

OH 532 Joe Booter Poet

BRENT LEWIS: Today is June 11th, 2024. My name is Brent Lewis and today, we are interviewing Joe Poet, better known to everybody as Booter, for the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum's Watermen's Story Swap Oral History Project.

Booter, do we have permission to film you today?

JOE POET: [00:00:23] Yeah.

BL: And thank you for joining us, man.

JP: [00:00:26] It's an honor, it really is.

BL: You and I have been bouncing around this for a while. We've been trying to get this together, and so I'm really happy that we finally have this opportunity to sit down and talk. And I know that you've been thinking about this a lot.

JP: [00:00:39] A lot.

BL: And part of what my understanding... the reason you wanted to do this is because you have a strong connection to Kent Narrows and you want to talk mostly about your grandfather's boatyard and you growing up around that. Growing up around the seafood industry, the watermen's industry here in Queen Anne's County. So let's start this way. Tell me a little bit about where you come from and growing up.

JP: [00:01:08] Well, I was born and raised in Grasonville.
Born... a lot at the boatyard. I was... my mother worked
with my grandad at the boatyard, and I was down there many
times in the playpen. I was...

BL: What's your grandfather's name?

JP: [00:01:24] Medford Thomas Sr.

BL: This is in the Grasonville side of Kent Narrows?

JP: [00:01:29] Yes.

BL: Wells Cove?

JP: [00:01:32] Wells Cove.

BL: Side.

JP: [00:01:33] That's actually where he had his first boatyard
was...

BL: What do you know about that first boatyard?

JP: [00:01:38] I don't know a lot about the first one. It was
him and three brothers. It was called Three Brothers
Boatyard and that started back when he was 14 years old.
And him and three brothers started the boatyard there.
Then over the years, they worked on a lot of stuff, mainly
watermen's boats. He always worked on the watermen's
boats, not the yachts and the pleasure craft. And he took
care of the watermen in this area. He moved... I don't
know when he moved from that boatyard. But he moved up by
where Mr. Herman Thompson Sr. had a shucking house where

The Narrows Restaurant is and he had a boatyard right there. And hand-cranked boats up on a railway. I used to have the hand crank that he used. And the last boatyard that he moved from there was where the Hilton Restaurant is now and that's where I started working for myself. I started my own business at 15 years old taking after him.

BL: Is it boat... working on boats?

JP: [00:02:58] Working on boats through him.

BL: Did he do mechanical, carpentry? Everything.

JP: [00:03:03] Oh, yes, everything. He done everything. My grandfather was widely known for working on the Velvet Drive Transmissions. I mean, all up the East Coast, Florida clean to Maine. People would send him transmissions to work on.

BL: Velvet Drive Transmissions.

JP: [00:03:23] The Velvet Drive.

BL: Tell us what that is.

JP: [00:03:26] That's a gear that they mount to the motor to run the prop. Some of them were reduction gears, some of them one-to-one, you had a two-to-one, three-to-one, two-and-a-half-to-one. There were so many different ones. And he taught himself how to work on them and became, frankly, famous for working on them. All over... like I say, all over the East Coast.

BL: How long did he have that boatyard?

JP: [00:03:53] Oh my God. I guess I was about 'round 2 years old. I'm 62 now. That last boatyard he had there, it was there for a long time.

BL: When did he pass away?

JP: [00:04:09] 2009.

BL: Two thousand nine. Did he work the whole time that...?

JP: [00:04:14] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. My grandfather worked every day and he was up at seven o'clock and worked 'till nine, ten, eleven o'clock at night every day. Every day to keep these watermen going.

BL: So he was dedicated to the watermen.

JP: [00:04:30] Oh yes, yes. He would actually put... if he had a pleasure boat or something up on the railway, he would take... and actually, "Well, push it off side. We got to take care of this man here; he's got to go to work." We'd push them aside, work on that waterman's boat.

BL: He must've had a good reputation with those guys.

JP: [00:04:50] Oh yeah.

BL: Do you ever talk to anybody who remembers your grandad?

JP: [00:04:54] I've talked to several of them. Several of them have passed. Joe Horney, Nick Hoxter. Shoot, I'm trying to remember some more of their names.

BL: Did you grow up around the boatyard?

JP: [00:05:13] Oh yeah, yeah.

BL: Tell me a little bit about your background. Who is your mom?

JP: [00:05:17] My mom was Yvonne Shanks or Yvonne Thomas.
My... I never knew my real father until I was about 21.
My step...

BL: Mm-hmm. Where was he from?

JP: [00:05:28] My real father?

BL: Mm-hmm.

JP: [00:05:29] Cambridge.

BL: And his name was Poet?

JP: [00:05:32] No. My real father's name was James Dennis Kyer.

BL: Okay. Do you know what he did for a living?

JP: [00:05:41] He sold guns and antiques. He had... him and his brother had a collection of old guns, and I mean ones that were... that women would carry in the palm of their wrist, their hand.

BL: Like those derringers?

JP: [00:05:54] Yeah, and the barrel would stick out here and all that, just squeeze it. They also had... he had one that women wore around their waist. If they sucked in real deep, you're in trouble. Bam! You got shot. [laughter]

So what protect women. You know, there were inventions that were unreal.

BL: So you met him when you were 25?

JP: [00:06:17] I was 25. What happened was I was in school, 16, and my mother had never told me. She didn't think I was ready to understand what was going on. [laughs] So...

BL: Mm-hmm. So had you thought your stepdad was your real dad?

JP: [00:06:33] At... for a while. He would come down and get my brother and sister, pick them up, get school clothes, leave me there. Something wrong with this. So I kept putting pieces together, asking questions in the family about my dad and then they would slip up. And when they did, they'd go, "Oh shit, I shouldn't have said that." Well, what finally put the nail on the head on me, my real father, was I started dating this girl in high school. Her name was Kelly Kyer. Unbeknownst to me and her, well, she brought me home to visit Mom. We went out to dinner. "Mom, this is my new boyfriend." Her mom went, "Ugh!" [laughter] "Oh no! Oh, no, no! Uh-uh, no he ain't. Uh-uh, no, this ain't no...,". [laughter] "This is not going to happen!" She was my first cousin. We didn't know, you know? [laughs] And so her mom got ahold of my mom and said, "Look." [laughter] "You need to tell this boy what's going on. He's trying to go ahead... he's trying to date

his first cousin." [laughs] I was... [laughs] and I didn't... we didn't real... you know, we didn't know. We're like, "Man, what the heck? What did they do?" [laughs] And my mom told me and then I started looking for him. Finally found him. He lived in Cambridge behind the Kmart... there was a building complex back there. So going to Ocean City, I just... I stopped by one day. I knocked on his door, he heard me. "Yeah, can I help you?" I says, "Yeah, I think so." [laughs] "Who are you?" "My name is Joe Poet." "So?" I stopped for a moment like, "Hmm. How about Yvonne Thomas?" He went, "Ooh, okay." Then he invited us in, we sit and talked a little bit. And I went down and seen him one more time. And after that, I gave him my address, my phone number. I says, "You know what? I found you. You didn't try to find me. I found you, so here is your chance. If you want a relationship with me, here's all my contact." I never heard from him again. Then Mr. Ellwood Devry [?], my wife at the time, worked for him as a secretary. Well, he had passed. We went to the funeral and the lady that was the mother of the girl I was trying [laughs] to date came over and told us, "Well, you know your dad died." I says, "No, I didn't. Nobody told me." And he had actually died in Tennessee so...

