

INTERVIEW LOG

Interviewee: Melvin Engle

Oral History #66

Interviewer: Richard Dodds
Joe Liener

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Location: Rt. 1, Box 62
Preston, MD 21655

Topic: Mr. Engle's activities as a commercial fisherman on the Choptank River in the vicinity of the Dover Bridge, other well-known fishermen and the boats and equipment that were used. Also discussed was net fishing, herring, shad, rockfish.

Comments: Two tapes

Documentation:

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TAPE A BEGIN SIDE 1

Richard Dodds: (Sounds of shuffling paper.) Because I wanted you to show me the names of your fishing shores. Have I got the right one? Where's the bridge? Here's the bridge. (Presumably looking at boating chart.)

Melvin Engle: Here's the old Dover Bridge.

RD: That way I can mark it right on here.

ME: Well, from Dover Bridge down here to the railroad bridge was called the Hog Pen (ph).

RD: All right, let me mark it... somewhere right about in here.

ME: It's up to you. Hog Pen they called it, cause I tell you for why—when the steamboats left the wharf at Dover Bridge, they cleaned their farr (fire) at Dover Bridge and they thowed their damn coal cinders out thar and we caught them in the shad seines....

RD: Huh.

ME: and thar was always a bunch of trash and stuff and sow bed we called it that you caught in your nets and that's why they called it the Hog Bed. Now just below that—now where was we at—right here—here's the Hog Bed. Now from here to here was called the railroad retch. See, here's the railroad going across here. Now that was one of the best fishing retches around here—railroad retch.

Joe Liener?: Because that was a nice sweet straight screw there.

ME: Well, it was, but you won't believe this...

JL: It didn't have many eddies in there I'm talking about.

ME: Oh yeah, but we had a lot of snags in thar. Give me a pencil here a minute. Now back here, here's what they called Hog Island Point. There is a navigation light there now. Didn't used to be one thar, but there is thar now. It's on poles. Well, we used to have to lay out in this direction in case that net had to come around and come up here straight, and if you could get right up against that railroad bridge when the train come along with the shad seine, boy, you'd knock the s--t out of shad.

RD: Is that right?

ME: That old train would scare 'em out in the nets, and everybody tried to get to the railroad bridge—about 10 or 11 boats and everybody tried to get to the railroad bridge, but everybody can't do it.

JL: (Laughter).

ME: See, you tied it—it took us about an hour to make a trip in thar—in other words, from the time you laid your net out and the time you took it up and come back and started laying out again—about an hour. On an average running on the tide. Now of course, when the tides slowed up, it took longer. Now then, when you leave Hog Island Point going down here, thar wasn't much in here, it was all stake nets. You couldn't drift through thar.

RD: Yeah.

ME: Now, going down here, there should be a wharf here somewheres... Barker's Landing Wharf. They got the road coming in here, but, they don't show it going onto the river. Thar was a wharf thar. We loaded wheat thar off this old wharf aboard a sailboat. A man, Dave Price, from Cambridge, was the captain on the boat and the owner of the boat.

JL: Now, he could come right in pretty close, couldn't he?

ME: Well, he could get right here, thar was plenty of water thar.

JL: Right up against...

ME: He could get right up against the dock and they'd put in thar two bushels in a bag, but they dumped it loose down the hold.

RD: (Laughter).

ME: Yeah. Now then, when you got the hold full, then they would pile it up on deck—two bushel bags on the deck and he would cover the damn hatch over just so the boom would swing around (unintelligible). We would thrash wheat thar. Now, this Barker's Landing farm, it was good for about 4,000 bushels of wheat, which was a good run thar. That river field—there's 125 acres into it. You don't see too many farms in Talbot County with 100 acres into it. I know, I've been into most of 'em. Now there's one up here in Wye Mills—Eddy Boyd got one up thar. You know him, do you?

RD: No.

ME: You don't know Eddy Boyd? You go by his place everyday going to St. Michaels, as soon as you get off Oak Creek Bridge out in those woods there's a mailbox thar and that's whar he lives back thar through that woods.

RD: Yeah, okay. I know the area.

ME: He's I guess a multi-millionaire, but he's a little bit of an alcoholic, too, (unintelligible). (Laughter). When I was working thar, this service truck would come at that time, would come in thar and he'd stop his truck thar, but we knew him as Horner, a boy by the name of Horner, Hookerberry (ph) Horner they called him. And he'd open the back door, and say, "Come here you sucker, you want to see something." He opened them doors up and you'd never see such a mess in your life. Eddy Boyd had been on some kind of safari and he had all this stuff mounted and sent home that he'd shot over thar...wild dogs and elephant tusks...you never seen such a damn mess in thar. Had a truck load of it (laughter)...a tractor trailer load of it. And then he used to go down here to, well, along here somewhere's was a flood (ph). Back in thar, thar was an airplane pilot...a fellow by the name of Smith and he used to go on safaris. I was down thar in his shed and you talk about elephant tusks and stuff hung up thar in that shed, you wouldn't believe all kinds of mounted heads and stuff...the whole dam shed full of it. And he had a lot of exotic guns and the boys went down to visit him about 15 years ago. The boys went down thar and caught him going away on a flying trip and nobody home and stole all his guns and set the damn house afarr.

JL: I'll be darn.

ME: But, they caught up with 'em. They found the guns and caught up with them.

JL: All that mounted trophies and so forth...that burned up in the house?

ME: No, no. That was in the barn.

JL: Oh, that was in the barn.

ME: I know, I've been down thar. And he had a run, I'm not exaggerating as far as here to the state road and about 10 feet wide that he raised quail thar. I bet thar was about a couple thousand quail in thar. In this long run, they fed 'em in thar and had a place in thar where they had a roof over it. A fellow by the name of Smith. He was an airplane pilot.

RD: Well, what happens in Barker's Wharf? We got to there.

ME: Well, we used to fish in thar, but thar weren't much drifting in thar. You had to lay out in slack water when the tide weren't moving for a while. You could catch fish in thar, but you had to watch yourself. I mean there was a lot of stuff on the bottom that you could get hung on to 'em and when you get hung on something on the bottom, you are hung. Right here at the Hog Island Point, Howard over here, he was fishing with my uncle at that time and they caught this old sailboat thar and they still got it down home thar.

JL: I'll be darn.

ME: They pulled that thing out of about 40 feet of water, brought it up and got it in the boat, but they caught it at one end, and they stripped the damn net from one end to the other. They (unintelligible) lead line right out of it...just kept sliding right down because it had a hook on the end of it, you know. It was one of those slide anchors.

JL: Flip those away.

ME: Yeah, you could lay it down flat, and it's still down home thar. The old anchor is still thar that they caught and when they got done, Howard fainted and my uncle brought him home that morning about 4 o'clock and called my father and he said, "Howard is not fit to fish no more," and said, "He fainted on me," so he called my brother Raymond, which he was working on the state road, but this was Saturday morning and he didn't have work Saturday, so he went Saturday morning. Now then Sunday afternoon, my father said, "You ain't going to school tomorrow." I said, "What's going on." "You're going fishing." But, I would have been 13 years old in June, but this was in April. That's when I started fishing.

RD: When you were 13.

ME: Thirteen.

RD: What year was that?

ME: 1926.

RD: 1926.

ME: I was born in '13 and this was in '26 now, but I wasn't 13 yet. This was in April and they put me out thar with my drinking uncle fishing. I'll give him one thing, he always had a bottle, but he never got out of way (ph), and you'd never see him take a drink. He wouldn't offer me a drink. Of course, I was all of 13 years old.

RD: At this time, how were the boats being propelled...were they mostly engines by that time?

ME: We had that one that I showed you a picture of with that Lockwood Ash (ph) motor into it. Now before I was old enough to go fishing, my oldest brother, Raymond—he was fishing with Uncle Albert (ph), and they were using that 10 foot oar that I gave you—didn't have any sail in the boat—they were using a 10 foot oar, and then my other uncle and his brother-in-law from Cambridge, Robbins, George Robbins...he brought up an outboard motor for him to use. But, he would always get you down thar and never bring you back, so they put up with that thing one year. Of course, they kept the oar right at hand thar and I used to go with 'em on Saturdays when I weren't in school and my uncle Charley—the one I showed you here in the picture with the fish—he was a rough operator that man. He was rough. "What the hell did you bring that thing along for this morning?" What is he going to do, pull them bugs out of them Elwise (ph) edge. You know, Elwise got a bug in the top of his (unintelligible). I don't know if it was for breeding purposes or what is it?

JL: I don't know.

ME: Have you ever noticed it?

JL: Never got an explanation about it. This was one I'm waiting to hear? Did you?

