

Interview Log

Interviewee: Earl White

Tape #: OH94

Interviewer: Pete Leshner

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of Sides: 2

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Topic: Skipjack Project

Corresponding Photography Log #:

Comments: Mr. White is difficult to hear and, occasionally, understand. There are a few inaudible or indiscernible portions noted in parentheses.

BEGIN SIDE A

P.L.: Okay. We're in St. Michaels talking to Earl White, a first mate on a whole lot of skipjacks. Been on skipjacks all his life. And interviewing is Pete Leshner. It is the 14th of February, 1996. Okay. Now you were, you said you were born down in Gain's Quarter.

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). It's about an eighth of a mile from the water. Wasn't far.

P.L.: Tell me about your mother and father and their family.

E.W.: My father was a White, and my mother was Wheatfow (phonetic). And, let's see, my father was about 70, 80 years old, I believe close to 80 when he died. My mother, she died a little sooner than that. But he was my father, she was my mother. And we had a big family -- 16 of us, and I was the oldest, I was the oldest one. And then until they died, they treated us kids like we belong to them. We didn't have no problem. And then we ain't never been in no serious trouble. No. I mean once in a while, I got locked up for driving a car if I was drunk, you know, but the wheel bearing went up, and I couldn't hold it straight. The police went off on me, thought I was drunk. So I ain't been in too many fights that amount to nothing. So I've had a pretty good life that way. My father -- make a living for us.

P.L.: Your father was a waterman?

E.W.: Yeah. My father, grandfather on my other side, and father's side, all was watermen.

P.L.: Your mother worked too?

E.W.: Yes, she worked in the factories and house cleaning and things like that. So you see, my life is -- I imagine it could've been better, but the way things is, when I wasn't -- I went to school till the 9th grade, I went to school, high school, went to work 'cause a lot of children, and I -- I got to help. And after all, we were always a tight family. I'll say that. We was all a tight family because we always looked out for each other. And when we started working, neither one of us -- knew what we was doing, something like a test. And one of them was -- the other one tried to do it too, either do it or learn it from me or somebody else -- always watermen.

P.L.: All you brothers?

E.W.: Yeah -- my one brother, he was tonging, and all the rest of them was watermen, crab, fish, all one place. We all go Jersey when it's time to go to Jersey when it's time to go to Jersey. And on the Chesapeake Bay -- the Chesapeake Bay if it's time for Chesapeake Bay. It was good -- and we had a lot of friends, and they all want to do it along with us, be just like they were brothers too, you know. Yeah. I went to see my brother day before yesterday. Some of the -- with my brother. We grew up together, worked together. What one had, the other one had. That's the way -- that's the way we worked. It was a good thing.

P.L.: And tell me how you started to -- when you first went on the water.

E.W.: Huh? When I first went on the water? I got married, 19. And I wasn't man enough to take care of my wife, I don't believe. More than things I was now. I just got mine, and you know what, my first wife was the one who showed me how to shuck oysters. Yeah, she showed me how to shuck oysters. So one of the boys in my class, he was dredging, and that's the first time I came up the bay. Before that, girl I used to go

with -- her brother, he was a grown man then, he was a -- and they needed another man. They come and ask me did I want to go. Other than that, then I went to -- next fall, I went on a boat, another boat with some of the boys were in my home -- my class. So that started me.

P.L.: And that first boat was Ralph T. Webster?

E.W.: Ralph T. Webster. First boat I ever did go on was the Ralph T. Webster. From then on with this boat, that boat, other boats. That's the way it was.

P.L.: When you were younger, didn't you do some tonging with your father?

E.W.: One time.

P.L.: Only once.

E.W.: Only once. When I tonged that time. When I went in, it was cold, and he said, the next day, I got up, got ready to go tonging. He said, boy, you can't go out there. It's too cold for you out there. And I never went tonging -- waterman for commercial water until I was 19.

P.L.: How old were you on that one day when you went tonging?

E.W.: Oh, I guess I was about 12 or 14.

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

E.W.: Could've been like that. I guess I was -- it was nice. And my father died after my mother, and we was just like brothers. Yes, sir. I just, all my -- I carried them around. It was good.

P.L.: So you learned the dredging trade on Ralph T. Webster then.

E.W.: Yeah, that's where I learned.

P.L.: With Captain Leon Evans?

E.W.: Yeah.

P.L.: And it was someone on there, you said, taught you to cull.

