enough around.

BRENT LEWIS: With most of the fiberglass boats, when would
they... like, how long have they been mostly fiberglass?
The last 20 years? The last 30 years?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:23:17] Twenty, maybe. A little... you know, building up a little over the years. Little by little.

BRENT LEWIS: Are there still local boat builders?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:23:25] Hm, I'm trying to think. Not right in this area, I don't think.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you ever had a close call weather-wise, or a boat on fire, or any kind of the crazy things Josh and I have heard over the last year? (laughs)

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:23:40] Yeah... no, I didn't... I can't say I had a boat on fire, but I went across the bay and come back on some scary days. I'd stay in the back. I wouldn't be up in the cabin.

BRENT LEWIS: Why is that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:23:52] Because I didn't like to see water break over the cabin on it. (laughs) And you try to go along... if you're going with it, when you try and go along enough... fast enough where... because you're rolling up and down, and it don't come over the stern, too. Because that's probably worse.

BRENT LEWIS: Would that happen mainly like when a storm comes up out of nowhere?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:24:12] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And, like, it's dark on you suddenly, (laughs)
and you're in bad weather.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:24:18] I had a smaller boat with a clam
rig on it, and it wouldn't ride the waves too good. That's
what I was scared of.

BRENT LEWIS: What about like freeze-ups, and that kind of
stuff? You've experienced some of those over the years.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:24:29] I dove under the ice, a few
times. I've done good, but it don't make good sense doing
that. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: What do you... would you cut a hole and...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:24:38] Just take the boat out... or, you
know, break ice to get the boat out, and you can break
enough around just to get you in the water, and you go
diving for it.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow, under. So finding the hole to get back out
is paramount?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:24:50] Well, the boat... a big boat
could break the ice, but not great. But enough for you to
work in.

BRENT LEWIS: Where would you work? Eastern Bay? Chester
River?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:24:58] Eastern Bay, mostly. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Uh-huh. When you were diving like that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:01] Yeah, it'd be a boat... one boat would go out ahead of the pack, and four or five of us would go, you know, diving in the general area.

BRENT LEWIS: Do watermen typically help each other like that? Kind of look out for each other?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:13] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: It's still competitive though, right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:16] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Everybody wants to be top dog, but if somebody's in a jam, do you help each other out?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:22] All the time, if you can. Yeah.

M: How cold did it get? Diving in those suits, you said they leaked.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:28] Man, if you... yeah, you get wet, but if you were busy, you didn't think about it as much.

M: I mean, was it...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:34] My hands used to get really cold sometimes. Hands and feet, mostly.

M: Was it a shock going on, or was it over time while you were down there?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:40] Over time that that little leak would get you, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Other than your mentors, Dickie, who were some of the best watermen you've known in your career? When you look back at some of the older guys that you looked up to.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:25:50] Some of the older guys? I don't know. I guess Joe Coleman, and Barry Coleman, and Bobby Larry, them guys. They were always real good watermen. They could it... you know, they would do it all. They had clammed when they had to. Washed their crab-pot out big time.

BRENT LEWIS: So their skills, and their work ethic?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:26:11] Their work ethic, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: You looked up to that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:26:13] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Because they were willing to do... to try anything?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:26:19] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And also worked hard, I guess?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:26:21] Yeah. And there was others, too.

BRENT LEWIS: Those older guys, when you look back on that, has... have the challenges changed for a waterman today, versus perhaps when you were younger? Or those older guys that, you know, the way that they did things is kind of the same, or has it changed a lot?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:26:45] I don't know how much it's changed, but I don't think there's as many challenges now as there was then.

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, it's easier now, you think?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:26:54] Yeah, because of the equipment for one thing.

BRENT LEWIS: How has the equipment changed?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:26:57] Everything's up to date more. Just like cars and trucks, everything's better now.

BRENT LEWIS: More easily [both speaking-unclear]?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:27:03] Boats are better. Everything's better.

BRENT LEWIS: Is it... would it be easier for somebody now to learn to work the water than it was 40, 50 years ago?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:27:14] If they had a good guy to get on with in the beginning, yes.

BRENT LEWIS: Because they don't necessarily need the skills that they used [both speaking-unclear]?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:27:22] They can get skills from a... you know, get a... have a mentor, or whatever. Go out with somebody who's a good, hard worker. Learn from that.