ME: I don't know anything about it, only it does have a bug right at the top of his mouth. Everyone of 'em, and that's what my uncle used to say. "What the hell did you bring him along for? Pull them bugs out of them bug heads?" (Laughter). He was a rough operator, that man was, and this was before they had rubber clothes to wear...oil skins.

JL: Sticky as could be.

ME: Yeah, you know something about 'em. But, he'd cut the legs off at the knees. Of course, he had hip boots on, see. I won't say he cut 'em off. A dog might have chewed 'em off the way it looked and we were along the Talbot shore that day...had a great big farr built up thar waiting for our nets. The tide was low, the wind was northwest. The tide don't run too fast on a northwest wind and he was backed up by that farr man, boy, he was something else. He got wet out thar. It was rough and the limp old oil skins caught afarr and I'll give you three guesses what happened (laughter). He run right overboard right up underneath his arms (laughter) to put that farr out (laughter). Another time, my uncle and I were over on the Caroline shore. Well, it had been rainy and nasty for two or three days, wind from the northeast...weren't doing no fishing. We was out thar fishing, but weren't catching nothing and to build a farr...it was kind of cool. To build a farr, it was hard to find something dry enough to build a farr with, and on a real high tide, the tide would wash this old marsh grass up on the shore. You would dig underneath of it, and you could find some dry stuff in thar and we dug underneath thar and found some dry stuff and hell, all it was doing was smoking and here come Uncle Charley ashore. Well, we always carried a two gallon can of gas with us. That would run us all day long on them little old putt-putts—two gallons of gas a day. And I never will forget it. He had one of these old Amoco cans with Amoco Oil on the side of it...square can...and he had maybe a pint and a half or a quart of gas in it at the most. Of course, he was in the stern of the boat and when he got out, he come ashore with that damn old can and he said, "You boys ain't got a damn thing up here but smoke." He took his old can and took the top off of it and gives her a squirt like that and when he did, she said boom boom. Right back out old wood and it just opened it right up. Now that's another one his dumb tricks.

JL: If it had been full, it would have been all right, but it was all gas in there.

ME: He weren't too far from it, but he said, "You ain't got a damn thing in here but smoke." But he found out thar was some farr in thar when he done that. He had his son and son-in-law fishing against him. His son fished in the daytime and his son-in-law fished at nighttime and he stayed thar. That's how damn tough he was.

RD: When you first started, how many boats were fishing at the time?

ME: I would say 10 to 12.

RD: By that time, they all had an engine in them.

ME: Not all of them. The first stern motor that I saw down thar, the Wilber boys had it. We called it stern squirter (ph).

JL: Old Calley (ph) wasn't it.

ME: I don't know what the hell the name of it was...

JL: A big long dry shaft it was.

ME: Yeah.

JL: That's old Calley (ph).

ME: Now a boy down here has got one of those Sears Roebuck engines that would come out with water wings (ph) run by hot shot batteries. He's an antique collector himself and I said, "Don't you want to give that to the St. Michaels Museum?" He says, "No, I can't part with that." But, I tell you what, he was up here yesterday. He's got a herring seine...3 ¼ inch mesh that floats and is as deep as a shad seine. He said, "I'll give you that and you take that down thar and put it in Sheep's (ph) old boat. Now if you boys want it, I can get it.

RD: Sure. I'd be glad to have it.

ME: It's about 20 somethin' feet deep.

RD: Is there any difference in the mesh size in the herring seine.

JL: Yeah, sure.

ME: The herring seine was 3 ¼ inch mesh. The shad twine was 5 1/8 or 5 ¼.

JL: Yeah, 5 ¼.

RD: What about rock.

ME: The rock is all sizes. Any damn thing you wanted from 3 inches on up to 7 inches. Seven inches just gets 15 pound rock. Just gill a 15 pound rock, but damn, they were mean to fish. Carps get through the mesh.

JL: Get all tangled up.

ME: Don't tell him about it, I know a little bit about it.

RD: Well, let's carry on with the different fishing spots.

ME: Now then, when you leave Barker's Landing, you come around here to what I call Boston Cliffs (ph). You shoot from a road going down to that from the Talbot side. This could have been it (pointing to chart), Boston Cliffs. Now, we used to fish in thar some, but it was always when the tide was real slow. Now then, there should be #49 can buoy right here (sound of shuffling chart).

RD: Yeah, it's right there.

ME: But, that's been changed. Now then, the only thing, I could never find no 20 feet of water in that place. I've been all through it with lead, 13, 14 feet of water is the limit. Now we would drift from thar down here on flood tide and drift through up to here. Thar was a right good drift through thar.

RD: What's it?

ME: About a mile.

RD: About a mile?

ME: About a mile in thar is where we'd drift. Now, that's what they called Rumbley (ph).

RD: R-U-M-B-L-E-Y—Rumbley?

JL: I guess it's spelled the same as Rumbley Point down there towards Crisfield.

ME: Rumbley—that's what we called it—Rumbley. Now, that was a good fishing place. We would all go down thar early in the spring 'cause your fish would get thar before they'd get up here, see, and we'd go down thar and fish. Now then, the next thing you'd come to was Windy Hill...Lloyd's Landing. Now here's is what they called Whirlaque (ph).

RD: Now, how would you spell that?

ME: Don't ask me, Whirlaque. I'll tell you a story about it. My uncle was down thar one day fishing by himself in an old boat and a fellow by the name of Frank Hummer

from Windy Hill—he claimed that was his fishing hole (laughter). He didn't want nobody else in thar. My uncle went down thar and laid out a net and here comes Frank Hummer along. "Take that god damn net up thar it almost (ph) cut the buoys off." My uncle reached thar in his warsh board (ph) and come out with that old single barrel shotgun and said, "Go ahead and cut or I damn well will start shooting, too." So Frank Hummer didn't bother him. Frank Hummer was a real tall string bean guy.

JL: Where was he from? Windy Hill?

ME: Windy Hill. He was from Windy Hill. Now that's as far down as I fished this Whirlaque. Of course, the boys went on down here to Drum Point. Now that's past Bow Knee Point. That's Bow Knee Point right here, I believe, isn't it?

RD: No, it says Frazier Point here.

ME: Frazier Point? Well, here's Bow Knee over here then. It's gotta be.

JL: Yeah, it's on this side.

ME: Bow Knee Point. Then there was a place on down here they called Drum Point. Some of the boys went down thar. I never went down thar. Whirlaque was the futhest down I fished.

RD: Okay. Now how up the other side of the bridge?

ME: All right. Now then, you leave Dover Bridge and you go up here to whar they called Dover, but the story they told that there was an old bridge timber broken out thar and a damned old side wheeler struck it with right wheel (ph) and drove it down in the mud. And we had it marked right to the minute. A cedar tree down on my father's shore and his house chimney is whar that old thing was drove out thar. Now this was considered Dover up to that cedar tree—from Dover bridge up to Dover. But, thar was a wharf in here too. I can't think the name of it anymore.

JL: There was a boathouse there somewhere's, wasn't there.

ME: Well, that's up futher. We ain't got to the boathouse yet. It's gone. My wife's brother owns that now and he tore the old boathouse down. But, anyhow...

RD: This is the bridge here.

ME: Here is the bridge. Up here is called Dover, up here about halfway. What's this, Mitchell's Creek?

JL: Yeah, Mitchell Run.

ME: Right in here was the dividing line of Dover and Kate's (ph) Hole and from here on up is Kate's Hole. Now then, when you leave Kate's Hole, you get into what you call Stocking Top (ph) (laughter).

JL: What's that, that little thin neck going out there?

ME: That's up above the boathouse.

JL: Yeah.

RD: Stocking Top.

ME: Up thar above this...Stocking Top. Now then, here was Kingston Hole. Now they only got 50 feet of water thar and two years ago, I was in thar and dropped dead in thar at 67 feet of water.

RD: Is that right?

JL: Yeah, that's right at the end of the road that comes down to Kingston.

ME: I measured 67 feet of water in thar. How do you figure that? Of course, this has all been warshed out. This was all marsh out here, but that's all been warshed away and

gone. There's no more point out thar. Now then, when you leave Kingston Hole you come into Tobacco Bed.

RD: Where is that?

ME: Right here...from here to here...Tobacco Bed.

JL: Before you get to Crowberry Creek.

ME: Yeah, now then, when you leave Tobacco Bed, you get into Hog Creek.

RD: Yeah, I see it there. Is that what they called it, Hog Creek?

ME: They called it Hog Creek. Now, that was a good fishing retch, too. It was a good clean retch and good long retch.

JL: Yeah, a long straight stretch there.

RD: How do you spell retch?

ME: Don't ask me (laughter).

