Michael Kline: Okay. Can you say, "My name is?"

Charles Winstead: So, what it is?

MK: Yes.

CW: My name is Charles R. Winstead.

MK: A little louder? Good.

CW: My name is Charles R. Winstead.

MK: Well, we never ask anybody their age, but maybe you would tell us your date of birth.

CW: 8/28/15.

MK: You got some years on you, do you not?

CW: I'm working in eighty-nine years.

MK: Could you start out and tell us about your people and where you were raised?

CW: I was born at Edwardsville, Virginia, over Northumberland County. I was raised down on the Potomac River, family of six brothers and sisters.

MK: I am sorry. Would you start that again? You were raised where?

CW: Over at Edwardsville, Virginia, over Northumberland. That's not very far from Heathsville. But I was raised down on the Potomac River. I was in sight of your hometown at St. Mary's.

MK: You grew up close to the water?

CW: Right on it, Point Lookout. I'm sure you're familiar with Point Lookout. Well, that shone right in our backyard. When the lighthouse would come on, clearly as day, you see it. All my life, we could see Point Lookout and Smith Point. That's where the mouth of the Potomac River goes, from Point Lookout to Smith Point. We had a place down right on the river.

MK: A place?

CW: Well, our home was on the river in a place called Hall's Neck. There's several necks beginning down at the end of the peninsula. Let's see now. There's Bridge Neck, Hack's Neck, Hall's Neck, Great Neck. That's up to the mouth of the Coan River. There are other necks going on up the river, but that's in our vicinity. We were fishermen from day one.

MK: What do you mean?

CW: We were fishermen. I started working in a row skiff when I was eight years old. I fished from that time until I was eighty. I put thirty-nine months in the Army, but in two of those years, I fished a part of them. I went in the Army the 6th of June, and I had fished crab before a part in [19]42. Then I came out of the Army in September of [19]45. I fished a portion of that year until that year was over. So, out of the thirty-nine months I was in there, I still fished a portion of each one of those three years I was in there. I've done some of everything, but fishing was always the principal occupation.

MK: Was that something that went back into your family for many generations?

CW: No. My father was a fish trapper. He fished traps. He drove them in there. In this area, since the middle [19]20s, there were fish factories – even before that. But in the middle [19]20s, they had fish factories. At one time, there were seven or eight fish factories over at Reedville on Cockrell's Creek, and some down here at (Diamonds?) Creek and one over on the Rappahannock River. Then they had them at Chincoteague and at Delaware. Then then the Smiths come along, and they brought up all their boats and had a factory at Port Monmouth, New Jersey; Long Island, New York; Egg Harbor, New Jersey; Beaufort, North Carolina; Fernandina, Florida; and even brought one over on – they brought two on the Gulf before they stopped. On the Gulf of Mexico, one in Cameron, Louisiana. They had three. They had one in Port Arthur, Texas. They had one that – I remember the name of that place in – further up the Gulf in Louisiana. But of course, they all passed away now, and they've changed hands several times since they started – all the older people that were in the fish business. There was a gentleman that came here from Maine, and the other one was from New Jersey, I believe. One was named Fisher and the other Morris. They came here and put up a Morris and Fisher factory. They were among the first that – of course, the McNeals were fishing in sailboats. That was ahead of my day. I don't remember that. But they fished with sailboats. I don't know where they came from. They weren't originally from right around Reedville, but they came down. But Mr. Fisher came from Maine, and Morris came from New Jersey. They put up Morris and Fisher. They had eight boats. That was the biggest of the fishing, and then they went from there to – then they started with boats that would carry 125, 130 tons. Now, they got them who'll carry six and seven hundred tons. So, they built them all in between that.

MK: Now, a thirty-five-ton boat, how long would it be? What sort of a crew would it have?

CW: A boat, 135 tons. Well, anywhere from a hundred. It depends upon the size – hold, the capacity that it had for a hold. Now, some boats were long and had a hold that would load them. There are others that were shorter boats, but still carried a fairly decent drag and good load. So, they bought boats that were used for other purposes and converted them. The biggest one up until in the middle [19]20s was the (*Louise*?) in Gloucester. Davis Packing Company come out and bought them. They would carry 12,000. A thousand fish weighs six hundred and some pounds. That's what it's supposed to weigh. Of course, the measurements all differed in – they had all kinds of different measures. But at one time, they worked for wages. Didn't make much difference to the crews how many fish the boat carried then. They were working for wages. But they had big coal boats, and the companies had heavy expenses because coal was high. They got them to using oil for cheaper. The bigger coal boats would carry a 125, 130 tons of coal. Well,

when they got rid of that, that left the carrying capacity for the boat for fish a whole lot more. The same boat that carried 500,000 one time would get six to seven when they got rid of the coal. Then when Smith came, he started a little factory up at Sandy Hook, New Jersey, up inside of Sandy Hook – had little sailboats. Finally, he bought a little boat that Herman Krantz built down on Yeocomico River there.

MK: Who built it?

CW: Herman Krantz. He's dead now, but the railway, they still got the railway on Yeocomico. They bought that boat, and one other boat went to Port Monmouth. They went from that two to three boats to forty or fifty. Then they started to dwindle out then, and they started to build bigger boats and less factories. They had factories all up down the coast. But they got out so many factories and built bigger boats. Last year, I worked at Port Monmouth. We run fish from Maine back to Port Monmouth. We didn't catch no fish a mile – nowhere around the factory. We leave here Sunday afternoon, go up and get aboard a boat, and take off to Maine. You could get but one load a week, but we were on a big boat. The boat I was on would never catch 250,000. She's a 750-ton boat. They run them fish all the way from Maine. Our bill was so high, and they were afraid, if it ever come a bad season, they would do them in. So, they sold out and stopped fishing up Port Monmouth. I haven't been up there for four or five years now, but I think that if the whole summer is all done, I don't think the factory is even there. Delaware factory that's going aren't there no more. I haven't been to Egg Harbor, but that was on an island. Nobody want that. No way. Then fish moved from here – everybody's on the Gulf now. It used to be thirty to thirty-five boats here on Chesapeake Bay. Now, I don't think it's eight or nine. They're a whole lot bigger boats than they were at that time, but there's only one company working there now on Chesapeake Bay, and one, two small boats working for crab bait to do crabs. Ain't no price, and I don't think they're doing too much now.

