

Interview Log

Interviewee: Patsy Higgs

Tape #: OH92

Interviewer: Pete Leshner
Lyla Ryan

of Tapes: 1

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of Sides: 2

Location: Rock Hall, Maryland

Topic: Woman working the water

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BEGIN SIDE A

P.L.: We're interviewing Patsy Higgs (sic) at her home in Rock Hall on September 3rd, 1993. Present are Pete Leshner and Lyla Ryan (phonetic).

L.R.: Okay. How did it come about, Patsy, that you started working on the water, and what age were you?

P.H.: Well how it all became, from the time I was a little girl on summer vacation, I would go crabbing with daddy. I'd sleep till I felt like getting up, and then make daddy sandwiches and just company for him then. And at the age of 16, I quit school and got married. And my father had just started getting his own fishing rig together because he had worked for another man. And my brother, at that time, was driving a truck. So I would go out with daddy then fishing. And that's how it all got started. And then my brother, he eventually quit the land job, and all three of us worked together, along with another man that we had with us.

L.R.: And your father's name was?

P.H.: Captain Melvin Glen, but then called him Knobby Glen. And he worked on it for 62 or 63 years when he died.

L.R.: And your boat was named?

P.H.: Ronald. Ronald Glen.

L.R.: And tell me what a day, a typical day would be out on the water.

P.H.: Well it would consist of getting up early. We done winter fishing and spring fishing. The winter fishing wasn't quite as early as the spring fishing. It was a little rougher because it was some rough weather in wintertime, you know, ice and all that you had to deal with. But I like the spring fishing the best. Got up early, we were in early. But June the 5th, it was all over with, and then we'd paint the boats up and get ready for crabbing.

L.R.: Winter fishing, what kind of fish did you catch?

P.H.: Perch and rock, rockfish. Spring time, it was rockfish, blues. They started coming up here the last, I guess, 10 years we worked on the water. And I had never -- my father said he had never seen them come up that far. I don't -- you go out there on a spring day, catch two or three, next day you went out there, you had a ton. That's how fast they came up here.

L.R.: And how long did they stay?

P.H.: They'd stay all summer. But we had to be done a certain time. We had netting. And -- but we would catch tons and tons of them.

L.R.: And what kind of price were you getting then?

P.H.: Not too good. I think about the best we got was it started out at a quarter. And, of course, after a couple days, they'd go down to like 8 or 10 cents a pound. We would glut the market, there would be so many of them. It was all soon that I could do to carry them, plus the two bateaus.

L.R.: Was Sinbad your father's boat or --

P.H.: No, belonged to my brother.

L.R.: Your brother. Did your father go out on the Sinbad?

P.H.: Oh, yeah. He had his own boat. But when his health started going, he sold her because he used to be a fishing party captain.

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

P.H.: And I would go out on fishing parties with him and my brother both. But when he sold his boat, then he just named him Sinbad.

L.R.: How cold was it out there in the winter, and what did you --

P.H.: Cold.

L.R.: What did you wear?

P.H.: Insulated underwear, sometimes I didn't know whether I had any feet, hands or rear end it would get so cold.

L.R.: Was there any heat on the boat?

P.H.: Oh, yeah. We had heat on the boat, but not on the little boats that we worked in. It was cold.

L.R.: And how long would you be out on the little boat at a time?

P.H.: It would vary. You know, three or four hours, sometimes six, seven hours we'd be out in that little boat working. And it was always a relief to get back in that big boat.

L.R.: How about weather? Did you go out every day?

P.H.: Every day that the weather was permitting. If it was blowing real hard, no, we wouldn't go. But we, you know, ice, everything we've been out in.

L.R.: You said you were married at what age?

P.H.: Married?

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

P.H.: At the age of 16.

L.R.: At 16. And then you had two children?

P.H.: Two children by my first marriage. And my mother and my sister watched them while I worked.

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

(Phone ringing - off record.)

L.R.: Did you go out on weekends, like Saturday and Sunday to the nets?

P.H.: Seven days a week. Working on the water is a seven-day job, really.

L.R.: So there was no, like the oyster people cannot oyster --

P.H.: No, they can't oyster on weekends.

L.R.: But you --

P.H.: But you can net fish seven days a week. Then, I don't know what it is now, you know, they've changed the law so much.

L.R.: And so you would go out on Sunday?

P.H.: Oh, yeah. Raining, snowing, it didn't matter as long as the wind wasn't blowing real hard.

L.R.: And what would happen if you didn't go out and the fish were in the nets? What would happen to the fish?