JL: He means reach.

RD: Reach.

ME: We always called it retch, old creek retch. That's the way we pronounced it.

JL: But, that's not the way it's spelled. You mean reach, but you call it retch.

ME: Now then, when you leave Hog Creek, you get out in here and these are what are called High Banks.

RD: Here's Hog Creek.

ME: That's Hog Creek. All right, going up here...well right off again there's Bell Creek, is what they call High Banks and thar should be a creek up here somewhere's...Turkey Creek. That's Turkey Creek right thar.

JL: That's a little sharp thing, isn't it?

ME: Yeah, it goes into Harbor Shore (ph). Now then, you get into what they call Ganey's. This is Ganey's from here up to Gilpin's Point.

RD: Okay.

ME: And that was a good retch in thar. Ganey's.

RD: There used to be a wharf there, didn't there?

ME: Well, there's still a wharf thar.

RD: Still a wharf there?

ME: And they had a fish hatchery thar for a while. I've been looking for something and I can't find it. I had two pictures of the old fish shad hatchery up to Tuckihoe (Tuckahoe)...one taken of the outside and one taken of inside of it and they got away from me. I've been trying to hunt 'em, but I can't find 'em. Now then, after you leave Ganey's, we never fished no more on up here till you get up to Tuckihoe.

RD: Yeah, that's the Tuckahoe here.

MR: All right. Now, what happened, we would fish down in here as long as the shad lasted, maybe the first of May. Now, about the 10th of May, we would take our shad seines that were no good and cut 'em two and take a small boat up here and just stretch 'em right across the creek. Maybe we'd catch 10 or 12 shad and then come home and carry 'em out through the neighborhood. We wouldn't sell 'em...give 'em to the people in the neighborhood...the shad. I mean it was all give to your neighbor and help your neighbor and do what you could. That's what we used to do; we used to go up thar to Reese's Landing and Culbert's (ph) Landing up Tuckihoe.

RD: Oh, that's beyond the bridge, isn't it, Tuckahoe Bridge?

ME: Yeah. Reese's Landing and Culbert's Landing, and they're still available up thar. They're open. And then there was a place up here called Snow's Flat. I think this was it right here called Snow's Flat. The boys used to go up thar and set nets and catch white perch early in the spring of the year...Snow's Flat. But, I never fished none up thar, and don't get me wrong on this, I'm not trying to....

RD: How far up did you go? Ganey's was as far as you'd go?

ME: That's as far as I've fished, other than go up to Reese's Landing and Dover Landing, after shad fishing was over. Are you recording all this?

RD: Hm, hmm.

ME: Come on.

RD: (Laughter). I have to, because I'd be writing this stuff down and have a book this thick.

ME: Well, after Lattery (ph) Gates and Clenton Carroll one day went up Tuckihoe fishing, this was after shad fishing was over see, and they come back and they got right thar into Hog Creek, just whar you get to High Banks—it was terribly warm out thar—he had two old 3 ¼ inch nets that he was gonna throw away anyhow, and he said, “Hell, I'm going thar and catch a mess of fish,” and he had this old bateau boat with a Model A Ford motor into it and had two nets, and when they come along and they stopped thar and they said they laid it into ‘em, “You dumb sucker, you ain't got sense enough for nothing.” They said he had white perch...I saw the fish...I guarantee you, out of the two nets, he had over 500 pounds of white perch...I mean of rock...3 ¼ inch rock. He had a pile up on the stern of that boat he couldn't hardly pull (ph) up over. Rock all in them two nets and he said thar was a fish in every mesh.

JL: Must have been.

ME: And this was way long in May. Now we used to catch shad up here called May shad and May rock. They were different looking shad and different looking rock. We'd catch one once in a while, in the shad seine...very seldom...once in a while. It was a short stubby rock...big fat belly, but they would call 'em May rock. But very seldom we ever caught any rock in them shad seines. Of course they were real fine twine.

RD: When you first started fishing, you said there was very little rock anyway.

ME: Oh, no, no rock. Rock never come along until the late '30s. Now, why they fished these herring seines, they floated them because they would go just like the same speed of a shad seine. Now a rock net, it drags the bottom and it don't go as fast as a shad seine. It doesn't go as fast as the tide goes. So, your shad seine and your rock nets wouldn't fish together unless you laid the rock net out behind all the time, but, you couldn't always do it.

JL: It would be crawling up on the other ones.

ME: And I know I've had that happen over nighttime. Now, you talk about a mess. A shad seine run up on a sink net over nighttime, and every carp went through a mesh two or three times, and you try to separate ‘em out thar in the river in the dark with nothing but an old Coleman lantern. The only thing to do is just pull the whole mess in the boat all together with one string, take it ashore, and reel it up and straighten it out.

RD: You talked about net reels before—where did you keep your nets when you were fishing.

ME: Where did I keep ‘em?

RD: Yeah.

ME: Well, that picture was taken whar they had the bottle. The reel was right thar right in back of them.

RD: Where about on the chart?

ME: Right thar at the railroad bridge where we had a reel at. There was a couple of reels thar.

RD: I brought this picture along from our file. This is on the Tuckahoe, but I think it's probably the same type of arrangement that you might have had.

ME: No, ours was altogether different.

RD: Was it? This is the reel here in the boat.

ME: We had two poles that were laid down on the sand. Of course, we had a lot of sand thar...sand shore. We had two poles laid down. Now Saturday at dinner time, you would pull that boat up on them two poles crossways right up to the reel and reel your net up right out of the boat and the reel was about 26 foot long. Now this don't look that long.

JL: No, that's a short one there.

ME: That's right. But now, and it was made out of 6 x 6 in the middle with a pin each end and about a 3 x 10 in the ground here and then thar was two pieces of 1 x 3 loaded onto that 6 x 6 and then pulled together on the end, and then your piece went longways.

JL: Longitudinal was in the ends of them.

ME: And when you had your carp on it, you always had a loop in the end and the other end you had a ring, and you just stick over that 1 x 3 and you start winding it. And a story about that. Fishing season was all over that year, and I heard my uncles—both of 'em—tell about it and laugh about it until they cried; a bunch of dummies. "Now here's another one of his dumb tricks." They decided to go down the river. They had two shad seines on this reel and then they go down and cut 'em out. They were gonna save the rope because the rope was still good and all they had to do is gear new twine in it for another year. Well, we'll go down thar and we'll cut 'em out. As we were reeling them off, cut the lacing, and throw the old twine away and keep the rope, the (unintelligible) and the rings, see. And they were working and Charlie said, "Ah, heck, this is too blame slow. (Unintelligible) got a match and struck a match to her. That twine, well it burnt just like gasoline over the linen and twine that was dry. Burnt the blame net up, the rope up, and the reel up (laughter). I've heard him tell that and laughed about it. Now this was before my time. But, I've heard him tell that back thar. Burnt the damn reel up.

JL: Yeah, those cross arms that you had on that 6 x 6. You had three sets, one on each end and one in the middle.

ME: Thar was about 4 feet on the end and another 7 or 8 foot in the middle.

JL: It made a bow there so that it gathered more of the net in the middle, than on the ends.

ME: See the shad twine and rock twine is geared. Rock twine, you've got to be pretty particular about how it's geared, the fullness of it. You understand what I mean. Now, I've got a book out thar in the shop. I can show you whar we geared nets at. Now you figure this out. You gear it half way between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$.

JL: That's the size of the mesh he's talking about.