MK: Can you talk a little bit about the crews on these boats? Now, when you take off on a Sunday to go up to Maine on a big fishing boat, how many crew, and who were these crew?

CW: Well, at the beginning of the fish season, when they had big boats and coal boats, I've known – in fall of the year, fish got heavy in fall. I've known them to have high as thirty-five, forty men in the crew. Normally, they would carry about twenty-eight, twenty-nine in the crew all the time. But in fall of the year, they'd take on extra men because the fish were heavier, and heavier sets. On the coal boats, the big boats, they had to have licensed chief, licensed second, and three firemen. Had a pilot. The maid didn't have to be licensed, but the captain did. Have two licensed men before and two licensed men after. Then they had a cook, an assistant cook. Up to thirty-five men in the crew on big boats. Before we had refrigerators and things on there, we had a lot of dry food. They had ham, treated red hams that was treated that you could keep for a while. But they didn't have no ice aboard there. But dry food, beans, dried peaches, dried prunes. You have a few eggs, not a whole lot, and canned food, canned greens, all sorts of cans. But now, they got great big refrigerators on. I think they got anything on we have anywhere in the world. They got any kind of food, any food you think about.

Carrie Kline: So, you were not stopping often enough to be getting fresh food?

CW: Well, up until the refrigerators came aboard the boat, they couldn't stay away more than three days at the time because the fish would rot. Now, they could handle them. They could handle them by some means. They had hot-air dryers and things. These factories, these old-time factories could handle them. Now, after the later years, they didn't use nothing but fresh fish, but had to come to the factory every night, put them out every night. They made better products. When they started making meal for horses and cows and poultry and hogs and everything they'd made, they used oil for. The government hounded a lot of the oil for machine guns. It had endurance. They even had it for perfume. They could take out oil and mix that perfume into it. It had endurance, and so, it made the best kind.

MK: So, you would set off for the coast of Maine, and what were you after? What was the strategy for catching those fish that you were after? What kind of fish would you be after on a trip like that?

CW: That type of fishermen for the fish factory was only the non-food fish. Some called them bunkers. Some called them alewives. But they were non-food fish.

MK: Menhaden?

CW: Menhaden. Some called them that. They called it menhaden.

MK: What else were they called?

CW: Alewives and bunkers. Bunkers, most people would call them. We spoke of them as bunkers.

MK: Bunckers?

CW: Bunckers, yes.

MK: B-U-N-C-K-E-R-S?

CW: Yes.

CK: Alewives?

CW: That's right.

CK: Spelled?

CW: Don't ask me how to spell that. I never saw it. But they're non-food fish. They are not supposed to catch food fish and grind them up for bait and stuff like they do. They're not allowed to do that. That stirred up a lot about that – well, the sport fisherman claimed that the working men catch all the sport fish in the nets, but that isn't true. I've been on there for a week or ten days at a time. You wouldn't see one – didn't see a food fish. You couldn't get one to eat. Then they would find something mixed in, but only if you get one to cook for yourself. But it

wouldn't amount to nothing. Then sometimes, there's a whole lot of them in there. That's where the trouble come, when they go to the factory and had too many of them in there. There's been many fines paid for that. But now, going to Maine, up in that area, there were bigger fish and bigger bunches. There never was very many plants up there. I don't know why, but there never was very many plants up there. One or two, but not much. But there was all any size bunch of fish you want there. We would aim to leave Sunday evening and get up out on Monday, time to make a set or two, and load Tuesday and come back.

MK: A set or two? What does that mean? How would you make a set?

CW: They have a net. Are you familiar with smoking? Well, they have a net with corks on the top and rings on the bottom, and you put that in two boats. You go down, you can see the fish on top of the water. Of course, they got planes now. When we first started fishing, you had to row off in a (dry?) boat a small boat, row off, and get on them. Then you direct the captain and mate off to have a set on. But now, they have planes, and they got walkie-talkies in the boats and planes talking right through men all the time, and telling right down, you go down, turn the boats and loose, let them go apart. That's where you start your net. Then you go around and circle and come back together. You have a lid they call a tom. They throw that overboard with a block on each side of it, put that line into it, bring it to a crane, something like this, and press them together at the bottom. You got your corks floating on top and the net closed up in the bottom. Then you've got blocks to web the net back onward, and you web them up until you get them tight. Then the big boat come alongside and hank that up on the thing, and now, you raise them up and pump them. They got pumps pumping overboard.

MK: Now, they have pumps. But when you were a young man …

CW: No, they had no pump then. You bailed them out of the net. You had a net go to loft, and you stand on deck and pull it back, get behind the fish, then pull it and fill it up then raise it out with a donkey. It used to be, you kept up in the air high enough to hook it on a mast and drop it then, and it turned over and dumped the fish in the hold. But then later, they stopped doing that, and they made a bail net with a drawstring into its rings. You could pull them rings together, and then when they come over the hold, just slack the ring up, and they spread all over the boat. Then it went down from that pump – I guess they've had pumps twenty-five years, I guess.

MK: Well, we are talking about earlier than that though. I am talking back in the [19]30s.

CW: Back in the [19]30s, everything was done by hand.

MK: So, people had to pull by hand?

CW: Pull by hand, press the net by hand, everything by hand.

MK: To do what to the net?