P.H.: Well they would rot, you know, after a certain length of time. But in cold weather, they last right good long while. But springtime, you have to tend your nets every day or you're going to lose your fish.

L.R.: Did you lay your nets always at the same place, area?

P.H.: Always in the same place. It was, I guess, you know, the old time watermen around here knew where everybody's set was, and every winter when it was time to set,

we would go out and just drag our line and catch your anchors, and put your brails and your lines on and then go put your nets on, and they stayed there all winter.

L.R.: What kind of netting was that called? That wasn't seam netting, was it?

P.H.: Nylon.

L.R.: But I mean nylon netting, but the certain types of --

P.H.: Gill.

L.R.: Gill.

P.H.: Gill netting.

L.R.: Gill netting.

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

L.R.: And did anybody ever mess up your nets?

P.H.: Oh, yes. We have a lot of that, especially in the springtime when we'd have them floated up. In the wintertime, they would be down low, you know, towards the bottom, and you would have to have a big ship or something that would be out the channel to tear them up, which that's happened before too. We almost got killed one day by a ship. It was fogging, and raining, and blowing, and we were trying to go across the channel. When I looked up, all I could see was the black hull of the ship. And I was screaming to daddy, you know, to turn the boat. 'Cause nobody would ever known what happened to us 'cause the ship would've never stopped. Believe me. 'Cause the guy that was sitting right above us, he went to Baltimore because it tore his rig up too and one of theirs. But I was in that, you know --

L.R.: How about pleasure boats going across your net?

P.H.: Oh, yeah, in the springtime. Daddy used to call them 10-cent millionaires. You'd be there changing your net, and you'd be waving them, you know, please go, you know, because every row was marked with buoys. Big wooden buoys. They couldn't miss them unless they were blind. And this one yacht, he went across our nets when we were laying them up. And when he realized what he had done, he threw her in reverse. Of course he really wound her up good then. Daddy said well, I guess we better go cut him out. And nice boat, and he said how sorry he was, and wanted to know where the nearest railroad was because he had a load of rope on his wheel. And he pulled out a \$20 bill to hand to daddy, and daddy told him, no, forget about it. That's how daddy was. I said forget shit. I said it cost money to make these nets. And I'm the one who has to stand there and go up and down the line. So I grabbed the \$20 bill out of his hand. 'Cause back then, I'd say it was maybe 30, \$35 for each net. But they were sitting up there drinking highballs. They could afford it.

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Did you repair nets?

P.H.: I didn't. Daddy did. Of course, when they come out with the nylon net, it was a lot less repairing that really had to be done. But when he first started working on the water, it was cotton net. And they didn't last too long. They were continue -- you know, gearing the net. But it was a lot better when we got nylon.

L.R.: What about the nets? What kind of price did you have to pay?

P.H.: It would vary. For rock net in the wintertime, 10, \$12 a pound. That's how you bought it, by the pound, and then you would gear it into your rope and your ports. You couldn't get it around here. We had to get it from Nashville, Tennessee or some place

like that. Memphis. They have net companies down there, and they would ship it up to us, and we'd get to work and, you know, gear the net in.

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). So you helped do that?

P.H.: Oh, yeah. Yeah, daddy taught me everything, you know.

L.R.: I want to say on the netting for a little bit more. How many years did you net fish? (Interruption - Off Record.)

L.R.: Did you go out netting fish? Would you say --

P.H.: From when I was 16 till I had to give it up in '83, 1983 is when I had to get off the water 'cause of my eyesight.

L.R.: I want to get into that too, but --

P.L.: I have a few more questions about your nets and so forth. How many did you set at one time? How many did you have out?

P.H.: We had six rows, and they would have anywhere from 11 to 12 in each row.

P.L.: Were those more or less continuous in the rows?

P.H.: Yeah. They stayed there. They were permanent. They stayed there, and every row was a different size. Like one row would have three and a quarter inch net, one row would have three and a half. Then towards the western, across the channel, we would set like four-inch net. It -- 'cause the fish, you know, they varied in size. But your three and a quarter was your good net for your perch because that was a lot, you know, in the wintertime perch fishing.

P.L.: Okay. Did you, did you anchor these nets --

P.H.: Yes, they were anchored there.

P.L.: Did you use, did you use stakes?

P.H.: There was what we call brails. They were, I guess, 10-foot brails. And they were hooked onto two anchors. And that brail would make that net, when the tide was right, open up right to fish with the tide. And, of course, on every net, you had two anchors. So you had 12 nets there, you had 24 anchors plus an end anchor on each end, holding that row straight. So the nets would be fishing up and down.

