

Sarah Briscoe Interview Log

Interview for Calvert Marine Museum Research on Seafood Houses

Interviewer: Carrie Nobel Kline, Talking Across the Lines, LLC

Also Present: Fred Carter (son), Ola Mae Carter (daughter-in-law), Robert Hurry and Hanna Thurman

Location of Interview: Home of Ola Mae and Fred Carter in St. Inigoes, Maryland

Interview Date: 3-4-05

- 00:15 Started shucking oysters between 1943 and 1947; Name; D.O.B.
- 00:42 Shucking for Charles Davis; my father was waterman, learned to open oysters when father brought them home
- 01:23 Elmer Smallwood drove the shuckers' truck; picked us up at six o'clock; all rode on back of truck –so cold; in packing house: boiler, wooden box to stand on; description of packinghouse house; canvas gloves
- 03:00 Shucked three pots; paid same amount though owner got more money for the different kinds of oysters; work hours; where truck went to pick up shuckers
- 04:10 Skim table; didn't give them any extra money; he had me as one of his main shuckers; held my box while I was pregnant; man who showed me how to shuck
- 06:20 I didn't take nothing –I didn't take other people messing over me; I protected my boss man; story – boss man paid my fine when I got into trouble
- 07:30 Captain Dave came from Crisfield to open a crab house after summer of shucking oysters; he brought crabs from Crisfield –made a steam house; how he brought the crabs
- 09:25 I started picking crabs; Mrs. Davis taught every one of us how to pick crabs; started off 15, 20 cents a pound; Mr. Davis wanted the meat separated –how; didn't want hands in the meat
- 12:10 If you're going to do something, do it right; I learned very well; Davis went up to 18 cents a pound
- 12:53 Description of types of crab meat: lump meat, special; Mr. Davis allowed me to bring and teach my children; important to do what you do right
- 14:52 We done a good job for Mr. Davis; now I pick crabs for people; I learned to be fast
- 16:20 Doctor said I shucked from my chest, so no more shucking

- 17:00 Didn't shuck under Mr. Lore because heard he was "a hard man"
- 17:35 Got around men at work to learn to work fast; six-inch long oysters –used to snap knife in half
- 18:55 Mr. Joe Ford taught me; whatever they taught me I was willing to learn; granddaughter wrote paper on me; cooked at St. Mary's College
- 20:35 Picked crabs for a woman from Pennsylvania; lump meat –how to get it out nice; have to clean out the yellow fat
- 22:00 We made Mr. Davis look good, but he never paid more; it was good, but it was hard; no heat in truck; walked to store in evenings; taking care of kids; got up at four o'clock; went out in any weather to shuck
- 24:30 Male crabs were six inches long; good people to work for; I learned to get something out of everything
- 26:25 How to make crab cakes
- 30:40 I put my whole heart in it; Mrs. Davis taught us well; started early; God has blessed me; the children are all here now to help tell the story
- 31:50 No running water; walked; getting kids and myself ready; man said Sarah is a wonderful picker; all my children are good cooks –can crack claws, pick crabs; I passed it on; they know how to survive; I didn't have anything I didn't pass on
- 34:40 It was rough, but good; I survived with my children; I love Luella Davis, she helped us so much
- 36:40 Names older ladies who worked in the house
- 38:00 Shoveling crabs out on the table; trouble come on me; fighting on job; fired; rehired
- 42:30 It's the way that you hold the crabs
- 45:20 I don't like no wet meat; different kinds of shells –explains
- 46:30 Male crabs have the best meat
- 47:20 I like working with my hands
- 49:00 Father was waterman; we lived off seafood
- 49:20 Mother died when I was two; daddy raised me; what he taught me
- 50:30 Where he worked as chef
- 51:30 Father taught me how to make bread

- 53:00 Father taught me how to make apple butter, clean fish –explains
- 56:20 I raised four sons and never bought jelly
- 57:05 Chitterlings; father taught me hog work
- 58:15 Father's father from Westmoreland, Virginia –was a slave, got married, ran away and came here; lived on Beachville Road
- 59:00 Man from Westmoreland said people from over there are just as "common as me," will invite you in, sit down and talk
- 59:30 Grandfather said he was a slave, came here on a scow; never told the details; came with nothing; settled at St. Inigoes
- 60:55 Grandfather's name –James Ball; he loved gardening, raising hogs, had orchard
- 62:07 My father raised all six of us; it's sad; mother Lela died in childbirth –father promised to keep the family together
- 64:00 Parents' names: James Frank and Lela Cecelia Lee Ball
- 65:00 How mother died
- 66:00 God gave me a vision of my mother
- 68:20 Mother's side of the family; gives me a spirit of heaviness that I didn't know more people from family; Lee family was very large; grandfather was Daniel Lee, part Indian, had many brothers; his home was where Clayton Marina is
- 71:30 Father brought oysters home, sat in chair by barn to shuck –explains; learned from him to shuck, then learned different way at packinghouse; story
- 72:15 Father taught me to clean and season fish; I had no mother to teach me
- 73:50 Father brought oysters and crabs home for us to eat; taught me to clean fish; scales as big as quarters; I was helping get food together for the family
- 77:25 I learned well
- 78:00 Hired at St. Mary's College; helped and comforted students; details relationships with students

DISC 2

Track 1

00:15 Only shucked at Charley Davis's because he provided transportation

00:48 Section removed at Sarah Briscoe's request

Track 2

00:00 Picked crabs for individuals –names

01:30 Ron Stone's crab house location

2:40 Paul Kellam sells crab, fish, came to me for
advice on opening crab house, but neighbors fought crab house opening

6:00 Ron Stone had 15 pickers working for him; shucked at night too; I picked some
for Mike in my home; helped with setting up Mike's place; health regulations;
hailed crabs to Baltimore

10:00 Camp meetings held on the fairgrounds, none in local community; church
(St. Matthews in Leonardtown) seems much more exciting now (than Mt. Zion in
St. Inigoes ever was as a child); I found true meaning in Holiness Church