BRENT LEWIS: It's less important, though, to... I mean, you have the technical equipment now... GPSs, and fish finders, and all that kind of stuff to help. Right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:27:41] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: That you didn't have before.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:27:42] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: So you had to learn all that in the past.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:27:45] Yeah. You'd have to eyeball areas and find out where you were and all that. Now, on your depth-finders, you can see when you're right on the edge. They tell you if... sometimes, you can tell if it's oysters on the bottom.

BRENT LEWIS: Really?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:27:57] Or fish. All that kind of stuff. Don't show you crabs, though. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, is that right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:28:05] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: (laughs) Where it slacks?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:28:08] You can see where the bottom's different for an oyster. Like if there's shells on the bottom, anyhow.

BRENT LEWIS: Would it help you crabbing, though, to, I mean, to know where the edge...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:28:18] Oh, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: ... drops off?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:28:19] Especially in the fall, and most of the summer, too. Because that's... usually you catch... do better on the edges.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you ever find anything interesting, amazing, unexplainable? Have you ever dug up any artifacts that were special to you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:28:36] I got some jugs, a few jugs. A couple shark's teeth, big shark's teeth. And I got some axe heads, and stuff like that. Pipes. I did have one pipe, I probably shouldn't have sold it. I got 800 dollars for it.

BRENT LEWIS: Like a colonial pipe?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:28:55] No, it was like a peace pipe, I think. It was only about half of it, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Indian? Native American? Wow. How did you dredge that... did you pull that up on a dredge?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:05] On a clam rig, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: A clam rig. All that stuff pretty much come up on a clam rig?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:09] Yeah, mm-hmm.

BRENT LEWIS: And some of these guys have really big collections of stuff.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:15] Yeah, more than I do. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that because they kept more, found more?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:22] Been doing it longer, maybe...

BRENT LEWIS: Been doing it longer. Ever see anything
unexplainable out there? Some of these guys have told us
they've seen leprechauns [unclear]. (laughs)

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:31] No, I can't say I've ever seen a
leprechaun.

BRENT LEWIS: (laughs) Anything odd? Any kind of weather
events? Cyclones, water spouts, any of that kind of stuff?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:44] I've seen a water spout, but it
was a ways away. I figured I was safe from it.

BRENT LEWIS: Have you had other on-land jobs?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:54] Besides pile driving?

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:29:56] The winter time now, part-time I
drive... (laughs) I deliver auto parts just to get me out
of the house.

BRENT LEWIS: During the winter?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:30:03] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And are you... and you're getting ready to go
crabbing?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:30:06] Yeah, just finished up the boat
today.

BRENT LEWIS: When you say finished up the boat, what does that
mean?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:30:11] Painting it. That part, and then I'll get to put the dipper and the lines, and all on there, this week or next week, or whenever.

BRENT LEWIS: What's the limit now for crabbers when you go out by yourself like that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:30:24] I don't know. You catch what you... all you can right now.

BRENT LEWIS: Is it on and off? What about later in the season?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:30:30] I think it's a female limit later on. It don't usually affect trotliners or nothing.

BRENT LEWIS: How much trotline do you run, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:30:40] I had to cut back because it was hard to get it all done. I got between 4,000 and 4,200 feet. I used to do 4,800, but it's hard to do all that. And they're getting heavier, too.

BRENT LEWIS: Why is that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:30:54] It takes more time, and I'm getting older.

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, yeah. (laughs) It's not that they're really heavier. They're getting heavier to you. (laughs)

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:01] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you use for bait now?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:05] Razor clams.

BRENT LEWIS: How do you bait the line?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:09] You put them in a bag, and go on a snooze. And I got mine about every 12 foot. Some of them have them closer, and some of them are even doing it further apart and running more line nowadays. So I just keep the way I've been doing it.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you still dip crabs?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:27] No.

BRENT LEWIS: Nobody really does that anymore?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:28] Oh, yeah, there's a few.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah? What do you do instead? How do you get the crabs...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:33] I got a dipper that hangs over the side of the boat. I'm left-handed, too, and that makes it harder to dip, unless I moved everything on the other side of the boat.

M: I was going to ask if you if your steering control was...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:43] No.

M: ... on the same side.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:44] Yeah, because I don't have to dip. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: When does crab season run till, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:31:50] Oh, I usually go into October, or the very first of November up here.