P.L.: Okay. And you set these -- where were your nets? Where was your stop?

P.H.: Between Love Point and Swan Point. That's all I can tell you. I really don't know whether it had a name. You just knew where you, you know, where your rig was. You took marks offshore.

P.L.: Okay.

P.H.: And they were always kept at home, you know, 'cause daddy would write all that kind of stuff down for my brother and me for when he passed away. So --

P.L.: And how did you decide which way the nets went? Did they always go across the current, across the tidal current?

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). They would, you know, the tide, it would run up and down the Chesapeake, you know. But they were there, daddy had put them there when I started working with him. That was the spot he chose.

P.L.: And how deep were your nets there?

P.H.: It would vary. I would say between 28 and 30 foot we were setting in.

P.L.: And that was in 28 or 30-foot water?

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

P.L.: When you, when you brought your catch in, where did you sell?

P.H.: It was Evans Seafood we sold a long time till he went out of business. And then we started selling to Jacobs Seafood.

P.L.: And where were these located?

P.H.: In Rock Hall.

P.L.: Both in Rock Hall?

P.H.: Both in Rock Hall.

P.L.: And you always sold to the same guy?

P.H.: Always.

P.L.: Were there others that you could have sold to? Were there other wholesalers around?

P.H.: No, not really. Well, there was like two places in Rock Hall when I first started working on the water. And you either had the one or two places to sell to. Some would sell where we sold, and others, you know, would sell to Hubbard's Pier.

P.L.: And the same people sold to the same wholesalers all the time.

P.H.: All the time. Yeah.

P.L.: How did you, how did you decide the price --

P.H.: They --

P.L.: It was the wholesaler who set the price?

P.H.: They set the price. Yeah.

P.L.: And how much control did you have over that?

P.H.: Not much at all, believe me.

P.L.: Did you ever, did you ever not fish or --

P.H.: No.

P.L.: You never withheld --

P.H.: You took what you got. It wasn't like no going on strike or anything because what were you going to do with your fish when they rotted? You took what they give you and, you know, a lot of times you didn't like it, but they always said that the middle man was the one made all the money.

P.L.: How did -- did they treat you any differently because you were a woman when you went to sell?

P.H.: No.

P.L.: You were pretty much -- you got the same treatment as all the other watermen?

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). I didn't want any other. You know, I mean I was out there doing a job just like the men were doing. I mean I didn't stand there and not do nothing. I worked just like my father, and my brother or any other man would work. And I stood there and froze to death just like they did.

P.L.: And the others respected you for that, obviously.

P.H.: Right.

L.R.: Did you pick the nets up after the season, or did you leave them there?

P.H.: No, we brought the nets home after the season was over with, and took the brails off, and just put our anchor line down on bottom. It was no problem to go out there and catch them the next year.

L.R.: Do you remember the most fish that you ever caught at one time?

P.H.: I think it was the blues. One day we had like, it was close to seven tons we had. That's a lot of fish.

L.R.: And how did you get them all to shore?

P.H.: We had the big boat, a 40-foot workboat loaded up to the cabin door, and two 20-foot workboats loaded.

L.R.: You were gutting the fish at one time.

P.H.: Yeah. Yeah, we had to gut them because they're such a scavenger that they would eat anything come in their path. And they said they would last longer if we took the insides out of them. It was a lot more work for no more money than we were getting.

L.R.: And that was bluefish.

P.H.: Bluefish, yeah. We didn't have to gut the trout or anything. It was just the bluefish.

P.L.: You have how many children?

P.H.: I had three children.

P.L.: And did that, did that -- how much time did you lose off the water when you were raising kids, or when you were pregnant or --

P.H.: Just long enough for me to get back on my feet 'cause my mother and my sister watched the children. And then it wasn't no problem when they got big enough to go to school. 'Cause we would usually be home from work by the time they got home from school.

P.L.: Did they, did they start helping you out at some point?

P.H.: Yeah. The boys did. When they got old enough to go out, they would go.

L.R.: And the boys' names are?

P.H.: Charles Higgs, Junior, and Donny Perry. And Donny was the first one pleaded with me to let him quit school so he could go to work on the water. So he left school when he was about, just before he was 17. And he's worked on the water ever since.

P.L.: Did he start working with you before he got his own boat?

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yeah.

P.L.: How long did it take for him to set up his own operation then?