CW: Press it. Do you mind if we just make this circle here? Your cork's floating, then you got the net come down there. The bottom is going to line into it. Back when I first started fishing,

that was thirty-five, forty feet deep. But now, they got a thousand marks deep, a thousand-inch marks, or some of them, twelve hundred. But they got heavy rigs to press them in. But back then, you pressed them by hand, and press the rings up on each boat just like you do now.

MK: So, that required a lot of people pulling together at the same time.

CW: That's right.

MK: How did they establish that rhythm to pull?

CW: Well, they two press boats. Half of the net was in each boat. Then when they're going off on a place to fish, they'd have four oars on each side of the press boat, rowing off. But now, when they got ready to catch them, they got ready to let them go apart, you took two of them oars off of each side of the boat, shove the boat apart, and then you had two oars on each side instead of four oars on the side. They rode, and the captain had them all in the stern, the heat stirred around. It could break around as it got around them. They come around together, the boats come together, and they fasten them. Then they had a crane, just something just like this, with two blocks on it. They'd drive that tom overboard, and that would go to the bottom. It had lines on it, and that would press the bottom of it together, the bottom of the net. Then when it got come together, when it got the net shut up, then you take the tom off it and raise the rings to the crane. Then you'd break half of the rings off on one boat and half on the other. You'd put back half in one boat and half in the other, and then your big boat would come alongside and bail. But you'd bail them by hand. They have big nets than – some of them had a good-sized net, but you have a block aloft and two men standing on the bridge to raise it up. Two men on the boat pulled it out, and the man on deck would've handled it shove it down until they got it full. Then the donkey raises it back up, carried up high enough for them to hook that thing on the block on the mast. They just turned it loose and they turned the bottom over and just turned them out. That was some procedure one time.

MK: Did they sing on the boats when they were working?

CW: Oh, my God. Yes, I guess they did.

CK: They did what now?

CW: Sing. I sang with a bunch – we had a bunch here. I guess it's been ten years, I reckon, or more. Well, we went all over the country singing. Not all over, but we went to New York, New Jersey, down the Carolinas, Richmond, all over, singing. Before you leave, I'm going to get a – I'm aware that I put my hand on them tapes a lot. I think I got one. I know I got some somewhere. But we made tapes, and we went to Staten Island, New York. We went to Cape May, New Jersey, went down to Norfolk several times, and Chincoteague, Virginia. We sang for quite a while. My legs got weak. They still got some bunch, but nothing like it was when I was with them.

MK: Can you give us an idea of how those songs would go?

CW: How it would go?

MK: Yes, how did some of them go?

CW: Well, see, the theory behind the singing was when they all sing together – and then when they stop singing, they'd all pull together. That was a big help. Before you leave, I'm going to see if I can find one of them tapes.

MK: How about just singing us a little piece of one so we have some idea?

CW: I'm supposed to be one of the best, but I haven't got the voice now like I had then. Let me see now. One of the songs that I used to sing mostly when I got in with a big set of fish and needed everybody to pull together was "Drinking of the Wine."

MK: Do not touch that.

CW: Oh, I'm sorry.

MK: No, that is all right.

CW: I'm sorry.

MK: It is okay.

CW: Drinking of the wine, wine, wine. Drinking of the wine, heavenly wine.

MK: Again, please. Start at the beginning, because when you leaned forward, I lost it.

CW: Oh, you lost it.

MK: Okay, go ahead.

CW: Drinking of wine, wine, wine. Drinking of wine, the holy wine, where you ought to have been there ten thousand years. Drinking of the wine. I haven't been able to – I didn't stop singing on that account. I stopped singing on account of the strength in my legs. But I've had problems with my throat.

CK: That was beautiful. Can I bring you a drink of water?

CW: No, no, it's all right. I'm going to see if I can find – I just can't remember where I had the tapes. They were on my desk. They were on my dresser for years. But I got something around here somewhere.

MK: Now, let us break it down. So, "Drinking of the Wine." When would you pull?

CW: When you stop singing. You say, "Drinking of the wine, wine, wine." You stop then and

pull. Then you say, "Drinking of the wine, the heavenly wine," and you stop, pull. "You ought to have been there ten thousand years, drinking of the wine," then you pull. I've seen boats in Long Island Sound – we got a set of fish that one time on *John L. Lawrence*. I guess they had 61,000. I believed, those boats, you could walk for a mile. Right across that sound, some sailing boats listened to us sing our shanty. The gentlemen, there used to be all of them down that coast. I don't know, we went – they had blessed another fleet. We went to Cape May, New Jersey, for the blessing of the fleet. We sang. They do that down there. Every time fleet goes out, they have a blessing of the fleet on Sunday before they go out the following week.

CK: Did you make up that song?

CW: Well, not necessarily. There was shanty singing from Florida to New York. Different ones had different shanties, and they make them up. Now, I typed them up when we started singing shanties when we started going. I don't know what happened to them. I can't find them. I must have mistakenly thrown them away. But the boys have still got some of them now. But I had them typed up and given to every man that sang with us. But when I got them so I couldn't stand, I must have, through a mistake, got them in the trash some way. I'm going to find them.

CK: Are these shanties that you learned from others or were they spontaneous songs that came to you?

CW: No. Well, it's like anything else when you can hear it. Now, see, the most people of my age are dead. There aren't very many more left my age. But we got ours from the ones that come ahead of us, and we sang them. One we learned like when we got out in Carolina. We'd meet the southern boys that was fishing down in Florida, and we would get the shanty. We'd learn one from (Delly?). I don't know who the first one started now. He's ahead of me. But we got it from going and working with other fellows that sang them ahead of us. Of course, I was a big boy, and I was way ahead of most people my age working, because I was fourteen years old when I first went aboard a fish boat.

MK: So, you learned from the real old-timers.

CW: That's right.

MK: Who was the best shanty singer that you ever worked with? Aside from yourself, I mean.

CW: I think that it was not – a Carolina man sang different from what they did. But we had some few that could sing. I know one man – he's dead now, (Tony Basker?). I would replicate him just the first thing he sang.

