Transcript of OH-00089

James Willard Dutton

Interviewed by

John Wearmouth

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Typographic Note

- [Inaudible] is used when a word cannot be understood.
- Brackets are used when the transcriber is not sure about a word or part of a word, to add a note indicating a non-verbal sound and to add clarifying information.
- Em Dash — is used to indicate an interruption or false start.
- Ellipses … is used to indicate a natural extended pause in speech

Subjects

Fishing
Depressions
United States Naval Ordnance Station (Indian Head, Md.)
Education
Bateaux
Fishing nets
Pound net fishing
Drift net fishing
Striped bass fisheries
American eel fisheries

Tags

Watermen
Depression, 1929
Nanjemoy Creek

Transcript

John Wearmouth [J]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Mr. James Willard Dutton at his home on Billingsley Road right at the edge of Mattawoman Creek. And we are about what two miles from Bryans Road would you say?

James Willard Dutton [W]: Three.

J: Three miles from say the fire department, the firehouse at Bryans Road and maybe a couple of miles from Route 228.

W: And we sit kind of in the center of it.

J: Yeah okay about midway between those two Routes. Between 227 and 228. The date is January 17, 1990 and this is another of the Charles County Community College Oral History Tapes and it is part of the series on lives of the watermen of Charles County. And Mr. Dutton has been at least a part time waterman and part time farmer all his life in the Glymont Indian Head area of the county. He was born at Glymont in 1919. And his father Notley Dutton was at one time a businessman in Indian Head and ran a store there? Was this—

W: [Stayed in] store, lunch room, you name it.

J: In the 1920's or so?

W: In the yeah. 20's up to depression.

J: Did you help him occasionally at the store?

W: The only thing we helped to do was eat the candy off of him.

J: Okay and his mother was Mary R. McCloskey she was born at Pomfret and his father was born—did you say Tompkinsville?

W: Yeah Tompkinsville.

J: Okay just as a matter of interest, how and where did your parents meet living rather far apart?

W: Well they—my father was running a bar room over at Indian Head and my mother's father and mother was running a hotel over there and that's how they met.

J: In downtown Indian Head?

W: Mhm and then they ran away and got married.

J: Oh for goodness sakes. Well you and I've known each other through various Charles County projects. I guess for about 20 years so this will be a comfortable community. I think we met during the Charles County—better Charles County. What was the name of that organization now? Citizens for a Better Charles County?

W: Yeah Citizens for a Better Charles County.

J: Which is a bit quite now but it may come back to life the way things are going. One of these days. How many brothers and sisters did you have Willard?

W: I had two sisters and three brothers.

J: Okay now how many of those are still alive?

W: All of them.

J: All of them. What are the sister's names?

W: Charlotte Anne Dutton or Charlotte Anne Gates now. You want last names?

J: Please.

W: And Lorraine C. Willett.

J: Did both of the girls marry Charles County men?

W: They're married but they don't live in Charles County now.

J: Okay, okay. Now how far back in your memory can you go? Just trying to get a feel for the extent of your memory. Anything that happened at home or in the family that sticks by you today that happened to you when you were a very young child? Any nice thing? Any punishment? Any embarrassments?

W: Well the only thing I can think of was we were there on the river when Lindbergh come back and went up to Washington on a boat. Everybody went down and stood on the banks of the river to look.

J: At what point on the river now?

W: At Indian Head.

J: Right at Indian Head. Did the boat stop at Indian Head?

W: Oh no. Kept right on up.

J: How did you know that he was on that boat? Did the word—

W: Yeah the word was out.

J: Was it a Navy vessel?

W: Yeah.

J: Okay so this takes us back to 1927.

W: Yeah it was in the 20's.

J: 1927 and you were at that time about eight years old.

W: Yeah. I reckon there was other things in [inaudible] but that was the only thing that I remember—

J: An outstanding bit of history. Did your whole family go down?

W: Yeah all the kids.

J: A good size crowd of people?

W: Well we lived right there on Indian Head you know and all the neighbors around there went to the river.

J: Okay.

W: Mrs. McWilliams and—

J: Did you go down at the Navy dock there?

W: No we went down, there was a steep bank down there. They used to allow us to come in there and go down to swim.

J: Oh I see.

W: And everybody we went down that bank.

J: Okay. How old were you when you started at school?

W: I reckon six. I don't know really.

J: Who took you to school that first day?

W: I don't remember the first day to be honest with you.

J: Where was that school located? Indian Head Elementary School?

W: No it was down past where the old hotel was and we had school in the barracks that were left over from the first World War.

J: What's on that site today?

W: I don't know. I haven't been back there in for years.

J: So it was on the Indian Head reservation? The Navy property.

W: Yeah. See they had a hotel in there.

J: A pretty decent looking building.

W: And then they had some houses that people lived in there too.

J: Now even on the reservation in those days as I understand it there was in the schools segregation? Black children went to one school. Swan Circle I think. The Swan Circle school and I know where that is because I've interviewed a couple of the black teachers but I didn't know where the white elementary school is. So that was about 1924 or 5.

W: It was—we were there when that tornado hit the school over here in La Plata.

J: Okay November 1926 on that—

W: Yeah we had been in there two or three years or a couple of years I reckon before that happened. But that so much stuck in your mind.

J: What school were you going to when you finished elementary? Where was that school?

W: That was Lackey.

J: Okay and we know where that is out on the green pretty much. That was not far from where the elementary school is now as I understand it.

W: Yeah well it was in a little further.

J: In towards the center of the green?

W: Yeah.

J: Okay.

W: Well the green was like this and the school set back here like this.

J: Toward the north end? Would you say toward the north end? Okay and then did you go to high school also in the Lackey building?

W: Yeah.

J: When it was—well see that building was built in 1919 I believe so it had been up about ten years before you went into high school, maybe more?

W: I don't remember it well 'cause I wouldn't remember 1919 anyhow 'cause I was just born. I was born in 1919.

J: So was that where the elementary classes also were? In that same building.

W: Yeah they were part of it—part of it was the elementary and part of it was high school.

J: I see. All under one roof. Okay. When did you leave school?

W: That was let's see 36.

J: Okay. What had you been doing in high school during your high school years to earn pocket money? As a young man how did you pick up a little change here and there?

W: Sold car tires five cents apiece.

J: Second hand?

W: Yeah. We used to and a man came through here and picked them up. Paid us five cents apiece for them.

J: That was good hard cash.

W: Yeah and as far as the other men I don't know that we earned any money. All the money went into the family.

J: Yeah in your case not being on a farm there wasn't the usual amount of hard farm work—

W: Well you could go up and your father would say, "I'll give you a quarter to clean this room up." Something like that. Somebody had a—in those days they didn't have power mowers and

they would say, "I'll give you so much to cut the lawn." But we didn't bother with it much because we were too busy running all over the place.

J: Yes things went in those days in Charles County you really were a city boy. You really were. How many of the boys in your class at school came from farms on a percentage basis?

W: What at Indian Head?

J: Yeah.

W: None that I know of.

J: For heaven's sakes. And most of them then came from what kind of home?

W: Well most of them were the people that lived right there in Indian Head and the ones that lived out and you know worked there.

J: Employees. The children of employees of the government.

W: That was the reason that I reckon that the school was built there to start with.

J: Did you ever reflect on the quality of teaching at that school? As you look back on it now compared to other schools in Charles County was it good, bad, about the same?

W: I would say about equal.

J: Do you remember the names of some of the teachers?

W: Well...[just like that it's gone]. Maybe it was the principal of that, Mrs. Rice.

J: Mildred Rice. O'Callaghan in later years?

W: Yeah. And she had a sister that taught there. [Inaudible phrase].

J: Right yeah.

W: Oh I can't....

J: Well let's see was Ruth Hickey teaching there? No, no she would be too young. Mr. Carey?

W: [Heaven no] Mrs.—Ms. [Farr] that taught there. She'd come I think from down around Tompkinsville.

J: There are [Farr's] down there. [Farr's] store.

W: Yeah.

