

Tucker Brown Interview Log

Interview for Calvert Marine Museum

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

Date of Interview: 12/8/05

Location of Interview: Avenue, MD

- 00:05 Name; Avenue, MD started out as little fishing village, numbers have dwindled
- 00:24 D.O.B. 7/25/38; started crabbing at eight years old, worked with father
- 1:06 Worked for American Airlines for a while because river had gotten so bad
- 2:10 Has worked all up and down the Bay; good people; was active in MWA
(Maryland Watermen's Association)
- 3:15 Wouldn't be where we are today without associations like MWA
- 3:40 Harvesters get fingers pointed at them; some people would like to see them gone,
but watermen will always be here
- 3:57 Watermen's ways have changed and will continue to change
- 4:15 The Bay is in terrible shape; food chain's jeopardized
- 4:55 Local creek used to be a large fishing village; now it's just 12-14 houses
- 5:22 Numbers of watermen are low; it's tough to make a living of it now
- 6:10 Watermen have done their part on being conservative in harvesting; power plants,
water and sewage treatment plants, everything has taken it's toll; people shouldn't
point fingers at watermen
- 7:03 If "these" groups think they can do so much, why haven't they fixed the problem?
- 7:40 Virginica oyster is diseased; it can't live under these conditions
- 8:13 Also losing softshell clam and razor clam; not all due to pollution—loss of grasses
also a factor; government sprayed it 40 years ago because it was so thick
- 9:45 Three different kinds of grasses; trying to get them back because they help purify
water, give crabs and fish habitat
- 10:45 Supports research, but against spending so much money on it
- 11:15 It might be time to introduce another shellfish to the Bay; there might be some
unknowns, but we can't afford to delay by more studying; 40 years of studying
current problems haven't solved much

- 12:03 Seed areas have dwindled, which has forced dependence on Mother Nature
- 12:25 Hatcheries did an outstanding job at producing seed; Stanley Tomawoski's hatchery in St. Mary's County closed last year, which hurt the community
- 13:15 Hatcheries are not an answer, they're a help, but depend on funding; new hatchery should be brought in
- 13:58 Defends power dredging
- 14:40 Keeping oyster bars up and cultivated is what matters
- 15:00 Acid rain needs to be looked at as a threat to the Bay and creeks
- 15:38 Serious combination of problems; stop pointing fingers at watermen
- 16:09 Leasing—leaseholders would introduce an animal that would survive
- 17:09 We're going to find that we'll have to introduce another animal; Asian oyster
- 18:25 Argues against more leasing; use currently leased ground to see if Asian oyster lives there
- 19:12 100% for aquaculture if someone else wants to do it; very labor intensive though; doesn't take much to jeopardize an aquaculture program; it has its place
- 20:48 The bottom tells you what the food chain's doing
- 21:05 Sting rays are another big problem; they clean out oyster bars and clam beds
- 21:20 Developments are another big problem; again, it's a combination thing
- 21:43 Upgrading sewage treatment plants sounds good, but other side of coin is that a million more homes will be built
- 22:42 MD has best seafood anywhere; good clean seafood
- 23:30 Carrie asking about Mr. Brown's own story
- 23:45 Born and raised on St. Patrick's Creek; grandfather Sam Brown and father Frank Brown were watermen; brother and son-in-law are also watermen; has tried to get family to get into other things—there are better ways to raise a family than by being a waterman
- 25:02 No electricity, no phones when he was growing up
- 25:18 Family visiting on Sundays
- 25:29 If you went to a store once or twice a year you had *gone* somewhere; you wore your Sunday best
- 26:02 18 cents a gallon for gas, soda was five cents

26:30 50 cents allowance a week was *rocking*!

26:50 Spring garden (start Feb.-March) with onions, peas, lettuce, early potatoes;
summer garden with everything else; a couple of hogs—you'd cure the meat

28:05 In winter when it blew too hard to go out on the water you'd catch snapping turtles
or hunt squirrel; always doing something to keep meat on the table or share with
neighbors

29:00 Remembers first movie theater in Leonardtown

30:20 Fish: croaker, spot, perch

30:45 El Niño and La Niña play a large role in the Bay

31:18 If we ever let it get to a point where we can't get it back, we're in for some serious
trouble; the rivers and oceans control it all

32:25 Scientists and watermen are trying to work together; scientists haven't solved
anything yet, though; we know we don't know it all, don't claim you do; we need
scientists and watermen; scientists will always have plenty to study

33:15 Used to have a lot of boat races with work boats; 20-30 skipjacks

34:30 As older watermen fade away, there's not many young ones to take their place; but
the young ones still have our licenses, so they'll come back