MK: I am sorry?

CW: The captain used to have us pick out. Now, there was a fellow down Morehead City, (Alec Dudley?). He was one of the king shanty singers. They managed to carry him onboard the boat just for him to sing a shanty. It was worth it. I mean, it was worth it. You'd be surprised how much difference it would make when you start a shanty.

MK: What do you mean then?

CW: When we're pulling. When they were trying to raise a set of fish. See, after you got the fish and you got them webbed on in the boats, then you had to come alongside with the big boat and hank the corks up on the steamer. Then you raise them up until they get hard enough that you could bail. You had to pull them up by hand then until they get hard enough that you could bail. Sometimes, they'd get a heavy set every once in a while. You'd lose when you couldn't get more than you could raise. But that shanty was to put them in together. So, they all sing together, they all pull together.

CK: What was distinctive about the Virginia shanties?

CW: What's that?

CK: What was distinctive about the Virginia style?

CW: There was nothing distinctive about it. Some of it was like everything else. Some could sing about it better than some others. Some had better rhythm than some others. Then just some people are better leaders than some others.

CK: Could you tell that somebody was from the northern neck of Virginia rather than from the Carolinas or Florida by how they sang or how the group sang?

CW: Well, you see, you would know where every man was from before you ever worked a day, because when they hired the crew, then everybody knew everybody. If they didn't, they soon learned everybody. They had to know everybody to work together. Like I'm saying you, you can work, but they'd all have to be together. Then you would know where they came from. But it didn't make much difference where they came from and working together. It didn't make much difference. The coast of Virginia crews were a little different from Carolina men. They were better men too.

MK: Of course.

CW: Yes, they were better men.

CK: Better men?

CW: Well, Carolina men were kind of – first place, we had bigger boats and bigger crews. They never had as big a crew in Carolina like they did up here. They had small boats. But shanty singing originated down south, and that's where we got it from. When we went down there, we learned to sing shanties. But they originated down there.

MK: Are you getting tired?

CW: No.

MK: Oh, good. Can you talk about the fish factories right close around this part of the country?

CW: You mean the beginning of them or as they are now?

MK: As you remember them in the [19]20s and [19]30s.

CW: Well, let me see. When I first was big enough to remember, Morris and Fisher was the first factory that I was big enough to remember. Then they had one at Reedville that had two boats. Then when I started fishing, Morris and Fisher had cut out, and the McNeals had – they had McNeal, Wilbert Edwards, McNeal Dodson and McNeal Edwards and Douglas Company across the creek. That was the four factories that we had. Dodson had four boats – had three, and they bought one later. McNeal Edwards had four, Wilbert Edwards had four and Douglas had two. Then there was a factory down here on the Rappahannock. They had three or four boats. Bellows and Squires over on Diamonds Creek, they had four. There was thirty boats. They were smaller boats. There was thirty-some boats – thirty-one, I believe – on the bay at one time. Then they'd run load, and some stopped, some sold out. Smith come in, and he bought up all the boats. I left out one factor. Let me see. What was that? That was Haney, (Raymond Haney?). He had four boats. Then they bought a factory up in Wildwood, and they put some more boats up that area. Fishing has been a boom and bust ever since Peter was fishing. That's always been a boom and bust. When you have a good year, everybody looks for a better year next time, next year, and sometimes, that didn't happen. Fishing has been a boom and bust ever since I knew a thing about it.

MK: Now, tell me about these fish factories. What happened in those factories? Who worked in them and what did they accomplish exactly?

CW: Well, they made scrap and oil as the principal – that's what they made out of fish. Now, when we first started, in my first fishing, they had scrap. They sold that to the fertilizer factory. I guess maybe in the first [19]30s, and then long in the middle [19]30s, they started mixing the scrap with feed for cattle, for all kinds of feed. That's where they made money at, because you can take – if you know, you can break an egg and smell the fish scrap right into it. Now, egg ain't no more like it used to be. This wasn't the same thing. You can break an egg and smell that fish I could smell that scrap right in? They got it right to the day it takes to raise the chicken until they sell the best on the market. They put lights in the poultry houses, and they eat night and day. They know the very day that he's ready – the same thing with pigs. They know the very day they're ready to ship that, they'll go – well, pig for 165 to 175 sell better than big hogs. I've raised hogs. If you keep them a week over, they're too heavy, because that stuff will grow, and it's that fast. You can take anything you want. You can take horse, cow, hog, anything, and feed them that scrap. You'll see them shed off and be just as pretty as ever you laid your eyes on them. Even the dogs, they grind it up and put it in dog feed. When you put in dog feed and you start feeding them that scrap, you can tell the difference.

MK: These factories, you said there was a couple of them at Reedville?

CW: Oh, when I first started fishing, there was McNeal Edwards, McNeal Dodson, Raymond

Haney, Wilbert Edwards, and Douglas. There was five factories there.

MK: Who worked in them?

CW: People from all over. They burnt a lot of coal in those first days. People used to come from all over – New York and Norfolk and everywhere. Firemen and things would come around here to work in the factories. Then they had a lot of men working, local men, right around there.

MK: Black and white?

CW: Black and white, yes. When we first started fishing, we used to have to put an elevator in the hold and go down there and bail them too with forks and then buckets. The bucket went on an elevator in the hold, and you put them in that bucket and going up outside and dump them. Then they had to drag to get them in the factory. Of course, now, they pump them out. They have two men down there in the hold to watch them do that, but ain't no such a worker as far as when I first come along.

MK: So, how many would these factories employ? How many men?

CW: They would have at least eight, ten balers. I never worked a day at the factory in my life. But they would have twenty-five, thirty people working.

MK: Women too?