ME: You take a 4 inch Morris (ph) wrench, or you say you want to take 4 Morris (ph), 4 x 4's is 16. Well, if you bring it back and make an 8 inch tie that's tied half, but it's gotta be halfway between $\frac{1}{2}$ and $\frac{2}{3}$. I tell you what happened. My uncle and I were

fishing together at that time. This was along during muskrat season. And I saw him one day and he said, "Dick, what are we gonna do about fishing this year." I said, "We gonna have to get some new twine." Then he said, "Well I'm gonna get a 4 ¼, what are you gonna get?" I said, "Well, I'll get a 4 ½." So we ordered it from Fish Net and Twine Company out of Jersey thar. And when he come, he brought the fire wood. Wilbur had an old shop down at home thar. It was only about 20 feet long. Of course, it had a stove in thar. This was in the first of March. "We'll get in thar and build a fire and we'll gear that net in thar." So, we got out and geared his net. Well, we used to cut a notch on the needle and used a 6 inch tire or a 6 ¼ inch tire whatever you want, and he went ahead and I tied off against his tire. Well, when we got done gearing his net in, I got ready to gear my 4 ½, I said, "Well how are we going to gear this?" "Oh, hell," he said, "You gear it the same way, there ain't no difference." (Laughter). We fished that net that whole spring and he cussed it every time we took it up. "That darn net ain't no good, won't catch fish, it ain't worth a darn." I said, "It's the way it's geared." "There ain't no such thing." Well, I was married at that time and I didn't have a thing in it. Only had the kitchen and the bedroom fixed up in here. I wasn't too well off money wise. I can tell you a long story about that if you want to hear about it. Well now, the madam and I got out that winter I cut that old net out from one end to the other—180 yards. Left the twine all laid thar and we'd wheel it around and the madam and I got out and geared it back differently like I wanted to gear it. Well, when it come spring to go fishing, I never said a word to him about it that I'd cut it out and geared it over again. I never will forget this. We went down here to Barker's Branch (ph) one day when it was slack water and laid it out and his 4 ¼ got 17 rock. I took mine up and got 54 out of it. (Laughter). He set right down on the stern of the boat. He said, "Dick, what in the hell have you done to this net?" He always called me Dick. My father's name was Richard and called him Dick and he'd call me Dick. My middle name was Richard. See, that's where he got it. "What the hell have you done to this net?" Well, I set down on the bow (unintelligible) too. We don't take nothing. Pulled the buoys in (unintelligible). I said, "I'll tell you what." Madam and I cut that net out last winter and I geared it over again. It was geared too full. It won't catch that way. "Well, it's geared all right now by gosh. It's catching now." He said, "Let's go home and order another one right now." He said, "We'll get Pauline down here and called in to Jersey Fish Net and Twine Company. We'll have it in two days." And that's what we done. So when we got ready to gear it, "You tell me how you want to gear it." (Laughter).

RD: Changed his mind, huh.

ME: He changed his mind only said thar weren't no difference in how a net was geared, but it is. I know that and this Tony Worm (ph) he has one of the best memories of fishing of anybody I have ever heard of. I mean, he didn't forget nothing. He could tell you just whar the wind was, what the tide was doing, how many fish he got that trip and everything. But, he couldn't remember how he geared nets. Well, I got a book out thar in the shop and I'll show it to you where I marked down how we geared nets. And every time he got ready to make a net, he'd come here and say, Engle, "How are you supposed to gear a 4 ½ inch net?" Well, he had another man gear it for him...Hopkins...he didn't do nothing but gear nets. That's all he done all winter longer—gear nets. And he was pretty good at it and pretty reasonable. He'd charge by the yard. You furnish the Clark's

rings and twine and the gearing twine, and he'd just do the work. And heck, him and his wife can gear one today without any trouble.

RD: You didn't actually make the nets here, they were always made.

JL: Not the lease (ph). They didn't knit the lease, only to repair the holes in it, right?

ME: Well, we repaired 'em, yeah.

JL: But, you didn't knit the lease (ph) to begin with?

ME: Well, thar's another story. I've heard my father tell 'em about when they were all thar at home thar was Shirley (ph), Albert, Louis and my father...four boys and I think thar was either four or five girls. Everybody learned how to knit. They'd knit shad seines and you'd knit a piece, I'd knit a piece and when we get done, we'd sew it together and make it all one piece. That's what they done all winter long and they were talking about my grandfather used to smoke a pipe and he kept a little bit of black powder around thar. While he was knitting, Louis, my father's brother, he got it and poured some black powder in his father's pipe and filled it up with tobacco and laid it down thar and when the old gentleman lit that pipe up, she said poof and his theory was he didn't whip one, he whipped all the boys. Every time anything done wrong, everyone of 'em got a licking—not one, everyone of 'em. (Laughter). And that's what my father said that he didn't approve of. He left home when he was 13 years old and jumped aboard a sailboat out thar at the railroad bridge and was gone two years before his mother knew whar he was at because they were supposed to be watching cows. See, they didn't have fences then and they always had a patch of rye or wheat or something down thar for cows to eat all through the spring of the year. Well, "All right, you boys go out thar and watch 'em and make 'em stay in that designated area." And they had these hot beds thar to use for their sweet potatoes. In the spring of the year they had these sweet potatoes bedded in thar for sprouts to plant. And Louis had a slingshot and he was shooting over towards them hot beds shooting them winter lights out and he knew darn well what was gonna happen. He was gonna get his tail end busted. But he saw this sailboat coming from up the river and he runs out thar on the railroad bridge, and by gosh, when she come through thar, he jumped aboard her.

RD: And was off.

ME: He jumped aboard the sailboat because he was involved with that (unintelligible). His mother was up thar the next morning looking for him, but she didn't find him. She got on the steamboat, and went up thar looking for him and it was two years before she knew whar he was at. She knew what had happened. Louis told 'em what he'd done and he run out thar on the railroad bridge and jumped aboard the boat. They knew whar he had gone, but they didn't know whar (laughter).

RD: I want to get back to the net reels and pardon my ignorance on this, but after every time you fished, was the net put back on the reel again or was it laid in the boat?

ME: No, that linen twine would get slime thar. You would have to reel it up. Well, we reel 'em up every Saturday. When Saturday come, you reel 'em up and quit Saturday at dinner time. But, now along about Tuesday or Wednesday, maybe we'd have to reel 'em up twice weekly, and we'd cover 'em up with sand and pull 'em through that sand and reel 'em up and just let 'em hang up thar for 10 or 15 minutes to dry. Of course, that twine was thin. It was dry quick and then put 'em right in the boat and go right on back to go fishing again and I'll tell you another story. Now, I didn't see this. I've heard it told many a time, but I didn't see it. The old fishermen used to have shanties all up and

down the river whar they slept during the odd hour and they didn't have no alarm clock. They would pull their boots off and lay down on the river shore and pull their stockings off. When the tide come up and got to their feet, that's what time they wanted to get up. That was their alarm clock.

RD: Makes sense.

ME: No, it don't make sense to me. I wouldn't do it. Well, I was left in that old shanty down thar many a time at nighttime, and go in thar and sleep a couple of hours and go back again.

JL: Did they have any floating shanties that they used here on the river?

ME: No, no. Everything was on the shore. Thar used to be several of 'em down here at the Dover Bridge...the old road rats. We boys were setting thar one day waiting for the tide to slow up. It was running too fast. Thar were eight or ten of us setting thar waiting for the tide to slow up and thar was one old river rat...old Hewlett Hubbard (ph--he come ashore and he was out thar by himself. You'd think it was eight or 10 head in that boat talking. He'd talk and run his mouth a mile a minute, always. He come ashore that day and tied his boat up and this was 2 o'clock in the afternoon. "Well, I guess, by gosh, you can go get your breakfast now, you didn't get up in time this morning to get it, you didn't get up till 3 o'clock. Now you go get your breakfast," talking to himself thar. Now we sat thar and laughed at that fool. He was something else old Hewlett Hubbard (ph). And then thar was another one thar by the name of Joe Knowles (ph). He was sort of an all around guy. He made a glubeno hound (ph). He said it weren't much for looks, but it was awfully strong (laughter). And the old bridge tender thar—this was after '33 when they built this bridge that's thar now. This bridge was finished up in '33, but he was still around in the shanty... Well, the old fellow that tended the bridge by the name of Bill Christy (ph)...he only had one eye...and he tended the bridge when they had to turn it off by hand. Take darn near two heads (ph) to do it. You had to unlock it and then make about 20 turns to get it swung it around at all. Well, Joe Knowles, he went to bed one night just about sundown and he ate his supper and went to bed and he thought, well darn, it must be getting daylight already and he looked up and he seen the light over the power house. That darn house is the same power house thar now...

END OF SIDE 1

(unintelligible) and he went to bed that evening and he said, I think I'm going to get up tomorrow morning and go out and have a couple of shots (unintelligible) before breakfast. Of course, he was one that always went to bed as soon as the chickens did as soon as the sun went down. Anyhow, he went to bed that night and woke up and looked around. The moon was shining bright and daggone it, I'll go (unintelligible) shot at that (unintelligible). Well, it was right thar within 30 yards of the house. He went out thar and started a shot (unintelligible). It would take about an hour to (unintelligible). That's what happened. He looked around. Well, the sun ain't coming up yet, I'll take another one. I took another shot. With the moon shining right bright, I started another shot. Doggone, I looked around in the morning the sun ain't coming up yet...looked at his watch ...it was 12:30. Now you figure what time he went out thar. Two hours, he went out thar at 10:30. I don't believe I'd ever told that on myself. I never told that (laughter). JL: You were't that absent minded.