E.W.: I don't think -- it was Frankie, it was Frankie. But, man, he was this white guy, he was -- I learned it. So at first, they was paying me so much for a day. Then after I got good with it, they started giving me a share like the rest of them. And I'll say for myself, I know I was good. (Laughter.) Yeah, I was good.

P.L.: So you worked on the same dredge with Frankie, right alongside of him, and he taught you to --

E.W.: Yeah, right alongside of him. Yeah, them was good all days. I didn't know much about it then, but them was good old days. And the next season, I went on there, and that's where I started to get, you know, knowing what to do.

P.L.: When you were on the Evans then, that's when you were with Captain Willy Anderson?

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

P.L.: And you said he, he taught you to sail, which you hadn't done on Ralph T. Webster.

E.W.: No. No sailing on that. Maybe I helped him, you know, get the sails up, something like that, but for sailing boat, I never did.

P.L.: Tell me about how he taught you to --

E.W.: Huh?

P.L.: How did he teach you to sail?

E.W.: He just take me, whatever he wanted done, show me how it was supposed to be done. And then I done it. I was easy to catch onto things. So I didn't have, he didn't have to worry about -- and he said go there and slack that jib up. I knew what he was talking about. And then he said, look, we're going to put a reef in the mainsail. First reef. I know what he's gonna do with that. Wasn't no problem or nothing, you know, show. Yes, sir. And when I was with him, I used to work all on most the motors -- pull the engine for pulling the dredge in. Yawl boat, I used to work on that. Tell you, one time we was coming from Deal's Island, and we had two little motors, one in the yawl boat and one out. And we got out in the straits, and one we had in the -- in the yawl boat cut out right in the straits. Never will forget it. And he said -- coming in Annapolis then. When you get there, if you don't get I fixed -- Earl, can you get down in there and fix that motor, find out what the hell's wrong with her. That's what I said. I said I'll do what I can. I got down in that motor, me and a boy named Hotter (phonetic), he used to work on motors himself. His father used to have a Ford too, that was a Ford. When I got down in there and looked at this motor, and I found out that it was the scribsher (phonetic). Scribsher wasn't working right. And I said, Hotter, boy was named Hotter, I said go down there and take that scribsher out of that motor we got down there, and both of them was the same, I said let's put this in here. We went down and got it out of the yawl boat, had the yawl boat to the -- I was down there working on it. I got it straight, I said turn that gas on. Let's see if she wants to start. The first time I hit her, she started. And the captain was down in the cabin laying down, and he heard that motor running, and boy, she was running too. He says, don't cut her out, don't cut her out. Said let her run. And we put her down in the water, still running. And you know what, that morning, that morning we going on up the bay, and we caught a whole mess of them guys before we got to Annapolis. That's where we was coming for the first of the season. And he wouldn't let nobody touch that motor but me. No, sir. No, sir. That's Earl's job. That's facts. Yeah.

P.L.: What kind of motors were you dealing with on those?

E.W.: Model A's. Model A Fords.

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

E.W.: That's what we were doing. After I done that, I got so I could do something with one of them. Nobody not getting that boat. What the hell you doing in there? You know it ain't your job. Get out of there. And I run her that day or so, that and got up Annapolis just dark, I'd say about 8:00 or 8:30. And, man, that thing was so red that looked like, I don't know what's that called. That manifold on her was so red, man it was hard to look at. But he wouldn't let nobody get nothing but me. And he -- and all of that whole season, never had none of that trouble with my motor. Yes, sir.

P.L.: He taught you to obey orders too, didn't he?

E.W.: Yes, he did. The guy was named Crawford, Crawford. Man, cut right across there, you can get in here a half hour earlier, you know. And, you know, I go across that first thing and see a (indiscernible).

P.L.: This was off of Annapolis?

E.W.: Yeah. And he said oh -- what the hell are you doing over here? You know I ain't taught you that. I said Crawford taught me that. He said Crawford, hell. You do like I tell you. From that day up until this, if the captain don't tell me whatever he tells me to

do, if it's right or wrong, I know it's wrong, I'm still going to do it. But if he tells me jump overboard, I ain't going to do that. Just not say -- I ain't going to help him overboard.

P.L.: So after that, you always obeyed orders.

