

Interview with Crystal Jordan, commercial fisherman

Occupation: Commercial waterwoman

Port Community: Solomon's Island, Maryland

Interviewer: Sarah Schumann

Date and year: June 6, 2019

Location: Solomon's Island, Maryland

Project: The Graying of the Fleet Part II: How and Why Young Fishermen Choose to Fish?

Transcriber: Sarah Schumann

[Start of interview]

[00:00]

Sarah Schumann [SS]: My name is Sarah Schumann. Today is June 6th, 2019 and I'm in Solomon's Island, Maryland, with Crystal Jordan. Crystal, could you state your occupation?

Crystal Jordan [CJ]: Commercial waterwoman.

SS: Do you prefer waterwoman as opposed to waterman?

CJ: I like it. I like it a little bit. It's what I say, anyways. I've actually heard more people say it to me, because they actually respect the fact that I work on the water. I think it's pretty cool.

SS: Yeah, it's cool. Are you a part-time or a fulltime waterwoman?

CJ: I'm fulltime.

SS: What's your homeport?

CJ: Solomon's, now. I've been in a lot of places, but I've been in Solomon's for almost three years now, year-round.

SS: What's the name of your vessel?

CJ: Some Beach.

SS: How old are you?

CJ: I am thirty-three.

SS: And what is your educational background?

CJ: Well, I graduated high school and came out on the water for college.

SS: I like that [laughter]. Ok, where would you like to start to tell your story?

CJ: I can start with the boat. This boat that we're sitting on, it was actually one of the first boats that I started working on. It was my father's boat. It used to be called Captain N Bunky. It was an all-wood boat. She needed a lot of work, so in 2004, we pulled it out of the water, stripped it down, and fiberglassed it. That was the year that Blake Shelton came out with that song, "Some Beach." It played over and over and over again. Everybody knows if you have a boat or anything, every time your turn around, something's going wrong. So not only is "some beach" your place to get away from everybody, but it's like "Crap, something's always breaking." Something's always happening. But yeah, it's my getaway. That's why I like it. I'm away from all the drama and craziness on land. That's how it got the name. I worked with my dad on the weekends when I was in school, and every summer I worked fulltime, since I was ten, growing up. My whole life, basically, I've been out here. In 2004, we fiberglassed it. 2005, my dad had bypass surgery, so I kind of ran the boat a little bit, after he got out of that. That was a little bit of trauma for him. 2006, he was diagnosed with brain cancer. I really started running the boat, because it affected his right side, and he couldn't really hold the hook to grab the pots. He said, "Well, you're up." I started driving it, then. 2006 is when he passed away, so within that year, that's when I basically took it over. It took two months for me to come back down on the boat itself. I had my sisters with me. That was hard. Then I just did it. A lot of people didn't think I was going to make it. I didn't know if I was going to make it. But I'm still here.

SS: What were the biggest challenges? When you thought you might not make it, what were the things that made you think that?

[03:30]

CJ: The biggest challenge, I guess, to be starting off, was getting a rig back together. My dad had sold off a lot of the rig to get money for the cancer treatment, so I only had a hundred and fifty pots to work with. It was all the junk that was left over, that he basically couldn't sell, so it was like patchwork and everything. I still had to pay for the license and the boat maintenance and everything. The battery was bad. When I came down to start it back up, I had to put a whole new injection pump back on. All that, with a mechanic down here, was like five thousand dollars. All of a sudden, I was just like, "Oh my gosh, here we go," trying to buy a rig and get going. The biggest challenge was getting back on the water. The hardest part was I couldn't be like, "Hey, Dad, what do we do?" "Ok, crap, who do I call?" But actually, growing up, I knew a lot of watermen who were Dad's friends. Bob Evans. I don't know if you're familiar with him, but he played a very big part. He was one of my dad's cousins. He was a very, very, very big deal for the Maryland Watermen. He was Anne Arundel County president of their Watermen's Association, and he did a lot for us. He was my go-to. He's actually passed away, and his daughter has taken over his business. That's pretty cool. Other than that, it was more just, "Go." If you're going to do it fulltime, you can't think about it. You're going to have ups and you're going to have downs, and you're going to think you're going to hit rock fricking bottom and be broken as can be, and think, "What are you going to do the next day?" But you just got to keep going. That's part of being on the water. Out of nowhere, overnight, you're catching crabs. You're like, "Holy crap! I was hanging on by a thread, but I made it!" You get through that time. Next time rolls around,

you go in a slump, you come back up. I guess that's just how this business is. You either like it or you don't. It's like a roller coaster.

SS: Have you always liked it? Did you know from an early age that this is what you wanted to do, or have there been other paths that you thought about?

[05:41]

CJ: It's funny you say that. Your parents always want you to go to college. It's always in the back of their head. "Oh, they're going to go to college." I know my dad always said, "You got to go to college. You're going to go to college." I'm like, "I don't know. I don't know what I would do. What am I going to take? What am I going to do as a career? What am I thinking about? I have no idea." I just always came out on the water and worked, and I liked it, because I'm a laborer. It keeps me in shape. That's my motto. I tell my crew, "You're getting paid to tan and work out." That's what my dad always said to me, and it's drilled into my head. "Shit, I'm paying myself to tan and work out now and I don't have to deal with anybody." That's my thing in my head, and I've always loved it, being out here, getting away from the world.