ME: Well, he wasn't absent minded, he just done something. Well, that man, as long as I fished, I could come home say 10 o'clock at night, call him at 4, call him at 2, call him at 1:30, whatever you want. He was upstairs. All I had to do was stick my head in the door and say, "Call me at 2 o'clock." He had nothing but an old eight day alarm clock down the stairs that struck ½ hour and the hour. If you would get up when he called you, you could be down the stairs when that clock struck the half hour or the hour and I never knowed him to call me late. Now how in the devil did he do it? I asked him one day. I said, "Don't you never sleep?" He said, "Boy, I learned something when I was young and I was sailing. We had to get up every hour on the hour and checked the boat for leaks, see. And he said, "I ain't never got out of that habit." And I still would say, that there was seven of us kids and my mother, we never knew how much time he'd spend outdoors over nighttime. Nothing went on, no wind blowed or clouds went over the moon that he didn't know about it and he could predict the weather a lot better than these guys on television or radio today. He was pretty hot. I never could figure it out, and I never asked him. "Well, the wind would be northwest tomorrow, be drying out." How the devil could he tell that? He knew something that he knew and wouldn't tell nobody (laughter). And he could tell you...I tell you one thing he always said, "Three dews and a rain. If you have dew three morning straight, then it's going to rain."

JL: Well, you know yourself if you get up in the morning and you have a heavy dew, it's going to be a fair day that day. And if there's no dew there, you better watch out.

ME: It's going to do something. But, I tell you, thrashing week, we always set the thrash machine so it would be right head into the wind. Just back on the saw rig (ph) you know, and then you can make a decent rig. Now, Wilbur's got some pictures of some saw rigs thar that you oughta see...one caved in and covered the whole darn thrash machine up.

RD: Is that right?

ME: But, he was pretty hot. While the wind is south now, but it would be around here west before dinner time, so we're gonna set her for west. Now, how in the devil did he know this? And just as sure as god make the little apples, thar's where it would be.

RD: Melvin, tell us about the seasons...the fishing seasons.

ME: All right. The earliest shad I ever caught was the 13th of March. That's the earliest shad I ever caught. Caught 'em in Rumbley.

RD: Huh. And when did the shad season end roughly?

ME: Oh, well, your best of the season and rock season both with full moon in April. After that, it went downhill and a full moon.

RD: Is that when you pretty much finished fishing for the season then, or did you carry on after that?

ME: We'd fool around if you had nothing else to do someday and you weren't fit to do nothing else, Tiff (ph) Wilbur says, "Oh, let's go get about." "Get about he'd called it. He didn't talk real plain. He had a language of his own. Them Wilbur boys were something else. They lived off the land. My father had a sawmill thar at home and snow was on the ground. And of course, I was always heck with a gun...a shotgun and all. Never owned a pistil. Never owned but one rifle, but always had shotguns. And I was down thar at the saw mill that day...snow on the ground...maybe three or four inches of snow, and I heard this darn noise out in thar woods. Well, the sawmill was right to the edge of the woods. Sawdust followed right in the woods you might say. Heard this noise out thar in the woods. I thought what in the devil is that? Yop, yop, yop. Now, I walked through thar. Thar was the two Wilbur brothers which grown men, both of them married...one of them was playing dog, tracking this rabbit and barking on the trail and the other one was the gunner (laughter). Can you believe that?

RD: Very strange.

ME: They lived off the land. They didn't depend on nobody else and they could always find something to eat. We were down thar at Hog Island Point one day waiting to lay out. Of course, you take your turn laying out. Sometimes if you had two nets, you'd let someone lay one in between you so it would give you a little more time to take up instead of having two nets right together, see. Understand what I mean? You'd let the next guy...you go ahead and lay one and I'll lay one and you'd lay yours out. Depended on how crowded it was when laying out. We were laying out one day and Melvin says, "Tiff, I'm going up thar and find the main lead to that muskrat house and as soon as I get up thar and get situated, you come up and stomp the house." Well, it weren't very near your pickup in the boat. And I set right thar and watched them. Mel went up thar and stuck his hand down in the muskrat lead and held it thar. He stuck his left hand in thar. He had a stick in the other hand. When Tiff stomped that house, here comes this rat boy (ph) on the water. He raised his hand up and a rat come by he grabbed him by the tail and throwed him out. Run his hand right back in thar. They got three in less than two minutes (laughter).

JL: I wonder where he learned that trick?

ME: Don't ask me. Now Tiff was different than most people. He didn't know when to quit...fishing or muskrat nor nothing else. Muskrat the year around, set turtle hooks. Caught bull turtles on hooks. How do you take a bull turtle off a hook? Very easily and very gently. He had a piece of brass welding (ph) rod you know what I mean, bent with a real sharp hook into it. He'd hold that turtle up and he'd take that real sharp hook bent in that welding rod and keep sliding it down that hook until he got it right to the turtle's mouth and he'd pick it up like this and the turtle would fall right off.

RD: Hmm. A lot of tricks

JL: Unhooked him, huh?

ME: Unhook him. Because, you don't want to get your finger near that turtle's mouth—not a snapping turtle. He will hurt you. And we were laying out one day and I said, "What the heck is that coming down the river drifting here." And Mel Wilbur said,

“That’s a snapping turtle. Get pushing that rod, get him.” Hell, how are you gonna catch that turtle. He went right out thar and picked him right up by the tail and put him in the boat. I said, “How the devil did you do that?” He said, “He still got moss on his back. He just come out of the mud.” He said, “Now as soon as that moss gets off his back, he can die, but he can’t die now as long as that moss is on his back.”

JL: He wasn’t awake either.

ME: Well, he just come out of the mud.

JL: Yeah, he wasn’t awake.

RD: Did you ever catch any in your nets?

ME: Snapping turtles? No. But, I tell you what I did do. My uncle (ph) and I had two shad seines in the boat. We were fishing shad. We weren’t doing much and the tide was high and he said, “Dick, let’s go ashore and go bull turtling.” Bull turtling he called it, because we always carried a hook with us, an iron hook about that long for hooking rock. I’ve seen the Wilbur boys even hook shad. Of course, they were drunk. And we’d go ashore and catch a bull turtle and come back and throw them in the boat. We’d never thought nothing about throwing the damn turtle in the boat. We’d come back, he got up into that shad seine. And if he hadn’t made one hell of a mess. Don’t never put a bull turtle into a shad seine ‘cause your shad twine was 52 cord linen. That’s pretty fine. Now my uncle made one one time out of 62 cord linen. It’s just about like spider web, but it will catch shad. The finer the twine, the better it will catch, but it won’t last as long, see. It’s not as strong. Now, shad, you don’t pull them in with the twine. You get your hand down under ‘em and flip ‘em in the boat. Now rock, you can just keep right on pulling because the twine is strong enough to hold him.

RD: Oh, I see. So you had to reach down before getting the net in the boat.

ME: Rock?

RD: No shad.

ME: Shad, yeah, you gotta reach down and get your hand under him and flip him into the boat.

RD: I guess your fishing was controlled by the tides. So, how often do you lay out a net during the day, was it twice?

ME: Well, as I say, you’re in this railroad retch, it would take us just an hour to make a trip.

JL: The length of time that they could cover that retch.

ME: Now as the tide slowed up, it would be less. I remember one day we was down thar. Thar was my uncle and I and one other boat...Eddie Worm and Dick Wilbur was down thar and we laid out down thar at Hog Island Point. The tide was real slow. We never got through thar all afternoon. Never got through the retch all afternoon. The tide was that slow and the wind was blowing a gale. Thar’s a picture of Eddie Worm and his wife. That’s my son-in-law and that’s his wife. That’s me. Thar’s my wife and thar’s Pete and thar’s Pete’s wife—my brother-in-law and my grandkids thar. Here’s my wife’s father her stepmother. That’s me and my granddaughter. That’s me and the madam setting to the table Christmas morning. Thar’s me setting thar again. Thar’s the four of us—me and the madam, and the two kids. The day he went in the army—he went to Viet Nam—he’d been a good guy. He was a helicopter gunner in Viet Nam and when he come back all right, he went right back into the Guards. He’s still in the Guards. He was just down in Brownsville, Texas last week. That’s our 25th wedding anniversary thar.

Them two is Mel Regine (ph) and Gary Gladstrum (ph), Sam and Kay thar. And thar's me and the madam; me holding onto the dog and her holding onto the grandkids thar (laughter). But that's Edward Worm right thar, Tony's brother, younger brother. He was a carpenter; done a lot of fishing. Now I got to talking with Tony's nephew yesterday...Robert Quidish (ph), and we went down thar. You remember that big packing shed right just before we went cross here (ph), well that's Tony's nephew living thar and I went down thar yesterday and finally put the points in his tractor and when I left thar I went on over to Boody's (ph), whar Robert's is his right name, everybody else calls him Boody either. A great fox hunter, but he's hard of hearing and he couldn't hear thunder, but when he's wearing his hearing aid, he's pretty good and I got into him. I said, "Buddy, the best of your knowledge, when did Tony Worm build that cypress lumber boat for shad fishing." And he said, "Daggone it, I remember it, but I don't remember just when it is, but I would say it was the early 30s." He says, "I well remember it." He said, "He had a 4 horsepower outboard motor on it."