E.W.: After that, I always -- just like on this boat. If I know Blake's doing, sometimes he do some things that kind of I don't think too much of, and I say it like that. But whatever he tells me to do, I'll do it. But one thing about it, if I see it's wrong, before I do it, I'll tell him what I would do. And most the time, he'll say well, Earl, he might wait a little longer, say well, it looks like you're right. One thing about him I like about Blake, if he finds out that he's wrong, he'll come to you and tell you. I like that about a man. But if a man is wrong and he knows, he finds out he's wrong and he don't say nothing about it, I don't care too much for him. 'Cause them kind of people is had to deal with. You better believe they're hard to deal with. Yes, sir.

P.L.: So even when the captain told you to throw the stove overboard --

E.W.: Yeah.

P.L.: Tell me about that time.

E.W.: Yeah. So we're coming in from dredging. I guess it's around about 4:30 or 5:00, and cook was cooking. Man that stuff would smell, part of it was smelling good. But the stove was smoking, man she was doing something. I was down in the forepeak. Captain, hey Earl, come down. I said what the hell's going on now? I know I had to get in there, got to get in and put our oysters out. So I jumped up out the forepeak, come out there and looked. When I come out the forepeak, I see smoke everywhere. Come back there, he says throw that son of a bitch overboard. I said -- what are you doing down there, something like that. He said something funny to me because he's a joking guy, you know, he always says something joking. And he said throw that son of a bitch overboard. I said come on, let's put her overboard. And him and I rolled up, pulled that stove over and throwed her overboard. And she went overboard. And after come to find out what he had said and told me, God damn it, I didn't mean for you to throw that stove overboard. I said that's what you said, didn't you? (Laughter.) That's the truth. That is the truth, yes, sir. That is the truth. You know I took about three, two or three out now. A little boy come aboard boat -- and I was working on the sails, getting the sails up. And he said to me, he says Earl, tell us some of the things you had experienced on a boat. I said okay, I will. Wait till I get these here sails and things straightened out here and I'll tell you. He messed around there, and after he seen how it was done, he come right back to me again. And I said okay, and I told him that story. And it was the truth, and he got interested -- that's why I tell, you heard me say children are something to deal with, they don't never forget. And I told him that, and boy, he just got to laughing. And to make sure he come aboard the boat. First time, first he laid eyes on me. Earl, I want you to tell these boys about that, about that stove. That's what he said to me. I said, okay, I said I'll do it. Yes, sir. See, that's what goes to show you. You take kids, they don't forget. And they pay attention to whatever you said. So I had to tell it to him, them other boys. And it done him so much good, just done there laughing. And you know we had some teachers from Pennsylvania, them boys one time. They asked me to tell them some jokes or stuff like that. I told him their story. No, I told them this story. This is the story I told him. I was in New Jersey in this oyster house shucking oysters. So we heard something in the oyster bed going boom, boom, boom, boom. Everybody wondered what that was. So it kept

doing it. So some of the guys got down and went to the bin to try to see what it was. Bet you couldn't guess what it was. It was a rat got his tail inside of an oyster, was beating it down up on the board like that, on that -- and he busted that oyster open and turned around and eat that oyster. Boy, if that man didn't do some laughing about that. He did some laughing about that. That was really funny. I told him. It's the truth. That's what it is. It's the truth. He said when I get back to Pennsylvania, I'm going to tell all my friends about that. That's what he told me. Yes, indeed. That was like a comical -- hear that boom, boom, boom in there. And when we went to see, it was a rat had his tail in an oyster, was beating it down up on the cement so break the oyster open. When he got that oyster broke open, he turned around and eat that oyster. Yes, indeed. Yes. That's something like a little old seagull. Take a seagull, and take an oyster or clam shell, go up in the sky and turn that loose on a brick building or tin building, bust that oyster or clam, whatever it is, open, he'll go down and eat it. I seen all that done. Yes, indeed. A lot of them come up with things, funny things when they're in the water -- when you're on the water. And it's a good life. And I believe once you get that oyster blood and stuff in your blood, it's no way of getting it out.

P.L.: Did you make good money up there?

E.W.: Yeah, sometimes. I have made good money on the water. I went -- I was with four or five other, had 20, even 30 hundred dollars between the five or six, eight of us. So you -- working down Tilghman Island.

P.L.: Tell me about some of your big catches.