BRENT LEWIS: What's the best part... what's the best time of year up here? When do you catch the most or the best crabs?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:02] Probably the middle of September and the 1st of October. Something like that.

BRENT LEWIS: Early fall?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:07] The best crabs and the most, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Who do you sell to?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:10] Mr. B. Freddie B. I'll still be able to sell there. They just ain't opening up the market.

BRENT LEWIS: So they're still distributing crabs out to restaurants and that kind of thing?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:23] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: That's a business that, historically, has been very important to this area. But there aren't a whole lot of people who sell. What, you got United Shellfish, you got Harris's. You got smaller companies...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:39] Yeah, there's a few more of them around now.

BRENT LEWIS: The smaller ones?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:41] The smaller ones, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you think that they... some of them that have their little front-yard markets sell to people who

have moved... like locals and people who have moved here.

Right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:54] Mm-hmm.

BRENT LEWIS: That's their market.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:32:56] Well, up here around this area, the traffic's so bad on Saturdays and Sundays, it's... they have to shut down. That's part of the thing going on too. After 12 o'clock, they have to shut down and nobody can get to them, or get away from them.

BRENT LEWIS: It makes it harder to keep a market when you get...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:33:13] Right.

BRENT LEWIS: ... your customers can't get to you.

M: And so you'd say that the changing demographics of Kent Island, and all the traffic has probably hurt business?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:33:19] Yep.

BRENT LEWIS: How does that affect your business? Does it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:33:24] I have... I usually try... if I work on Saturdays, I usually come in maybe a little bit earlier. So I make sure I get up here and go back... get out of here.

BRENT LEWIS: Be done before the traffic starts to collect.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:33:36] Yes.

BRENT LEWIS: Hey, Dickie, we're going to move on a little bit.

Now, I want to ask you some more general questions. What don't you... what do you think the general public doesn't understand about your job? Do you have any thoughts on that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:33:51] I think you guys have been helping out some, but people are more and more... or more and more, they understand what we're doing, and all, I think. Especially the people that move over here. Maybe some of them that live over there don't think so, or they don't understand, but there's more and more people that are starting to understand.

BRENT LEWIS: You think people have more interest in what you do?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:34:14] Yeah. Well, I think one other big thing is our Waterman's Association in Queen Anne's County is... and Talbot and Kent. They're starting to get... you know, people are getting... they do stuff where people get involved more. Like the Christmas tree lighting and all that good stuff.

BRENT LEWIS: It brings an awareness into the community about you guys.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:34:35] Right, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: But in the... historically, watermen haven't always been able to come together a lot. Right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:34:44] (laughs) Yeah. Yeah, old times. Yeah, the old time hand-tongers didn't like us divers.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:34:52] Oh, no.

BRENT LEWIS: They resented you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:34:53] Yeah, because we were doing better.

BRENT LEWIS: And they didn't want to move into that. Are there still a lot of people who dive, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:35:01] No. There's some, but not as many as it used to be. I can't... maybe a dozen of them up and down the Bay altogether now.

BRENT LEWIS: Really? Do you think that's because it's harder for them to make a living that way, or that it was kind of almost a fad? That, you know, time expired, and people just aren't interested in doing that part of it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:35:27] That's not it. I think it's the oysters aren't there, and they have a lot of sanctuaries where you're not allowed to work. And where they are allowed to work is mostly a hand-tong bottom. And then they started dredging down the Bay years ago a little bit, and they turned the bottom over real good, and they caught

oysters. Caught, you know, spat on them shells by doing that. And so now, they're working down the... that's where all of our dredgers got to go. Hand-tongers, too.

BRENT LEWIS: Is it important to turn the bottom over like that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:00] Yes, indeed.

BRENT LEWIS: What's it... why is it important?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:03] It cleans the shells up, so the spat will catch on to them.

BRENT LEWIS: And over time, the markets have changed. Right? Like, I mean, like for instance there's always kind of been a small eel market around here for bait if nothing else. But now, it's an international... they sell eels internationally. Right? Do you know much about that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:22] No. I heard...

BRENT LEWIS: [both speaking-unclear]

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:25]... I heard it's not that... yeah. I've heard it's not that good right now, but...