CW: No, no women. The only women – they used to cut herring in the spring of the year when (shark?) fishermen's going on. Some women cut fish. They put them down on a – get down on their knees and cut the heads off and clean them. So, they salt them. Some women did that, but I never know no women who worked in the factory, not here. But further up in Delaware and places, women worked just like the men. Not the same job, of course, but they had jobs that they'd work there. But I never know a woman who worked at a factory down here, not for menhaden fishing.

MK: But the women did work in the oyster houses?

CW: Oh, yes, women worked in oyster houses. They're some of the fastest shuckers, the women. But sometimes, they just get into oyster. Yes, sir. I knew a man that – he worked right on through. He wouldn't stop eating his (dump?) and tried to keep up with his wife, but he couldn't do nothing with her. She could go into them.

MK: I guess the women had their own style of singing in the oyster houses. Did you ever hear them?

CW: Well, they never used singing nowhere else but to raise fish. They were singing on a boat to raise the fish, but not …

MK: Now, where were the big steamboats in all of this that you are describing?

CW: There's a place over Reedville called Cockrell's Creek. That's where the fish factors were. There was one down here called Taft Beach just below the Rappahannock River Bridge. There was one down there on Rappahannock.

MK: One what?

CW: There was one fish factory. That was (Colano's?), ever since I could remember. I think they built it. Then there was Bellows and Squires and Eubank. They were the only two down here in Diamonds Creek, Bellows and Squires and Eubank. They all sold out now. All the old-timers are gone. I tell you the truth, I don't know who – Raymond Haney had this factory that was operating now. He built it, but it changed hands so many times, I don't really know who owns it now.

MK: Do you remember the big steamboats on the river when you were a boy?

CW: Oh, yes.

MK: Can you talk about the steamboats a little bit, what was?

CW: The big steamboats was *Wilbert Edwards*, *Joe Bellis*, *G.H. McNeal*. The *Wharton* was the biggest one, the *Joseph Wharton*. She was the biggest one who was out there. *Pequot*. The *Joe Bellis*, the *Wilbert Edwards*, the *Wharton*, the *Pequot* – *G.H. McNeal* didn't carry quite as much – but those five boats I named would carry 150 tons of coal one time. You go down there, and you'd come to find them boys had to wheel that coal onboard with wheelbarrows.

MK: Who did?

CW: The crew had to coal them up when they'd come to the factory. They could carry 150 tons.

CK: By wheelbarrow?

CW: By wheelbarrow, yes. They put a board on the dock and put it on the rail, and you get that wheelbarrow. A guy will get on dock and shovel. They had to roll out coal overboard there. A boat would come in and bring a hundred tons of coal. *Bellis* would come fast to get the last spoonful of it one time. That's why them big boats – it cost so much to run them. Of course, they weren't paying much then. I worked for $18 a month and $3 holdback.

CK: $3 what?

CW: Holdback. You're paid $18 per month and $3 a month holdback if you stayed a season. If you didn't stay a season, you couldn't get the holdback. Then they went from that. When I first started fishing, we were getting fifty-five and five. Then the next year, they cut it to eighteen and three. If you didn't stay all the season, you didn't get three dollars.

MK: Now, these five boats that you mentioned, those were fishing boats or those were big

steamers, all of them?

CW: They were steamers. They were steamboats, but they were fish boats.

MK: Steam fishing boats?

CW: Yes.

MK: What about the passenger steamers? Do you remember much about them?

CW: The passenger steamers used to run – they used to be a set that came from Baltimore, and they made wharf at Reedville and Blackwells Wharf. You know where you come across the bridge down here at Glebe Point, but it used to be, on this side of the river, there was a dock there. There was a wharf there, and down the bay a little further was (Marla?). There was a wharf there. Over in the cove not far from there, on the north side of the river, was Blackwells Wharf, and they made Reedville, and then they – as far as they went. Then they'd go back down the bay and come up the Rappahannock and made Westland. They went clean on up the river to Tappahannock, and then they'd start back. They came here two days a week, came Tuesday and Friday. That was shipping days. Now, they come down from Baltimore. They'd started putting off Monday morning, and they'd go up and make that middle of the day in (Great Yeocomico?) then they'd go on down the Rappahannock and go up the Rappahannock River, make that his wharf south. They'd hang up somewhere until Tuesday morning, and then they started picking up freight to go back to Baltimore. Reedville and Fleeton was the last two docks they made. When they left that, they went to Baltimore. They leave there on Tuesday. They get here Monday morning and make their boats all up in them docks all up and down these rivers. Then they start Tuesday, sometime in the day, picking up freight, and they'd make all them docks. Then by night, they'd made the last dock, and they'd take off for Baltimore. They had boats from Washington come in Coan River. Now, they had boats from Baltimore come in Coan River too. They come in at Coan River. They made Smith Creek. I think they made St. Mary's too. They did make St. Mary's. They come on across the Coan River and they make two, three docks on Yeocomico. Then they'd hang up there for a while. Now, they didn't have the same days that the boats down here did. There was one boat that come from Washington. They had one boat a week from Washington, but they had two for Baltimore.

MK: Do you remember the names of some of these boats?

CW: *Dorchester*, (*Panorama*?), *Piankatank*. *Piankatank* was the fastest one that run. She made it down here to Reedville and Fleeton, and then on up Rappahannock. *Dorchester* was on Coan River. I don't remember the other one's name. But there was two on there, and there was two down here too. I don't remember the other one's name.

MK: Was there one outstanding passenger steamboat that you recall?

CW: *Piankatank* was the fastest and best rigged-up one.

MK: What do you mean best rigged up?

CW: She had better staterooms and bigger and fast. When she'd leave here Tuesday evening, before day, Wednesday morning, she'd be docking in Baltimore. You were getting here, then you could go to Baltimore overnight. There weren't nobody driving from here to Baltimore. Hadn't been thought about. They didn't drive in no car. But them boats were running here.

MK: Why did nobody drive?