E.W.: Well I'll tell you what. One time I was on the Amy. Went down -- not -- Sharp's Island. Was it Sharp's Island? Yeah, that was it. And we was going west. We had opened up a seat area in there, and we had six or seven. And let me tell you true. We made so much money. All them boats left us, and we were right there, and man, we had her loaded. We had so many oysters on her, and they were great big oysters. Had so many oysters on her that when she'd go down in the sea, she'd -- right overboard. And we had a boy on there that -- he went that day, and he got so scared, he never did go on a boat no more. Never did go on a boat. I don't remember going on a boat anymore. You know what I'm saying? So I definitely made money on boats. I was way ahead. Some weeks, I made 15, \$1,400.

P.L.: Dredging with Ed Farley?

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yes, I did.

P.L.: You've seen some dangerous times out in the water then too.

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Don't let nobody fool you. I've seen some tough times. I got a brother that's seen tough times too, but he ain't done it like I have. With (indiscernible) he pulled by his self. He's just little, about my size, maybe a little thicker, but he pulled that -- it was rough out there.

P.L.: Tell me about the, about the time you were out on the bugeye, Clarence --

E.W.: Coming, coming from -- see, I was living in Crisfield then, I got my -- the first, I lived in Crisfield. And I got the boat from down that away -- and we got around, everything aboard, headed on up to going in Annapolis. About 4:00 that morning when we left Crisfield, maybe three, 'cause we left early. Then we headed on up the bay. We was pushing -- sailing. Wind wasn't blowing, doing three men. And let me tell you true. We got up here to Herring Bay, it was dark, falling in dark, you know. And the wind

struck in northeast, and them seas started rolling in there -- went up, she went down, boat -- down. And there we was. Great big sea in there. Boat going anywhere she wanted. And there we was. Banging, hammers and everything. I guess we, we were -- hassled for a quarter of an hour getting her loose. We let the yawl boat fell from the -- maybe the sail, and we was stuck in a northwest. I think that police -- the police told me about 65 mile at least. And somehow, we changed northwest, she went about, come about, and we were seven or eight plus for Tilghman Island. That's where we were going, Tilghman Island. Them seas would break, and we just let a stick fly right across the water. Them boys crying, my Lord, my Lord, I ain't going to see my children no more. And I was foolish, .young and foolish, I said -- your children, they're safe. You better worry about yourself. Just then, we heard this noise. (*Making sounds*). That was that old beached (indiscernible). You could barely make it out 'cause it's kind of foggy, you know. Then we hear boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, flowing up till we got across it. Reverend Christian (phonetic), I never will forget him, he tied a rope around his self, tied it to the mast and crawled out on the bow on the Clarence and Eva. And caught so many hooks of the jib up, said that would hold her head up. And he caught our boat, and we scudded from there to Solomon's Island. Went in Solomon's Island, right -- it was wind, and anchored. And looked around that evening around 2:00, captain said (indiscernible). That's bad. And captain said, boys, ain't nothing we can do. Try and get back to Crisfield and get fixed up again. You know, when I'm sailing, I never do go in the cabin and sit around, you know, I always stay on deck to see what's going on. And once we -- Crisfield, going to Crisfield, looked up at that mast, that mast, and it was bending just like this -- I said, Reverend, come here and look at this. And it was rotten right down to the core. What happened, we'd have been -- we didn't sail. And I'm telling you the truth, captain said, boys, we can go ashore here anywhere, you know, going in that canal, going in Crisfield. We can go ashore anywhere. Said I'm going to blow it out of her. And you know, they didn't come out of there.

P.L.: The foremast.

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Bend never come out of it. Lay right there. And then she was running water right over her shocks. Never come out of her. 'Cause we could went to shore anywhere, you know. Never seen nothing like it. That's why I used to tell Wadey, Wadey, you tighten them rigs up. The riggings must hung the mast in there. No, you didn't. But you got it. Yes, sir. You got it.

P.L.: What happened to the Sigsby then?

E.W.: Huh?

P.L.: What happened to the Sigsby when the mast didn't get tightened?

E.W.: Pulled the mast out of her. Yes, indeedy. And you got, long as you got a sailboat and you can keep that rigging lifted up right -- not unless the mast, I'll say if the mast is rotten or something like that, you might break or something like that. But as long as you got a good mast into her, you ain't got to be scared of her. You know the way I feel when I'm on the water? When you're out there, you're out there. And if it gets bad out there, ain't nothing you can do but fight it. Ain't nothing to get scared because what's going to happen's going to happen anyway. So you just stay there and fight it. 'Cause if you lose, you wonder what you're going to do, going to do this, that's when you mess up. That's when you mess up. So -- how about that? I said -- no, no, you come back in here, I'll go

back. I said all right, that's the way you want it. And then he asked me, is that the way of tying it down? I said yeah, you got it right. You see, you got to use good judgment on the water. And don't think, don't never think you can do it on the water and conquer it, because you can't. Two things man can't conquer is wind and water. I don't care what they do, they can't do nothing with it. That's right. Some people don't believe there's no, no God ruling this, but somebody's ruling. You ever realize that or think of that?