BRENT LEWIS: Why? What would make it bad?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:31] Troy Wilkins does it, and he said they just don't want them. He could sell the smaller eels for bait, fishing bait and all.

BRENT LEWIS: Wow. But the markets?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:41] It's overseas, most of it. Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: So that's part of the job too, right. You kind of have to be adaptable to what's being caught?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:50] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you think the future of the industry is, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:36:54] Well, I thought the oyster industry was going to go way down, but it's starting to pick up again, which is good. And crabbing, there's a lot of people crabbing. A lot of people. It's not that bad, I guess. There's some young people doing it.

M: Do you think the seafood population runs in natural cycles, or [both speaking-unclear]?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:37:13] Yeah, I think so. Yeah. If you have a... sometimes you have a real wet spring, and then a dry summer, sometimes that helps, or sometimes it hurts. Different things.

BRENT LEWIS: What do you think was the reasons that the oysters have come back in this cycle? Has there been specific reasons, or is it just a cycle?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:37:38] The cycle is... weather has something to do with it, I think. When it's wet and all, that helps kill diseases. When it's dry, you have a better spat catch, but also later on, you catch more diseases. We had that MSX come up here, and that's one of the reasons

why I started... I guess, quit diving. It killed a lot of oysters then. Big oysters.

BRENT LEWIS: Did they ever figure out why those diseases went through oysters [both speaking-unclear]?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:38:10] No, no. Not that I know of.

BRENT LEWIS: Has that...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:38:14] It's the weather cycle, though.

BRENT LEWIS: Has it subsided, or is disease still a big concern?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:38:17] Yeah, yeah. Some, but not as bad as it was, I don't believe.

BRENT LEWIS: How do wild oysters differ from planted oysters? Or is there a difference?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:38:28] It should be no difference. The only thing is they don't turn their bottom over, and they don't want nobody else to do it for them either.

BRENT LEWIS: They resist having that bottom turned over?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:38:37] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Even though it's pretty well-known that turning the bottom helps?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:38:46] (laughs) I'm afraid that some of them, you know, if that happened, they'd lose their job and they don't want that to happen.

BRENT LEWIS: Do regulations, and like the environmental changes... what have the biggest impacts on your job and the way you've done it? Have regulations been a help ever at all?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:39:08] They haven't hurt me none, because I'm small time, I guess. Some of the crab-potters maybe, and oystering too somewhat. But actually, it might help the oystering somewhat. Because they can't catch as many and they got more to go back for the next day.

BRENT LEWIS: Do watermen have that point of view more than they might have had historically?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:39:30] Yeah. Yeah, I think so.

BRENT LEWIS: That it's not just about today. It's also about tomorrow, a little bit?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:39:34] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that part of the way that water... the seafood industry can stay in business? Is that environmentally positive?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:39:47] Yeah, I think so. It don't affect me as much anymore (laughs) because, you know, I don't do as much as I used to.

BRENT LEWIS: When do you think you were most busy? When you were the most... made the most money working on the water?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:40:01] Probably...

BRENT LEWIS: Was that diving?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:40:02] Probably, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: How old were you then? You were in your 30s?

Maybe...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:40:07] Yeah, I think so. I think I'd done it up until I was around 40-ish.

BRENT LEWIS: And made good money at it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:40:13] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Would you consider... would you describe your life work, you know, in the water as having been overall a good life?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:40:27] I've never made a load of money doing it, but yes, it's been a good life.

BRENT LEWIS: You mentioned sunrises as being one of the parts you liked most. What have you also otherwise liked about being in the business?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:40:39] Oh, it's nice to be able to go out and all of a sudden hear the... you know, you start catching crabs, or it looks good for you one day, and a couple days. Of course, you always want to catch them.

BRENT LEWIS: Is being your own boss part of the equation?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:40:53] Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yes, and I never thought about that, but definitely that.

BRENT LEWIS: Would you encourage or discourage a young person to get into the business?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:41:04] No.

BRENT LEWIS: You would discourage them to [both speaking-unclear]?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:41:06] I wouldn't discourage them, no.

BRENT LEWIS: No, you wouldn't?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:41:09] I wouldn't encourage. Either one. They [00:41:11]... you know, like him, he went out with me a little bit, and he wasn't interested in that much. And I'm not going to make him do what he don't want to do.