P.H.: Right good while. The water business is nothing like it used to be. They took rockfishing away from us. And a lot of times, my oldest son would work for somebody else, and my younger son too. And just -- he'll be 28 the 28th of this month. And he's only had his own boat, big boat, I'd say maybe five years. And he just bought another boat because this one that he's got right now is not safe. And I would worry every day that they were out there in the wintertime, and he bought his self a nice boat this time.

P.L.: Did you teach him what he knew about how to work the water?

P.H.: My oldest son learned a lot from my father before he died. He learned how to trot line from him. He went with him from the time he was nine years old every summer. And he learned all, you know, from my father.

P.L.: Would he go weekends too during the school year?

P.H.: Well, see, during the school year just fishing, crabbing in the summertime. He crabbed every day. But he would go out, if I would get sick or something and he'd be 14 or 15, all I had to do was say, Don, would you go fishing today? I'll let you stay home from school. And he would be tickled to death. It was no argument there.

L.R.: Did you go out every day while you were pregnant?

P.H.: Yes. Well, see, I was pregnant most of the time in the winter. But I got pregnant in the winter, but it would be towards the end of the summer when I had the children. They were all born in September.

L.R.: All of them? All three of them?

P.H.: All of them. All three of them were born in September. So the main part of my pregnancy, it wasn't no hard work to it, not in the summertime. Crabbing.

L.R.: So you were not pulling nets when you were pregnant?

P.H.: No. 'Cause I, I really didn't know I was pregnant till like February. So all you had left was March, and April, and May.

L.R.: You said somewhere in the book that working on the water's messed up your insides and you've had a lot of operations?

P.H.: Yeah, I've had a lot of operations.

L.R.: Female organs and things?

P.H.: I've had back surgery. That was the first. And I had a lot of trouble with my breasts, you know, lumps and everything, until finally it -- you know, it was cancer, and I had to have one removed. You didn't know that?

L.R.: No.

P.H.: Yeah. That'll be 15 years this Thanksgiving.

L.R.: And you think maybe working on the water might have something to do with that?

P.H.: Yeah, I think it could've. I know it did my back.

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

P.H.: I couldn't, I got to the point where I couldn't even walk without my legs giving away with me. So I was off, I went in University Hospital in March, and I was back to work the end of April.

L.R.: Did the men working, your brother, father and sons, have they had back trouble like you had?

P.H.: Huh-uh (negative). No.

L.R.: So you think that it was the water?

P.H.: I think it was, you know, with all the lifting and -- 'cause I would pick up a bushel of oysters just like a man. And, you know, daddy would put them up on the wharf and I would load them in the truck, bring them out to Rock Hall to sell. Oysters are heavy. Bush of crabs are heavy. And I have arthritis terrible now, and it's got to be from working in that cold water.

P.L.: Why don't we talk something about when and why you stopped working out in the boats. You said you stopped working in 1983?

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Because I didn't know what year it was, my brother and I found out we had Retinitis Pigmentosis. That's -- it's a hereditary eye disease. And we got it from my mother's side. It's tunnel vision. And what do we call it? When you can't, you don't have any side vision up or down. It's a gradual slow blindness because your retina is deteriorating. And it's nothing they can do for it. They have no cure for transplanting your retina. My brother's five years older than me. He's a lot worse than me. He's almost totally blind. He could not go out the door without really hurting his self if he was someplace where he didn't know where he was. He's comfortable where he's at because he knows where everything is in the house. He can go through the house with

the lights completely off. And he had to wind up selling his boat. And he went in and put in for his disability, I guess it was in '81 or '82. And he got his right away. And I put in for mine after I had went to the Wilmer Eye Institute in Johns Hopkins, and they told me I was legally blind and had been for about 10 years. So I said well I worked, you know, all them years on the water. I might as well collect what I paid in. So I put in for my disability. And months, and months, and months went by. Every time they wanted another doctor's opinion. And Dr. Finklestein is head of the Retinitis Pigmentosis Foundation in Baltimore. And why they didn't believe him, I don't know. So they found me a doctor in Annapolis. So I went there. And after I finally seen that doctor, then I got my disability. 'Cause he said he didn't know how I got around without hurting myself. But why they questioned me, I don't know, unless it was because I was a woman. Why would anybody want to say they got R.P. if they don't have R.P.? Nobody wants to go blind.

L.R.: Do you think it had anything to do with your working on the water, your eyes?

P.H.: They say the sunlight that glares off the water is a lot worse on somebody that has eye trouble.