BL: How many years later was that after you met him?

JP: [00:09:28] Oh God. Seven, maybe seven years. And he never tried to get ahold of me, so his...

BL: So was stepdad Poet?

JP: [00:09:39] Yes.

BL: That was his last name.

JP: [00:09:42] Yeah. And I learned through that mess why he never treated me the way he treated the other ones. And my father's mother at the time was one of the richest in Cambridge. When you go over the Cambridge Bridge, you'd look to your right and there was a big mansion house out on a point. She owned all of that... every bit of it. And when she met me, when my mom finally took her down to see her, I was a baby. The woman looked down at me and said, "Hmm. He'll never want for nothing." "Well, if I'm being honest, well, how..." [laughter] "Here I am!" [laughter] "I'm living in my motor home and [laughs] I want the lot." [laughter] But you know, in one way, you know, I'm not glad she died. But I'm glad I never got that. You know, I live my life to the fullest the best that I can and that... money changes people. I don't care who you are. If you got a whole shit... buttload of money, you're an asshole. It always comes out into you. You know? You treat people like dirt, like they're under you and all that. I didn't... man, I didn't want to be that person. No.

BL: Right. Do you feel like you've... because of all that, you've led a tougher life?

JP: [00:11:18] My life has been tough I will say. I've had to fight for everything I've got and most people say, "Well, my grandfather gave me this, gave me that, gave me this." No, he didn't. I worked for it. There was some things he helped out on, you know? But that's a grandparent, you know? And they just... they resented me because at 13, I guess, my grandfather took me in. My mother moved to Delaware and that place wasn't doing me too much. Too much drugs and all that shit. I went, "Uh-uh, no, I don't want to be near this mess. Uh-uh."

BL: Since you were a little boy.

JP: [00:12:02] I was 13.

BL: Yeah, a kid.

JP: [00:12:04] [Unclear], or hmm, yeah. I started smoking pot at 12 because of being up there. But in a way, it was good. When I... we moved up there and then I started smoking pot, before I did start smoking pot, asthma was... I was in and out of hospitals and everything. Then I started smoking pot. I smoked it for a while. Never went in the hospital, doctors. My mother, she's like, "What the heck's going on that you ain't... your asthma's not bothering you?" She finally [laughs] found out I was

smoking pot and hey, that's what it was. The marijuana was actually killing my... the asthma in my system. So it never came out.

BL: So how old were you when you moved in with your grandfather?

JP: [00:12:51] Fourteen?

BL: Who was your grandmother? Who was his wife?

JP: [00:13:00] Peggy. That was the step grandmother.

BL: Do you... so that wasn't your real grandma.

JP: [00:13:05] No. Vivian Thomas was my real grandma.

BL: Do you remember her maiden name?

JP: [00:13:10] Vivian Horney, I believe. I think.

BL: So another local name.

JP: [00:13:14] Mm-hmm.

BL: So you come from... other than your dad who wasn't from around here, your families were all from around here.

JP: [00:13:20] All here. Yeah.

BL: Most of them connected to the water... the seafood industry? The water business?

JP: [00:13:27] A lot of them, yeah.

BL: Yeah?

JP: [00:13:29] Yeah.

BL: When you moved in with your grandfather, did you start working in the marina right away?

JP: [00:13:35] No, I rode to school. I was 14, I guess, high school, I think we were in.

BL: What'd you do for money before that? Did you have jobs?

JP: [00:13:50] Just done little stuff for my friend that he'd give me a few bucks to do things, you know. And in school when I left Delaware, I had straight F's. Come down to this school, May 10th, something like that, almost the end of the year, and got in classes. I wouldn't do nothing. Why should I? Was my theory. Why should I? No matter what I do, I can't pass. I only had one teacher in high school that understood why I wouldn't do it. I never interrupted in classes, I'd just sit there. And the one teacher, Mr. Cohen? Do you remember him?

BL: I do remember Mr... Was he a math teacher?

JP: [00:14:31] I think.

BL: Yeah, Mr. Cohen.

JP: [00:14:33] He drove me out of the class one day. He said, "Joe, look. I've been watching you come in here for weeks now. You won't do nothing. Everybody keeps sending you to the office, sending you to the office," because I wouldn't do nothing. He said, "Why are you not doing any work?" I said, "Mr. Cohen, let me ask you a question. Do you know what my grades are when I come here?" "Oh yeah, you had straight F's." "Oh yeah, yeah." I said, "Do you know of

any way that I can come to your class, work my ass off, take home all the homework I could carry, and still pass your class?" He said, "Son, there ain't no way you could pass this class." I said, "I know that, you know that. Why should I work my ass off for nothing?" He says, "Well, I tell you what you do, son. You bring a book, bring whatever. You just keep not disturbing my class, I will mark you here. I will not send you down the office." I got sent down the office so much, there was a Mr. Young and a Mr. Darwin?. I got so tired of looking at them two...

BL: [laughter] I have a feeling it was mutual.

JP: [00:15:43] Yeah. [laughter] Yeah, they got tired of looking at me, too. So one day towards... closer to the end of the year, I walked in there, I looked around at them two in the offices, I said, "Hmm." You know, they had walked out right in the middle because buses were coming in and they had other stuff so and I said, "That's it, I'm done. I'm going home." So I walked out... started walking out. Well, them two got in front. "Where are you going?" "I'm going the blank home." "No you're not." I thought, [laughs] "Oh, here we go." I mean, long hair, I was a... I had hair half-way down by back back then. You remember that.

BL: Yeah, I do.

JP: [00:16:24] [laughs] And I said, "Gentlemen, look: I get sent down to your office every day. I know you're tired of looking at me and I'm definitely tired of looking at you. I'm going out and I'm going home to my grandfather and go to work." "Well, you're not leaving here. You'll have to call him to come get you." I said, "No, I'm walking out of here." "Well, we're going to stop you." I looked right at them. I said, "Let me tell you something, gentlemen. Here's how it's going to be. You got three choices; I'm going to give you three. One, I walk between you and go on out that door and you're done with me. Two, you try to stop me and then we get into a scrap." And I forget what the third one is. I told her something, "I'll hit you up the side of the head with something. Beat you upside the head with something and going out the door now." "We're going to have to call your grandfather. Go ahead" I got out that door, got to the main road, stuck my thumb out, had a ride to the 301. Wasn't at 301 for two minutes, stuck my thumb out, I had a ride right to the Kent Narrows. He was on the phone. They had finally called him to tell him that I left school. So I was there [laughs] before they already had got on the phone, and that's coming from Centreville to the Kent Narrows. [laughs] I was getting things done.

BL: You were getting out of Dodge.

JP: [00:17:49] Yeah. He got off the phone, said, "All right. There's a copper brush bucket, you know where it's at. Get to work." That's just what I did.

BL: So you went to work there.

JP: [00:18:00] That right there. And I had all the way up until he shut down. And I don't remember the year that he shut down the boatyard. But when he got this last boatyard, he made a deal with Mr. Herman Thompson Sr. And back then, a handshake, that was well as a 100-page lawyer document. That meant more, that handshake. He got the property, shook his hand, done. He moved the one building up from the other one and then he built the last one. And oh man. [laughs]

BL: What were your duties there when you started working?