CW: One thing, they didn't have nothing to drive. I remember when my father and Joneses had the only three cars down the whole street where we lived. They didn't have cars to drive to Baltimore. Then, you know, later on, when they started getting bigger cars and faster cars, then they started going to Baltimore. Going to Baltimore now is like going to Kilmarnock.

MK: So, your father and a couple other guys had the only cars around?

CW: That was over in Northumberland. See, I wasn't raised up in this area. I can't tell you who the first one – I can tell you the first man that had a car. I can tell you the first man had a car over in our country, over Northumberland, that I know and think about, he had straight fenders, an engine – [inaudible] on a buggy and had a change in the old fifty. It was a fellow that owned a wharf down at Blackwells Wharf named (Al Hogan?). He had the first car I ever saw. (Billy Blunden?) down in Reedville had one. Wasn't but very few people had cars – very few that I can remember.

MK: What did you think of the first car you ever saw?

CW: My father had a 1919. I was born in 1915. So, I didn't know much. All I know, they had little glass holes – these would be about this size. It wasn't very big, two little glasses out of the back you could look out of. They didn't have no mirrors on them. They had curtains. You had to crawl underneath them then. They didn't have them open. When I knew first knew them, they put a rod in so we'd go and open it. The curtain would open with the door after a while. But when they first put them on, they didn't have that. They just put curtains on, and you had to crawl underneath that. You had a crawl underneath that to get in the car, and you reached out and buttoned it. But finally, they got rods and put them in the door so it opened with the door, the curtains. But I remember when there was just a very few cars, very few.

MK: So, the steamboat was the main way to go?

CW: That was the only way to go. There was a boat that came down here. She made a dock at Reedville and then went down Piankatank River somewhere. You could get off down on Piankatank and get to a train from West Point. See, the steamboat would come down Monday morning. He'd made docks over to Cargill's Creek and come over here and make these. Then he'd go down Piankatank River. If you wanted to go somewhere south, you'd get on in Monday morning and go down Piankatank, and you could catch a train to Yorktown and go to Norfolk. That's the closest is the (Alabama?) train to us is Yorktown in Virginia. You could get off down there and go south if you want or anywhere else you want, because that train went to Richmond or wherever. You could go where you want to go. We never start driving to Richmond until – in

the first days, like nothing, they put this Downing Bridge up there at Tappahannock. That was somewhere around in the first [19]30s, named after Thomas Downing. Then they could drive. It used to be an old ferry that run from (Prostel?) on (Davis Farm?) to Tappahannock. You go up there and get on that ferry and go across Tappahannock. Then you go to Richmond from Tappahannock. But it was such a long roundabout way, and cars were so slow then. You didn't do much driving. After the Downing Bridge was built, then you could go to Richmond. People would go to Richmond then. Just go across that bridge if you want.] There used to be a ferry from down there to White Stone over to Greys Point before they put that Robert O. Norris Bridge there. If you want to go across that, if you want to go to Norfolk going that way, you get on that ferry, go across there, and then you go on. There was a ferry at Yorktown that went across – I forget the name of the little place – that went across York River. You go down there and you get on that ferry to go across. Now, if you wanted to go down Mathews County or Norfolk anyway, you had to go across through ferries. If you didn't, you would drive all the way to Tappahannock and get on that ferry and go across that and then drive back down through Essex and Middlesex to get down to Mathews and Gloucester – all day long getting to Gloucester.

MK: Can we go back to that eight-year-old boy that was out in the middle of the Potomac River in a skiff?

CW: Now, I didn't say in the middle of it now. Our land went right down to the river shore. My father had boats tied up out on the beach, out on the Potomac River. He also has boats in the creek. There was Cubitt's Creek and Hull's Creek.

MK: Cubitt's?

CW: Cubitt's Creek and Hull's Creek. My working in this row skiff was in the creek. Of course, I could row from the shore off to the boats where he was tied up. But I worked in the creek crabbing. We could take a skiff and had a trotline and put bait on it. You pull on your line and dip the crab off when you come up to it, put them in a barrel.

CK: What does that mean, a trotline?

CW: For instance, if this was a cotton rope, you just take a loop into it, put the bait into it and pull it tight, and throw it overboard. Then the crabs would come on and bite it. You'd come along – sometimes, you'd pull with your hand. Then you'd have a roll on your skiff. You'd just go along and dip the crab off as you come up to it. Of course, you'd anchor. You'd put the anchor overboard on each end of your line. That would hold the line, so you could run up and down that line until the crabs stopped biting.

MK: Did they used to have more crabs then than they do now?

CW: I don't know they had. They didn't have the facility to catch them then that they do now. Now, when I first started crabbing, they had a number of that trotline. Your bait, that's just eel parts and cut the eels up and put them in there. You'd just go along that line. Once they had gasoline boats, they'd have a roller hanging over the side. They'd put that line into it and just run along slow. As you come to the crab, and if he didn't turn loose and run before you got your

hands to catch to catch them, you'd catch them and put them in your barrel. But then they come for some behind the roller, that when it dropped off, it had fallen in that rig, and then you hoist the rig up and catch them. Now, they go to crab pots. Everybody has crab pots now, thousands of them. They throw the pot overboard. Sometimes, they throw overboard twenty-five in a place as big as this room, and they fished the pots. But they haven't done much in the last few years. Prices haven't been – they've been high enough. I think jimmies have been as high as a dollar and a half a piece. I think they paid $12 a dozen for them a lot of times. Even up in Delaware, they were higher than that.

MK: Did you ever tong for oysters then?

CW: I never did very much of that. I was always in the fish business. I married a girl and moved in this area in 1949. She passed away in eighty-three. But I was working away from home all the time. I was working in the fish business all the time. I never did much oysters. I've done it a little bit. I've done some tonging, but not much. I never liked it the first place. I sweat so bad. When I'd get to working, I'd get all sweat up. Then in the evening when it gets cool, I catch a cold. I couldn't do much. I had to be very careful about it. I didn't do much oystering.