P.L.: Oh, yes, indeed.

E.W.: Man can't run it.

(END SIDE A.)

(BEGIN SIDE B.)

P.L.: Maybe you can tell me about some other close calls you had. You told me that when you were working up in New Jersey, you got hit by lightening once.

E.W.: The boat did. I didn't get hit, but the boat did. I seen lightening go right straight up the mast. Old captain says (indiscernible). I know it was coming. That's right. And we're out there working that day. Out there working. It blowed so hard, rained, and it blowed so hard that the Coast Guard, two or three Coast Guard boats out there with life jackets on. We're out there dredging. And we have a load of oysters on her. We had to get down on our knees throw the shovels overboard. Couldn't stand up and do it. Had to get down on your knees and shovel like that overboard. That's right.

P.L.: Just to get rid of the weight?

E.W.: No. That's where we plant them at. These was seed oysters. Planting them.

P.L.: Okay.

E.W.: Catch way up the bay, bring them down the bay. We caught most of them up on Rock Hall -- and brought them down the bay. And the ground, see them people down there had plywood rounds -- let them stay two to three years before they catch them. So that's the way we did it. And, boy, it was blowing that day. Then another time, out on the (indiscernible), she, we was out on this one place called Muddy Island. It was a little place, you know, so wide so boats can get out and back. And it blowed that night, wind, high tide. And the next morning, that boat was laying across the bank. Laying right across the bank. Yes, sir. You see, sometimes it's something to think about, you know. You wonder how did you make it. Got to be good Lord there 'cause if it ain't -- if it ain't, you're in trouble. Yes, indeedy.

P.L.: You've been on some good boats, and you've been on some pretty poor boats too, I guess.

E.W.: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I've been on some bad boats.

P.L.: Did you tell me that Claude W. Sommers was, she wasn't in very good condition when you were working her?

E.W.: She leaked a lot. I think that's why (indiscernible) -- I don't know whether he got scared or not, but he scared me the time --

P.L.: When the Claude W. sank?

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Boy, it was something.

P.L.: And that was the same year you worked on her.

E.W.: Yeah. I was dredging that oyster season. Net was full. We were full the 15th of March. Yeah, man. Yes.

P.L.: Why weren't you aboard when she sank?

E.W.: Well -- stay at home, not gonna make it. Me and his nephew -- his uncle, it was his uncle, boy's uncle, you need to go back with him. So that's what happened. We could've -- I often think about that. Lenny had been aboard there, I don't believe he drowned, he done it, but I said well, whatever it is, it's your time, and that's it. Nothing you can do about it.

P.L.: How about, you've seen, you've also seen some captains that didn't have a whole lot of respect for the law.

E.W.: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed. I tell you -- yeah, I (indiscernible). I've seen the captain, police boat come up -- and he told him to -- them guys do what he told them to do, the police boat. I go in there, the police in there, the captain arguing. They were arguing. And that captain -- on the shore, he's going around trying to (indiscernible). Got rid of him, go on up there Tolchester, 2, 3:00 that night.

P.L.: All under power.

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative).

P.L.: You were dredging the whole time under power.

E.W.: Yeah. And it -- boat sail out and went across there -- that's a plant up there, went in there till the next morning. Next morning, we went on down to Annapolis, some like that. Put the oysters out and sail back up the bay. And his name was Bobby Webster (phonetic). He'd do anything.

P.L.: That was the captain.

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yes, sir. I don't see any more (indiscernible) telling a lie. But I'm not telling a lie 'cause --

P.L.: How did you get, how did you get away with it that day?

E.W.: Huh?

P.L.: When the marine police came aboard that day when you were up in Sandy Point, how did you get away with it?

E.W.: We just went on down and put them out, no police.

P.L.: Oh, okay.