[06:30]

SS: You said it was two months between when your dad passed away and when you came down to the boat. What thoughts were going through your head at that time about your future with this boat? Where you a hundred percent sure you wanted to do it?

CJ: Yeah. I think it was the biggest part of me, and I guess I didn't realize how much I really did love it.

SS: You said you have some sisters?

CJ: I do. I have a twin. We look nothing alike. We act nothing alike. She works for a jaw specialist, as a dental assistant. She's in the dental industry. My other sister's fourteen months older than me. She's a podiatrist. She's a foot surgeon. There's actually more siblings than my two sisters. Debbie, Shane, Jon, and Erik. Seven of us, total.

SS: Are you the only one who works on the water?

CJ: Yeah, I'm the only one who works on the water. There's construction workers, cleaning, podiatrist, dental assistant, all kinds. We're all different. I guess some of them go fishing. My twin, actually, she gets seasick.

SS: That's not a problem for you?

CJ: No. I don't think I've ever been seasick, except maybe from partying too hard the night before. I don't do that now. I think, now let's see, it's 2019. It's crazy to do math and think that I've been out here that long on my own. Well, I don't feel like I'm on my own, because I always have a crew. I guess I've created a family with watermen, so you never feel alone out here. What is this, 2019? Thirteen years. That's a long time. But I feel a whole lot more confident. The first year I started running pots, I wasn't doing the greatest, because I had a

crap rig and I couldn't afford to buy a whole other rig. I do remember like, "How the heck am I going to survive doing this? This is crazy. Do I have to meet somebody to be able to afford a house? I need a man to take care of me! What's happening here?" [laughter] I guess it just turned around, with help. Now, thirteen years later, I can honestly say that I'm confident enough to go out here and pay bills and put a roof over my head for me and my kid. That's a good feeling.

SS: That's a great accomplishment. How old is your kid?

[09:22]

CJ: He just turned seven. He actually comes out in the summer. I had him on the boat when he was two weeks old. I had no choice. I'm like, "Come on, we got to go to work." I put him in daycare early, because I just had to work. As soon as he could come out, I had a Pack 'N Play on the boat. He'd just chill in the Pack 'N Play. I'd throw a horseshoe crab on the floor, and he'd just watch it. He learned how to walk on a boat. He's got some balance, too. He can walk better than most people can on a boat. It's pretty cool to watch him. When it's rough out, my crew falls all over the place, still. They're like, "Man, it's crazy. He just walks like nothing's going on."

SS: A natural. I don't think we've stated it for the audio, but obviously you are crabbing. Is that your exclusive fishery?

CJ: Crabbing is my biggest go-to. It's just instilled in me, because obviously that's what I always did with my dad, and I enjoy it a lot. It's a lot of work, with the pots. But I do oyster also, in the wintertime. That's pretty cool. I patent tong and dredge. Mostly patent tong. I got into dredging within the last three years. It's a little easier than patent tonging, but I like the workout.

SS: Did you do those things with your dad or did you learn them on your own?

CJ: No. I remember going with my dad one time when I was sick from school and it was freezing outside. I just remember being bundled up. You could probably barely see my face. Like, "It's freezing out here!" He's like, "Well, you have no choice." I vaguely remember that. I just remember being at the cull table, trying to push some oysters off. That's probably the only time I ever went, because I was in school.

SS: Because that's a wintertime fishery?

CJ: Yeah, it's wintertime. Kids are in school. So yeah, I learned it. My son's father, Kevin, who he is named after, is who taught me how to run the rig.

SS: How'd that go?

[11:34]

CJ: Actually, it was pretty good. I already knew how to run the boat, so that was half the battle. All you got to do is just learn hydraulics. I have a peddle for the crab winder, so I thought it was pretty easy. It's like dancing on the water.

SS: That's what you do in the winter. What's your annual cycle like?

CJ: Crabbing starts April 1st. Not always set April 1st, because the water temperature has a lot to do with whether they're moving or not, so if it's a pretty bad winter or it runs through the beginning of April, there's no point in even starting. Oystering ends March 31st. There's sometimes some downtime, like a week or two, when I'm not doing anything at all. I usually, generally, try to crab through November. The season goes until like December 14th. There's been one year, since I've been crabbing, that I've actually crabbled until December 14th. I had still been catching plenty of crabs. I remember pulling the pots, and I had like fifteen bushel of [grade number] ones. I'm like, "Oh, this sucks! The season's over!" But if it gets cold sooner than that, it kind of ends, anyways. Oystering starts October 1st for patent tonging, November for dredging. I have the option in those later months to switch over and go.

SS: Is it based on area? When do you choose to dredge and when do you choose to patent tong?

CJ: All those have different areas. There's dredging, patent tonging, hand tonging, you can dive for oysters. Each one of those specific things has different bottom that you can go on, in different areas. Depending on what you want to do, if you wanted to patent tong, you could start on October 1st, pretty much. Where I'm based, out here in Solomon's, I can crab and oyster right out of here, so I don't have to move anywhere. That's kind of why I came here, because during the school year for kids, this is where I can be and still take him to school and get here on time and still make a living, without having to travel. That's why I picked to come here.