J: Okay. Any [Brookbank's]? Do you remember a [Brookbank's].

W: Yeah there was a [Brookbank] here. I was trying to think of some of the ones that taught the grade school. I can see them but I can't remember—

J: Yeah well anyway that's pretty far away. Willard what was your first full time job? When did you really get out there and get into the workforce and started to—

W: Well my father died when we lived there at Riverside and a man by the name of Paul Robertson ran a right good size farm down there. Those days wasn't no money.

J: How did you get from Indian Head to Riverside?

W: Well—

J: What brought it—

W: Well my father saw the price of cotton. So he sold out all his businesses and everything, settled up all his debts, and we went to [Greaten] to wait out the depression. And we didn't hardly get to [Greaten] before they closed the damn banks on us. And then on top of that he was a Spanish American War veteran. And he was getting a small pension and they took that away. So I didn't have any love for Roosevelt.

J: No I guess not.

W: It was 32 years I think before we finally got all of our money back. We didn't have a whole lot but at that time it would've you know meant a whole lot.

J: Was this put in a local bank in Indian Head?

W: Yeah, well it was called Eastern Shore Trust Company at that time and—

J: Okay who were the directors of that bank?

W: Well...the man down there he was the head of the Navy over there. I can't think of his name right now but John Thomas Parran's father was mixed up into it too.

J: Okay.

W: They were the one [inaudible] they could've gotten it.

J: How about John [Roe]? He came over here to be a clerk in that bank I think but he was not an officer that I know of.

W: No, his father I know he worked in Indian Head didn't he?

J: Later that's right he went from the bank to Indian Head. That's right and he was an accountant.

W: Well Parran I think came out of Calvert County.

J: I think you're right. I think.

W: And but when they closed on all those people of course most of the people had come off the farm and they didn't spend much money and they had a hell of a lot of money tied up in there. And when they closed the bank they got their self a rope and went up and went up after Mr. Parran and Mr. Parran got out of Indian Head—

J: Is that right? They were that serious. What are we talking about? 1930?

W: 32 I think.

J: 32 the moratorium? When Roosevelt closed the banks?

W: Yeah.

J: Eventually they did pay back?

W: Yeah after all those years. They paid off the stock with half the year or a little more. They paid preferred stock off. Then you had the common stock which was most of it. And that dragged on. We used to get letters every once in a while offering you a penny on the dollar and all this kind of crap. And Momma said no can't get it all just throw it up in the safe there and let it stay.

J: So that's how you ended up on the farm? How far were you from [Greaten]?

W: We were right in [Greaten].

J: Right in it. Okay. Not far from old Durham Church?

W: Well old Durham the rectory and everything wasn't at the church like it is today.

J: That's right. You're right.

W: And we lived right adjoining to the farm was adjoining to the rectory down there.

J: I see on the same side of the road?

W: Yeah they had about—well that old house is still—that old place is still standing there.

J: The rectory?

W: Yeah.

J: Right I took pictures of it a year ago.

W: And we were up the road a little ways coming back towards the church. Great big old double story house. Somebody went and burnt that one down.

J: Is it gone now?

W: No it's still there.

J: I think I know which one it is.

W: 14 with the ceilings.

J: I think I know what one it is.

W: Yeah the—

J: Two chimney's?

W: I reckon it is.

J: Yeah but that was a pretty nice house at one time wasn't it?

W: It was built out of green lumber. Didn't have any subsiding on it. Some kind of I don't know what they called it but I'd call it cardboard inside. And it cracked when the wind blew.

J: It came through?

W: Come right on through.

J: Where did you go to school at that point or were you out?

W: No I was at it would be Nanjemoy then.

J: Okay that was—

W: Not till I went to Riverside is when I—

J: So you came very close to going through the high school period didn’t you? Which was what eleven grades at that time? Do you remember?

W: See it had seven under grades and four top grades.

J: Yeah 11. Who were your teachers there at Nanjemoy?

W: Mrs. Calvin Compton.

J: Oh really?

W: Yeah.

J: Ms. Wade?

W: Yes Ms. Wade. She wasn't married then.

J: She was still Ms. Wade.

W: Yeah.

J: Margaret [inaudible].

W: Had a principal there by the name of [Donnette]. I can't think of there was two or three more there. But one time Ms. Wade told Bill Lewis that I was [peachy] with him. She didn't know what made me so ornery.

J: Were you [going hungry]?

W: We were [bucking] this was later years. We were [bucking] on a political thing you see. And I told him I said, "Well when you go to church next Sunday you tell Ms. Wade that she was the one that taught me all this." And by God he went and done that.

J: Oh boy. That was a pretty decent new building wasn't it there at Nanjemoy? The Nanjemoy school.

W: Yeah but the damn roof always leaked. Them old flat roofs and they ain't learned their lesson yet.

J: Nope, no you're right. They had some problems with it. With more recent construction than that. So did you begin to get out on the water a little bit when you were living in the [Greaten] area?

W: Well I'll go back when we were—when my father died and man had [inaudible] farm [inaudible]. He hired me. 15 dollars a month.

J: What was his name?

W: Paul Robertson.

J: Okay.

W: And 15 dollars a month but the only trouble was we got up four o'clock in the morning and went to work quit at ten o'clock at night. So I worked for him for two months and that was it. I never worked for nobody after that.

J: Good Lord.

W: I said I'd make a go. I come on back and went crabbing there at Riverside and I was making ten dollars a week which was more money than most of them were making.

J: And you were your own boss.

W: Yeah.

J: What was your first boat like?

W: Bateau.

J: A bateau. Can you describe that Willard? How does is it built? A fat bottom, V bottom? What draft?

W: No bateau is a flat bottom. And it's a French name.

J: That's right. Sort of a big skiff?

W: Well it can be any size but it was a flat bottom.

J: Okay. Pretty stable?

W: Yeah and those days when we were at Riverside we didn't have any boat so some of them said, "Well come on." And went up with the Posey's and they were fishing over at that shore down there. Cutting up green fox [inaudible] pine there and they had sawmill and we sawed it up. Made ourselves a boat. Put a Model A motor in it and went fishing.

J: What were the dimensions of that boat?

W: They were about 18 to 20 feet.

J: Well a Model A engine would've pushed that along at a pretty good clip.

W: But they—of course you had to have a keel into them you know. But come back the first year my father died when we were there the first year.

J: So what year did your father die now?

W: I don't know—

J: Early into the depression?

W: Well I can go back and look at the records up here.

J: Well maybe we can do that later. But early in the 30's really?

W: Well it was let's see, two years at [greaten] so that would've made it 34 or 35.

J: Okay.

W: And my Uncle—I have a—We had an Uncle lived in Washington that period. He was a fire chief and he come down and my father told him he wanted some money to buy some [net] so he gave us some money and I set it out there with all these [Posey's] they helped set it out. I had an older brother and an Uncle and they went fishing with the [Posey's]. That's what a little bit of change they got. I fished of course the [gill net wasn't purchased yet]. We didn't know nothing about any size limit or anything. Anything that wiggled we sent it to the market.

J: How big was the mesh in that gill net?

W: Two and a half.

J: Two and a half. And what material was that net made of? Not nylon.

W: No, linen.

J: Linen? Why linen?

W: Well I don't know but that's what they used.

J: Stood up better than a cotton?

W: Well even after they made machinery in there. No cotton wouldn't do. Cotton would have been too thick. And he made a haul seine [inaudible phrase] out of cotton. But that was early. A right good size mesh net you know. But the linen, the [Posey's] there they remember I don't know how far back it was when the family made that net on their own. He said that their mother and sisters spent all extra time rigging this net out you see. Making it by hand. So when they could buy it well they really thought they'd gotten somewhere then.

J: About how many square feet of mesh would be in a net like that one?

W: Well you go by the pound. It's hard to tell. They tried for a gill net to make it as long as they could because it was drifted. We came in—it was in the 20's when these changed from drift net to [stake] what they call a [stake] net.

J: How did the drift net work? What did you have to do to get that set?