E.W.: 'Cause see -- that time, Captain Frank Edgar, have to worry about him, but it was like now, you go out there in that bay now and catch some oysters. You ain't got but one oyster and you go out there, go back to -- that police is there. Yes. People catch anything. You know the oysters is too small. They say you got a limit. Some of them sit there and catch, catch over your limit. They used to have a way of catching over their limit, have so many on deck, and the rest of them in the hole. You know. Nobody ain't got no oysters. They was destroying them oysters themselves. Destroying them themselves. And they wonder -- and didn't hurt nobody but their own self. That's all they could do, hurt their own self. Of course, I realize a lot of people coming from these big cities building places alongside the shore, and they don't, they don't care where the trash and stuff goes, they let it go back overboard. And that's going to, that's nothing good. Nothing good. The -- people can have no oysters, no fish, no crabs, all right by hand. I walked alongside the shore many a times, picked up great big soft crabs, maybe two or three dozen of them. Picked them up, have a basket or something, put them in and carry them over there. That's the way it is. But they wonder why it's happening. They explain they don't -- most people don't never think about who's controlling this, who is controlling this. Now if he wants it that he controls you, me, everybody else, whatever he wants

when he gets ready for it, it's going to happen. Don't let nobody fool you. It's going to happen. Just like people don't believe he said it. He was here once, and left and said he's coming again. Everything else has happened what he said. And now he's getting ready to come back again. Well people don't believe it, but you better believe it. You better believe it. Because if man controls them oysters, the fish, crabs, wind, rain and snow and all that, man, they'd have a perfect life here. They'd have everything like they wanted. They'd do like they want to do. But so you see, they don't control it, and I'm glad of it. And I'm going to tell you the truth, the way I feel about it, the way I feel, I could be wrong, but I don't think I am, but I could be. What it is, these people got money and stuff and don't have a worry. They don't care what happens to, what happens to the poor people. They say they do, but a lot of times, they get to the place they can help other people, they don't pay no attention to that. You know what I mean? They'll see something they want. They'll go get it. I bet you that. You better believe it. So you see, it's not anything you can do but ask the good Lord to help you. If he don't help you, you're in bad shape. Now you better believe that. If the good Lord don't help you, man, you're in a bad place.

P.L.: Now you've done, you've done more than just oystering. You've done a lot of crabbing and clamming. A little bit of clamming anyway.

E.W.: Yeah. I crabbed, I picked beans, I picked strawberries I picked sweet potatoes, tomatoes, I've done all that. I've done every bit of it.

P.L.: And you said you even shucked oysters in the plant.

E.W.: And I've shucked oysters.

P.L.: Where did you do that?

E.W.: I've shucked oysters down in Tilghman Island, Rock Creek and all. Crisfield.

P.L.: Are you pretty fast?

E.W.: I was. Yeah, I was one time. Thirty-five, 40 bushels a bucket. Not (indiscernible). And I ain't gonna say I can do it now, not no more. And I wouldn't even try to do it.

P.L.: Now you've been, you've been pretty steady on the Stanley Norman now for quite a while.

E.W.: Uh-huh (Affirmative). Yeah. Just like I said, I'm gonna work on her long as they want me. Or if I get too --

P.L.: Did you get on because your brother was already on the boat?

E.W.: No. They needed another man. And they got my brother (indiscernible). So as long as they want me, I'm going to stay there if my health holds up.

P.L.: Now do you get to do a bit of teaching, work with the kids some?

E.W.: Yeah. I tell them about oysters, shuck oysters, shuck oysters, show them different parts of the oyster. Tell them -- show them how to tie a knot, all that kind of stuff, I do that. It's good 'cause I can -- change them in groups, you know. Your group and my group. And I can do right good with kids. I like working with kids. That's good work.

P.L.: Now you said you always had a tight-knight family yourself.

E.W.: Oh, yeah. My family was -- I tell you one thing, all my family was (indiscernible), you want to work. But after they got to a certain age, all of them will work. Keep their own jobs, get their self a job. If you ain't got a job to take care of yourself, you're in bad shape.

P.L.: You worked, tell me your brother's name that you worked with a lot.

E.W.: Well I've got two brothers, we worked together. I've got one named Floyd, and then one named Malcolm, and the other one working together was named Benson (phonetic). All White. Yeah. Work with him. I used to drink a little bit. I'm gonna tell you about that.

P.L.: Okay.