SS: Where were you before?

CJ: In Edgewater. It's an hour away. I always traveled down here in the spring and the fall for crabbing, so it kind of just made sense to stick it out here, during the school year anyways. Then in the summertime, when my son's out of school, I can just travel if I need to, and he can be with me on the boat, so it just made sense.

[14:35]

SS: Before I turned the tape on, you were saying that going to meetings and keeping up on the management side of it is something that takes a lot of time.

CJ: Yeah, the political side of it can get—I'm not good with politics. I'm not an argumentative person. I'm ok with debating, but when you get into the politics of it out here, there are a lot of people who are very strong headed and they think that their way is the only way. I'm open. I agree to disagree. In an argument, I can agree to disagree, and then move on. But some people are very stubborn with it. There's the Southern Bay, the Middle Bay, and the Northern Bay. Each section, I guess you could call it, is different. It's different as far as working. The crabs are different. The oysters are different. So for one man to say that they're going to judge this entire bay off of the area that they work in is wrong. It's unfair. For a lot of people to only have that thought that they have, and not to broaden their mind and open it up, I can't deal with it. I'm just like, "Well, you all figure it out. If you want my opinion, I'll give you my opinion." But as far as going to meetings and stuff, it just takes up so much time. Some of them might only be once a month, but when they get into when DNR is

really hounding on things, and you got to go to meetings that could be two hours away, two and a half hours away, and when you're working on the water fulltime, you got to take off, so you're losing however much that day is, and your help's losing, because they're not working. It kind of starts to affect everybody.

[16:39]

SS: What are some of the big issues around here?

CJ: One of the bigger, debatable things that people are getting into, is the aquaculture. I don't know yet what my opinion is on that, honestly. It is a good thing to get into. I believe that you can definitely make money on it. But I believe that it's also taking bottom from other people. It's debatable on both sides whether it's going to work or not work. Here, in this river, there's a lot of public bottom. There's a lot of homeowners that don't want anything out in front of their land. It's "their property," but it's not their property. I think that's going to be a bigger issue around here locally, that people are seeing. Regulations on crabs. The female limit is kind of up in the air right now, because they're trying to figure out whether we should have smaller limits and extend it for the whole season, because we actually can't keep females at the end of crabbing season. They stopped it in November. We have a month of crabbing where we can only keep male crabs. Every year something changes on it so it's hard for anyone starting out to think about putting money into any of these industries and know after a year or two that it will pay off.

[lull in conversation while interaction with CJ's son takes place]

[19:08]

CJ: I don't know. I don't pay attention to a whole lot of the political side. I just go to work.

SS: Another thing you were saying before I turned the recording on is that you see a number of other younger watermen around here.

CJ: Yeah, actually, around here in Solomon's, it's not as many waterman, period, as I have been around in other areas. Since I've been down here, there have been more younger watermen starting. A lot of people trotline around here, because it's a good river. It's long. There's a lot of different areas that you can crab. But as far as out on the bay, there's not that many crab potters. A lot of people travel to here. Most of the guys who are actually crabbing here are from Baltimore, so they got a good drive to get to here. That's like the spring time. They come down here and try to follow the crabs up. In different areas on the Eastern Shore, there are a lot—a lot—of young watermen. I think it's those areas. Tilghman Island, St. Michael's, Hooper's Island, Taylor's Island, all those are based on watermen. I think the younger generation, they are exposed to it more and have greater potential to be watermen.

SS: So those are generational watermen whose families have done it for a long time.

CJ: Right. I don't know of many watermen who have gotten into it who haven't been raised somewhat around it. There might be one boy who's around here now. He's not from around here, but he's down here now, crabbing. But I do think that there's still a pretty decent

population of young watermen getting into it and doing it. It's hard to say. My son's only seven years old, but he loves being out here and getting out on the water. He can catch a bull minnow with a perch hook, just sitting there with a soft crab on it. He's got patience. He'll sit there and he'll catch a bull minnow. You don't think that you can actually catch a little fish like that.

SS: A bull minnow?

CJ: Bull minnow, yeah. They're little. They're way too little to bite that hook, but he has patience and he'll sit there until they get right over top of it and then he'll yank it. I mean, right now, at seven, that's his passion. He used to go around when he was two years old. He used to take a little net and go around and scoop the grass shrimp. He knew how to take a net and scoop all the grass shrimp off of the bulkheads. He'd come up with a load of grass shrimp. It's the things that interest him, but at least he's out here and on the water. I can't say that he's going to continue to do it. Would I like him to? Yeah. I hope that there's a good enough market in this industry to keep going.

SS: Market for the product?

[22:10]

CJ: Yeah.

SS: What's that like right now?

CJ: Markets are actually pretty good. I guess the bigger issue, in any of it, is just the rules and regulations. They're worse than when our parents were doing it, I guess you could say. But the population was higher, I believe, for crabs. As it's gone down, I guess they've cut us back some. To me, the population's been fine the last few years. It's just a matter of where they are. A lot of watermen can say that up the bay right now, they're not doing that great. It's early, but the water's been so fresh. Mother Nature, rain, rain, rain, rain. It made the water fresh, so the crabs just aren't going to be in the same areas every single year as the usually are, when there's a wrench thrown in their routes or whatever.