JP: [00:18:43] Oh, I coppered the bottom of boats. And then sanding, nailing, renailing the bottoms. And then I got into the mechanical part. You'd see me out in the front of the place always had a bunch of motors, so I'm out there piddling with the motors. So he started to show me what they do, how they do. I've always taught myself how to work on the motors.

BL: Did you have a knack for that?

JP: [00:19:10] Yeah. Yeah. That was... ended up being my thing.

BL: Mechanics.

JP: [00:19:17] Mechanics. I would work on the motors, rebuild the motors, take the transmissions off and tap... so he could rebuild them. Towards the end, he started showing me some stuff about doing the transmissions.

BL: Mm-hmm. Did he ever tell you where the name Wells Cove came from?

JP: [00:19:35] No. He never did.

BL: I heard a bunch of people say that it used to be an old well there. They would say that the watermen from Grasonville would carry their empty buckets to the well and fill up there before going out on the boats, you know? There was still a lot of packing houses in Kent Narrows at that time.

JP: [00:19:52] Oh gosh, yes. Back in them days? Hoo. We... back to me starting out there, I was two years old. Well back then, man, everybody come by and give you a little sip of beer. That was the thing back then.

BL: Yeah. Light up a cigarette, a drink of beer.

JP: [00:20:12] Yeah, a little puff of a cigarette, a little sip of beer. [laughter] Well, everybody else didn't know everybody else was doing it. [laughter] My little two-

year-old ass got drunk. That's how I learned how to walk.

[laughs] I started walking. [laughter] Oh Lord, I guess that's why I like beer so much. [laughter]

BL: It was a different time, bud.

JP: [00:20:35] Oh yeah, yes it was. That boatyard, you know, it had been there for all them years. Then all the shanties got moved in and the trailers and the Blacks.

BL: Kent Narrows was very different then than it is now.

JP: [00:20:49] Oh my God, you had to watch yourself at the Kent Narrows.

BL: It was rough, right?

JP: [00:20:54] Very rough, very. I've seen people get shot down there at the Rocky's Liquor Store. I seen this big old guy, I forget what his name was, but he had arms on him about this big around.

BL: Bronco?

JP: [00:21:08] Bronco! That's him. Yes. And I forget what the young guy was. He was littler than I was. Him and Bronco got into a fight. Well, the little man, [laughs] yeah, well, probably I don't blame him, pulled out a gun and shot him. Shot him right in the chest. Bronco went, "You little blankety-blank." [laughter] "You just shot me!" Took the pistol from him and beat him half to death with it. [laughs] It was funny. But I could see my

grandfather, he'd go over to the liquor store there and get beers. My grandfather always drank them little Pony Millers and he'd fight his way coming back. Then, he started supplying water for him. They'd come over at the chop, get water to take back over to their shanties because none of them had water in there. And if they started acting up, he'd cut their water off.

BL: Cut their water off.

JP: [00:22:04] Oh yeah. I mean not just cut one, cut the whole community down. And boy, I'll tell you what: when they found out who done... started the trouble, they got their asses whooped and...

BL: The water came back on?

JP: [00:22:16] ... and they'd come over and apologize to my grandfather big time. Then he'd let them have the water again.

BL: So he was a real big part of the Narrows community.

JP: [00:22:24] Oh God, yes. Oh God, yes. That whole area... well-known. He helped many a people. God, he was a... When he passed or when he shut down the boatyard, he was actually offered one time over three million dollars for that boatyard. Three million! Me? I'd have took it and run. Him? Uh-uh.

BL: That's his baby.

JP: [00:22:53] That handshake. That handshake. He always said that if he ever shut it down, it would go back to Harmon Thompson's family. He paid Harmon some money, you know? But Harmon never bothered him for it, you know? But he turned down three million dollars.

BL: Was your grandfather originally from Grasonville?

JP: He was born in a... over across the Bridge, a place [Weems Creek?] used to be. I don't know what it's named now. His father had the boatyard there; that's how he got started in the boatyard business.

BL: So we're talking early twentieth century.

JP: [00:23:31] Oh. Eighteen hundreds, you know?

BL: Uh-huh. Wow.

JP: [00:23:39] And then my grandfather and the three brothers come over here and started the boatyard at Wells Cove.

BL: Do you remember the names of those three brothers?

JP: [00:23:48] [laughter] Let me check. He had six brothers and one sister.

BL: Okay. But three of them helped work.

JP: [00:24:00] Three of them went with him. It was Charlie, William... it was Charlie and William Thomas and then Medford, my grandad.

BL: Who ran the...

JP: [00:24:11] The Three Brothers Boatyard.

BL: Did he have employees? Did he...?

JP: [00:24:17] Or Thomas Brothers Boatyard. I don't think so back then. It was just them three and then of course when he went into the service, the other two stayed and took care of the boatyard and everything.

BL: When you worked for him, did he have employees?

JP: [00:24:31] Yes and no. Because I was saying back in them days, you worked for my grandfather but you worked for yourself.

BL: Mm-hmm. You were a subcontractor.

JP: [00:24:43] You were a subcontractor more or less. He paid you cash, "There's your money, you file your own taxes." And that's what we did. Because he didn't... the paperwork, he wasn't good with paperwork, you know. He just couldn't do it and he just said, "You know what? Huh. Let me do it this way."

BL: Everything was more on the fly and as-needed as opposed to having full-time employees.

JP: [00:25:07] Oh, they were there every day. You were there every day. You didn't, you were going to get yelled at. [laughter] But yeah, there's so many... there's a lot of things that he invented that he'd have been a millionaire.

BL: Do you have... like what?

JP: [00:25:25] You know the davit they use on the clam rigs today?

BL: Yeah?

JP: [00:25:27] He built the first set.

BL: Is that right?

JP: [00:25:30] Yes sir. Never patented. He should've, but he built the first set of davit that they used down east. Back then...

BL: So explain to us what that mechanism is.

JP: [00:25:42] That... the davits that they use for the clam rigs are two poles that come up on each side of the boat. They come up to another pole that goes across and outside the boat with pulleys that goes down to the clam rig. And you raise and lower the clam rig with this system. And he built the first system. They used to use the old style, the post in the middle and then the other post out like this with ropes to go to one post to the other and you'd pull the clam rig up and down. He had Texas Instruments come in one time. The clam chains they used were steel at the time and they'd rust up real quick. So they had to... kept buying them before they come out with the stainless ones. Texas Instruments come in and talked to him. They wanted him to help them invent a plastic clam rig chain. And they tried; they done everything they could to make it

work, and it just... was no way to make it work. He's done things for the Coast Guard when he had the first two boatyards. Coast Guard had a yacht out in Eastern Bay sinking. Hit a log or something. They came to him. They couldn't figure out how to stop it from sinking, so they came to him. He went out on a boat, got there, assessed what happened, dove overboard with a bunch of rags, stuffed them in the hole. So that they could take the boat and get it close to shore, up on shore, really, and then put a patch on it to bring it to a boatyard. But the Coast Guard come to him back in them days. That's...

BL: Wow. So he was well-known for being innovative.

JP: [00:27:32] For everything. Yes, yes.

BL: Weren't your... wasn't your grandad and the maybe your... his brothers the first ones to work the clam rigs here locally?

JP: [00:27:45] That I'm not sure of. I don't want to say.