RD: This is still a little puzzling to me, because the Dowdys (ph) say that when they found ...

ME: An 8 inch stern was wide enough for a motor.

RD: Yeah, when the Dowdys say that when they found the boat when they got the property, she was sharp at that end.

JL: Not sharp. It was 8 inches.

RD: They said she was sharp at both ends. I don't know...

ME: Definitely not. I can get two or three other heads to verify what I'm saying. Now that old Boody... he's about 70 or 71 years old now...and he'll tell you the same thing what I'm telling you. I mean I'll take you down thar and you can go ask him without me talking to him. He'll tell you the same thing that it was about an 8 inch stern on top of it. And him and Eddy fished together and Tony, he wouldn't leave the whiskey alone, so Eddy quit fishing with him and that's when he built this little boat—a 16 foot boat and had what they call a Fisher engine into it. You ever hear tell of one?

JL: A Fisherman engine, yeah.

ME: Fisher or Fisherman, I don't know what you call it.

JL: It's a Universal product—Universal Fisherman.

ME: Well, he fished by himself. 'Cause, Eddy, he quit fishing with him, but what happened, they were right off agin the old home place out thar taking up one (ph) day and he fell overboard and when he come up the second time, he said he reached down and grabbed him by the hair, and that's the only way he got a hold of him and pulled him in the boat and his mother was upstairs making up the beds and she was watching out the window and said what meant to have left, (ph), Eddy pulled out and the boat went right ashore and the mother was right down thar. "Tony, you go to the house, change your clothes and go to bed until you sober up." So, that broke that up.

RD: What was the average length on the nets that were used in this area?

ME: Anywhere from 175 to 180 yards.

RD: Is that right?

ME: I've been talking to them boys down there in Nanticoke and they use about 150 yards. Of course, it depends on the length of the river. But now up here it's different places. There are different things. You gotta learn, you don't do it by just doing, you

gotta learn. And that old Tony Worm was the slickest thing I ever seen up here. You find your boathouse and all and I'll show you what I mean.

RD: Right there..

ME: All right, he laid out right off agin that boathouse. Say, here's the river. Here's the boathouse. He would start here and he'd go up thar like this and thar was a point over here and thar's whar he wound up at. Instead of going fishing across river, he went this way.

JL: He wanted to get the length of net out.

ME: No, he said, "If you laid straight across, you wouldn't catch no fish. If you laid it this way, you catch fish every time." I said, "That's craziness." He said, "But damn it, you try it. I've tried it."

RD: And it's true.

ME: It works, now why. Now then, up thar in Hog Creek, thar's a point that sticks out right thar by Buddy's place. Thar's a big point that sticks out thar. Now you stay way back here and it goes here at this point because the tide's coming on high banks, I say, and to make it come down here straight across river, that's what you try to do, make 'em stay straight across river as you could.

JL: At a different speed of tide on one shore from the other.

ME: Yeah, yeah. And another thing, I never can understand it (unintelligible) we were talking about here some time ago, wondering why you'd be taking up a net, thar's carps in one end and the rings in other end, and the first thing you know you come up to whar the lines are crossed. How in the devil did them rings get up over them carps?

RD: Strange.

ME: All right. What you do then, you just throw everything overboard and you take your boat and you find out which way it crossed, you just turn your boat around. Go around. You could take up about half as (unintelligible) the rode, you'd run into the same thing going across the other way (laughter). What you do is go back up the other way and go around ...don't ask me to explain it. I can't explain it, but I've done many a time and it's one hell of a mess in the nighttime.

RD: I'm sure it is. You mentioned some time ago about stake nets, is plank (ph) nets the same thing.

ME: No, no. Deep water nets. They stuck stakes over 20 feet apart across river, every 20 feet and then they had big wooden hooks with a weight on it that they slipped over this pole and they'd drop 'em down until they struck (ph) and they'd pull it up tight and tie it up here on top above the water, see. And they'd know which end to start on to drop 'em down, and they fished 'em everyday and they stayed thar, Thar was twine in between everyone of these stakes.

RD: They go right across the river?

ME: Yeah, right straight across the river.

RD: Wouldn't that be a problem I mean for boats coming up and down.

ME: Well, the boats were pretty good. I mean, they could see if they had a green bush on the south (ph) end, they didn't shut the whole river.

RD: Yeah, they could still get around.

ME: I tell you what did happen. My uncle and I made a right brand new shad seine. We just started fishing it that year and we were down here in Rumbley. Whar were we at? (Pointing to chart.) We're here at Rumbley.

RD: Right down here.

ME: All right. We was up in here taking up a sink (ph) net. I was about half done taking that sink net up and looked up and here come the ole Ella Valkner (ph), a bugeye. Ever heard tell of her?

RD: Yeah. A big boat.

ME: A bugeye.

JL: About 80 feet. She was a big one, about 80 feet.

ME: She was a fast son of a gun, too. She was the fastest sailing boat that sailed on the Choptank River. Here she come up river (unintelligible). Well we nearly stripped that darn net as fast as we could run down thar and started waving. Right brand new shad seine. Of course, you could see the carps all across the river every nine feet apart and we kept away of 'em. Take you hat and wave. He turned her just in time. We got right thar to it. The Clarks (ph) look right down side that boat, but he didn't run over 'em.

RD: That's good. Was she sailing up?

ME: Huh?

RD: Was she under sail or was she powered?

ME: Under sail. Then they started running these big oil tankers up the river here and the boys was up here in the Hog pen (ph) fishing. Well, they the net laid out and thar was room...water enough for him to get around either end of it. Well they picked the best end and waved them around it. Now (unintelligible), he didn't pay no attention at all, and went right on up the middle of the river. Cut her in two and I mean tore the hell out of her.

RD: Did you ever fish any stake nets yourself?

ME: Stake nets, no. I fished pound nets and pikes (ph) and drift nets.

RD: Oh, you did pike nets, too.

ME: Yeah, I still got pike (ph) nets in the shop. But, I had 16.pikes at one time and a pound net.

RD: Where did you lay the pound net?

ME: It was off of Wilbur's (ph) dock. It was 14 foot square and set in about 12 feet of water and I found out that a pound net is no one man job (laughter). You ever fool around with one? Ever see one fished?

RD: No, I saw one a couple of weeks ago down at St. George's on the western shore.

ME: Well, you know how they fish one?

RD: I have a general idea, but you can go ahead and explain.

ME: I fished 'em and I've seen 'em fished.

RD: Show me how yours are set up.

ME: Well your pound net itself...is made with a hitch coming in here like this and then you got what they call a hartch (sp). It comes around here and fastens here. Now here's your body of the pound that comes across here. Now, here's your funnel in here. Thar's a hole in here that's about like that, and then it goes back here like this and thar's a wooden stick top and bottom. Now, you got stakes all around here and thar's one right here in the middle here in the back for your funnel. These are stake stubs. Pretty good size stakes. The stuff is good and heavy. Now, you got what you call haul downs (ph) on them. You got a stake stub with another stake pulled down along side of it with a hole through the end of it and your rope goes through that...what you call a haul down. Now, that's brought up to these stakes and tied up above. Thar is a stake put all the way around

the top of your pound net to keep these stakes in place and tied to one thing or the other. It's all used. Now the first thing you do when you go thar to fish it, you take this funnel, cut it loose and wrap it up here. That shuts everything in and out. You loosen these haul downs, just untie 'em and let 'em go. No you get your boat. You let just one corner down and you got sort of a square stern boat—square end boat—scow-like. You get right inside this thing, fasten this back up after you get in thar and you start right here; just overhauling that twine and pushing it and running all your fish to one side. Keep pulling the twine in and putting it back overboard again, keeping enough in the boat so it don't fall back out and when you get over here, you just flop everything right in the boat. That's the way it's fished. Sometimes, you got so darn many fish in here, that thar's nothing else to do but take the dip net and throw 'em out. You can't get 'em in. Two heads can't dip them out of the water in the boat. So you take dip nets and dip 'em out.

RD: This is shad?

ME: Not as many shad as thar was herrings and stuff like that. You catch a few shad into 'em, but the shad was no big deal. You'd catch a few shad, but not too many.

RD: How did you drive your stakes?

JL: Jig 'em down?