[23:18]

SS: [laughter] So the rules and regulations contribute a little bit of uncertainty?

CJ: Yeah, I mean, the population count of what they had for this year said that it was up. It said that it was going to be a really good crabbing season. Of course, everyone up the bay was like, "What are you talking about? There's no crabs here." "Well there's no crabs there. But there's crabs somewhere. They're just not there." That's where I opened my mind. They're not here, right now—because everybody wants them right in their backyard so you don't have to travel, but it's not practical every time. That's just part of working out here. You don't get to wake up every morning and know exactly what you're going to make. You're just hoping to make something. Hoping you're not going to go negative, because that's something that happens a whole lot, too.

SS: Who's on your crew? How many deckhands do you have?

CJ: I have two who work for me. I actually have another girl who works for me and then a guy that works for me. The girl actually shakes pots and the guy culls the crabs. She doesn't like getting bit.

SS: [laughter] Are they from fishing families as well?

CJ: No. The girl that works for me, Brittany, we went to school together for two years in high school. She was actually really good friends with my twin, back then. I was friends with her too, but she was closer with my twin. Her and her husband, they had three kids, and she was like, "I got to get out of the house! Help me!" I was actually crabbing by myself. It was after my dad passed away. I was like, "Come on. Come out here. It will help me out. It will make it faster." I didn't have that many pots. It was just for her sanity to come out here on the water and do something. I couldn't pay her a whole lot because I wasn't making a whole lot myself, but it worked for both of us.

SS: She's been with you the whole time?

CJ: No, not the whole time. She finished off that year. Then, I don't think I was oystering then. I think I was perch fishing with another waterman, gillnetting. I haven't ever done that on my own, but I've worked for other people, fishing. Yeah, she came back with me four years ago for that year, or for two years. She worked with me for two years. Then she broke her ankle, took a break. She went with another waterman down here. She actually just now started back with me, a month ago. She knows my operation, and she's like, "Crystal, I can't take these other boats. They're not set up like yours." She learned on this boat.

SS: That's the right way [laughter].

CJ: Yeah. It's kind of cool, though, because she's got the energy to do it. She hustles. It's easy to tell her, "I'm paying you to tan and work out. Just suck it up." At the end of the day, I'm like, "Come on! You got it!" I told her I was her personal trainer the other day. She's like, "I know! I got this!" It's kind of cool.

[26:30]

SS: The hours are such that you're both making it work, as moms, with the scheduling and kids?

CJ: I'm glad you brought that up. That has probably been my hardest—I wouldn't call it a problem. What would be the correct word? It's probably one of the hardest situations that I have to deal with. We're allowed to start a half hour before sunrise, and we have eight hours after that. I can't start a half hour before sunrise, because I can't even take my son to daycare until six, and that's a set time, regardless of when the sun rises. That doesn't change. I actually have my crew meet at the boat at six. It takes me twenty minutes to get from daycare to the boat, sometimes fifteen, if I hit the lights right. They have the boat loaded up, ready, and started, so when I get down here, I just jump on and go. That helps, for sure. Her kids now, her oldest is thirteen, so they're old enough to get up and get on the bus, for her, thankfully, because I don't know what I would do if I had to wait any longer. I think that's been the hardest part, and then, traveling up the road to deliver crabs, I'm at like

a break point where I got crabs on the back of the truck, in the heat. Do I stop and get my kid a half hour early from school? Just take him out? Because by the time I get up the road, deliver the crabs, and get back down, I'm cutting it close to when daycare closes. I'm like, "Oh, what do I do?" I got to play a little bit with it and it's a little bit harder. I'd have to quit a little bit earlier on the water, and that would cut me back, since I get started late, and then if I got to quit sooner just so I can get in, it sucks. I deal with it. He's seven. It ain't much longer [laughter].

SS: [laughter] It probably gets a little easier every year.

CJ: Yeah. Well, he's awesome. He's been an awesome kid. I guess because he's grown up in this life, he's always like, "Go, go, go." Mom's always doing something. We're always in a rush, no matter what. I'm in a rush when I'm not in a rush, because it's like, "Come on, we got to do something." In the morning, I just get him dressed, and he gets in the truck, and I drop him off, and it's so easy, because he know I got to go. It's like, "When you fight, Mom gets mad, and then you make her upset. Just deal with it. Everybody's happy. Get in the truck. It's fine."

[29:27]

SS: Are you raising him on your own? You said you had a boyfriend.

CJ: I have a boyfriend. Yes, I am raising him. He definitely helps out, for sure.

SS: He's not your son's dad? I don't mean to pry.

CJ: No, that's fine. No. He sees his dad on the weekends. His dad lives in Edgewater.

SS: Ok. But for the most part, you're a working waterwoman and a single mom?

CJ: Right.

SS: That's tough.

CJ: It is, but women can do it [laughter]. Women can do anything, really. His dad works on the water, also.

SS: Which probably doesn't make it any easier for scheduling.