W: Well a drift net you just, you laid it on a board or a platform and you went out and you'd run it right off. And it had small corks on it and it floated. And the depths was set by from your cork to your top line. And if you wanted to [shallow] it up you just wound your cork up like that with the net with the little rope right on it.

J: Oh I see.

W: And if you want to let it out deeper you knew what the depth of the water was.

J: And that you had to know right?

W: Yeah. And you could unwind it and it would drop down.

J: How long were these nets on the average? Any length you wanted?

W: Any length you wanted but as far as I know it wasn't [that long].

J: The smallest practical size would've been what 25-30 feet.

W: Oh no that wouldn't be big enough to get out there before the tide would twist it around one way or another. The longer it was the more that it would lay there when you're drifting. You know lay in your patterns that you wanted.

J: And how were the two ends of the net anchored?

W: You had a cork—

J: Or held.

W: You had a cork. You didn't anchor it. It just drifted along down the river.

J: Oh so it was just a loose.

W: Yeah. And like I say by running it out the longer it was the better it was at staying in that straight line. It was too short it would twist it up first thing you know it'd be running straight up and down. You want it across ways.

J: So there were no weights on either end?

W: They had a little weight.

J: A little weight just to—

W: Just about—

J: Trying to keep a little tension.

W: They had a little ring about this big around—

J: Six inches in diameter.

W: And about as big your pencil. And they tied them ever so much. You didn't want too much weight because you didn't want it right on the bottom.

J: Okay now what effect did the tide have on that net? Did it shove it back and forth?

W: Well it depended on the run of the fish. If there wasn't too many running they generally laid it out on what they called flood tide. That was running up. Most of your fish moved on your flood tide. Some of them would drift all day. They were left till free tides run through. Most of them laid out so many say an hour before changed and let it stay slack and would be run about a half hour. Then when it went to the run down then they would let it run another hour and then take it up. So that was an hour each way.

J: Okay so you didn't just set it up and walk away and go shopping.

W: No, no when we come along we drifted a little bit but not much. We went to the [stake] net. So you stuck your net in left them over you leave them night and day and you still in the same place you see.

J: What was the dimension of this drift net from top to bottom?

W: About 15 feet.

J: 15 feet so you had to get it out there in pretty deep water?

W: Yeah. And you set—the net was about 15 feet deep but that didn't have the little rope running from the net up to the cork and that cork had most times some twine wrapped on it so you could drop it down deeper depending on where you were drifting.

J: How far apart were these corks on the average?

W: Oh about 20 feet I reckon.

J: Okay well we're gonna need a picture of it now. Who today coming along can do this?

W: Very few.

J: That's why this is important.

W: Even back there then there were just certain people that rigged the net and stuff like that.

J: How did a good fisherman determine whether or not he wanted to use a drift net or a seine type [purse]—

W: Well it would depend most time on what he was after.

J: Okay.

W: A drift net was done in March, April, and May. Sometimes up in June depending on the run.

J: To catch what?

W: Rock, shad.

J: Okay.

W: You caught mostly rock to start with. And then as the weather warmed up and the shad came you picked up the shad. But those days there wasn't a whole lot of fish.

J: Huh really?

W: They if you caught a hundred pounds of rock you were doing good.

J: A day's catch?

W: That was a day's catch.

J: And what would a good—what would a man get for that if he found a good market?

W: Well it as far as I can remember even though it was depression those fish started out at 45 cents a pound.

J: That's not bad.

W: And it ended up about 25 cents because you were still—when I went to the war I come back home I said damn, "I'm going down to the shore and getting some fish." Went down there and of course I knew the men that were fishing down there. And I said to them, I said, "Mr. Davis what're you getting a pound for?" "By god boy you have [what you want] 10 cents a pound." I almost keeled over.

J: What made the difference? Why? It's a big difference.

W: Well they—pressure was off during the war and they were out there just as thick as hell. I don't know how many pounds they had caught there.

J: Oh okay so with the decrease in fishing the fish increased to the point where we can catch hundreds where you could catch a hundred pounds of rock ten years earlier now you might bring in five hundred in a day.

W: Yeah. They then they built back up. Those things weren't going to start a cycle. Course if you [grabbed to call] perch, well you could set gill net for perch but cod and catfish you used a haul seine [inaudible].

J: How did the haul seine work?

W: Well the haul seine you laid out in a circle like a half moon I always called it. And your rope went on out so far. And then your net was on that you laid it out around like that. Come back about here and then there was a rope again. Then you wound them both in—

J: Sort of like a crescent type. And maybe a half circle or a third circle.

W: Well about a half circle.

J: And that was anchored how at the ends?

W: It wasn't anchored. Well it we had the ropes on it. You had [surely] had about four men. And two up here and two down there. The longer lines you could pull one end of your net.

J: So you would pivot on two men. Just swing it around while he stood still.

W: Or you come around a certain length and [stopped and rope] pulled both sides in.

J: And then you gradually closed it?

W: Yeah and then you gradually closed it.

J: And then what? Haul it into shore?

W: Well they had a bag—what they call a bag on it. Which was run back here so that the fish [for a whole] went right in that one spot and then you dragged them up on the shore. If you didn't have too many. One time we caught ten thousand pounds like that in one haul.

J: In one haul? How the devil did you handle that five tons? Did you have to leave some get some rid of some of them?

W: No we put them all in [lime] boxes. Except, I think it was about 500 pounds. It was dark when we were getting them out so Bill Lewis said, "What are we gonna do with those? Let's take them down there and throw them in that old boat that's half sunken." So we threw them in that and I said, "If they get out we ain't lost anything." So we got back there the next morning they had every one of them in there.

J: Good lord.

W: And we put that in there. We'd caught—it was only three of us and we only had boots on.

J: Who were the other two people?

W: Bill Lewis and Robert Mason. Robert Mason was colored. And he was good. He was good as two men.

J: Was he black or Indian type?

W: No he was black.

J: Okay.

W: And I always figured somebody knocked him in the head. He had his house burn down on him Christmas day. But he was a good fisherman.

J: What was the reason that there was not much oystering going on at this part of the river?

W: Up in Nanjemoy?

J: Yeah.

W: It was too fresh a water.

J: Okay that's good. That's for the record. They just wouldn't live. Oysters could not live. Where did the oysters begin to sort of peter out? At what point along the Charles County shore?

W: Well back through history of the thing they were up Maryland Point. Oysters were that far up. Then they gradually come back down. I suppose as they cleared up the land and the cities built up the water got fresher.

J: More run off.

W: So then you got to right off Pope's Creek. That was the boundary line along there. Some above there but not too many. And course when the Agnes come along through there it killed all of them.

J: Have they ever really made a comeback since Agnes?

W: No. They can make a comeback under the setup we got. We used to make the laws for the county. You see we governed what went on in here. Now the state come along and went to court and said, "Oh no you can't make the law just for your county." And that ruined me because you don't go here and work your hide off like we used to and move oysters and little oysters and put them on different bars and everything because if we did that now well St. Mary's would be up here the next morning getting them up. So that ruined us and I don't care what anybody says. That was what ruined the oysters in Charles County. I think it was the whole state to be honest with you.

J: So watermen who were north of say Blossom Point anyway weren't oystering?

W: Yeah no.

J: Couldn't be. How about crabs?

W: Well they were crabbing.

J: Okay.

W: But part of those men went down in the lower part of the county and oystered.

J: Okay. In season?

W: In season.

J: What were the names of some them you knew as a young man who were really full time watermen?

W: Well to be honest with you I don't know any full time watermen even at Rock Point. They work the seasons. When the work opened up in the spring they went somewhere else to work. But oystering was the biggest draw. They [topped] a year that we had in here in the late years we had 365 licensed watermen in Charles County.

J: About how recently?

W: It was oh I don't know. That was before Agnes come through there and killed them [inaudible].

J: What year was Agnes? Hazel was in 54. She did a lot of damage.

W: Well I get them mixed up sometimes. Hazel or Agnes whatever the one was killed all the oysters. That was done in the summer time you see and fresh water comes down and those things swelled right up and popped right out the shell.