BL: Right. I see a picture of Kent Narrows.

JP: [00:27:49] Yeah, I don't want to say because I'm not positive.

BL: Right. Because certainly [both speaking-unclear]

JP: [00:27:43] Oh, he was amongst the first of them that had clam rigs.

MALE SPEAKER 3: Right. What's your oldest memory of those boatyards?

JP: [00:28:03] I won't tell my age.

M3: [laughs] You already have. [laughter]

JP: [00:28:07] Well, yeah. I already let the cat out of the bag. Here I am auditioning, I'm trying to find me a girlfriend, and you gone messing me up. Y'all messing me up. [laughter]

BL: This is going to show up on some online dating. [laughter]

JP: [00:28:19] Oh, don't you dare! [laughter]

M3: I'll put it on YouTube.

JP: [00:28:22] I know where you live. [laughter] The oldest memory, I guess, was the second boatyard. When he moved it from down where the side where the Narrows is. When he moved it up to where the Hilton is now. That's my oldest memory. So that's... he... I was trying to think of something else I wanted to tell you all about. It's...

M3: One of the guys we spoke to lived in that shanty area. He said it was near where the Hilton was. I don't remember who that was right now.

BL: Montro?

M3: No, this was the... this round.

BL: Oh, this round.

M3: A couple back. But I did talk to him. I can't remember who.

JP: [00:29:11] I'm trying to think of what else I was going to talk to you... The money that... My grandfather saved a lot of watermen. There was watermen who'd come in there and they were so poor that they had to have something fixed and they couldn't pay for it. And usually, he was like, "Oh, go ahead. Don't worry about it." You know? And then, there's the ones that had the money to pay for it and wouldn't pay him. I'd bet when he shut the last boatyard down, I think he was 86 when he sold it back to Herman Thompson Jr. We went through the books. Thousands, ten of thousands of dollars that were owed to him.

BL: Owed out.

JP: [00:29:59] That were owed out. My grandfather would never let his secretary send out a bill. [telephone ringing] Oh shut up, phone. [laughter]

M3: That's why they're [boarding?].

BL: [laughs] They go, "Boarder is out." [laughter]

JP: [00:30:16] I tried to turn it off.

BL: So he wouldn't let people... he wouldn't pursue getting paid.

JP: [00:30:22] No. Nope.

BL: What do you think motivated that?

JP: [00:30:25] I don't know. I really do not... It's just his personality, his...

BL: How did they live, your grandparents? Where did they... where did... because you stayed with them, right?

JP: [00:30:36] Right. He had an apartment over the top of the boatyard. I used to watch them fight out there. Fire trucks come down, hose them down to break up the fights. He's done so much for Queen Anne's County, it... the thing that I couldn't believe and I was really, really pissed off with Queen Anne's County. When they built that Watermen's Monument, they put names of people from the Narrows in bricks. Some of them were charged. Some of them were put on there because they were the first in the Narrows. Well, you know what? He was the first boatyard or first really in the Narrows boatyard. Very first boatyard that was ever in the Kent Narrows. Never got credit for it. Never.

BL: So this is an opportunity here to talk about him and to maybe get him some, you know, recognition.

JP: [00:31:35] Recognition. Yeah. I mean, that man done a lot for everything in Queen Anne's County. The fire department, Grasonville Fire Department. He... they come down there, they needed something made or done, he was a machinist. Taught himself. They needed something made, he'd stop what he was doing and make that for that fire

department, you know? Never got recognition for some of the things he's done in this county and helped. You know, it's...

BL: Right. What kind of man was he? Was he kind of a quiet guy? Did he not seek attention?

JP: [00:32:08] He was quiet. Yeah, he was quiet. You know? Didn't seek a whole lot of attention, never hardly ever went out anywhere.

BL: Right. What kind... did he have a temper at all?

JP: [00:32:18] You really, really had to push his buttons to give him a temper. I've seen one time my aunt was getting out of her car and across the street from the boatyard was a Black area. And this one Black guy hollers very un-nice things to my aunt. That... they told her, "Shut up." "I ain't shutting up." "What about that white man?" Well, my grandfather heard him and he went out there and he told him. "Don't talk to my daughter like that. You talk to my daughter like that again, I'm going to knock you the fuck out."

BL: So more personal stuff would make him get pissed off.

JP: [00:33:02] Oh yeah. And my grand... that boy said something about my aunt, and then he called my grandfather a little white MF. [laughs] The first time I'd ever seen my grandfather hit anybody. I wouldn't want him to hit me.

Man, he'd come up with an upper cut and hit that son of a bi... and off the ground he came about that high and back down. And this other big Black guy, I mean, he was a monster. All of them is like, "Oh, shit, here we go." So we're getting ready to go out. [laughter] You know, Georgie Thomas, Georgie Thomas was a big boy. All of us come running out there getting ready if we had to and that big Black boy [laughs] picked up picked up that little Black boy. "You better leave that little man alone. He's going to kill you." [laughs]

BL: So your grandfather was a little guy?

JP: [00:33:49] Oh yeah. Real little. Real little. But [laughs] like I said, I wouldn't want to mess with him.

BL: Was he strong?

JP: [00:33:57] Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

BL: A lot of those guys back then, physical, right?

JP: [00:34:00] Oh yeah. Well, he was picking up them heavy-ass double-drive transmissions all the time. He's [laughs] pretty stout.

BL: Plus you had a big family. I mean not immediate family but a lot of cousins, a lot of aunts and uncles?

JP: [00:34:09] Right. Oh yeah. Well, I had three aunts and uncles. Plugsie who was...

BL: Uh-huh, who just passed away, right?

JP: [00:34:18] Yeah.

BL: Plugsy just passed away.

JP: [00:34:20] Yeah, a couple years ago. My mother, of course my mother. Then my Aunt Rita, Rita Thomas, which ended up Gerwig.

BL: Yeah. Are any of them still alive?

JP: [00:34:30] My Aunt Rita is. Of course my mom's still alive, thank God.

BL: Uh-huh. Do you see your mom?

JP: [00:34:37] Yes, every once in a while. As a matter of fact, she's coming down on the 22nd. I'm going to take her to dinner to go... to Double T Diner. [laughs] So but...

BL: Very good. Do you have brothers and sisters?

JP: [00:34:47] Oh yes. Yes.

BL: Oh, is that right? You have step...

JP: [00:34:51] Stepbrothers and sisters.

BL: Stepbrothers and sisters.

JP: [00:34:54] Debbie Poet, she's the oldest. Tommy Poet, my brother. He's the middle or next. And then it was me, then it's my younger sister Kristie and then my younger brother Matthew. He's 36...

BL: Are you guys close?

JP: [00:35:20] Me and Matthew are more close than any of them, than of my sister, Kristie. My brother, I hardly ever hear

from him. My other sister, she's a cantankerous old woman. She just is as mean as a snake. One week, she'll talk to you, then she'll get mad at you, you won't hear from her for six months. So I don't even mess with her no more. I just pffff [sound effect]. She's being herself, you know?

M3: Who gave you the nickname Booter?

JP: [00:35:52] [laughs] My stepfather. When I was young and started walking, my mama bought me a pair of cowboy boots, you know? Once she put them on me, it was done. It was done. Every time she'd dress me to put tennis shoes on me, I'd yank them off, put the cowboy boots on. So then he started calling me Booter.