MK: Over in St. Mary's County in Maryland, a lot of people over there talk about the oyster wars. But I have never been too clear about what that was all about. Were you aware of the oyster wars when you were coming up?

CW: Well, I think what they were talking about oyster wars was between Virginia and Maryland. Now, I remember when it happened. Don't quote me on this now, but I think when they built the Potomac River Bridge, Virginia wouldn't help or something. Some way, Maryland got jurisdiction of the Potomac River to low-water mark here in Virginia. When we would trap, we had to go to Colonial Beach to get license to drop a trap in Potomac River.

MK: To drive?

CW: A trap, a fish trap. Maryland has had control of the Potomac River for, I would say, sixty years. As long as I could remember – not when I first remember – we used to get that license right here in Virginia. But something turned up, and Virginia wouldn't – there was some dispute about it. Virginia didn't come up with their end of it or something. Maryland got jurisdiction of the Potomac River clean to the low water mark all the way from one end to the other. It's been that way for years.

MK: So, what did that mean for Virginia?

CW: Well, they had to get licensed from Maryland to work there, and they still do.

MK: That did not sit too well, I guess.

CW: Well, I'm really not old enough nor smart enough to know what happened, but something happened. When I was a boy, you could buy a license from Virginia. Virginia had half, and Maryland had half jurisdiction. But something happened, and Maryland got jurisdiction clean to

the low-water mark over here. I don't know really what happened.

CK: You are plenty smart.

CW: [laughter]

MK: Did that have an effect on liquor laws, too?

CW: Well, now, Maryland has had Smith Creek. St. Mary's, they've been running liquor ever since I could remember. I don't know who, but boats from the Coan River have been going over to Smith's Creek and bringing liquor over here ever since I could remember. I don't know where they got it from, but they must have been just calling liquor over there somewhere.

MK: People in Virginia do not know how to make liquor?

CW: Yes, some of them do. Some of them do. There's a place up here in (Langston?). The (Guilds?), they've made it as long as they done lived. Old Mr. Guild, the doctor, he's an old man, an old lion. They caught him, and they managed to just send him to jail, penitentiary somewhere. He said, "Mr. Guild, you told us that if I let you off, would you stop making liquor?" He said, "No, sir." He said, "I'm going to make it as long as I live. When I go to hell, if I can get half of them, I'll make it there." [laughter]

Now, he said, "He'll make it just as long as he'll live." But he had two, three sons. All of them made liquor.

MK: Family tradition.

CW: Yes, sir.

MK: It is wonderful hearing you talk about this stuff.

CW: [laughter]

MK: Hearing you sing, my word.

CW: You say you're from St. Mary's? How often do you come this way?

MK: We will be back and forth.

CW: I got some of the …

MK: Well, we are going to let you look for them today, if you can find them.

CW: I just can't remember where I put them.

MK: I would like to take them back to St. Mary's and copy them and bring them back to you

right away.

CW: Well, I certainly got some.

CK: You must have known a lot of people who worked on the steamboats.

CW: Do I know who they were?

CK: Yes.

CW: You mean the fish boats?

MK: No, the big passenger boats.

CW: Oh, no. I wasn't big enough when the – they stopped running the year – I think thirty-two was the last trip they made here. I wasn't big enough to know the captain. I'd go down to the wharf with a horse and wagon, get whatever my dad had sent for. I'd go down there, and whatever it was going to ship – we'd get fish down there to the ship, or care for whatever, the ship. But I wasn't big enough to know the captain, nor any other crew. I know the name of the boat because I'd see that when it comes to the dock. But I wasn't big enough then to know who the captain was. I don't guess there's anybody around here living now that does know who they were.

CK: Were there Black people working as crew?

CW: Yes. The Blacks worked in the crew, but there was no Black in the pilothouse. Now, I'm the first Black from this area to enter the pilothouse around here. I am under impression that I'm one of the first that had a license. I told (Clarence?) here, for whenever he had to get licensed, for a lot of the other boys that were out here to get license.

CK: What year was that?

MK: When you got your pilot's license, what year was that?

CW: That was in the first [19]50s.

MK: Early [19]50s?

CW: Yes.

MK: You were the first Black pilot?

CW: Captain. You know how I learned? I learned by going with drunks. I went with the captain to drink, get drunk. I'd seen the captain laying in the floor drunk like a fool. I had to bring his boat and take good care of him and bring her. That's where I learned. Now, the first way I learned to take a course was in 1935. We were fishing up on Rockaway Beach, New

York.

MK: You were twenty years old then?

CW: Yes. Captain (Fred Haney?) is dead and gone now. John (Robson?), I don't know whether John is still living. I believe John is dead too. But anyhow when they took the boats up over (David's?) Inlet, Fred took the chart down in the floor and showed John how to take a course. He gave me the course to run from out of Sandy Hook. Well, I was second engineer on the boat. When it got to the dock, everybody jumped off and went home. Well, we didn't go home because we went out, but they would go up somewhere to have a drink of liquor somewhere. I stayed to get fish out. So, when I put the boat underneath the pump to get the fish out, I went back in the pilothouse and got a pile that I wrote and that same chart.

CK: You got what?

CW: The chart. I put that chart down in the floor and saw how Fred got the course. I know what course he gave me, and I saw how he got it. From that day on, I learned how to take a course.

CK: What do you mean course?

CW: For instance, in the hour, or underwater, the river runs a certain way. If you were down at Reedville and you wanted to go to Tappahannock, you'd have to take a course from Reedville to Windmill Point. Then when you get to Windmill Point, you'd have to take a course from there to Mosquito Point. Then when you got to Mosquito Point, you'd have to take a course up the river. You have to know what the course to run to stay clear of the rocks and hazards, whatever have you, and stay in the town. Well, the chart has got a compass on it, and it's got parallel rulers that you can put – you can put that parallel ruler on the point on the chart that you want to run from. Then you can work it back to the compass on the chart. Whatever course that gives you on that chart, you can tell what course you got to run to get to it.