E.W.: I was in New Jersey dredging. We were dredging crabs. We were dredging crabs in the fall of the year, first of spring. And that weekend, I was drinking. And I went out and had a ball. That Monday morning, I had to go to work. Oh, the captain come down, I went aboard, got read to leave, New Jersey. Got out there in the bay, first while I was all right. We got to crabbing. The wind breezed up, the boat got to rocking, my stomach got to rocking. Rolling like it's growling like this here, that's the way it sound. Old captain looked at me. Laughing. Dredge up full of crabs. I used to be good at picking up crabs, putting them in baskets. That morning, I couldn't pick up no crabs like nothing, had crabs running every which way, on the deck, you know. Old captain -- first thing you know, yelling -- can't -- feel like I was getting weak and all that. Then he -- right back there again. I said don't know how I'm gonna make it. Turn around and happen to look up, he's looking at me laughing. And everything was going through my mind. But it was my fault. Wasn't really his fault. It was my fault. I was the one had that mess in me. By and by, he took pity on me, says, Earl, come here. He had a glass of liquor about like that. He said here, take this. I said man, I don't want that damn stuff, just like that. Next thing I know, here I go back to the side again, that stuff coming out of me just as green as a board. I said, Lord, if I ever over this, I'll never do this no more. So he told me, come take a drink of this. I went, and I happened to go over took that -- I was feeling so bad, got to do something. I went and got the glass of liquor, and I -- I guess about for 10 minutes, my stomach act like it was going to settle down. Next thing I know, I was over the side again. Oh, I come back. I said, Lord, if I ever do this, I'll never do this again. By and by captain to me, dip that bucket overboard and get some water. I dipped the bucket overboard and I got some water, and I drunk about a half a glass of that water. And you know one thing -- a good while, sitting down, next thing I know, I feel it again. And from that day up until this one, I ain't never been seasick since. And I said, Lord, if you ever let me over this, I'll never do this no more. From that day until this, I don't drink nothing unless it's soda, lemonade or hot chocolate. Can't get me to drink. I don't care who's drinking. I can go around them, sit down and talk with them, laugh, but I ain't putting it in me. (Laughter). But, man, that was a bad feeling. I guess if I could've died right then and got out of it, I would've felt better or something. I don't know whether I would've felt better or not, but I know I wouldn't have been feeling it. I've had it.

P.L.: Well one or two last things. We've talked a little bit about eating out on the skipjacks.

E.W.: Eating?

P.L.: Yeah.

E.W.: They had pretty good food. We had food. Had a lot of beans. Soup beans, butter beans, pork chop, chicken, white potatoes, sometimes we had cabbage and all that kind of food. Have a cook to cook it. Eat pretty good on the Chesapeake Bay. But now it's a little different. Get a little of this and a little of that. Make a sandwich, that's it. But

when we was dredging, stay aboard the boat, they had food -- what they would do is they would say today's Monday, be day for dredging on the Chesapeake Bay. That would be first of November. All right. Then fill up with food, buy food, flour, salt and pepper and all that kind of beans and white potatoes and all that kind of meat, fish and all that. Had that aboard and how you want aboard, anything. And that was enough to last until you got ready to go home for Christmas. So -- come up the first of November and stay until the first week, two, three days before Christmas, go on back down the bay. Then stay down out Christmas holidays, and New Year's, shack up what they needed, and then they would go Solomon's Island. Then oyster in Solomon's Island up till the 15th of March and then they go home. And that would be the season. My other -- I'd say home till the first of May. I go to New Jersey and I help overhaul boats. We'd go dredging. They'd -- oysters, they dredge oyster for to put on their beds. They had beds down there. They took them oysters, put them on the beds and let them stay two, three years. That's the way they do. Then I stay there and go crabbing. I'd go crabbing until the 1st of November or the week before the first of November. Then I'd come on back down there and get on the Chesapeake Bay -- spring. That's the way I do it. Used to say, get this many crew, you know, so many men, 10 or 12, whatever you needed, that's the way I would do it. I think the water's been good to me. I do. When I'm around the water, I feel better. I feel -- sound funny. When I'm up in the land, I don't feel as good as I do when I'm -- then I really feel good on the water.

P.L.: Good.

E.W.: What time is it?

P.L.: We should probably wind it up here and let you get back on over to Annapolis then.

E.W.: Oh, yeah.

P.L.: Okay.

E.W.: I want to see what this here, over there.

P.L.: All right, well thank you very much.

E.W.: All right.

(END OF INTERVIEW.)