L.R.: And did you wear sunglasses or a hat?

P.H.: No, I never wore a hat. My brother did. But they seem to think, you know, that it hurried it up a little faster, working on the water. I don't know.

P.L.: Would you have worked out there longer if you could have?

P.H.: Oh, yeah. That's the only thing I've ever known.

P.L.: What -- when we came in here, you were picking crabs. And it looks like you're pretty fast. You've picked a lot of crabs.

P.H.: Yeah. You live around that kind of stuff, you know, you learn to do it fast.

P.L.: Have you been doing that pretty much since you stopped going out on the boats?

P.H.: Yeah, when I can. I could never go and get a job because I can't drive anymore. I had to give my license up because I was -- I had a fender bender (laughter). It was either I was going to kill myself or kill some poor innocent person.

L.R.: But as far as I know, you only pick crabs for your friends.

P.H.: Yeah, that's all I pick for is my friends. My close friends.

L.R.: It's not a business of any sort.

P.H.: Oh, no.

L.R.: It's not a business, it's just that you pick them.

P.H.: No.

L.R.: Going back and forth, but I'd like to find out about your tonging for oysters. You said at one time that you tonged, but it was really hard work.

P.H.: Yes, it was.

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

L.R.: Okay. I wanted to know about tonging. You said -- I've heard other women say that they couldn't tong. It was too hard work in lifting those tongs. And you said you did some tonging.

P.H.: Yeah, I did. Like I said, it was really quite a bit that day. My brother and I were tonging, and we were around a lot of other boats from Rock Hall. And this one boy said he liked see me up there on the washboard tonging. I said don't you think I can't do it.

And I said if I had a short set of shafts, I'd get up there. He said I got a pair of 16 here. I said well give them here. (Laughter.) So he handed them over, and I got up on the washboard and I had so many oysters in them tongs that my brother had to grab -- when I got them up to the top, he had to grab hold of the tongs and help me get them on the cull board. But believe me, that night when I got home, because I stood up there and made like 8 or 10 grabs. And I was tired when I got home that night. I hung my arms out the bed.

L.R.: Women's arms don't have the muscles or the shoulders.

P.H.: No.

L.R.: Don't have the muscles of a man. And with other, with oystering, what did you do, did you do the culling?

P.H.: I did the culling, yeah.

L.R.: So did you oyster before you went fin fishing? In other words, when you started fin fishing, didn't you stay with fin fishing winter after winter?

P.H.: Yeah. But before my father got into the anchor netting, you know, full time, we would hand tong half of the season. And then it was, you know, netting up until June. They always like to get the oysters, you know, right when -- it's in their prime when it first starts.

L.R.: And there were oysters then.

P.H.: Huh?

L.R.: There were a lot of oysters.

P.H.: There were oysters then. Beautiful oysters.

L.R.: And a lot of them.

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

L.R.: What is then? What kind of year are you talking about?

P.H.: Patty was, she was born in '63. Talking about 1965. She was only like two years old.

L.R.: The 60's.

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

L.R.: And how about the fin fish? What have you seen happening over these years?

P.H.: Bickering and fighting over the water rights for sportsmen and the watermen. It's always been like that. And then finally they said, you know, that the rockfish were getting extinct. I don't believe that in a heartbeat 'cause daddy always told me that rockfishing, it's in a cycle. And every seven years, the bay will replenish itself. Now they say it's so many rockfish out there that, you know, they don't know what they're going to do with them.

L.R.: Yeah, they've been tearing up the nets to get the rockfish out to get the other fish. But amounts of fish, what have you seen from the 60's until you quit, and about what year did you quit going out fishing?

P.H.: It was the early 80's.

L.R.: Early 80's?

P.H.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

L.R.: What did you see the trend? Did you see less fish each year?

P.H.: No, I can't say that. I was -- some winters, you didn't know whether you were going to catch enough rockfish to survive. And then you go out there two or three years later, and it would be so many rockfish that you couldn't hardly get them out of the net.

L.R.: And how about the crabbing, Patsy? Did you always crab in the summer?

P.H.: Yeah, we done some crab pot, but mostly we were trot liners. And crab potting is just -- it's so many of them today. A crab really don't have a chance. I was, I guess, seven months pregnant with Patty. You could go down Green Lane and walk around with a dip net in the water, catch two bushels and dozens of soft crabs. But you can't do that today because a crab ain't got a chance to come ashore with all those crab pots. I --

L.R.: Did -- go ahead.