BL: Oh, that's awesome.

JP: [00:36:17] So and that name stuck with me all my life. Okay? I've ever tried to, "Man, my name is Joe." "No, it's Booter." [laughter] I've had people that I could tell or that would ask for Joe Poet to different people that knew me. "Who's that?" They didn't even know my real name. Most of the people there did not know my real name. God, I remember in school, old Mr. Fields...

BL: Yeah, Gary Fields.

JP: [00:36:49] ...mean old, mean old son of a bitch. [laughs]

BL: Yes he was. Still a teacher.

JP: [00:36:52] I come to school... yeah. I come to school one day, "Just been to Ocean City." I got me a thing pulled on the back of my jacket. It was a pussy cat in a wine glass. Well, what did it say? Have a...

BL: Weren't you in like seventh grade?

JP: [00:37:07] Yeah. Yeah. "Happiness is a tight pussy."
[laughter] Well, that's what it said. Well, guess what? I got sent home for that one. [laughs] My grandfather looked at it. "All right, what'd you get sent home for?" "My jacket." "Why? What'd it say?" "What's wrong with that?"
[laughter] I said, "The gym teacher didn't really like that." [coughs] Right? My grandfather was ornery when he wanted to be. He was ornery.

BL: Was he strict at all?

JP: [00:37:37] Yes. Very, you know, very strict. I... that man was my father to me. He raised me as his own. My uncle, he resented that bad. He resented me bad. He...

BL: May I ask, did you ever... yourself ever think of going on the water?

JP: [00:37:59] I did. I did go on the water. I was 16, I guess, and with all the grandchildren, my grandfather rebuilt the boat for a workboat and gave it to the grandchild. And he gave me one. I went out and give her a try. Meh. Didn't really like crabbing too much. I did,

but I didn't. It was a lot of work which I didn't mind that. Oystering, too got darn cold. I like froze.

BL: But you dove.

JP: [00:38:28] But yeah. When I turned 18, I took a diving class and I learned how to dive, and I tried diving. Well back then, all you had was a dry suit. I tell you what, it might've kept you dry [laughs] but it didn't keep you too damn warm. That day, after I got out of it, I wrote, "This ain't for me." That's when I really got back into the boatyard. [laughs]

BL: So you did dive for what, a couple seasons?

JP: [00:38:57] No, I didn't even make a season.

BL: Is that right?

JP: [00:38:58] Yeah, it's too damn cold for me.

BL: Who was running the boat? Who were you diving with?

JP: [00:39:02] My cousin, John. And, "Man, this ain't for me, it's [laughs] too damn cold."

BL: Did you ever do rescue diving?

JP: [00:39:08] Yes, I did. I joined the fire department in Grasonville when I was 16. And I been there for... I'm a life member now. I was there for 40-some years. Now, it's over that. I don't know how many, 16 of whatever, 62. I'm still a life member. And I took... they wanted to start a dive team. Well, I quit diving but they asked me if I

wanted to do it. I said, "Yeah, I'll take the class again." I wanted to get... do that class again to really learn more, so I did. And I liked it; I really did. The diving part for the fire department.

BL: Do you participate in rescues?

JP: [00:39:54] Yes.

BL: Any stick out in your mind?

JP: [00:39:56] The one, the only one rescue that I done, it was two weeks after class. Caroline County had a swimmer in a pond that was fishing and they suspected he drowned in it. They called us up there. Well, we got all the way up there and the way I was taught is you go in the water wherever the person's belongings are. You go in and start there. So I had a partner. You never dive alone, you always dive with a partner. So me and my partner got talking. "You go all the way out and I'll stay in and we'll swim to each other and then we'll move over a foot and do the same thing out to come back." Well, we got in the water, were in the water for about a minute. Said, "Nope, this ain't going to work." So much seaweed. We had to take the flippers off. So we both come to shore and I said, "Look: take your flippers off. We're going to walk." So we had enough weight on to keep us down so we started walking. When you felt something on your foot, you're like, "Okay, is that

it?" So you reach down, grab it, well, then you felt a stick or whatever. "No, that ain't it, that's a tree. Get that away." So I walked out a little [laughs] bit further. I reached out and felt a log and went, "Hmm." I reached... it didn't feel like ... really feel like a log too well, so I reached down a little more and hit a tennis shoe. I went, "Oh, shit." [laughs] "Do I want to do this?" So I latched on to him and you have a tethered rope to you. In case of emergency, they can yank your ass out. Well, they... the signal was pulled twice. Well, I pulled twice, I thought I was waterskiing. [laughter] Them boys were yanking me in. Once I got to the shore where I could walk, I stood up and I walk... had the leg still attached to my hand. Once I got to the beach, I just dropped and said, "There he is, boys. He's yours." And I walked up to get changed. Got done, they come back, they wanted to talk to us so we talked to them. They wanted us to come up and train their divers the way we were taught. Because we were... they were in the water for hours trying to find this body. Well, they were all the way over on this side of the pond, that side of the pond and all that. And I was in the water 14 minutes and I came out with the body. And they were just amazed. They couldn't believe it.

M3: Wow. Another question if you don't mind. My math tells me you were talking about the middle '70s when you were kind of saying it was pretty rough and tumble along Kent Narrows?

JP: [00:42:33] Yeah, the first part of the '70s. Yes. It was bad.

M3: And to me, like being a chicken-necker who's only been here 11 years...

JP: [00:42:39] Oh, you wouldn't even want to come down here.

M3: ... when... what... how long did it take to go from that to, you know, people that are in sandals?

JP: [00:42:39] A lot of it started in the late '70s when they started moving things. Bigger people started coming in there like The Jetty Restaurant. That used to be called...

BL: Portside?

JP: [00:43:05] Portside. I dated a girl from Portside.

BL: Is that right?

JP: [00:43:08] Yeah. Mr. Jim Day, his daughter, Debbie Daphnis. I was 15, 14, 15, we weren't dating, but fooling around, you know.

BL: Boyfriend and girlfriend.

JP: [00:43:17] Yeah, kissy kissy, whatever.

BL: And it was an African American American Legion, too, at one point.

JP: [00:43:23] Yes. That was a legion there and that caused a lot of trouble. [both speaking-unclear] Well that, I believe, ended up burning down. Once it burned down, a lot more of it started going. Then, some of the shucking houses started shutting down and that's where all these Black people worked.

BL: The shanties.

JP: [00:43:43] The shanties, that's where they all worked. In one of the boatyards there, Harris' I think? Is that right there by the Narrows? In the Narrows? It used to be... I guess it used to be. Well, they bought some of that property and they tore down the rest of them shanties. So people had to find a place to live.

BL: Right. And so you think that was a big change there was when the shanties disappeared and they were gone.

JP: [00:44:03] Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. I used to go up... when I was a kid, I rode a bicycle or walked to Grasonville. That's where all my friends were every day. Needless to say, my leg muscle become... [laughs] They ain't there now, but I had some humongous leg muscles because of walking, riding bikes. And being that back in that time, it was kind of scary to be walking that back road because of the Blacks. I had one one time and I always used to carry a knife. Well, my knife is bigger

than most and I wore cowboy boots, right? [laughter] So I made a strap with my leg here and I had a bayonet that went right down into my boot. And then I could yank it out if I needed it. Well, I was walking back from Grasonville one night about twelve, one o'clock in the morning. Right there by Mr. Herman Thompson's house, I looked over my shoulders. I just felt something. You know, you get that weird feeling and there he was. "Okay." I walked a little faster. Well, then he walked a little faster. Got just about to the electric plant where it's at now, Lippincott, and I went, "Okay." So I broke into a dead-ass run, got under that light where he couldn't see me at first. Stand there and grab that knife, I rounded up my sleeve. I had the tip of it in my middle finger tip. "There you go." Pulled out his little pen knife. "Give me your wallet." I said, "No, I don't think so."