BRENT LEWIS: What kind of qualities would a young person have to make them a success going into the business?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:41:26] They got to want to do it. My son, that's all he wanted to do. Because he went out with me some, and that's all he wanted to do.

BRENT LEWIS: How would one... how would a youngster get in the business now if they wanted?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:41:39] I ain't sure about buying a license deal of it. I guess there is apprenticeships, so I'm not sure about that either. They'd have to go work with somebody and find out how much they did like it.

BRENT LEWIS: Oh, a captain willing to take them on?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:41:53] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Are there captains out there who mentor younger people?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:41:57] Yeah, there's a few.

BRENT LEWIS: Are there many families who are second or third generation after your... like, are there many people out there like Deny who have gone into their dad's business?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:42:11] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:42:13] Yeah, I think so.

BRENT LEWIS: Is that because maybe you have access to learning that stuff, right? Like...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:42:19] Yeah. Well, even the... actually, all the younger people that are doing it, that... they wouldn't... their parents didn't do it. They moved over here, or they just got into it.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you still learn anything out there, or have you pretty much learned everything you need to know?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:42:36] No, it's always told by Bobby Larry. He said, "You get an education every day you come out here." And it... you probably do.

BRENT LEWIS: There's always the unexpected. Is that part of it?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:42:47] Yeah. Most... some days, yes.

BRENT LEWIS: have you learned anything about yourself? Have you learned anything about life? Have you learned anything about people? Have you learned anything? Have you learned anything, Dickie? (laughter)

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:01] I'm trying to think, I'm trying to think. Maybe I have. (laughter)

BRENT LEWIS: I'm trying to think. Maybe I have. That's the best answer I've had so far to that question.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:12] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Let me ask you about Kent Island a little bit more, Dickie. About the changes that you've seen here. Do you still have family that lives on Kent Island?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:23] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: But you live in Centerville?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:26] Yes.

BRENT LEWIS: How long have you all lived off Kent Island?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:29] Hm, we lived at Great Neck Road, I don't know, 10, 15 years. Before, when I was growing up, I lived there all the time. Then when I got married we lived down here for...

BRENT LEWIS: Great Neck Road. That's off Warehouse Creek?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:45] Yes, it is.

BRENT LEWIS: There's some history there, too.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:47] Yes, it is. A lot of your family history there.

BRENT LEWIS: And also, in general, the local history. Did you work... did you keep a work boat when you lived on Warehouse Creek?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:43:58] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: And you were crabbing at that time?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:01] Yeah.

M: What made you decide to move off of Kent Island?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:04] I'm not sure. You have to ask Norma that. She...

BRENT LEWIS: She packed you up, and...

M: She called that one. (laughter) Since you were in Chester, you refer to Stevensville people as town daisies?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:15] Yeah.

M: Do you know where that originated from?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:17] No, I don't. (laughs)

M: We've had some assumptions on it, but nobody's ever... I haven't had a straight answer.

BRENT LEWIS: Do they still call that Buzzardville where you lived when you were a kid? Did they...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:26] Just some of the older people.

BRENT LEWIS: Some of the older folks. And there were other parts of Kent Island that had, kind of, nicknames like that?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:34] Yeah. Down the road there where Dundee Avenue is, is Tick Town.

BRENT LEWIS: Tick Town and Buzzardville.

M: Shark Town.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:42] Shark Town, that's where it used to be Buzzardville, I guess.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. I want to ask you a little bit about the equipment that you used. I was thinking about people Bobby Aaron and Kirby Brian. They were almost like blacksmiths in a lot of ways. Right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:44:55] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Did... who made your equipment? Who did you get your...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:00] Bobby Aaron built the clam rigs all up, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: He was kind of one of the last of his kind. Wasn't he?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:07] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Particularly here locally.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:09] And this... locally, yes.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you remember ever going to Kirby Brian's shop?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:14] Once or twice.

BRENT LEWIS: Down in Grantsville?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:16] Just once or twice.

BRENT LEWIS: And I'm kind of curious, just because all the families and stuff.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:20] I got him... I brought him some old bottles and stuff, and, oh, he was tickled to death. And I got him to building me a coal box. And I thought he'd charge me extra for it instead of giving me a deal. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: That sounds about right. (laughs) You know a lot of characters over the years, too, haven't you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:38] Oh, yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: Who were some of... like Wes Thompson pops into my mom. Guys like him.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:45:44] Yeah, he used to say when he quit drinking, he didn't like it because when he woke up in the morning he knew that's just as good as he was going to feel all day. (laughs) He always had a good saying about something. He entertained a lot of people.