J: Good lord.

W: There was that much fresh water in there. Now we've had bad—well last year was one of the wettest years we've had for a long time but it was done gradual you see and they adapt themselves to it. But you can watermen either crab or. He does more harm to himself than anybody else does.

J: How so? What makes him different.

W: Well most of them I would say are descendants of the Vikings [anyhow]. And then the Viking always said what's yours is mine if I can take it away.

J: A little bit hard headed sometimes.

W: Well they're so afraid somebody else is going to get another oyster from you, you know. They when he had the boundary lines [half dozen or so] went to Annapolis and got a law passed that you couldn't oyster on a Saturday. And the buyers told us that's the best thing you ever did because they dropped on Friday evening a dollar on a bushel you see but Monday morning went right back up. So—

J: How far back are we going with this law? 20 years?

W: It might have been that long. I can't remember because I know at the time that they changed it I was in the hospital up here and two of my good friends went to Annapolis and got it changed. And I said, "[Inaudible] what'd you let them do?" He said, "By God you can't tell them nothing let them go." But they wasn't loosing anything but they couldn't stand [setting over there at] Cobb Island and look across there on Virginia—on St. Mary's side and see those people working. Even though they were working cheap oysters. They couldn't stand that. They wanted it open so they could work on Saturdays.

J: So what is it now? Are you back to five days of oysters?

W: Well let's see. In the Potomac it's five days. I think in the Wicomico you can put your six days in.

J: Oh and only until noon each day I understand?

W: They have loosened that up a little bit but I don't know just how many. Because they—I used to [help them out there you see]. But what gets me, you know, they said, "I used to [tear] those

up." That's nature's way of protecting what she's got. So then they go and crawl on their knees to the people up in Annapolis and say, "Let us work an extra hour or two or extra day or something like that." [And when you went wind up you done took everything at the center.]

J: As far as your experience is concerned Willard, what Charles County waters do you know best?

W: Nanjemoy Creek.

J: Okay. And what were you looking for? What did you normally take out of Nanjemoy Creek?

W: We took out carp and catfish.

J: Carp and catfish. What happened to the carp? Who bought the carp for what reason?

W: Well it was mostly, we sold them to a man that had been buying in here for 30 years. He was a Jew and well we never made a whole lot. I mean you know big price we got a whole of fish.

J: Whole lot of weight.

W: Yeah and he was dependable and if he told us he was coming we knew that he'd be there.

J: He'd come down by truck?

W: Yeah.

J: From Washington?

W: No he'd come from Philadelphia. And he'd come down here and he'd put those—he had water air holes along there and he put barrels and he had a big bin. But he even had the barrels and the fish tails sticking up like and he took them back to Philadelphia like they'd be alive when he got up.

J: Is that right? Huh. What was the average weight of those carp? What's a good size.

W: Well at least ten pounds.

J: And these would've been good eating wouldn't they?

W: Oh yeah.

J: If you didn't mind eating—

W: Well what he did—he bought them down here then he took them to Philadelphia and I think he took some of them into New York and they were alive. And he told me he said, "The people

come into the shop and then they look at them and they say well I want this one." And they took them out and they killed them and I don't know whether they skinned them or just what they did do but they got them ready for whatever the man wanted.

J: I wonder if they pickled them? Maybe [the kosher type]?

W: No no kosher was the herring. Not carp. Now carp was what you call a [gook]. Some kind of fish.

J: Gefilte fish?

W: Yeah.

J: They turned that into Gefilte fish?

W: Yeah that was the carp.

J: Did you ever eat gefilte fish?

W: No.

J: It's pretty good.

W: See I one time he was down there and I asked him, I said, "[Inaudible], what about the roe? The roe is green." "Oh," he said, "It's good. It's good," he said, "But not many people eat it." So I brought some home and my mother cooked it. It was green when she put in the pan. Took it out and it was just as orange as could be. And it—and I liked it.

J: Just caviar.

W: It was coarse you see but she didn't want to cook so I didn't get much of it.

J: Were you working alone most of the time?

W: No.

J: Okay you had always at least one other person?

W: At least one.

J: Okay—

W: I have worked out there [when I was younger] by myself you know but after you got into it a little bigger well I had most time had three men.

J: Were you using nets for carp?

W: Yeah nets and—no, only haul seine for carp.

J: Haul seine.

W: [He'd tear the net up]. And they got on their top end they got a thing that sticks up out like that and it's a saw blade.

J: Oh really?

W: And he generally gets set in there and twists it.

J: About an inch, two inches long?

W: Well that depends on size fish. Some of them I've seen them that long.

J: Up to six inches long.

W: And we took in—we always carried a pair of pliers with us so we could break the thing.

J: Oh I see. So that could get tangled in the net?

W: Yeah and then you had to untangle that's why you never pulled the net on it, it took too much time. And the carp haul seine see they didn't get tangled up into that.

J: Huh. What was the difference? What prevented this entangling with the haul seine? The size of the mesh?

W: No the [course or so they seine].

J: Oh I see. How large were the—

W: Well the mesh is run—what did we—we always—we always used to have us buy stretch mesh not square 'cause you pulled it out this way three inches would've been an inch and a half square. We always tarred it. Tar made them so that you could roll them [over the head of it]. Then you could get hung up this easy.

J: You tarred it? Up on dry land when it was thoroughly dried out? Using what rollers? Brush?

W: No we used a barrel or most of time we had a tin thing bigger than this. I got things down there in the front yard now. And he hated to tar then later on in later years they got what they called net sap. You didn't have to heat that. You just put it in there and soak through it and hung it up and dried it out.

J: Okay so what else was there in Nanjemoy that was worth catching and selling?

W: Muskrats.

J: Muskrats.

W: We had a pattern or part of us did. I farmed in the summer time. I fished in the fall till about December. Most of them [inaudible phrase] or we used a haul seine sometime later on. Then went and trapped from the first of the year up till the 15th of March. Then we went back fishing again. I never fooled with crabs other than when we lived at Riverside but crabs wouldn't come in there.

J: Was this an enjoyable life for you?

W: Yeah that's the reason I did it.

J: These seasonal changes. Still your own boss all these years.

W: Yeah.

J: About what percentage of your income Willard would you estimate came from the water?

W: I don't know it was hard to tell because—

J: AS much as half?

W: Yes in some years. Fishing and farming were very much alike. You hit it one year the next year you didn't. I wasn't always lucky. I'd hit one year on farming, we lost on fishing. Next year we make it on fishing and we'd loose on farming.

J: How many acres were you farming?

W: Oh when my brothers were here with us...I reckon we have about 200 acres for the farm.

J: This is still down in the [greaten] area?

W: No, no. It would be up here.

J: Oh I see.

W: At [greaten] we didn't. We I reckon we were working about 60 acres. But then there was horses then. There wasn't—

J: Was that decent soil down there?

W: Had red clay in there some of the hardest stuff to work with.

J: What was the money crop?

W: Tobacco. [But it had ruined us when we were at greaten]. That was right at the Depression and old man Blacklock come over and looked at the crop and he said, "I'll give you 15 cents for [the seconds and the bright]. My father said to him, "How about second bright and then the tips." He said, "There ain't no second bright or tips it's all dark. He didn't want that. So my father said, "Well we bought this fertilizer from the Tobacco Growing Association. We'll ship it up there." We got three cents for it.

J: A pound?

W: A pound.

J: Did that even cover the transportation cost?

W: [No it didn't]. And that was—so then we went back truck farming. And we didn't do much. Everybody else was truck farming at the same time.

J: What was the money crop there in truck farming?

W: Well it was a little bit of everything. Whatever you could raise. But the trouble was raising [truck between here and I] listening to these people talk about doing away with tobacco and getting another crop. If you can't get a truck [inaudible] it wasn't—there's either we were too early I mean too late most of the time. The first [inaudible] have flooded you know a certain amount. Then ours come along about that time. Well then everybody's glutted so you can't make nothing out of it that way.

[Tape Interruption]

J: Willard what sort of description can you give me of the store as you remember it? The building itself. Which was called historically Nanjemoy's Stores with an S on it.