ME: Jig 'em down, yeah. Use chain, tie two half hitches around the stake and put another stick about that long across thar and you'd get up on that stick.

RD: Pound them down.

JL: When you're going down, then you gotta move that chain up.

ME: Yeah. Of course, you do like I said about the old two guys...well they would driving them down with a maul (ph) somewhere here in the Bay and drive 'em down with the maul. Now there's one down below and one up above with the maul say. I said, "When I get this stake right, I nod my head, you hit it." So the old log hit him right atop the head with the maul. That's what he said to do and when I nod my head, you hit it (laughter).

RD: How long did he fish a pound net?

ME: Well, my uncle had it for years and then my brother, he took it over for two years, and then he went to (unintelligible), and I took it over for two years and I found out that the flight school (ph) was a lot easier than the damn pound nets. "Cause I'll tell you for one thing, you take a dry stake 25 feet long and you're by yourself in a boat and you try to get that thing up in the air and get it down in the water, it's dry. Thar's only one way you can do it if working agin the tide, let the tide carry it down and get it whar you want it. It's all bull (ph) work.

RD: Sure is.

ME: All bull work. Now, of course, when we get ready to pull 'em, it ain't too bad to hook 'em down the thing to cleat it to the side of the boat and the motor would start up and pull the hell out of it and drag 'em ashore.

RD: Where did you lay your pike nets?

ME: It wasn't around the shore to place 'em, but what we'd do...of course, the darn river bottom has changed so much. It's ridiculous. It used to be, you could go around the shore and it was right straight up and down. But, maybe I'm wrong, but this is my opinion. This damn chlorine they're putting in this drinking water. Don't tell me you ain't tasted it, especially in the summertime. It is killing the grass on this marsh and without them roots in that marsh, it's just spreading out. It's just going away with water

and that marsh of Wilbur's thar... Wilbur's got pictures he can show you... pictures from Dover Bridge in Caroline County with a dirt road thar and grass 20 feet tall on each side of the road. It ain't a darn thing but that darn chlorine that is killing it because over thar in Talbot—say here's Dover Bridge going cross river here. When down the river here you come to a sand point out here. As soon as pass that sand point, thar's a creek mix up in here. It won't show it on this map 'cause it's too small a creek, but it runs into Easton's disposal plant. You can't run up that creek in the summertime and get you (unintelligible)... chlorine. Just that much of it coming down thar and I blame the scum on the water that deep in that creek. And I've heard that Easton has got the commonest, poorest, sewage disposal in the State of Maryland, and thereby, I wouldn't contradict it. At one time, we was down thar fishing when they first put it out. They come out right in front of the old railroad bridge. Come right down the railroad track, come out the railroad bridge. I'm not kidding you. Nothing but raw sewerage coming out thar. The boys would laugh about old condoms coming out thar with knots tied in 'em, and everything else (laughter). You couldn't take up a net if you didn't get a (unintelligible) into it and it's still no better than then.

JL: We had the same thing right thar in (unintelligible).

ME: But here's what I say. The chlorine is what's killed the grass.

JL: Now there's nothing there to hold the mud and the dirt.

ME: Without them roots you can't walk across that marsh. Now as long as thar's roots thar, you can walk across it. But in bare mud, you'd better be down on your knees if you want to walk across it. You can do it, but you better know how to do it and you wouldn't do it the first time either. You gotta walk on your knees. You could get across mud by walking on your knees. That's the only way. But, raw sewage, that's been going in the river since the beginning of time.

JL: Since they put that pipeline down there.

ME: No, no, no. Raw sewage. It never hurt none, but it's that darn chlorine that they're putting in the water is what's hurting it. Now, they'll never make me believe anything different. That's what's killing our grass. This old boy in Talbot County here is the game warden... Burt Wheeler (ph). You ever heard of him?

RD: I've heard of him, yeah.

ME: Well, before he got this game warden job, he was working for the... now well it was for the Coast Guard or who, that was his job. He had a grass cutter on the back of a boat. People that had boats that wanted to get in and out of their docks couldn't get out for the grass. He would take his grass cutter in thar, or he says, "Do it yourself." He'd give 'em chlorine. You just spread that chlorine out thar and you'd clean a path of grass. Now don't tell me that that chlorine ain't what's killed our grass and it's killing this marsh grass.

RD: When did you stop fishing?

ME: When did I stop fishing?

RD: Yeah.

ME: When they put a moratorium on it.

RD: That was the moratorium on the rockfish.

ME: (Unintelligible) I'm going back again I got seven or eight nets right up here in this attic... right ready to go.

RD: Do they still catch any shad or herring in the river?

ME: We caught a shad here a year or two before they put the moratorium on (unintelligible) small shad. But, our shad disappeared when they done away with that hatchery thar and when they started hollering about the rock being bad, I said, damn it, put a rock hatchery up the Tuckihoe like they had the shad. "Oh, that won't work. We can't do that." I got into old Jack Culbert (ph) down here, in Secretary. A big fish dealer, wholesale fish dealer down here. I got into him about it. "Ah, you can't do it, you're crazy as hell. You can't do that, that won't work. Rock hatchery, whoever heard tell of that." I said, "Well damn it, it worked on shad, why won't it work on rock." So, I've never brought the subject up to him since, but, I still say that I was right.

JL: Well, you get the paper here. Did you read anything about the gang from Germany that wants to come over here and start raising rock down there in Dorchester County?

ME: Did you see on television last week...

END OF TAPE A

BEGIN TAPE B

NOTE: This is a separate interview, but same OH #. Location and others in interview are not known.

DATE: 1/13/90

ME: ...for a couple hours, put them cork (ph) in a tub of water. They laid out a lot better.

Unknown Voice: These go with it.

ME: In the boat they're just extras. (Background conversation). Here's an old shad seine.

Unknown Voice: I didn't have no net at the time (Unintelligible).

ME: Wet twine lays out a lot better than dry twine to my opinion and I would put them in to soak or throw some water on it or somethin'. I was wettin' it before you started and then just go ahead and lay it out. That's all...better than driftwood and tide.

RD: Well, you got the two men in the boat--one back here with the oar before the engine anyway--one forward with the paddle. So you reached the place where you want to lay the net out, so a certain position in relation to the wind and the tide that you start.

ME: Well, you don't want to have to lay it out agin the wind, but the tide's going one way and you're going across it. But, you got nowhere to lay 'em out at, do you Howard? But, you wouldn't believe the obstacles that's on the bottom of that river--of old tree stumps, of old sunken boats, skeletons of all kinds (laughter) out thar and you got to know whar you're gonna put the net out.

RD: When you reach the spot you want, you let both ends of the net go out at the same time.

ME: No, no. You just start one end and start laying it out right across the river--stretch it out cross side.

RD: Well, the front man and the rear man...

Unknown voice: Both gotta go out at the same time.

RD: Go out at the same time. What do you put out, six feet or so? This is between the corks is what you put out at a time?

ME: Whatever slack comes up.

Unknown voice: On the rings...each (ph) ring as you come to it.

JL: But you grab about six inches from that ring and you give it a sling, cork's same thing.

ME: You have sling lock (unintelligible) about six inches from it and give your sling (ph). And on that shad seine, you throw one cork here and the other cork here. The next cork here, the next cork over thar. Don't throw them all in the bar (ph).

RD: So they don't get hung up.

UV: Because on this net, the corks will sink.

ME: No, these don't sink.

UV: Well, sometimes they do.

ME: Well, I doubt the rings are heavy enough to sink it Howard. Them rings are not heavy enough to sink them corks. No, they ain't nothin' but old telephone wires. They would never sink it.

RD: So, the corks would keep this net afloat most of the time.

ME: That's right. It would float. But, that's why they made 'em deep. Herring seines at one time NOAA said was 90 marshes deep... 3 1/4 inch mesh, 90 marshes deep and they made 'em to float. They would drift along the same speed as that shad seine. Now you take a rock net which sinks—it drags the bottom—it don't go as fast. And when them two collide, you got a mess. Everyone of them corks have through about ten holes and the only one thing you can do is to put them all in the boat, go ashore, spend the balance of the day straightening them up.

RD: How long to you keep the herring seine down?

ME: Well, it drifts. You got a certain area you drift at. In other words, you say you went from here to that point over thar, or further, but you know where you gotta be taking up at, where there's another snag at.

RD: Now when do you take her up? How do you go about taking her up?

ME: Well, you just... a man grabs a buoy, pulls it in and brings the head line and ring back here to the stern and you try to keep the boat going sort of end-to. The man in the bow controls that. Instead of pulling it side-to, it makes it harder to pull in. You just kind of quarter on, shearer, keeps you pulled back tight. I've been told about it a lot of times. "Slack up, darn it, a little bit or somethin, take up some slack or somethin'."