BRENT LEWIS: He was a salty old fella.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:46:00] Yes, he was.

BRENT LEWIS: Deny, did you come up with anything you'd like to ask your grandfather?

M2: Yeah. My first major question was why did it take 15 years to name a boat Norma Lynn?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:46:12] That's what your grandmother asked me... no, she didn't ask me that. I don't know, because most of the time the boats had other names on them already. I liked... the Renegade was one I had quite a while.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. Is it bad luck... is it supposed to be bad luck to change the name of a boat?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:46:29] I've never heard that one.

BRENT LEWIS: Do you have any superstitions?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:46:34] Don't take egg sandwiches out on... egg salad or anything out on the boat.

BRENT LEWIS: Why is that? Just because [both speaking-unclear]...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:46:40] I've... when I was a little kid, yeah. I took one, and one time when I was picking clams for somebody. I was young, and they seen what I had to eat, and they said it was bad luck. (laughs) That was one of the older guys. I don't remember him. It might have been my Uncle Bootsie.

M2: Do you have any idea what the future might be like for watermen?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:46:58] I would say right now, it don't look terrible bad, but it is a lot of regulations, and we need some of them.

BRENT LEWIS: Are there fewer watermen now than it used to be?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:47:09] It was a... when I was first starting, there was quite a few, I guess. And then it kind of went down, and then now, it's coming back up some, I think. Some of the younger guys are getting into it.

BRENT LEWIS: Mm-hmm.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:47:19] Especially with the oystering part of it.

BRENT LEWIS: Filling a void. They see that there's an opportunity there.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:47:24] Yeah...

BRENT LEWIS: John, did you have any questions?

M: Just the Chester-Stevensville relationship. I've only been here like 12 years, but it's interesting, some of them don't talk to us [both speaking-unclear]...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:47:35] I was always friendly. We were... I was buddies. I had a lot of friends from up here. We just called them town daisies. It wasn't no big deal. (laughter)

BRENT LEWIS: Was there any... or not animosity, but any competition between Kent Islanders and Grasonville, the other of Kent Narrow?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:47:51] No. Maybe from Kent Island to Centerville, but yeah, probably then.

BRENT LEWIS: Ah, Upcounty.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:47:57] Yeah. Upcounty, yeah, them dirt farmers. (laughter)

M: Speaking of that, do you know... were you friendly with any farmers? Like that farmer-watermen relationship? Was there any bad blood between them? Because I know there was a lot of runoff issues that were blamed [both speaking-unclear]...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:48:13] No. No, we didn't... no, there wasn't no bad blood at all.

BRENT LEWIS: And you never worked on a farm?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:48:19] No.

M: How about the enforcement people? Did they change? Do you think they trying, "Okay, we're not here just to hurt you. We're here. We can kind of help this industry, too"?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:48:31] They used to... I used to get a few tickets back in the day, but no, they're not really hurt... they don't hunt you down.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you have good relationships with them?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:48:38] Yeah, yeah. Well, most of them.

BRENT LEWIS: What would get you in trouble with them? Like
what would...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:48:47] Starting too early.

BRENT LEWIS: Huh?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:48:49] Starting too early. I used to
get a ticket a year there for a while. I haven't had none
in a couple years. I've been lucky. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: That's what you get for wanting to be first out
there, right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:48:57] Yeah, yeah.

M: Very specific to the Narrows, where the Big Owl is now.
That used to be the Shanty, and then before that, I heard
there was gas pumps there. I guess it was [unclear]
anglers.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:49:08] Right.

M: Did you guys ever use that for filling up, or just...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:49:12] Yeah, a little bit.

M: Because I remember...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:49:14] We even had card games out there
in that shanty before.

M: So maybe that's... I have memories of helping pop, John
Coursey, out. And when the weather was real bad, we would

just go over to Anglers, have a cup of soup, and sit there and chill out.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:49:29] My father used to go into Angler's and have a couple beers, and give me a fishing rod. I used to go fishing off the Angler's pier.