P.H.: I think a crab, you know, has a better chance, you know, if you're a trot liner because you're only there for a certain amount of hours, where a crab pot, it stays in the bay, you know. Night after night after night. And a crab's hungry, he's going to go in that pot.

L.R.: Did you crab by yourself?

P.H.: Yeah, trot lining.

L.R.: Most of the time?

P.H.: Most of the time. Oh, I had one of the kids, the boys with me when they were younger, but Charles would go in the morning, and I would go in the afternoon. We didn't see much of each other in the summertime.

P.L.: When you went out crabbing, did you hang out near the other boats, the other crabbers' boats?

P.H.: You were not really too close to anybody else.

P.L.: You staked out your own territory?

P.H.: Yeah.

P.L.: And were there others, were there others who were fishing near you when you were, when you had your nets out?

P.H.: Not too close to us. They stayed a right good berth away.

P.L.: So you pretty much kept to yourself out in the water.

P.H.: Yeah. Right, right.

(Interruption. Off record.)

P.H.: On a normal day, they wouldn't be here. But it was blowing, and they didn't go crabbing this morning.

P.L.: Have all of your children gone to work on the water now?

P.H.: My two boys have.

P.L.: Okay.

P.H.: My daughter, she never did have it in her.

P.L.: Just no interest?

P.H.: No interest at all in it. You got to like it to do it because it's, I mean you're your own boss, you don't have anybody telling you what to do, what time to go to work, what time to come home, and it's a gamble too, and I always liked to gamble. I'm a big gambler. That's what life is, really, a gamble. I like making big bucks, you know. There'd be weeks you go and you wouldn't make nothing. We were froze in one time for seven weeks. We never made a cent. It was hard. You didn't know where your next dollar was coming from to get a loaf of bread and milk. And we finally got help that year,

but it was the day we broke out and got out to our nets. They just didn't want to give you anything, you know. And I guess then the watermen too were, in a sense, proud, you know, didn't want to ask for anything. But we had to that one year. They gave us a check, you know, for the seven weeks we were off. But like I said, mine didn't come till the day I got back out on the water.

L.R.: Did it cover the seven weeks?

P.H.: Yes. They gave you like -- it went according to your income, what you had made for that, the year before, that's how they done it.

L.R.: Do you remember the most money you ever made in a day?

P.H.: I guess the most in one day was 8 or \$900 for a day's work.

L.R.: And that was netting?

P.H.: Netting fish.

L.R.: Was that for the whole boat, or each person?

P.H.: That was my part.

L.R.: That was each -- your part.

P.H.: Yeah. You had to learn to put it away, you know, a little bit of it. Because like I said, when you're making it, you got to. Two weeks later, you could go out there and not make a cent, or just make enough, you know, to get by on. You had to learn how to handle your money working on the water. You really did.

L.R.: What did you do in the months between the fishing season and the crabbing?

P.H.: Painting them boats up. I used to hate it. But you only have what you took care of. And my brother believed in taking care of his boat.

L.R.: Did you ever go on trips and leave Rock Hall and go on vacation?

P.H.: Went to California and couldn't wait to get back. There's no place like Rock Hall. California. Oh, my. We flew out there and seen some friends that we had got friends with. They had moved here thinking they were going to make a killing working on the water, but they soon found out, they moved back to California. And we flew out there to see them. We were out there a week, and I think it felt like seven months instead of seven days. It was terrible.

P.L.: Did you feel competition at different times from crabs from Louisiana or some other place, the things that get trucked in?

P.H.: No.

P.L.: Was the business pretty consistent as far as selling your product in Maryland?

P.H.: Right. We never had any problem. I think because -- well Maryland crabs are nice crabs. And when people, you know, eat Maryland crabs, I don't think they care about the crabs being bussed in here from someplace else. We never had any problem getting seafood.

P.L.: So even though the price was low, they'd still buy everything that you had.

P.H.: Right.

P.L.: Okay.

P.H.: Like I said, a lot of times, you didn't agree with what you got, but you had to take it.

L.R.: Were there any times that you can remember, Patsy, that you were treated differently than the men?

P.H.: That I was what?

L.R.: Treated differently than the watermen?

P.H.: Not really. I mean I would go to the fish meetings in Annapolis, you know, when all the other men were there because I was concerned about what was going on in the Chesapeake Bay. I didn't want to lose anything, you know, 'cause that was my living too.

L.R.: Were there any other women that would go to the women? Do you know of any other women who fish?