W: Yeah.

J: How'd it look to you?

W: He had a like an old country store. Had the shelves on each side and sold just the bare necessaries that people need.

J: Any liquor? Any hard stuff?

W: No it was prohibition was still—

J: That's right. We're talking about the 30's.

W: Yeah but they had a hole in that door over there. It was a real thick door. And the man that run it before Harrison was Bill [Hazel], which is Dick [Slaven's] father in-law. Let's see am I right?

J: I think you're right.

W: And he was in there and he thought somebody—

J: Fanny [Slaven's] father.

W: Father yeah. He was in there and something was pushing up against the door and it scared the hell out of him. We thought it was somebody trying to rob the place. And he told us he said, "If you don't get out of here I'm a put a bullet right through that door." And it pushed against the door and then he shot it. And then he was scared to open the door. So he waited till the next morning. When he opened the door there was somebody's ox laying there dead.

[Laughter]

J: I guess he didn't mind that too much. Could've been a human being just dropped out there.

W: Yeah he used to be the sheriff of the county you know.

J: Was he in the construction business [Hazel]? Can you remember?

W: No I don't think so.

J: Maybe it was his father. Okay what was old Pine Tree Inn like? Was it a black bar? A white bar?

W: Had a hall in there.

J: Pardon?

W: Had a hall.

J: Okay.

W: For dancing.

J: Was it primarily for black people?

W: Well that was mostly—

J: It is now.

W: Well that was what was mostly around there. But it didn't make any difference. They had the separate bars in there.

J: Oh I see. Same building just separated the bars. Okay.

W: And they used to have a time cause part of them—most of them were drunk when they—

J: Yeah it was the entertainment center in that part of the county wasn't it?

W: One of them was down there and he got in a fight. I said, "Well what happened to you?" He said, "That son of a bitch hit me with a two by four."

[Laughter]

J: That was a long drag from there to La Plata wasn't it?

W: Yeah.

J: Even now. How good was that road there in the 30's? What is now—

W: Well it was [tar]. It was [tar].

J: It was all weather surface.

W: Yeah. And Wallace Wheeler who lives over here around Bryans Road—

J: Claggett Wheeler's brother?

W: Yeah. He used to run a [medical] route from Riverside to La Plata. And when he went up the road people would stand on the side of the road and tell him, said now, "Wallace I have a kind of pain here and this and that." He got over and he wrote it down and he got over and went around to the doctor laid it down and doctor he prescribed a medicine for them and he brought it back down the road to them.

J: Oh isn't that fascinating.

W: And then of course—

J: Which doctor were some of those people going to?

W: Well...I don't really remember the names.

J: Was Bicknell treating people?

W: No Bicknell he was coming down through there too. But this bunch—see Bicknell came down to Riverside and then he covered Doncaster and on back in Marbury and those places. And that was when we first went down there he has this little white flag stuck up on the side of the road. and went down another mile or so there was another one. And what it was they were sticking out these flags when Bicknell got to that flag he parked his car and walked down through the woods to the house and took care of them.

J: Probably there wasn't a good enough road for the car to go.

W: Well most of them didn't have roads. You had just a pig path.

J: Do you remember any of the stories watermen used to tell you as a young man? Things that had just been passed along to them? Some true, some not about things that happened to them when they're out on the water? Ghost stories, supernatural?

W: The watermen were always superstitious. They one of them told me one time he said, "No damn wonder you ain't no fish this morning." I said, "How's that?" He said, "You put your boot on the wrong foot." They always put the boot on the right foot. And didn't like a crow to fly across the bow of the boat. If it did they'd twirl around and get away. There were different things that they come up with. I was trying to think. I don't know of any really ghost stories I heard.

J: Did they ever tell stories about things they saw in the water?

W: No. A lot of them were very careful. I made a mistake on that one time. [And there you've got]...down there in Tayloes Neck there was a snake in there and my uncle he lived down there on Tayloes Neck for about 30 years. And he'd get all drunk. And we went down to see how he was getting along and he was up in the field with a shot gun and the dogs trailing this snake. You've seen them in the dust. How they'll leave a mark, you know. That big and that wide.

J: Half foot wide.

W: We had heard we're close to it. We had heard of it because we used to live down there you know. So we just got him and brought him on back to the house. I was down St. Mary's [till meeting one room] meeting in this. I got there a little late and this girl was a reporter she said to me, she said, "[You ever have any]"—what was that thing that was supposed to be out there on the water.

J: The dragon or a serpent or?

W: Yeah some kind of thing. I told her, I said—

J: Like the monster of Lake Ness.

W: I said, "No." I said, "We had, we got a big snake up there." I was telling her and Robert Brown said, "Do you know what you're doing?" I said, "No why?" He said, "By God you'll have that all over the place." And I'm telling you for about three weeks I couldn't pick the phone up. People called. And this girl went back and wrote the thing in some paper in Baltimore. The radio—I mean the television stations they came down. I took them up there and when they got through with it you looked like you were over in Africa somewhere.

J: Good lord. About what year was this? After World War II?

W: Oh yeah. This would've been...I don't really know 10 years ago.

J: How did they write it up in the newspaper? What did they call it?

W: Well they called it the monster. What it was—or what we think it was that good old sail boats in there you know they used to sail down to South America. They'd come up there and left them in there to rot and there was a snake on that thing and he just grew and grew. One lucky bastard down there he lives right on the creek. On Mills [Brook] Run. Whether you go right across that bridge going down towards Riverside.

J: Yeah.

W: And so I stopped by there one day it was raining. We always sat around and talked you know. I said to him—About that time they had a bear down there running gall over the place. And I stopped and talked to him about the bear. I said to him, I said, "You ever see that snake down there?" "No," he said, "I never did but," he said, "I've heard about it." And there was three men sitting up on his porch. They had rented a boat from him to do some fishing. They'd come in when it was raining. One of them said, "Well I saw it but," he said, "I never told nobody about it because," he said, "I didn't think anybody would've believed." Then he told me he said, he told me where it was at in the creek. And he said, "It was almost dark and we were fishing." And they heard this noise coming down this path. We called it [Willy Bottom in there]. And he said they thought it was a deer. He said, "That damn snake [come off here and a head] on him like that. And he dropped down and it was in the narrow part of the creek. Well he went across there." And he said, "When he got to the other side well his tail fell down on this side. And we went down there and looked at him. About 50 feet."

J: Must be—could've been a boa. That was no black snake.

W: No, no that's for sure. But we'd—we had heard about it when we first moved down there. But those—I had a man that had saw the damn things and so I took one of this television people right in to him you know. He didn't nothing. He didn't know what I was talking about. He wouldn't tell nobody. All I wanted him you know was to verify what we had seen. In fact we hadn't seen the snake itself we saw when it across this plowed field. But this colored fellow him and anther one

down there they was going up what we call a gut, which is just a little narrow stream. And thing come down on them. Come down to them. And he jumped out of the damn boat and run across the marsh. Got away from it. And so I said to Bob, I said, "How the hell do you get across that marsh?" I said, "I couldn't often get across it in the winter time when it's froze up." He said, "man we were about that high over that grass." And they you know—

J: Like walking on water.

W: They wouldn't go down there at night time and do any fishing.

J: Good Lord. About what year Willard did you put in your last full fishing season in the Nanjemoy area?

W: Oh about I'd say five years ago.

J: Okay so you've seen a lot of changes down there. Do you ever fish that narrow stretch up behind Carlson's place? Were Rita and Arthur Carlson—

W: Yeah I know what you're talking about but I don't know—

J: At the end of Friendship Way and the road where they've got a very nice public landing dock. Have you seen it lately?

W: No.

J: It was nice. It's worth—

W: The watermen were the ones who got that road down there. Lewis got it down there actually.

J: The county's done a good job there—

W: Well they tell me now that the whole farm on that side of it has been given to the county.

J: Yes that's right. That's right the old Friendship Landing Farm. That's right yeah. County now owns it. Right across from—

W: [Eulies].