BRENT LEWIS: While Mr. Warren was in the...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:49:37] Yeah. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: ... in the Angler's...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:49:39] I caught a duck one time. I didn't like that. (laughter)

BRENT LEWIS: You caught a duck?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:49:43] Yeah.

M: If you don't mind another one, I was interested in your service. I was in the Navy, but I came more from your typical metropolitan area. When you went into boot camp and other places overseas, were they quite interested to find out what you actually did as a teenager? That you were actually out on the water?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:02] No.

BRENT LEWIS: Did you serve with many guys who were from the ... any guys from the area?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:07] Actually, my third day over Vietnam I seen my neighbor. So he was... he had been over there for a while, but he was going to come home in less

than a month or so. He got... he was in artillery just the same way I was.

BRENT LEWIS: What was the circumstances of seeing it? Where were you?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:24] We were on the same hill. Like, I was in the 105s, he was in the 155s, and then there was 175s. There was three artillery batteries on that one hill. It was a big deal.

BRENT LEWIS: What was his name, Dickie?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:36] Larry Harris.

BRENT LEWIS: He's still around?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:38] He lives in Pennsylvania now. He was a relation to the Harris seafood people. A cousin or something.

BRENT LEWIS: A lot of Kent Islanders were still related back...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:52] Oh, yeah. (laughs)

BRENT LEWIS: ... in those days, right?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:54] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: A lot of cousins.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:50:56] Yeah. (laughter)

BRENT LEWIS: Deny, did you have anything else?

M2: What do you think might be the biggest threat to the industry in the coming years? Like over-regulization from government agencies?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:51:12] That a little bit, but I think mostly probably environmental stuff. The weather.

BRENT LEWIS: Which you can't control.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:51:19] Yeah. I don't know, back... it is weather changing... the weather's changing. If somebody don't realize that, I don't know why.

M: Well, yeah. You can tell just from walking around shorelines and looking.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:51:32] Yeah.

M: Have you seen any contributing pollution over the years that has an effect on the water?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:51:37] Yeah, we see... I work in Chester River crabbing a lot, and you see more, I guess...I guess some of it's pollution coming down. A lot of logs and stuff coming out. I guess it comes from Conowingo Dam, and then the water gets real red, reddish, and more out in the way.

M: Do you notice...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:51:55] It dries on the shore, and I work kind of close to shore crabbing. That helps me out sometimes.

BRENT LEWIS: And that makes me want to ask you, too, about like invasive species, and also, you know, people seeing dolphins and stuff, and so much more.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:52:10] Now, the blue catfish, we didn't use to have them around. Now that long ago, even. Evidently, they're hungry devils. It's like the snake head. They changed the name on it or something. They're good eating.

BRENT LEWIS: They're like, "It's here now. We're going to call it something different." (laughter)

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:52:26] Yeah, and the catfish, that's... I like it.

BRENT LEWIS: Yeah. It's just invasive, and it also, I saw a picture of Jay Fleming cutting one up [both speaking-unclear]...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:52:36] Yeah.

BRENT LEWIS: ... all the different species that they...

M: Are skates still invasive?

BRENT LEWIS: I know at one point they were.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:52:43] Yeah. They seems like they get earlier every year. They'll probably be up here in a couple of weeks.

BRENT LEWIS: Skate? Yeah, and how about... have you noticed jellyfish earlier each year?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:52:53] It's according to how wet it is, somewhat, on that too.

BRENT LEWIS: I mean, I was seeing them over the winter. I mean, and that [both speaking-unclear].

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:53:00] Oh, but, well, they don't bother you, though. They don't [both speaking-unclear].

BRENT LEWIS: No. I just, I don't remember as kid seeing that.

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:53:04] And I've seen a couple before, yeah, sometimes.

BRENT LEWIS: But you say it depends on how wet it is. If it's more wet, do you get more jellyfish, or less wet, you get more jellyfish?

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:53:12] Less wet. Drier.

BRENT LEWIS: Drier you get more? Dickie, thank you for taking the time to join us. Deny, thank you. John, thanks for having us.

M: Thank you, [Isaiah?].

BRENT LEWIS: We appreciate your [both speaking-unclear]...

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:53:22] Yeah, the air conditioner is working good now.

BRENT LEWIS: (laughs) [both speaking-unclear]

DICKIE COURSEY: [00:53:25] Almost getting cold.

END OF AUDIO FILE