P.H.: Not year -- not like I did, you know, for a living. They would go out and give their husbands a helping hand, but I done it strictly for a living. It wasn't no pleasure thing about it to me.

L.R.: And you did it, and then Charlie joined you.

P.H.: Yup. When daddy took ill and Charles went to work with us, he quit his job and we worked side by side for like five or six years. (Laughter.)

L.R.: And he's your second husband, and he had another job other than --

P.H.: Yeah.

L.R.: Charlie Brown is your son between you and Charlie.

P.H.: Yeah. Between me and Charlie. But Charles left his job. And after my brother had to sell everything and we got off the water, then Charles went and got a land job.

L.R.: What you were trying to think of earlier with your blindness is the peripheral vision.

P.H.: Yeah. Right.

L.R.: I couldn't think of that. I know it's the peripheral vision. And so being a woman and, this was a question that somebody asked me, were there any times that you felt too badly to go netting fish or crabbing because you're a woman, because of your monthly cycle?

P.H.: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

L.R.: You'd get cramps and couldn't get out on the water and so you'd have to stay home.

P.H.: Yeah.

L.R.: Yeah. That seems logical.

P.H.: Well I forgot, I had a hysterectomy. But after that, then you know, it was pretty well. It wasn't too many days I missed. But like I said, when I did, my son would cover for me. He would go in my place. He'd be delighted to stay home from school.

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). So you managed to keep your job.

P.H.: Right.

L.R.: That's what -- okay, that's interesting.

P.H.: And the only thing, I only had one downfall that I really -- working on the water was when we found a fellow waterman in our nets. I mean that was something that really tore me up to think you know the person and they were looking for him for seven days. And I had a feeling that morning when we went out that something was going to happen. And the tide wasn't right, and daddy and the colored man were in one bateau and my brother and I were in the other when we were fishing on one row. And I just glanced over to see if daddy and them were done, and I just looked at the net and I said oh, my God, Ronnie, there he is. And he was laying across the net. And trying to get him in that bateau, it's something you don't know unless you're there to experience it. It was bad

enough that he was dead, but we knew who he was, and it was a relief for his family that they had found their father.

L.R.: Had he fallen off his boat or what?

P.H.: His boat sunk. He was bringing her around from Chester River. And winds were really gusting that day, and he should've never even attempted to bring his boat from the river to the bay. They never did, I don't think, found the boat. The next day we went out, it was a couple days before we could tend our nets 'cause the weather was so bad. And when we went out there, we found the top to the engine box and a couple other things that was floating. I don't think he went down too far from our rig. It was him and his dog.

And like I said, he was seven days in the water when we found him.

L.R.: Were there any storms that you were scared of, and you all got back and didn't -- what did your father tell you, it was too bad? Don't go?

P.H.: One day, it was only a couple times that it was -- you'd be out there, you know, and something, a storm would come up, and it would be so bad, you didn't think -- well one day, we didn't get back in the big boat, daddy was in the big boat. And it was so rough that it was three of us in the bateau. And it was no way. The swells were so high, we just didn't even attempt to try to get back in the big boat. We just eased our way along real slow and brought the bateaus in behind the big boat.

P.L.: Did you have motors in the bateau or --

P.H.: Oh, yeah. Outboard motors, yeah.

L.R.: Twenty-two foot, isn't it? They were 22 feet?

P.H.: They were 20-foot bateaus, and we had like 25 horse outboards on them. And ice, we got hung up in ice one time, and we were going out Rock Hall Creek, and it's so fast, things happen. It shifted. And the ice just come up alongside of us and drove us sideways up so we were laying sideways because we couldn't go any further 'cause we were in that shallow of water. And we had to, you know, get somebody to come and pull us off. But, no, other than that, with the ship and -- I, you know, I was always confident when we were in that big boat, she was a nice boat. But you'd be in some rough weather.

P.L.: The only time you were really scared is when that freighter came at you.

P.H.: Yes. The ship was about the only thing that really scared me. I didn't know whether I was going to die or not that day. He was close.

L.R.: What do you do for a social life?

P.H.: And he never even attempted to blow his horn to let us know that there was a ship around. You couldn't see nothing.

L.R.: Do you think he didn't see you?

P.H.: He didn't see us, and we didn't see him, and he wasn't even in the channel.

L.R.: How did you get away from him?

P.H.: Screaming to daddy to turn the boat, 'cause me and Ronnie was outside 'cause you couldn't see anything. It was raining and blowing so hard, and so foggy. And when I screamed, then daddy hurried up and turned the boat and I looked, you know, we're going right down the side of this great big ship.