CJ: I do all the scheduling. I'm like, "Well, I do it. I know it can be done, because I do it." It is what it is. We're still friends. We still talk. I actually talked to him today. He's getting ready to move here to crab. I'm like, "Of course, it's the end of the school year. You'll wait until then." He should get him more in the summertime if he wants him. But he likes being on here with his momma. Momma's boy. He's a good kid. He's ran the boat some. When I go oystering, winter break. I'm usually oystering then, and he's been out with me a couple times. I have him go up in the cabin and drive, so I can clean the boat up. He'll steer the boat a little bit. I have a niece, Faith. She's thirteen, actually my twin sister's daughter. She is more like me than my sister, so it's kind of cool. She comes out. My mom put her in a summer camp this year. She's all upset about it, because she can't come out on the boat with Aunt Crystal. She

wants to just come out for the whole summer, which I'm fine with. She plays lacrosse and soccer, and she's trying to keep her involved in that, which is a good thing. She's like, "I'm coming down the last three weeks so I can work with you." I pay her. I started getting paid when I was thirteen years old, and that's only because I was working with my dad so much, he said, "Well, if you're going to work, I might as well pay you." I remember saving money. I had rolls of money with rubber bands around it. I thought I was a high roller. I was like, "Oh, yeah!" I didn't have any bills to pay. I just had money! I bought my first car. I think I was almost fifteen, because I knew I was getting ready to get my license. I bought my first car. It was my stepmom's. She was getting ready to trade it in. She said, "If you want to buy it, you can buy it. If not, I'm going to trade it in." I was like, "Heck, yeah!" That was way before I even had my license. I still had money. That was cool. But I guess just growing up, we didn't have much growing up. My parents separated when I was eight. They were still friends, but I don't know. I didn't really pay attention to what happened with that. Whatever. It is what it is. But I stayed with Dad. I was Daddy's girl. He always worked, so in order to hang with Dad, I had to go to work, and I was fine with it. I think that's what my son does. "If I'm going to spend some time with Mom, I'm going to go work." He likes it.

[32:57]

SS: Is that par for the course in this area? Would you call this a fishing community?

CJ: No.

SS: More of a tourist community?

CJ: Yes. This strip in Solomon's is more touristy. It's a lot of locals, but it's a small little town, so it's kind of the only place to hang out and go anywhere. This here is probably most of the local people. There's marinas where most of the people from other parts of the bay come in. They tie up up there, tie up up the creek and stuff. It's not really that much of a commercial fishery-based area, not from what I've seen in other places.

SS: What town did you grow up in?

CJ: I grew up in Edgewater. That is an area that is fading out.

SS: In terms of commercial fisheries?

CJ: In terms of commercial fisheries, yeah. A lot of it has to do with people buying houses on the water, and pushing out the marinas, and sailboats and yachts coming into marinas and pushing out the commercial fishermen, because, "Oh, you got this rig. You got clam shells hanging off." You know. It's what we do for a living. This is what makes us money, but they don't want to see it. They don't want to see the rig. They think it's all junk, to them. A lot of it has to do with that, and with people dying and passing away. Some of the older marinas that were there are gone, because there was nobody there to take them over, and the next people who bought it don't want anything to do with watermen. Annapolis area alone, downtown Annapolis used to be all oyster boats. Now, if I went in there with this workboat, they'd be like, "What are you doing? Sorry, you can't tie here." That's pretty much what we got. We did it once, actually, just to do it [laughter]. We were voting for Erlich. I don't think he won. No, O'Malley won. We all went in there in our commercial boats. We were going in

there and making a loop. As soon as we started going in there, they were like, “Y’all got to leave!”

SS: It was a bunch of boats?

CJ: Yeah, like seven, like a fleet.

SS: It was a political rally? Did you have signs and stuff?

CJ: Yeah. It was kind of cool. But instantly, they were like, “Work boats can’t tie in here. You can’t raft up.” They had all these great big yachts, which is fine. But at the same time, this place used to be based on commercial watermen. All these restaurants here serving crabs and oysters and everything, where do you think it comes from? People don’t look at that. If they want to eat oysters, “Well, we’ll just go to the restaurant and eat oysters.” They don’t think about where it came from, supporting the local people.

SS: But you think that’s just certain areas?

[36:06]

CJ: Yeah. Crisfield, they’re well known for crabs. That’s a small town. That’s a long drive. The population isn’t near, like other places. I think one of them hurricanes really wiped them out, so they’re still rebuilding from that. Any place on the Eastern Shore, I think, has a lot of people who come in for the crabs. People respect the watermen. All the locals usually do. It’s a whole different world over there. I lived over there for a couple years.

SS: What’s different about it over there?

CJ: I guess just that.

SS: More remote?

CJ: The populations are smaller. It’s small towns everywhere you go. You get more respect. People wave to you. Growing up, everybody in the neighborhood, we all used to wave. I went into the neighborhood. I tied up there about ten years ago. It was like habit to wave to people, and they’d just stare me down. I’m like, “What are you doing? You can’t pick your arm up and wave back? Is that that hard? Sorry that your arm might be broken.” It was just a nice gesture. Like, you know, “Smiles are contagious.” When you wave to somebody and they wave back, it’s like happy vibes. But that’s fine. I don’t even know what the world’s like anymore, because it’s terrible. I like being happy. It makes me happy out there.