BL: People were getting mugged in Kent Narrows.

JP: [00:45:51] Oh yeah. He was getting ready to get mugged. [laughter] He said, "Boy, I'll cut you!" [laughs] I laughed. I said, "I really don't think so." "You white mother fucker, I'm going to cut you." And I went psh [sound effect] like that and that hand thing fell out, and the handle fell in my hand perfect. I went psh [sound

effect], "Who's going to cut who?" "Oh, oh, oh, I..."

[laughs] He had...

BL: Do you know who he was?

JP: [00:56:15] I did afterwards.

BL: Afterwards, yeah.

JP: [00:46:19] Yeah, we got to know each other. As a matter of fact, we walked that back road right together. [laughter] He was my best friend walking that back road [laughs] and funny as hell. He... my grandad always taught me that with them Black people, do not show them fear, don't take no shit I had an old '67 van, I put a 327 into it, V8. Had a 6, put a V8 in there. Well, I was pulling out of there try right. [laughs] So I'm coming up in between the boatyard, one shop, and then this building where some of the shanty people lived. Whole bunch of them out there partying. I beeped the horn and I'm trying to get out. They looked at me like, "Oh, fuck you." I go, "Mm-hmm." I beeped the horn again. Okay. I didn't give them a third try. I backed that son of a bitch up, throwed it up in first gear, I wrapped it up about 3 grand, 35,000 and I popped that clutch. Headed right for them and boy, they seen that and they started throwing chairs and running right through it. I took her up the road, tested her out, I come back, they were back. I went to pull in, they looked. "Oop!" They

got up with the chair and let me come in. You had to show them that you were boss. Yeah.

BL: And you lived right there.

JP: [00:47:44] I lived right there, yeah.

BL: And so you had to protect yourself and be part of that community. And really, the only way you could do that is to show...

JP: [00:47:53] Force.

BL: ... toughness. Right?

JP: [00:47:53] Yeah, oh yeah. You don't want to show them fear.

BL: You don't want to be a pushover. So...

JP: [00:47:57] Mm-hmm, yeah. I used to go [laughs] and get beer for my grandfather amongst them at old Rocky's Liquor Store.

BL: I remember Rocky's.

JP: [00:48:04] And I was 16. I got... I'd go, he'd want a case of beer. He called Rocky, I was only 16. Two more years, I'd go and bought it myself. But Rocky knew him and knew me. I'd go over and get the case of beer, bring it back over. That got to the point where I said, "Hmm, I need me a case of beer." [laughter] Right? So I go over, "Rocky, dad'll need two cases of beer." [laughter] Go back, get just about to my car, unlock the trunk, throw the case in

the trunk, "Here you go, Tada." And he knew I was doing it. He wasn't no damn dummy.

M3: Is that where Winchester is?

JP: [00:48:39] No, no.

BL: Where the real estate...

JP: [00:48:41] Where the real estate is right now.

M3: Oh, right there on the [both speaking-unclear]

JP: [00:48:42] Yeah. Where you turn to go into The Jetty?

M3: Yeah.

JP: [00:48:44] Yeah, that... right there.

BL: Rocky's was a...

JP: [00:48:46] Oh, man.

BL: ... it was some something.

JP: [00:48:48] Oh my God, yeah. We had...

BL: Your grandfather probably didn't need to call to get the beer...

JP: [00:48:52] Oh no. [laughs]

BL: ... because I remember going in there at 15, 16 years old.

JP: [00:48:56] Oh yeah. I was going in Castle Marina when I was 16. Then I turned 18, he carded me. [laughter] The guy says, "You've been coming in here for two years." I said, "Yes sir." I said, "Now you can't stop me." [laughter]

BL: They were there for around [both speaking-unclear] were kids.

JP: [00:49:12] [coughs] Oh yeah. Man, a cop pulled you over if you were drinking. "Come on, boy. How much beer you got?" "About a case in the cooler. Don't..." Then they'd look at you. "All right. Pull it out."

BL: Do you think that had something to do with everybody knowing each other?

JP: [00:49:29] Yes. Yes.

BL: Like those cops probably knew your grandfather.

JP: [00:49:33] Oh, your grandfather, your mother, your [laughs] great-uncle. But they'd make you pour the beer out and take you home.

BL: I want to swing back real quick to what John was asking about working on the water. So a short time crabbing?

JP: [00:49:47] Very short time crabbing.

BL: What didn't you like about that?

JP: [00:49:51] Heat. It was hot.

BL: What time did you have to get up?

JP: [00:49:55] Oh, I... you'd get up two, three o'clock in the morning sometimes.

BL: Trotlining?

JP: [00:49:58] Trotlining. Oh yeah. It's the only way to go with eels.

BL: With eels.

JP: [00:50:02] Not with this bull lip and all that mess. Yeah.

BL: Right. Were you by yourself crabbing?

JP: [00:50:07] Yeah. Yeah.

BL: Then you hand-tonged for a short time?

JP: [00:50:11] Yes, tried that. My arms weren't big enough to do that. [laughs] I mean, that's a lot of work.

BL: Yeah. That is a lot of work plus it was cold.

JP: [00:50:18] Oh yeah. That cold is getting me.

BL: The heat and the cold. [laughs]

JP: [00:50:22] Pff. [sound effect]

BL: And then diving.

JP: [00:50:24] Yes.

BL: Any other [both speaking-unclear]

JP: [00:50:26] I went out clamming with my uncle.

BL: Uh-huh. On a rig?

JP: [00:50:30] On the rigs, yeah.

BL: What did you think about that?

JP: [00:50:35] That was very interesting.

BL: Out of all that stuff, what did you like best?

JP: [00:50:40] I ain't feel like the clamming because of the stuff you find. The arrowheads.

BL: Yeah. So did you find... have you found cool stuff?

JP: [00:50:49] Yeah. Old bottles. I mean real... the ones you got out there, some of them older. I used to have a box of bottles that I had three of the Clorox bottles. I had a gallon and a quart. Those there, them old pipes. They were all broke up, but I found those old smoking pipes. I'd love to have one right now. I really would.

BL: Do... were you able to keep any of that stuff?

JP: [00:51:13] Oh yeah. Yeah.

BL: Do you still have it?

JP: [00:51:15] No. I've got some of the pipe stuff... pieces. I've got a Civil War bullet, couple of those. One or two arrowheads I think, shark's teeth.

BL: Uh-huh. Ever see ghosts or anything unexplainable?

JP: [00:51:35] Oh, [laughs] yeah. Yeah, I've seen it. Right in that...

BL: Tell us about it.

JP: [00:51:39] Right in Grasonville, that La Piazza used to be an apartment house. My third stepfather, Buddy Favis, we rented the apartment there. Downstairs was just an open hall. It used to be an old soda fountain. My sister had a sleepover with a couple of her girlfriends. They were down there and they... sleeping bags and whatever. Well, they come up to get my brother and I was just a little fellow because they kept seeing this door open. It scared them.