J: Right across from [Eulies] yes that's right. I interviewed her and—

W: Well we set all up and down those places. We used mostly catfish pots up in there.

J: What's a catfish pot look like? Can you make it yourself?

W: Yeah. It's four hooks, two [thumbs] about eight foot long. And what you do you put a bridle to it. And you lay them out ten in a line, pull it tight, don't use any bait or anything those catfish will go in there. We used—we didn't haul much seine up there because it's deep water and there's a lot of hooks and old trees and—

J: Rotting roots, snagged.

W: It caused damage [sold] boat. Well 50 years ago they took some old cars up there and dumped then on the best [hold] and them damn pieces are still in there.

J: Oh no. Carlson do that?

W: Yeah. Eric Carlson. Eric was crazy as hell [anyhow]. I went to school with him.

J: Good Lord.

W: But the—I saw the last of the sail boats come up in there. One man was bringing his up, Parker [Grey], and they were lifting the anchor up at morning to make the final run and caught his coat into it and swung him and killed him.

J: What was his name?

W: Parker [Grey].

J: Parker [Grey]. Is that the anchor at old Durham church today the one that—

W: I don't know the—

J: It's up there in the front yard.

W: They took the boat on up—on up off of [Inaudible phrase]. The other [graves] and the anchors and stuff laid there for a long time. I don't know whether somebody got them or not.

J: Was he a full time waterman?

W: He was the last of this sail boat. But they had got they used to haul [pump wood] you see on them boats. And grain and stuff like that. But it had run out just like everything else. Then Bill Lewis he had the sail boat there they called it Kathleen. And old man...the name was Rye, Howard Rye. Old man Howard Rye. He had one up there and that sunk with all the dishes and everything on that.

J: Where in terms of how could we find the spot today? About where—

W: Well where Rye's went down it was soft mud and I don't know how you would ever get that. But on up further—

J: Up in the broad part of Nanjemoy?

W: No in the one of the—it was setting right on the side of the channel right there. Right there well the Rye's used to own the land down there but I don't know who owns it now. But—

J: Would it be near Calvert Posey's property?

W: No it's up that creek and...[Mayme Grey's] and them [Mary Dorothy Hell] [inaudible phrase] who she married.

J: Did the Grey's at one time run that mill there.

W: At Mill Brook?

J: Yeah.

W: I think so.

J: That's what I heard yeah.

W: But anyhow I'm not mistaken that mill came from off of Tayloes Neck. And they moved it up—

J: Was it ever really functioning when you were living?

W: No. I don't remember anybody ever getting any corn ground. They built the dam up twice and washed out.

J: When you were fishing at Nanjemoy where did you keep your boat?

W: Those days you could pull it anywhere and keep it.

J: And not worry about people?

W: Not a worry about it.

J: Now if you pull it up there it's gone the next morning. We had it down there in Tayloes Neck where my uncle worked the farm. Kept it there and then after he died and Bill Lewis died then I went over on the other side of the creek, Cherry Grove, and kept it over there. Well we have—we never had the big motor boats and things. We had the small motor boat and then we when that went we back to the outboard.

J: What was your favorite boat? You favorite all time working boat?

W: I don't know that I really had any favorite.

J: Did you ever have a boat strictly for recreation? Strictly for fun. Yours were all working boats?

W: Yeah.

J: Okay.

W: And we the reason that we pulled bateaus and made them out of yellow pine was if got we through fishing we just pulled them right on up on the barge, left them there till that fall and went back. We'd come around in summer time see if there was water in it. But ordinarily we just pulled them up and went on about our business.

J: What was the overall length of that bateau?

W: Run from 18 to 20.

J: And your beam?

W: About six.

J: Now you wouldn't dare take it out on the Potomac would you?

W: Oh yeah.

J: Did you?

W: Yeah I got caught out there on the Potomac with a 14 foot bateau one day and—

J: And you got back in?

W: I got back in on a prayer I can tell you.

J: A little wind come up?

W: The wind was blowing so hard that you couldn't see. I was trying to see how to bring the boat around into the wind and you could feel it pick that boat up. And when it did that I'd throw myself to that side.

J: You were alone huh?

W: Yeah well Bill Lewis and them were in there with a 21 foot motor boat and they couldn't get out there to me.

J: How old were you then?

W: I don't know but I aged a little bit.

J: In recent years after World War II?

W: Oh yes. Yeah most—

J: Even a good waterman would sometimes get caught in a bad situation?

W: Oh yes. What happened out there was getting in the spring time in the year. I was fishing stake net and I right in the mouth of Nanjemoy Creek. And I could look up to the river to Maryland Point. The storm come cross Liverpool on down the river and went on over in Virginia. So the water [the tide had smacked] my nets were rolled so I was trying to get them

straightened out. And I happened to look and another one coming long. And when she got to Maryland Point she turn right straight down that river and before I could get away from that net the wind hit us properly.

J: What kind of motor did you have?

W: I had a little—

J: Outboard?

W: Yeah the little old seven's. Seven horse power.

J: A seven horse power. You were praying for a 40 weren't you?

W: I was praying to get to shore.

J: Where'd you come ashore exactly?

W: Claude Jameson's right there in the mouth of Nanjemoy. But Bill Lewis got out beside me after I got in there part way and he said, "I might have to pick you up out of Virginia yet." So the next day I had fished out early and had about 600 pounds of fish still had the little 14 horse power—I mean the 14 foot boat.

J: Seven?

W: And the little old seven horse power motor and then we got a mist but I was only in water about that deep. [I didn't you] son of a bitch, [you cut off if you want throw overboard].

J: How fast would that push you on? Five, six knots?

W: It pushes along pretty good.

J: But you got good mileage?

W: Yeah.

J: That's important too isn't it.

W: We really—the way we made money was cause we did things nobody else did. Our overhead wasn't as high as a lot of them. Using them old bateaus, [poking boats].

J: And making your own boat.

W: Yeah.

J: Is this the bateau that you made?

W: No I had them—bought them from over here. I was over yesterday on the Eastern Shore but I couldn't get one. I reckon put it off too late. I just wanted something I could fish a couple more years.

J: Yeah wood now we're talking about?

W: Yeah.

J: You don't care for these aluminum [jumbos].

W: No.

J: Are they dangerous in rough water?

W: Well it depends on how they're built. A lot of them got that curve there that is not too good. You're better off with a straight piece down like that. That curve gives them a roll to them. We had a somebody made a boat out of plywood and we come along one day and it was floating up the creek. So we got it and towed it into shore and I said, "We were fishing pound nets then." I said, "We'll use it to untie the rope from one pole to the next." Got up there the next day. I got up in the front of it. That son of a bitch shot right from under me and left me hanging up on the pole. So I got back in the main boat. [Inaudible phrase] running the main boat up there. ['Cause it] turned that son of a bitch loose. So they—so later we looked up the shore and there was a little old man who lived in a shanty up there. He had it. So the next morning when we went up we went up past the shanty because we had some nets setting way up the creek. There she was floating up the creek again. So we said to him, "[Shant] what happened?" He said, "I don't want that son of a bitch on this shore. It'd thrown me about the boat."

J: Was it a flat bottom?

W: It was a flat bottom but it was plywood and every damn thing so it'd run right from under you. But that man over there yesterday he had a I reckon that thing must've been about 12 or 14 feet. A little bateau.

J: Where did you have to go over there?

W: Rock Hall.

J: Rock Hall oh yeah. So somebody's still making them?

W: Yeah. He had I think three or four going then.

J: What does he get for them?

W: Depends on the size.

J: Say a 14 footer?

W: He had one [inaudible phrase] the other day he wanted 400 dollars for it. If I happened to live right on the water I would have bought it.

J: So now if you were to get one where would you keep it here?

W: Well [inaudible] we always kept them down there. Now they—course the old man ain't in too good a shape. He got a brother that's fishing with him. And he's further up the creek. Keep them one place or another.

J: Well that beats having to trail them back and forth.

W: Yeah it's—

J: What is a pole net like? Can you describe that?