RD: How long does it take to haul in a net?

ME: Huh?

RD: How long does it usually take to haul in a herring seine like this?

ME: Take one in?

RD: Yeah.

ME: Depends on how many fish you had in it. (Laughter).

RD: How heavy it was in other words?

ME: It would take maybe ten or 15 minutes to take it up.

RD: Do you take the fish out as it's coming in?

ME: Most of the time. Unless you're in a hurry. My uncle and I were fishing down there in Rumbley one night... what they call Rumbley... number 52 buoy. Fifty-two or 49 buoy at Rumbley, Howard (ph)? We were fishing down thar, and fishing three nets and along about 11 o'clock I said, I seen a light back thar. I said, "You're crazy. You can't see no light back thar." So it run on to about 4 o'clock that morning—slack water. We were laying on the shore. Had three nets out. (Unintelligible) lanterns on it and the wind blowed up. Blowed all three lanterns out and thar was another man and his son and they weren't as far as your hand laying out along side the shore. He said, "Al, is it tied (ph) boat done, ain't it?" That man about just jumped out of his hide. He had a scary of a nighttime. But, we had a job to find them three nets with a flashlight. The wind blowed all three lanterns out.

RD: When you're taking fish out, where do you put them in the boat, just anyplace in particular.

ME: Put them in the middle thar.

RD: In the middle?

ME: Yeah. Sometimes I had a buoy to cross thar on each side between them two seats and you fish ate or not, if you caught any (laughter).

RD: As far as the tide goes... the current... what were the best times to set the net?

ME: Well, we always liked the last part of flood tide in slack water. Everybody wanted slack water. I fished with one side (unintelligible). There are two slack waters every twelve hours and I haven't missed either of 'em the whole week.

RD: Is that right? So you're out night and day in other words. You could be out there anytime of the day and night.

ME: The first year I was married in 1936 and this was in '38, we were fishing fish and it was running good, I put my boots on 12 o'clock Sunday night midnight and never pulled 'em off till Thursday afternoon at 3 o'clock.

RD: Is that right?

ME: I come home, lay down on the kitchen floor and the madam packed my bucket.

"Get out of here and get right back to the river." (Laughter). That's all the sleep I got.

As I say, we never missed a slack water. Your slack water is usually 95% of the time the best time to fish--slack water---when the tide stops going one way and starts going the other way. You don't want (unintelligible) net go back very far.

RD: Gets all tangled up.

ME: Picks up everything, all that junk that ever was. And we got one place over thar what they call a hog patch. It's not too far from Dover Bridge, whar the steamboat used to stop thar all the time, and I guess he built up his fire, and re-coaled it, and pulled out the clinkers and stuff, and thar's whar he throwed the cinders overboard just up from thar from the bridge a little ways and we used to catch everything. Now they're nice in a shad seine. Great big clinker that big around. A lot of cinders.

RD: Yeah, I imagine they caused some damage.

ME: It's a job to get out. It's pretty near bad as a darn cooker burner. Now that's something to get out. You try that...

RD: Melvin, during the day, did you have a gourd on either end of the net?

ME: Yeah.

RD: So there was two of them.

ME: Well, sometimes on rock nets, there was two of 'em. There had to be. But on a shad seine, you always put 'em on the lower side of the wind.

RD: Just the one you used on the shad seine.

ME: 'Cause you could see the cork all the way across river, see.

RD: Yeah, now at night, how many lanterns did you use? Just the one?

ME: Just the one. Put it on the same side with the buoy. That was usually the last one you...the first one you started laying out, you didn't put any lantern on. Could you imagine four of them in the bow of that boat and you had two or three nets in thar, where are you gonna get (ph)? And at nighttime, you're stumbling around in thar.

RD: Before you pulled the nets back in at night, you had to take the lantern float off the net?

ME: No, I set 'em up thar on the seats somewhere so we could have some light to see by.

RD: Oh, I see, yeah. But you kept it tied to the net. You didn't untie it.

ME: Yeah. Yep, that was a great experience.

RD: Did you use these little wells up forward and aft? Did you cover them up when they weren't used?

ME: That's what you call a stern locker.

RD: What do you put in there?

ME: Well, it was nothing in particular. But that should be filled in and made a seat out of it and the bow the same way.

RD: Yeah.

ME: You tear a side off somebody's barn (laughter).

RD: You put odd bits of gear in there or lunch or something like that.

ME: That oughta be filled out. Get some old boards and fill it out.

RD: About the same up forward, too?

ME: The same up forward.

JL: That's a portable seat in there.

RD: You just take it out.

ME: Yeah, that comes out. But, most of the time we would keep rain gear in thar, see.

Now up in the bow, now you didn't keep nothin' back here, 'cause there was always water back here. But, you kept everything up in the bow--buckets and rain gear.

JL: Oil cans.

ME: No that stayed right along side the engine...the gasoline can. Them little putt-putts would run all day on two gallons of gas.

RD: Now how about the corks that were used? Were most of the guys using these corks or were they using the wooden type on the Choptank.

ME: Well, thar was always wooden corks on shad seines, but now when we went to herring seines or rock, I would say it was cork. Then it got so, you couldn't get cork. You had to get plastic.

RD: What was the reason for using the cork on the herring seine and the rockfish.

ME: Well, you had to have somethin' and it was reasonably priced and you could get 'em already cut to size and everything.

RD: So, it was just harder getting the wooden ones in other words.

ME: I don't think you could buy them wooden corks, not to my knowledge.

RD: When you see the wooden corks, they're the usually the older ones...older than the cork.

ME: Well, you see, they made their own like (unintelligible).

RD: Yeah.

ME: Are you seeing that man (unintelligible) tomorrow afternoon.

RD: Tomorrow afternoon about 1 or 1:30 to pick up the engine.

ME: He'll be thar, 'cause I told him this morning and he said that if nothin' happens, he would have it off the ground this afternoon, so when he comes up here all he can do is run his truck right in thar and back right under it and all he's gotta do is release the brake and let it out. That way it saves him time.

RD: Are they okay with you if they look all right?.

ME: If they finish these lockers up.

RD: All right, we can do that.

ME: Well, I'd love to see some old oars or something.

RD: An oar and a paddle on this one?

ME: Well thar's two paddles in this one, but thar should be one in the bow and one in the stern of that one beside that oar.

RD: So in other words in the Nanticoke boat they had two paddles and an oar—two oars and a paddle.

ME: Two paddles and an oar.

RD: And in this one, just two paddles. So, in other words, they really didn't use oars on the Choptank.

ME: Well, some of 'em had oars they could steal off from somebody or somethin' and you wouldn't believe what they done to hide their identity. How would you mark that oar so nobody wouldn't find out that it was your oar and I wanted to steal it and you had it marked? You bored that end out and put a piece of paper in thar with your name on it and just plug it. That's been done a lot of times and that's fooled a lot of people. Not as bad as a boy was who kept stealing this wood from this man. He says, "I'm gonna break that up." So he bored a hole into it and poured some black powder into it. He found out who was stealing his wood (laughter). So it don't always pay to steal.

RD: Well, we'll see what we can do about rounding up some additional paddles.

ME: Oars will do.

RD: We got some we can use.

ME: Some old oars.

RD: This is about the size of oar we should be looking for, right?

ME: No, you want smaller than this...5 or 6 foot ones.

RD: Is that right?

ME: Well, like that paddle is all you want.

RD: Okay. Well, how about this oar here, though? Is that a bit too big?

ME: No sir, no sir. Ain't big enough. Should have been a 12 foot oar.

RD: So the paddle is the right size, this oar here is a little smaller than what we need.

ME: Well, its' the one we used to use.

RD: Yeah, but usually they were a little bit longer than that.

ME: You have to use 12 foot oars.

RD: Twelve foot oars, okay.

ME: And they use sailing tong (ph) and when they lay it out, and the wind's right, just raise the sail up and let her drop in the breeze and it will lay right across the river.

RD: Is that pretty much the kind of sail that was used.

ME: No the boom was right flat, right straight down. There weren't that bottom jib into it.

RD: Okay.

ME: Three corner sail.

RD: Three corner sail with a boom.

ME: And the man in the stern, he controlled the sheets. The man in the bow, he took the sail down and rolled it up. It was a cedar pole. The mast and the boom was all cedar. It weren't always canvas. It was just muslin or something' like that that they used. They used whatever they had. Like my father always told us boys, "Do with what you got until you can do better" (laughter).

RD: Good advice.

ME: Are you a jailer or somethin'?

Unidentified female voice: You would think so, wouldn't you. Can't find the doors in this place.

END OF TAPE B