So my brother come down and was thinking about leaving me by myself. Uh-uh. So I went back down there with him. Mistake. We were sitting there listening to music and we kept hearing the door. We looked back there and we'd catch it. It would open up about two inches, stop and shut. Kept doing that. Well, we finally, "Guys," we said, "Look, we're going up to get Buddy," my stepfather. So we all got up, started towards the stairs and there was a real big girl, Fern Burns? I think her name was and Debbie Hotels. That's another haunted house. And then my brother. My sister went back to get her switchblade. She had a switchblade back there with a tiger, gold tiger on it. Just a beautiful thing. When she reached down to get that knife, that door went whoosh [sound effect]. Well, needless to say, "It's time to get the fuck out of here!" [laughter] I took off. I was at the bottom through my brother's legs, one girl's legs, top girl's legs. I was at the top of the steps before my stepfather got there. I was moving. [laughter] I thought, "To heck with this." And it's been a lot of things happened in that old place.

BL: Yeah? Which brings me to the question we were talking about earlier before we started taping: superstitions.

JP: [00:53:45] Oh, I'm very.

BL: Oh, are you?

JP: [00:53:47] Oh yeah, I believe in those things.

BL: In regards to boating and the watermen, what kind of superstitions have you heard?

JP: [00:53:56] Well, you're not supposed to take a boiled egg on a boat or a banana.

BL: What about the boiled egg that you're...

JP: [00:54:01] I don't know what it was about the egg.

BL: But your grandfather was the one who told you this?

JP: [00:54:05] Yeah. Yeah.

M3: Somebody said egg salad.

BL: Yeah.

JP: [00:54:08] Yeah. Even, yeah, egg salad. Anything with an egg.

BL: Blue-bottom boats? You ever heard that one? Not to paint the bottom of your boat?

JP: [00:54:16] That's supposed to be bad luck, yeah. We always coppered there with the red. And as I got older and started my own... doing more on my own, I had blue, red, black, I didn't care.

BL: Whatever anyone... whatever they want.

JP: [00:54:27] Hey. You got them greenbacks, baby, I'll paint it whatever color you -- I'll paint her pink.

BL: [laughs] After your grandfather's boatyard closed, what did you do to make a living?

JP: [00:54:38] I stayed working on boats. I stayed doing...

BL: Mm-hmm. Working for someone else?

JP: [00:54:42] No, working for myself.

BL: Out of your yard? Your...

JP: [00:54:45] Yeah, out of my garage, my yard. I had a little shed that wasn't much bigger than this room. As a matter of fact, smaller than this room. I'd done work out of it. The one thing that my grandad did for everybody that did work for him, he gave them something. Couple of them, he gave boats... gave them a boat. "There it is; it's yours." Me? I didn't want a boat. I worked on them... I didn't want one. So he helped me build my shop up on Quinn Road. I had to build it myself, but he bought the materials and all that.

BL: Mm-hmm. How long did you run that, Joe?

JP: [00:55:21] 'Till the day I lost it. And that was not good. I... It all started when I lost my youngest daughter. She was 19 years old and that almost took me out of here. I... as a matter of fact, I put it on Facebook. I was going down to Big Owl's to get drunk and go home and pull the trigger. I couldn't handle it. And one of the Kingsman Motorcycle Club that's around here that a lot of people know. They're a very good club. One of them... I was down at Big Owl's but I was hot when I did... said that on

Facebook. He came over to me. Of course, he was big as a doggone tank. He looked at me, he says, "Come here, boy. I want to talk to you." I went, "Oh shit. What the hell have I done?" [laughter] I'm getting ready to get beat the hell out of. Well, he got me up to the other end of the bar. He says, "Booter, a lot of us boys like you." He said, "You help us, you follow us, everything." He said, "But I'm going to tell you this. What I seen on Facebook today, if you ever put something like that on Facebook again, I'm coming over here and I am going to beat your ass bad." And when he done that, I was in a dark spot and didn't think anybody would give a shit about me so what the hell? Leave. And when he done that, it brought me out of that dark spot.

BL: Because someone cared.

JP: [00:56:49] Somebody... yeah. Somebody cared enough that I really didn't know that well. And it brought me out and then the following week, I went down there and I walked up to him. I said, "Payne, I want to talk to you." He was talking about, "What do you want?" I said, "I need to talk to you. I came up and talked to you, now you come up and talk to me." So he did. I reached out and I shook his hand. "What the hell is that for?" I said, "You saved my life last week." "What do you mean?" I said, "By you

telling me that you were going to beat my ass if you ever see something like that on Facebook again, you brought me out of that dark spot I was in." I wasn't going to go home and pull the trigger.

BL: Wow. Saved your life.

JP: [00:57:37] Yeah. He... that's what I told him. I said, "You saved my life." And then...

BL: You also were in a motorcycle accident. Is that right?

JP: [00:57:46] Yes. That was before my...

BL: [both speaking-unclear], right?

JP: [00:57:50] Yeah, that was before.

BL: Before you lost your daughter.

JP: [00:57:52] Yeah. That was 10/10/10. [laughs] Never forget that date.

BL: Wow.

JP: [00:57:57] Oh yeah. I was at The Jetty and drank one beer there. This other guy, I really didn't know him too well but I knew him, he wanted to ride up to the docks Centreville. All right. What the heck? Well, got there, drank sodas. So we decided to leave. Coming back on 18, the little back road, well that corner that you get to just before John Brown, I was in front of him. And I was on a Kawasaki Vulcan, he was on a Harley. Well, I guess he didn't think that Harley should be behind him. I'm going

around the corner which is something you never do: pass on a corner. Well, he tried to come by me on the inside. And when he did, he kept coming over because he couldn't handle the corner, over on me, pushed me right into a ditch. They seen where I was fighting with him to get out of the ditch when the front tire hooked the dirt and throwed me into a telephone pole which tossed me out in the field. I didn't know it at the time. There was an old lady and her hus... her son and daughter who drove a motorcycle, they heard the accident. Well, they come running out there, they called the ambulance for me. That guy, after I got... they put me on a helicopter, shock trauma bam, they lost me twice on the helicopter. Got me there, I don't know how many times they lost me after that. I had a torn aorta in my heart, a brain injury which they call the same as shaken baby syndrome, and a disintegrated wrist. All the little round buttons that you have in your... or balls that you have in your wrist, a lot of people don't even know they're there. I crushed all of those. I tried to go without it when they got me out of the hospital. Uh-uh. The pain was just... so I ended up having to go back and have that fused. Well, when I finally got my together, I went up to the farm where that lady was, a big white farmhouse. The one before you get to John Brown and knocked on the door. And this lady

about 86 years old knocked... answers. Says, "Can I help you?" I said, "Yes, ma'am. I'm the gentleman that was in that motorcycle accident and I wanted to come and thank..." "Oh, boy..." I didn't even get it all out. "Come on in here. Sit down. Do you want a cup of coffee? I'll made a cup of coffee." And we're drinking coffee and she said, "What ever happened to the guy that run you off the road?" I said, "Well, he told me that he was so far ahead of me that he didn't even know I had an accident." Here's this 86-year-old woman. Boy, she jumped up out of her chair. I said, "Wooh, granny." [laughter] "Easy, baby." She said, "Bull fucking shit. He was right there when you hit that pole. We heard him nail it when he took off."