W: Pole net? I would have to have a little more information.

J: Well the one where the boat slipped out from under you and left you hanging.

W: Oh that was a pound net.

J: Pound net. Okay what is that?

W: That was—that was the ones we had was 18 feet square and about 12 foot deep and then they had an 8 foot [hedge] in them right there and then you run a line of stakes up there and put your [hedge] from the shore out. And the fish come up and they would trail out and move through that funnel [and then you'd get out there and pick pod]. And your funnel was eight foot at the front but it tapered off to about 12 inches.

J: Oh okay so they would be impounded, caught in this big—was it made of not a chicken wire type?

W: No, no this is all made out of—that was cotton then.

J: Okay.

W: And tarred.

J: Did you ever make when you were crabbing did you ever make your own crab pots or did you use something else?

W: No. Well we were crabbing at Riverside there wasn't no crab pots.

J: Okay are they a fairly recent addition to?

W: I would say yes but—

J: IN your lifetime anyway?

W: Yeah it was in our life time.

J: Huh and what was used before? Trot lines and things like that?

W: Trot lines.

J: And is that what you used mostly?

W: Yeah.

J: Okay.

W: Trot line crab is better than pot. Once he gets in there and he gets run around that wire and everything he don't weigh as good or he acts like he loses weight. And then your trot line crab well you can sell it to the same man that's [inaudible phrase] and yet you get more money for your—

J: That's interesting.

W: For your trot line.

J: How long a line were you using as a young man?

W: Oh I didn't have but about 500 feet. 'Cause really—

J: That's quite a bit.

W: Well as I say I had a little old 14 foot bateau and what I did I laid it out and then I rode back down it later whichever way I fished with the tide. And then when tide smacked for change went the other way I'd take the line up. And used salted eel.

J: Okay now were these lines allowed to rest on the bottom?

W: Yeah.

J: And how long would you leave it there before you started bringing it up.

W: Well I just floating up that way you wasn't going very fast so when you got up to the end then you rode back down and started all over again.

J: Oh okay I see.

W: Some [of them that were] using the motorboats and down at the creek and then you know have a long ways they would come down then turn right around and come right back up.

J: So [it wouldn't take very darn long]?

W: Huh?

J: A couple of hours sometimes?

W: I don't know it' depend on hour long a line they had on it. Some of them nowadays have a run about 500 feet or maybe a 1,000 foot out. Then they will go and lay some anther line somewhere.

J: And if the crabbing is really good that day a couple of hours and they'll have about all they think they can get on the line?

W: Well most of them get up in the morning. And I would say they get out there about the crack of day. And 12 o'clock they in.

J: What's happened to the eel market? [Well I've heard] people who are not watermen are just beginning to hear about this eel market.

W: Well.

J: Is it better than it used to be?

W: Well it depends on which side you're standing on. We got a fight coming up in February on the Potomac. Old man down there by the name of [Robocheck] buys eels. He ships them overseas—

J: What side of the river is he on?

W: Virginia.

J: Virginia side?

W: [Inaudible] and so he says that we're catching the little eel up here and they're not growing up. We said it don't make a damn bit of difference who catching them. The ones up the river entitled to living as well as the ones down the river. And those small eels come up there in the spawning time and they eating up their eggs. I don't know why they want them in the river anyhow.

J: When is spawning time for the eels?

W: Up around from Maryland Liverpool well it's all over the river but the congregation of them up there from Maryland Point on up to Falmouth. I mean let's see Falmouth, Quantico. Quantico.

J: Oh okay. Now do they thrive in brackish water? Where do the eel—

W: They will live and thrive in any kind.

J: Now what is considered a small eel? How small is small? What's the average size of a?

W: One that we are talking about that we use for trot line bait you see and then run this big a little bigger.

J: Easily a big fat one.

W: Yeah they don't want a big one.

J: Inch in diameter? Inch and a quarter.

W: Something like that.

J: They small like that because the crabs come to them because I suppose that the hide on them or skin on them or whatever it is soft you know they can eat them.

J: And what's the average length of an eel that would be put on a trot line?

W: Well you cut it up. You don't put the whole thing on that.

J: Into what size pieces? Inch and a half two inches?

W: Yeah.

J: And then you put a loop around them and just tie them into the trot line. And the crab just hangs onto it?

W: Yeah.

J: How often do you lose the bait completely? Can you use it over and over again?

W: Oh yeah you can use it over and over. Until they you know eat it up. Most of the time they've eaten a little of it at a time you see. But one year I caught a bunch of eels up the river there and we were [inaudible phrase] [pulled with her] trot line down there. So I just cut them all up and salted them [that was a quarter] but they were about that big around. I ain't telling you no lie. We never caught a crab on. They would not come to it.

J: That's interesting. So they like the roughly one inch diameter eel cut up into about two inch long chunks.

W: Yeah.

J: Do you—did you ever eat eel?

W: Yeah.

J: Did you like it?

W: I didn't see anything wrong with it.

J: I didn't either.

W: I'm not a big fish eater though.

J: If I had a choice I might not but I don't see anything wrong with it.

W: Well I hear [they used to cook them] right on the shore down there you know.

J: Sort of a roasting—

W: Yeah.

J: What's the average size today of an adult eel?

W: Oh he's about three foot long.

J: Three feet long? And about what diameter? So?

W: A little bit like that.

J: Inch and a quarter to an inch and a half.

W: The biggest one I ever saw Frank Willet caught it in Liverpool. And I stood up on the back of a pickup truck and held him up there like that. And his tail was just dropping on the ground.

J: What are we talking about seven feet?

W: Yeah and he was about—

J: That's a lot of eel.

W: And that bugger was that big around.

J: Seven and—

W: Never seen one like that in my life. Old man Frank said [we always] [inaudible phrase], "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll sell it to you for 50 cents." We bought the damn eel. We were [inaudible] fishing.

J: What did it weigh?

W: I don't know what it weighed.

J: 25 pounds?

W: I wouldn't doubt it. Anyway we went all over Nanjemoy and come on out by Welcome and finally hit a woman up here at [Marshall Corner]. "Indeed," she said, "I will. How much do you want for it?" I said, "A dollar and a half." "Indeed I will take it."

J: Black lady?

W: And that's what...she said, "I'll be able to cut stakes off that."

J: Yeah she's right.

W: But I wish now that we had it weighted and everything you know.

J: Yeah [inaudible] for the record. Some good photographs.

W: Well I've never seen one like that in my life.

J: Think of that. How's the eel market today? Is it as good as ever?

W: Yeah. They run from a dollar to two dollars a pound all year this time.

J: That's very good.

W: That's good money.

J: Yeah I talked to a waterman recently that—well [Freddy Robertson]. Every once in a while he'll concentrate on eel and when he figures he's got a 100 dollars worth he runs them down to the Virginia place and sells them.

W: Freddy's like a lot of the rest of them. He wants to keep it for his self. And a bunch from the Eastern Shore over here and lay a line from Goose Bay there from Maryland Point. Freddy he just can't stand them people over here catching them fish. Willy and myself, Willy [Bowie] and myself were talking about it. I said, "Well God damn he goes over there and gets their oysters don't he?"

J: You know Willy Bowie?

W: Oh yeah Willy and myself are good friends.

J: I've got to interview him. He's a crabber?

W: Yeah.

J: Okay.

W: Well he's done with fishing. He's getting—he's like I am. He's getting in bad shape.

J: Yeah he is. You're better off than he is.

W: Well I never thought he'd be living today.

J: Oh really?

W: He had two places that come on his leg on the shin part of his leg [inaudible phrase]. Well they were [pretty bad shape,] raw.

J: Ulcers?

W: And I thought to myself you know you just, he ain't going to cure them up. But damn he didn't he cured them up.

J: I saw him about three weeks ago and he had a hard time walking.

W: Yeah.

J: But he's moving around alright.