[37:43]

SS: Tell me a little bit more about what you love about doing what you do.

CJ: Well, when I wake up in the morning, for the most part, other than having to take him to daycare, my little drive to the boat is all I have to deal with [in terms of] traffic. Once I get on the boat, it’s just me and the water and what I’m going to do that day. It’s pretty cool running the boat and it’s cool having my own business, because to me, I guess as a female,

I'm a mother, so I feel like I have "my crew" or "my kids." They kind of are. I call them in them in the morning to make sure they're up. If they don't have food, I feed them. I also employ them, so for me, I'm taking care of somebody. It's like, "Get up and go to work," because not only are you taking care of your kid and yourself, you're taking care of other people and you're giving them a life. To me, that makes me happy and it makes me take joy in what I do out here. And just, you're free minded. If you can make it out here, it's awesome, because you don't have to deal with traffic on land, and cities, and getting in a jam. You're just free. You're free. Free from problems. I mean, you still have them. You still think about them all day. But it's like a vacation every day, until you hit land. Once you hit land, you can deal with them then.

SS: How far do you have to travel in the boat to get to where you fish?

CJ: Right now, I'm running about an hour to get to my pots. If my crew's tired in the morning, they just go in the cabin and go to sleep. But they know I'll get on them. If they go to sleep, I'm like, "Get up! We got to go to work," if they don't have their stuff ready back here, like the baskets set up and bait ready, when I start, I'll just start. I'll be like, "You got to play catch-up, because you didn't set them up when it was time to set them up." They're good about it. They're usually down here before me anyways, so they get it all set up so they can go and lay down.

[40:02]

SS: Are there any parts of it that aren't your favorite? Any downsides to this way of life?

CJ: Washing pots. I'm going to sit over here and take my time, so that he can keep washing those. [note: CJ's boyfriend was washing her crab pots during the interview]. This really never happens. I'm like, "Woo! What's happening right now?" Yeah, the maintenance on the rig itself is a headache, because it's not making you any money. Right now, I have four lines over there. I have twenty-four pots in a line. I run underwater lines. I got four of them out over there, and that's that many that are not catching. When I go crabbing tomorrow, where I pulled that out of my rig, I'm missing out on that much money, because it's out. But when they get dirty, they don't catch as good either. Then you got a day that you have to take with your crew—like I'd be paying them to wash instead of crabbing, and I'm not making anything. I'm actually going negative because I have to pay them. It's more a downside to it, but it's part of it, so you just have to do it. I don't know. I like it, though. It's my thing. I can't complain. I hear about all these people that can't stand their jobs, don't like their job, and people that are miserable. In all honesty, even when it's rough as hell out, it can be miserable if it's raining and rough and you're trying to hold on and everything's flying and the cabin looks like a fricking hurricane came through, because everything's falling all over the place. It's a disaster. The end of the day, we have to come in and clean the boat up, just from it being so rough. But I still love it. If it's too bad, well, I haven't really had to turn around too much, because this boat can handle a good bit. It's a deadrise, so she's built for rough weather, and I just won't go if it's too rough.

[41:58]

SS: When you took over the boat, did it come with a license?

CJ: The license passed to me when my dad passed away, and my sister got the boat in her name. She knew that I was going to run it. They didn't have any interest in it, at all. I think that was just that my dad didn't know what to do. That was actually in place when we were younger. He did that just to have beneficiaries on something because there's a spot for that. Then ultimately, the mail and stuff for Coast Guard—because it's Coast Guard documented—kept going to my sister. She was in college. She was out in Arizona in college to be a podiatrist, and my mom was getting her mail in Pennsylvania, and it was starting to be a mess. The renewal for it was free then. Now it's only like five bucks or something to renew the Coast Guard. We kept having to pay ninety-five dollars every year because my mom wasn't getting the mail and sending it to my sister. It was like, "Crap! Just put it in my name." It's still the family boat. It's still all of our boat. My sister worked with us in high school. She's a year older, a year up from me. She worked in the summertimes until she went to college. When she went to college, she played lacrosse and did her thing out there and couldn't be back out on the boat. She's got plenty of blood, sweat, and tears on here too.

SS: When you took over running the boat after your father passed away, you had to build up the gear, the number of pots and stuff. What is the financial picture for all of that? For someone just starting out who has to acquire a boat, a license, and all the gear, how much of an expense is that?

CJ: That's a big expense. I didn't have to buy it, but this boat here would be around forty thousand. The market for licenses went way up a couple years ago, and now it's dropping back down. You could probably buy a license for anywhere from five to ten thousand, depending on what you're looking for. There's three hundred pot, six hundred pot, and nine hundred pot licenses, but then you can get a rockfish allocation with it. There's different variables, but I'd say five to ten.

SS: Do you have to buy a license off another person or does the state issue some?