MK: You learned this from an old captain who was too drunk to get up off the floor?

CW: Well, I learned how to go, because the captain would get drunk. I was back in my bunk one night, and the man who come back had said, "Get up, Captain Charlie, get up." He said, "The captain is drunk, and in a solo pilothouse. But the sea is thick as mud." I was with my brother. He's passed on now too. I said, "All right." I got right up, because I didn't want him to hurt himself and the crew of men. I got up and went to that pilothouse and stayed up, run all night, and worked all day the next day. Load it, run all night, the next night, he's coming back, the captain. Everybody said, "I wouldn't do that." I said, "No, you wouldn't." But I learned how to go for myself. I had a license from Eastport, Maine, to Port Isabel, Texas.

CK: Why did they come to you that night?

CW: Well, there wasn't nobody else they could come to. The captain was drunk. the man at the wheel didn't know nothing, He'd give him a course to run, and they'd come back and get me,

because I knew where to go.

CK: You already knew?

CW: Oh, yes. I learned when I was a boy how to take a course, and I've been ever since. I backed out of Norfolk one Monday evening, and the captain told me to let him know when I would get to Cameron, Louisiana. I went to the phone and called him. I told him I was getting ready to back out then and look for me the next Monday around 6:00 at Cameron. Ten minutes to 6:00, I was coming up to Calcasieu Pass. They could see a mast coming. I figured what time I'd be in Cameron, Louisiana, ten minutes before the time.

MK: Did you ever run into any real bad weather?

CW: Oh, my Lord, I guess we did. We lost a boat, seven head of men. Yes, sir. Men were dropping saltwater going in my face.

MK: Tell me about that boat that was lost.

CW: We were fishing up southeast of Hatteras one Friday, 28th day of November. We got a drag of fish, and we went on and started on down the beach. It breezed up, got rough, and she shift her fish. We went over on one side and couldn't get her back. We lost seven men. I said the 28th. It was the 8th of November.

MK: It was what?

CW: The 8th of November.

MK: What year was that?

CW: Let me see now. 1968.

MK: Tell me about what you were doing in …

CW: I was a pilot on her. I was a pilot for a fellow who lived down in Mathews. He had fished down south that summer, down on the Gulf, and I fished Port Monmouth. I probably would have been down there. We lost on the 8th day of November, seven head of men.

MK: Did they get washed overboard, or how did they die?

CW: No, we lost the boat. We all got overboard. We all went overboard. The boat picked us up. (WTJ?) picked us up, but the fellows panicked. They hooped. They hollered. They were overboard, hollering. They panicked. We picked up one man who was already dead. The boat picked him up. They picked up seven of us.

MK: November 8th, it must have been freezing cold.

CW: Oh, my God, it was snowing, hailing, blowing [inaudible] with salt. Three different seas – southwest, southeast, and northwest swell. Everywhere you turned, there was one of them getting ahead too. It was just rough as it was then.

CK: How did you all get caught in a situation like that? Did that storm blow up suddenly?

CW: No idea. We were fishing up Hatteras, and that's about nine, ten-hour run – ten, eleven-mile run from Edwards Factory. It was calm in the day, and just breezed up at night. I told the captain before he took his boats up. I said, "Once you go off that shoulder, you drive this boat to the beach as hard as you can. It's going to blow a gale wind tonight." He said, "You think so?" I said, "I know it." I said, "I felt that warm breeze, the sea at 2:00 blowing that warm breeze in my face." I said, "When you feel that on this coast, you look out. Going to blow a gale wind tonight." He'll relive the day I told him. He said, "Well, we can go off [inaudible] don't pay no attention to the others. You drive her to that beach as hard as you can." But he didn't do that. He went offshore. She shift her fish and turned over on the side.

CK: She what?

CW: She shifted her fish. She got water in the hold, and then the fish went over on one side and she went right down, rail in the water. We lost her.

MK: She sunk.

CW: Yes.

MK: Well, could you say that?

CW: Yes, she sunk. Turned over. Turned bottom upwards before she sunk.

CK: What is that now?

CW: She turned bottom upwards before she sunk.

CK: Sounds like it happened pretty fast.

CW: Wasn't too fast, but she turned bottom upwards. She sunk to the bottom. She was mashed down bottom up, bunch of her now.

CK: You were up in the pilothouse?

CW: I was up there until I found out we couldn't do her no good, and I got to leave her there. But we got overboard after she sunk. She went down.

CK: Did you get into other boats?

CW: Yes, there was a lot of boats around us, but all of them were in trouble. One wouldn't help

the other. But the boat that picked us up was behind us. He came down behind us and he heard the boys hollering. Now, I capitalized on that. They were hollering. I didn't holler. But I know that's how they come to have found us. They was hollering on the water. He, in fact, heard them hollering. He started to pick them up. The first one he picked up asked what boat he was off. They told them he was off *Fenwick's Island*.

MK: He told them what?

CW: He told them it was off the *Fenwick's Island*.

MK: Phoenix?

CW: *Fenwick's Island*, yes. The boat was named *Fenwick Island*.

MK: *Fenwick's Island*?

CW: Yes.

MK: He told him he was off the *Fenwick*?

CW: The first one he picked up told him he was off *Fenwick's Island*. He knew *Fenwick Island* was in trouble, but he was behind us. Captain Ernest Delano.

MK: Ernest?

CW: Delano. I was overboard, and one fellow said, "Lord, that's Captain Charlie." He said, "Captain Charlie, can you catch a line?" I said, "Yes, I can catch it." I held my hand like that. He saw that there's this plum between my fingers, as long as he could've shot it with a gun. I got it. I pulled some slack. I was going to throw it to the man next to me. But they threw a line off the boat to him before I got to ask to give it to him.

CK: Could you swim?

[end of transcript]