W: [All the tales that you want to hear some of them told on that much]. They're damn good people if they like you. If they don't like you better damn sakes stay away. They up here stealing the fish one time out of Virginia over here stealing our fish. And they tried to catch them and they couldn't catch them so the boy Bill he went way up the river and drifted down just at the edge of dark. And when they got down to his net there they were. Both of them had 75 horse power motors on them. Kicked them in and down that river they went. One of them told me and

said, "Bill shot that motor right off it. I didn't say a damn thing because Bill wasn't shooting at no motor. He was shooting at—"

J: That was an accident that part.

W: He shot at—

J: This is Willy? Willy?

W: That's his son.

J: Oh, oh, oh okay.

W: And he shot and he had a damn slug in that thing and it hit that 75 horse power motor and said the flames went up in the air 25 feet. And when he got back to him they were down on their knees begging him. And he let them go but—

J: How recently was this?

W: Oh that I reckon about six to eight, maybe 10 years ago.

J: So not too long. Do you remember any stories about the oyster wars of the 20's and 30's when let's say Cooksey was out there and Sidney [Inaudible] dad was—

W: Well they always were fighting back and forth. Course they killed a man there you know. I think his name was King. That was done right after the war [because we had come home and] were back fishing again. And they caught him in cross fire.

J: A Virginian?

W: ...and there was always a certain amount of resentment. Well a lot of them got along alright. 'Cause a lot of them down there in Nanjemoy used to deal back and forth across that river. They bought fertilizer and everything. You couldn't get any over on this side because the roads wasn't good enough. But—

J: Where would they pick it up over on the Virginia side?

W: Well they would take the boats over you see. I don't where they picked it up. The man was telling me, that was Mr. Henry Posey. And that was 50 almost 60 years ago.

J: So the river was a better road?

W: Yeah.

J: Than the roads.

W: When we went down there it was just coming to an end. The river was a road. And they used to use it. Of course all the wars that dropped pieces and things like that. But course the best part

of the county was on that river at one time you know. All the people that had the money. In fact some of them even right there said, "Oh yeah you out the forest ain't you?" At tide water there.

J: Well what's the future of a waterman's life now?

W: None. I said that.

J: What's hurting it most?

W: People.

J: People?

W: Yeah. Getting too many people and too much slop in the water. And what gets me you son of bitches well they don't only move in here but they come in here from other states and demand that they get their lion share of the rock and everything.

J: Was that moratorium necessary on rock?

W: No. We told them before they put it on that the blue fish had come in. I had never seen a blue fish in my life when I was fishing. And here they were all up in the Riverside up in that area. And we they chopped up the perch and everything and the rock and the catfish and we told them—

J: Did the blues do that?

W: Yeah. And they don't—

J: They're mean.

W: They don't eat the thing after they kill it. They just bite them as they go along. Bite hunk out of them and let them go. And we told them that there was gonna be a slowdown in the rock. And they told us we didn't know what we were talking about. Well when the slow down came it was over with when they found out all finally admitted that it was you know that the rock had been hurt. And so then they put the moratorium on it. Well hell there was more fish out there in the second year of that moratorium than you'd ever been out there for years. And they don't grow over night. When I went with them a couple of times when they checking the year [inaudible]. I was watching them count the fish you see and what they did they took from Blossom Point up the river. You had five different stands that they use each year. Don't make a difference what is going on they use these places. Then the next day they wanted me to go with them. And they were going from the bridge down. And I said, "Well what the hell are you going from the bridge down? Ain't no spawning down there." Well he said that's our orders. So when they come before the commission over there I got on them. I told them I said, "You've got five down there that you didn't get bear a damn rock [inaudible] and nobody expected you to get a [inaudible]." Then I said, "You used that five to knock down the percentages of rock in there." And the head man he

got mad. I told him—I was hot half sick in there—I told him, "You son of a bitch you want to settle? We are settling it right now."

J: And this was only what about three or four years ago?

W: Yeah. That was three years ago.

J: Welp, I got in some good fishing one day with [Kermit Hayden] out there the best rock fishing I ever had was about the time the moratorium was put on it. I mean we were hauling in 16 to 20 inch—

W: Yeah well they what they did they used us as a spawning ground to put it all up and down the coast. We got nothing out of it. Now we're sitting alongside the banks starving to death. They furnish the rock to everybody else. They caught the ban in the department of natural resources. It gives 10,000 small fish to Pennsylvania. I said, "We're supposed to be so poor without the fish." And here they giving them away.

J: And those came from the Potomac?

W: The little ones?

J: Yeah.

W: No they have a spawning place over on the Bay. But that you know they've run experiments and I've think it's been five years now. Five you know five times. And rock fish if you know anything about them only move at the edge of dark. They'll start moving then and then move all night. And when anytime you go to catch them in the daytime then there's a hell of a lot of fish out there. So I wanted them to make one night laying their nets out at dawn. Wouldn't do it.

J: Don't they listen to the people who have the knowledge?

W: No. No. That's what burns you up. These experts and most of them are getting it out of a book somebody wrote.

J: Maryland should be doing better than that by its watermen. They have the knowledge here.

W: Well you can't like I'm saying when they did away with the boundary lines on the county then they whipped us. And then they used the watermen being greedy taking it all. How the hell is this ever any an oyster or fish or anything out there. Some of them we were in a meeting and they—I was fighting with them I think Robert Brown over at St. Mary's.

J: Now you've been a member of the Watermen's Association have you not from the state and the county?

W: Yeah.

J: Okay are you know?

W: No. I'm planning to join back [inaudible] in the county.

J: Where's the meeting going to be?

W: At the Bel Alton High.

J: Maybe I'd ought to be down there.

W: Yeah it'd be interesting to see how some of these people work.

J: What time?

W: Seven o'clock I think.

J: Well I'll call Billy Rice and as a courtesy because I told him I wanted to come to the meeting and he said you should. Well okay. I want him to know who I am and what I'm doing.

W: Then you ought to come over at the Potomac River commission.

J: Yeah I should. Let me know when they get together.

W: I think that—they seem to advertise in the county paper. I think it's on the 9th of February.

J: Are you going?

W: Mhm.

J: And where will the meeting be?

W: At Colonial Beach.

J: Okay. Keep me in mind. I can go with you or I can drive whatever. I should go over there. Now in addition to your connection with the water. You've also been very much involved in other matters in Charles County. And you've just left the—what's the proper title of that group you were in?

W: Planning commission.

J: The Charles County Planning Commission. When did you leave that?

W: First of the year.

J: First of the year after how many years on it?

W: I'm not sure but I think it's 14.

J: Okay. Was that a good experience for you? Did you learn a few things?

W: Yeah. I learned that you can fight all you want but in the long run they whip you.

J: Well you left your mark. You left your mark. A lot of people respect Willard Dutton because he said what he said and he said what he thought.

W: Well the last year that I was on there I was so sick I couldn't hardly get along. I wouldn't give it up because I knew damn well they were gonna put somebody on there like [Mark Wills]. To me it's a bad situation.

J: How does the whole thing look to you now? Is it stacked or is there some—

W: Well I don't know how it—what's [Buckmaster] or he's [a banker]. I don't see you got 90,000 people in the county and you can't tell me that you can't pick a board where it' not—you know not any conflict in there. But you don't get it by bankers and business people because they are tied up in [getting] as many houses as they can put in here. [Mark Wills] wants to see it because they're gonna sell them oil. Looked to me like they could come up with better selection.

J: Who are some of the better members of the commission in your opinion during the years you sat on it? Who did you feel were the most conscientious and competent?

W: I wouldn't like to answer that.

J: Alright. Okay. Well we're not talking about the worst ones but those that you think made their weight felt in a good healthy way for the county.

W: Well it was always a friction in there. They might have not been so strong as the [inaudible] as some of them are. But they were always conniving behind your back you know. It was really something to. Well Bill Harvey was on there. Bill was alright. [Elvis] I couldn't say too much. [Elvis] would strike a deal in a hurry. Reed he was one that money [inaudible]. Anybody had money well he was welcome. Harry he was—he never said much of anything.

J: Harry Stein?

W: Yeah. They used him. I told him I said, "Harry—" Course Harry himself—

[End of Tape]