[44:43]

CJ: The state issues it, but there's a list. You can put your name on a list and you pay for the license at Department of Natural Resources, but then you're waiting. In 2004, my dad put in on a list to add a six hundred pot allocation onto the TFL license. They all are three hundred pots. TFL is a Tidal Fishing License. You can do fishing, crabbing, oystering. You can clam. It's kind of all of them. You have separate reports for each, but instead of a specific crab license, you can buy a three hundred pot crab license and then a buy an oyster license separately if you want to oyster. The TFL holds all. That's what I have. That brings the price up and down. It's faster, if you want one, to buy it from somebody if you know somebody. Your boat would be, say, forty thousand. The lowest would be twenty. If you want top of the line, solid fiberglass, big, nice motor, it could be a hundred thousand. If you're trying to get started, you don't want to go that big until you know you can make it. It's hard if you've never done it. We'll say forty. Anywhere from five to ten for a license. Then you need a rig. If you're going to crab pot and you have a six hundred pot license, crab pots now are, I believe, twenty-five dollars a piece. If you want six hundred at twenty-five dollars, you're getting up into the thousands. I'm really bad at math off the top of my head. It can be fifteen to twenty thousand just for a new rig. You're looking at close to seventy to a hundred thousand dollars just to get started, if you don't have any help at all. I think when I had those few pots I

actually built pots. My dad used to build pots. The pots that we sold were pots that we built in the wintertime outside of crabbing season. I learned how to build pots from my dad. Back then, we could build them for eight dollars a piece. That was the cost of materials. Then you go all your time, so if you're not doing anything, it's ok. If you're doing something, you're going to wear yourself out trying to do it all. I mean, I still build pots now. It's so much cheaper.

SS: Just for yourself, or do you sell them?

CJ: Just for myself. I don't have time to build them for other people. Oyster season, the last few years, it's been decent. Oystering is only Monday through Friday, so you have Saturday and Sunday off. I really enjoy that, because you have no choice but to take a break. But crabbing, you can crab six days a week. We're required to take one day off. But it's so hectic, and with crab potting, you can only crab six days a week, but you've got that other day, and that's like catch-up for whatever else you need to get done. There's always something to do. I do try to take a day so that I can relax my brain a little bit. I just started doing that. I used to not. I used to work every day [laughter].

SS: You mentioned trotlining earlier. Is that something with lower barriers to entry?

CJ: That would be the simplest and least expensive to start out in. All you need is a boat. You could get a skiff. Fourteen to twenty-six, something in that range, you could start out in. Fourteen is small. But all you have is one or two lines and your bait, and that's it, and a net. The expense in that is way lower to get started. But you still got to be able to catch crabs. You still got to make a living doing it if you're going to build your rig. Or you can get a bigger boat and you can get more line. There's different times of year. I don't know a whole lot about trotlining. I've done it a couple times. I did it when he was like eleven months old. It was a really bad crab year for crab potting, and it was just a lot, having him all the time, and the pots were dirty, and I just didn't want him on the boat with all that. I think that's when his dad went on land and got a job and I started trotlining. It was just cleaner. I wasn't catching a whole lot, but I think I did ok for the first time trotlining. His dad showed me how to set the line one time, and that was it. "Alright." He was like, "Alright, see ya." I was like, "Ok, I can figure it out." As long as you know how to run a boat, you can pretty much figure anything out. That was pretty much the only time I trotlined. My boyfriend trotlines, so I go with him sometimes, just for fun though. I make sure it's just for fun. I'm like, "If I miss a crab, I don't care." [laughter] He's just doing it just to do it anyways.

[50:30]

SS: Do you market some of your own catch direct to consumers?

CJ: Crabbing, I do. There's actually a lot of people that'll buy crabs, that have been the regulars even from when my dad was here. It'll be twelve years this year since he's passed away. People who know it's a good quality crab, they'll call me and still get crabs every year. I don't do a whole lot. My market has been very good to me, so I try not to sell out on holidays and stuff. I just give him everything. People who know me know not to call on holidays. They know that I need to give my market crabs. But generally I do, here and there, for family, friends. That's my biggest thought in my head lately, is that really aren't any places to eat crabs around here.

SS: That's weird.

CJ: It is, because you asked if it was a fisherman-based area. If it was more of a fisherman-based area, you'd think that there would be more crab places around here. It's on the water. It just only makes sense. In my mind, I'm like, "How the heck can you have all these restaurants and these places on the water?" They just don't feel like dealing with the crab mess, I guess. I don't know. But my dad always wanted a market. That might be my next goal in my mind.

SS: When you think about the future?

CJ: That's what I think about, in my mind. Being out here on the water is hard on your body and hard on your mind. Everybody always says, "You'll never be able to keep doing it." I'm like, "Yeah, I know. Neither will you [laughter]. Yeah, everyone gets old. I know. Right now, I'm not, so I'm still out here." But I do think about that. I do think about where I'm going to be, and in my mind, that's my route that I take. "Well, hey, I'll just open a seafood market and then I can do that." Or I'll just run crabs up the road. I can figure that out. Everybody likes seafood. I think I'll stay in the industry. I don't think that will be too hard for me. I actually don't know what life would be like outside of the industry. I don't even want to think about that. Not even a thought in my mind, really. I guess just born in my blood. I don't really know what else to talk about.

[53:12]

SS: Is there anything else that we haven't touched on yet?