L.R.: What do you do for a social life, Patsy? I know you have a lot of parties and fish fries, for instance.

P.H.: Oh, we had a fish fry every summer. Every summer.

L.R.: And you've got a swimming pool in your back yard. Still have it?

P.H.: Yeah, but I don't fool with it anymore. I let it go.

L.R.: And now what do you do mostly? You're home most of the time.

P.H.: Just a homemaker. Taking care of three grandchildren. I'm raising my second family.

L.R.: How old are the children now?

P.H.: Ten, 11, 12.

L.R.: Do they live here?

P.H.: Yeah, I've had them for nine years. I have custody of them. They're beautiful grandchildren. I don't know what I'd do without them now that they're, you know, growing up.

L.R.: You do -- are raising another family.

P.H.: Yeah. It's hard, and it has been hard because I don't get any help, you know, from their father or anything. And it takes a lot of money to raise three children today.

L.R.: Does your daughter help at all with them?

P.H.: Oh, yeah. When she can, she does. Yes. But the father don't care. It's the only home they've known. The oldest one, I've had her since she was born. And when the other two came along, they were getting along so bad that I just went and took them away from them because I couldn't see a child being brought up in that environment. I always knew, I had a stable home, and my parents were there when I got home from school, and my supper was on that table every night, and that's the way I believed in bringing my children up, and that's how I'm bringing my grandchildren up.

L.R.: You certainly are, aren't you?

P.H.: They know I'm here when they come home from school. They don't have to worry.

L.R.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Do you have any other questions?

P.L.: That's all I have. It's terrific.

L.R.: Anything you want to add, Patsy?

P.H.: No. If I had it to do over again, I think I'd think twice. I really do. I mean it, it's a good way of life, believe me. And I don't have any regrets of my father being a waterman. But it's a hard way to make a living. You have to take a lot off of people, you know, that you sell your seafood and stuff to. But if I had it to do it all over again, I think -- I don't think I'd do it.

L.R.: Do you have any idea what you would have done?

P.H.: No, not really. When I was going to school, my dream was always to be a secretary. But I was a secretary all right because I took care of all the bookwork and everything when I started working with daddy and, you know, getting the taxes prepared and all, I took care of all of that.

L.R.: And the licenses for your boat?

P.H.: Yeah. I was going through some stuff a couple weeks ago, found an old fishing license.

L.R.: How much was it?

P.H.: How much was it then? 200 and -- I think it was like 290. Now to work on the water, what they call a TFL, it's \$600. But you know what's wrong with the watermen is you've got too many white collar watermen. And I think it's sad that they're taking away from our watermen. They have good jobs, they take a vacation just when the gravy's on,

that's what we call it, right, first of oyster season, they'll take their vacation and go oystering. Well why take it out of the waterman's mouth? They're going to have a job. They're going to go back the next week and get their weekly salary where the watermen don't know what they're going to make a week. And I think they ought to do something about that. Get rid of -- get rid of your Pennsylvania and Delaware people coming in here and taking everything we got and taking it home and not spending any money in your town. A couple years ago, I was helping my son pick up horseshoe crabs for catfish bait, for catfishing. And I didn't go with him this year. And they went one day because they needed horseshoe crabs for catfishing. And I kept wondering why didn't they come home. The Coast Guard had picked them up and hauled them into the Coast Guard station and was trying to lock them up for picking up horseshoe crabs in New Jersey. But yet, it's all right for New Jersey, Delaware and Pennsylvania to come here and take what they want out of our waters for \$10, a license fee. We didn't know it was illegal to pick them up. It had just come out in a book they said, I think last year. At a certain time, you couldn't pick them up. And that's because of these simple bird watchers because they like to watch the horseshoe crabs because they come up on shore to lay their eggs. And, of course, you get all these birds coming around to eat the eggs. Yeah. They were lucky. I mean they could've socked it to them. They only had about 100 crabs, but they could've been fined \$100 a crab.

L.R.: And what happened?

P.H.: So they told us we had to call back there the next day. So I called there for my son, and they didn't know what they were going to do. They explained to them that they didn't know that it was illegal to pick them up between a certain time in this month and a certain time in this month. And they told me that the fine was \$35, which I was very relieved.

L.R.: So they made out of jail on that one.

P.H.: Right.

L.R.: Have you got some more questions?

P.L.: I don't.

L.R.: Thank you. Thank you, Patsy.

P.H.: Oh, you're welcome.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)