35:11 School teacher who's kept a license for many years is coming back to it

35:50 You wouldn't believe how many boats there used to be

36:02 We need to change our methods; power dredging for example—we need to start
doing it now

36:13 Carrie asking about Mr. Brown's personal history again

36:20 Mr. Brown's father had a stroke in 1957 and died in 1964; Mr. Brown was in his
twenties

37:00 People used to use only trot-lines, no crab pots

37:35 There were twenty-some shucking houses on Kent Island; only one or two left
now; there used to be lots and lots of them

38:30 There's still a couple of other shuck houses in the county: Junior Thompson,
Bunky, and Joe Scribner (Maryland Seafood)

39:20 Used to fish with a top-notch, dedicated crew; eventually fish started dwindling

40:20 Used to work up the Bay, driving four hours a day; it got to be too much, so he put

- air conditioning in the boat and stayed there; his wife would come up sometimes; he would go home on Saturday evening
- 41:10 Put 103,626 miles on a truck in a year, driving to the Eastern Shore and Annapolis all the time; also visited daughter in MA
- 42:00 Upgraded fish house to a shuck house; in the days of running a fish house he worked a boat and packed and shipped fish; not much sleep; once went 30-some hours straight; when the fish were there, you had to go—there was no stopping
- 44:20 Didn't used to have special boots and clothing for fishing; when they came out with hip boots, that was nice; sometimes you have to get overboard, and the nettles were painful before the boots
- 46:20 Separating fish, grading them, getting sea nettles in the face, Pepsi and Coke would help the burn of the nettle, more on sea nettle injuries
- 49:24 Used to cook soup, stew, potatoes, biscuits on the boat; some of the fellows could cook really well; used a wood stove on the boat to cook
- 51:15 Ate a lot of fried fish and molasses while working
- 52:10 Salt fish and eggs or oyster cake and eggs for breakfast—now that's a waterman's breakfast; home fries or bacon with it
- 53:20 It was very enjoyable
- 53:30 Every Friday evening the crew would come down and clean everything on the boat
- 54:10 Sometimes on Friday or Saturday you'd have to pull the net off and fix it; everyone working on it together
- 55:35 Doesn't regret any of it; it had its hard times, but everything in life has ups and downs; just got to fight it out; when things get hard you learn from it
- 57:00 It's so easy for someone to point a finger; non-watermen at meetings sometimes don't know their own business but think they know what should be done with the Bay
- 58:14 The environmentalists don't know the whole picture; they talk to a lot of people, then come up with their own version of things; they don't understand things from experience; they're not knowledgeable enough; the scientists are knowledgeable
- 59:47 The crew helped do a lot of the fish house work; separating fish species, weighing

- them in 100 pound boxes, putting ice in them, loading the truck
- 60:20 Lots of traveling in the truck
- 61:08 Shuckers come in at 2:00 A.M., stay until 11:00 A.M.
- 61:50 After the oysters are shucked you clean them, but not to the point where you take the flavor out of them
- 63:20 Try to shuck only MD oysters; may have to move to TX oysters
- 64:05 MDE (Maryland Department of the Environment) and Dept. of Health and Hygiene watches the shucking houses closely; paper trail behind a jar of oysters is unbelievable: temperature and other things are exhaustively recorded so the state can trace any problems to their source
- 66:15 Cleaning and sanitizing the building; MDE comes randomly to check on things; so far MD hasn't had any problems
- 67: 30 Date on top of a jar of oysters is a "safe date"
- 68:00 Tickets on bushels of oysters tell you the date they were harvested and where they came from
- 68:30 Some people love the out of state oysters; it's no different, though
- 69:20 When you have over an inch of rain you can't harvest, as a precaution to keep the oysters safe for consumption
- 69:29 Used to deal with crabs as well, then stopped and got into razor clams to take to Chinatown; made some great friends in Chinatown even though he had to use mostly sign language; loved bartering in Chinatown
- 72:20 More on bartering with Chinese folks, going out to breakfast with them; has a lot of respect for them and their culture
- 73:30 Beautiful china (dishes) in Chinatown; broke some expensive china in a store one time
- 74:20 A Chinese friend of his helped him find customers in Chinatown
- 75:45 Fresh fruit and vegetables in Chinatown
- 77:00 Great Vietnamese restaurant in Washington
- 77:20 Wife Agnes delivering oysters and clams
- 78:00 Dealing with customers and pleasing them
- 78:40 Taking care of the trucks is a nightmare

79:00 Always buy the best, no matter if it's a frying pan or anything—it'll pay for itself

Disc 2

1 min. 45 sec. more on buying the best of whatever you buy and taking care of it; this is essential to any business