CJ: As far as the younger generation, looking back, they did some research on waterwomen. There's really not a whole lot of waterwomen. There's a lot of daughters, a lot of wives that do work out here. Not too many women run a boat. There is a girl here, Rachel Dean, she's a schoolteacher, and in the summertime, she comes out on the water fulltime for the summer. I guess that's part-time, but she runs a boat. She likes doing trotlining. She does, they call it poling. They'll run around and get peelers and soft crabs off the poles. They eel pot and catch fish, spot and stuff, for hook and line fishing, for rockfish and stuff. I've spoke with her some, down here. Actually, two boats down, there's a girl who works on that. That's her boat, Criminal Intent. Her name's Samantha. I don't know how long she's been working on the water for. I'm not positive. It's been a few years. Generally, you don't see a whole lot of women running the boat. That's few and far between. I guess the research might show more on that. I know I've been in some newspapers and magazines, because I do actually run a boat and I'm fulltime. That's pretty cool. My kid will look at that when he gets older. Like, "Hey, that's my mom!" I might not look like that when I get older [laughter].

SS: [laughter] Who was doing that research?

CJ: This girl, her name was Lydia Woolever. She lived in Tilghman Island. She was from Easton, but they were staying in Tilghman Island. That was for Baltimore Magazine. Did you see that?

SS: I saw it. I saw an article and I saw a video, as well.

[55:13]

CJ: I believe the article in the Baltimore Magazine was the first biggest one that I actually did, where it was like, "Oh my god! I got pages on here." I've been in the Watermen's Gazette. My dad was always in it, so it's kind of cool. I got some of the old Waterman's Gazette. But then when I made it in the Baltimore Magazine, I was like, "Woah, that's like everywhere in Baltimore. In Maryland." I actually had people, like, "Hey, I saw you in the magazine!" Once I did the Maryland Public Television. It was on MPT and PBS. I've seen it a couple times. But I never really watched it more than a couple of times. But there are some people who watch it religiously. I think it's a really good station. I just don't have time to watch TV. I don't have time to go home and think about turning on the news. I don't like watching the news. Everything's sad. Somebody is killing somebody. Drugs. Kids. I don't even want to talk about it. It's just sad. I don't even watch the news. But I've been to three or four different places, and a random person has walked up to me and asked, "Can I get a picture with you?" I'm like, "For what?" They're like, "I saw you on TV." "Oh, yeah. That's right! That was me!" It doesn't even phase me at first, but then I'm like, "Wow. I don't know if I would even recognize someone if I saw them in the moment." You know?

[56:50]

SS: It sounds like you're totally comfortable with your newfound fame.

CJ: Yeah. It's important. Every year in January, they do the trade show in Ocean City at the convention center. I was at the hotel. We were just down in the little bar at the after party kind of thing, and this woman, she walked right up to me, and she goes, "I knew it was you!" She was like, "You're on the TV, right? Oh my gosh, I finally get to meet you." She was so excited. I'm like, "Man, I just made you smile!" That is so cool. That was really cool. She came and got my picture and signature and everything. I'm like, "I don't think it'll be worth anything, but hey, if it made you happy, I'm good with it."

[57:42]

SS: Do you think the public understands what you do, or are there things you think the public needs to understand better about being a waterman?

CJ: I think it's kind of the same aspect. Out of sight, out of mind. People in the inner city, they don't think about watermen. They don't think about, "Oh, there's actually somebody out on a boat today, catching these crabs." If they want to eat crabs, they just expect them to be there at the market. In that aspect of it, I think there's a lot of people who don't have a clue about what we do and what we go through, to even catch the product in this industry. It's for fishing too, not just crabbing, because there's plenty of fish market. A lot of it's farm-raised, so I don't know if people even understand all that, to even know how to ask if it was wild caught or farm-raised, to support local, or they just buy it just because it's healthy. But hey, crabs are organic! Oysters are organic! That's all what everybody is getting into now is the health and organic stuff. Maybe it'll bring more to our industry.

SS: Let's hope so.

CJ: Yeah. I hunt too. My twin sister, she's into all organic. She used to never eat deer. I made spaghetti one time with deer meat, and I didn't tell her until after she ate it. She was like, "I can't believe you did that! Actually I can, but I can't believe you did that." And I told her, "Look. You're worried about all these hormones and everything." She had Lyme disease, and she was kind of going through a rough patch where she couldn't figure out why her body was reacting to things. She started detoxing and she went all organic and everything. I said, "Look. You can eat the deer that I shoot, and you know where it came from. You know it wasn't shot with hormones. You know it's been eating this grass, because the area we hunt in is our property. And crabs. Anything you get from me, you know is organic. Fresh caught." That kind of opened up her eyes, and I gave her a whole fifty-pound box of deer meat. I guess that's getting off topic.

SS: Is there anything else we haven't covered yet?

CJ: Probably a lot. Did you ever email me?

SS: No.

CJ: Do you want my email?

SS: Yeah.

CJ: Because if I think of something, then I can just [email you]. I'm pretty good at writing, I guess.

SS: I'm actually going to ask you to fill out this release form, which has a line for your email address.

CJ: If I think of something, I'll just write it down and send it to you. I'm pretty good, usually, at, "Oh, I should have said this."

SS: While you're driving home, you'll think of something. Should I turn this off? Do you have any closing thoughts before I do that?

CJ: No, not off the top of my head.

SS: Ok, I'll go ahead and shut this off then.

[61:04]

[end of interview]