BL: Wow.

JP: [01:01:09] Left my ass there to die.

M3: How did that affect your ability to work?

JP: [01:01:14] That's what's... I ended up... I've been on... I've been on disability ever since...

BL: You need that.

JP: [01:01:20] ... was the... you get to work on a car under a hood. You got all that mess out... you try... you got to get in contortionated spots that's... and I can't do it. So they...

BL: You ever seen that guy since?

JP: [01:01:34] [laughs] Yeah. I went down Big Owl's one night and was sitting there with Johnny. Guy walked over, wanted to talk to me. Not a good thing was what I had in my pocket. Riding bike, always had something in my pocket. I always do. You never know what you're going to run into. There are some crazy-ass ones out there. And [laughs] he walked away. Come back Johnny again. "John, what's wrong with Booter? Won't even talk to me." Johnny said, "Why don't you ask him?" "He won't talk to me." Johnny says, "He knows you left him there to die. And he knows you might not want to talk to him again. You might not make it out of here." [laughter] I'd have either shot him or I'd drug his ass overboard and we'd end up diving. He'll learn some tricks.

BL: So...

M3: [laughs]

JP: [01:02:32] He would have accidentally not made it up.

BL: [laughs] Right, he'd get under one of them wharfs, one of them piers.

JP: [01:02:38] Oh, accidentally, man. Accidentally, definitely.

M3: You got some really mean tattoos. How did that come about?

JP: [01:02:45] Oh my gosh. Well, with liking my pirates so much... well, this is one of my first. Ugh. It's a naval

anchor in memory of Medford Thomas Sr., of my grandfather.

And then I got this one. And then the Sexton. I have everything to do with pirates. Got the telescope, the pirate's chest, and then I got my favorite.

BL: The cutlass? Oh, the mermaid.

JP: [01:03:15] No, that ain't the mermaid, baby. That's the pirate chick.

BL: Oh, the pirate one.

JP: [01:03:10] Oops, I'm sorry. I'm not supposed to...

[laughter] I forgot we're on camera. You weren't supposed to see that. [laughter]

BL: R. That doesn't have an R rating.

JP: [01:03:25] And then on this side, my diver. I was starting to do the thing about what I did over the years. Diving, working on the water. The first one was this one up here, the dive flag, and it says, "Muff, M-U-F-F, Diver."

[laughter] It ain't funny. That is actually a dive team in Annapolis.

BL: Is that right?

JP: [01:03:55] They are actually called Muff Divers. [laughs] I didn't know that until after I got it. [both speaking-unclear] Then I got the shark. And then I got the shark. Then, of course, my little mermaid, my EMT. I was a fireman for... since I was 16 when I got into being an EMT.

BL: Grasonville Fire Department?

JP: [01:03:12] Yeah, Grasonville.

M3: Well, you've seen some changes in that fire department, haven't you?

JP: [01:04:15] Oh my goodness.

BL: Yeah, they're building a new...

JP: [01:04:18] To see that building go down, that's... that building was built in '58 and...

BL: Yeah. Our whole childhood was...

JP: [01:04:26] I remember when I first joined, riding them firetrucks. Oh, especially one... I hated it. Snow, rain, or sleet, you're not inside. You're standing on the backboard holding onto the pole like, "Oh, shit." When you get to the fire if you had a beard, it was frozen. It was froze. Your face would be all iced up, you'd have to smack to get all that off.

BL: Pirates.

JP: [01:04:52] Oh. I've always been fascinated with pirates.

BL: Is that something unique to yourself or is that something within that community that, "Hey, they came before us and here's what they did for us."

JP: [01:05:02] No, that's kind of just me. I've always been fascinated with them.

BL: What have you learned about this area in pirates?

JP: [01:05:08] I've learned, one, Blackbeard. Everybody said Blackbeard never came up this way. It's bullshit. He actually came up as far as Queenstown Creek.

M3: I had read a bunch that he was associated with the... it wasn't the mayor of Queenstown, but it was whoever ran the town back then. And they had a situation where he would essentially guard the town while he was in town.

JP: [01:05:30] Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Yeah. I've heard the same thing. A little tavern they had up here, a little Blackwater tavern I used to go into, and learned a little thing about why they called it Blackwater. Well, they make a vodka called Sloop Betty. That's really got me going there lately on it. And there was actually a sloop called a *Sloop Betty* that Blackbeard sunk off the coast of... in the Chesapeake just off the coast of Virginia. And I found a book... I found a lot of the shipwrecks in the Chesapeake and I looked that up and I found it. I said, "Well, there it is." And it tells you. Sunk by Blackbeard the pirate.

BL: You had mentioned earlier that there was probably a different grandfather that was in the navy during World War II. Did that have any influence on you?

JP: [01:06:18] No, that is the grandfather I've been talking about.

BL: Is that right?

JP: [01:06:21] Yes.

BL: So he left the boatyard then to come back or...

JP: [01:06:24] He started the boatyard, him and his three brothers, at 14. And then when the war... just before the war started, he went into the navy. He enlisted into the navy. I think he was 17 and he got in somehow. Oh, he saw some real bad stuff.

BL: Your grandfather and grandmother must've been really good people.

JP: [01:06:45] They both were. They've done, like I said, done a lot for the community.

BL: Mm-hmm. And a lot for you it sounds like.

JP: [01:06:51] Oh yeah, me. Yeah.

BL: Because of your family situation. Without them, you...

JP: [01:06:56] Oh yeah.

BL: ... you'd have been jammed up, it sounds like.

JP: [01:06:58] My grandad, like I said, he was my father all my life.

BL: Mm-hmm. Were there any lessons that he taught you when you were young that you carry with you today? That your grandfather instilled in you?

JP: [01:07:10] Oh yeah.

BL: Can you give me a couple examples?

JP: [01:07:13] Respect. Honesty. And one thing you never do, and that's cuss in front of a woman.

BL: Is that right?

JP: [01:07:20] I've seen... I... well, I made that mistake one time. Just once. I learned. I said the f-word in front of a woman. Next thing I know, I'm picking myself up off the ground. When I stood up, he said, "You do not say those words in front of a woman. That is disrespectful. I don't ever want to..." "You'll never hear that. Uh-uh. Not from me again."

BL: Is he the most important person in your life until you had kids of your own?

JP: [01:07:47] Yes. I'd have done anything and I mean anything.

BL: When did he pass away?

JP: [01:07:55] 2009. Worst day of my life.

BL: Is that right?

JP: [01:07:59] Oh God, yes.

BL: Even with all the stuff that you've been through.

JP: [01:08:03] Yeah. Well, other than losing my children. I've lost two children, not just one. Two years after my youngest, I lost my oldest daughter, [Amber?].

BL: Both daughters. Do you have any other kids?

JP: [01:08:16] I've got one left.

BL: Mm-hmm. Boy or girl?

JP: [01:08:18] Girl. I had all girls.

BL: Awesome, man. Well, thank you for taking the time to join us today, Joe Booter Poet.

JP: [01:08:26] Yeah. [laughter]

BL: I know we've been trying to make this happen for a long time.

JP: [01:08:31] It's been a while, yeah.

END OF AUDIO FILE