

Nieman, Kenneth

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Interview Date: September 26, 1984
Interview of Kenneth Nieman
Shady Side, Maryland
Interviewer: Jennie LeFevre

Note: Mrs. Maria Nieman participated in some of the interview and is designated as MN:

JL: Mr. Nieman, could you tell me if you were born in Shady Side?

KN: Yeah.

JL: You were born. Would you mind telling me what year?

KN: 1912.

JL: 1912. Where did your parents live in Shady Side?

KN: Well, they lived over where the old Instrument Company is now, that has been torn down ... And then the year after I was born, we moved over on the point. Mouth of the creek ... And that's where I grew up.

JL: OK. Did you go to, uh, school in Shady Side?

KN: Yeah.

JL: Could you remember who some of your classmates were?

KN: Yeah. There's a bunch of them. There's Russell Allen, Francis Proctor, Harry Proctor, Vernon Joyce, uh, . . . Ann Powerbridge(?), George Griner, Jimmy and Jack Wilde, and Jack Hallock, ___ Hallock. There's more than that, I just can't think of all of them.

JL: Could you recall who some of your teachers were?

KN: Yeah. My first teacher was Miss Helen Dawson from ... she lived over in Mayo and then Miss Mamie Bast, Mrs. Andrews and a teacher named Mrs. Welch, but I never knew her real good, she taught me a little bit.

JL: In growing up at home, did you have brothers and sisters?

KN: Oh yeah.

JL: Would you mind telling me what their names are?

KN: Well, there's Roxie and Marion, Ed, Betty, Jack, Mary Lou - Mary Lee.

JL: And Marion?

KN: And Marion, yeah.

JL: Could you tell me what all of you did as little children for entertainment?

A: I guess fighten most of the time (laughter). Not a whole lot.

JL: Did you play ball. Did you ... uh ...

KN: Yeah.

JL: Did you play, you know, along the shore line. .or..?

KN: Oh yeah, we played around the creek a lot, we lived right on it ... And, yeah, we used to play ball, mostly.

JL: Were there any ball teams down here at that time that perhaps you and your brothers played on?

KN: School ... we used to have teams that would go over Mayo some, down Cedar Grove some during the school year.

JL: Well you must have gotten that from your father, because your father told me he liked to play ball, too.

KN: Oh yeah, yeah he was a great ball player.

JL: Could you tell me some of the gentlemen that you used to be on a team with?

KN: Just us, I mentioned in ... a while ago.

JL: Some of the gentlemen you went to school with.

KN: Yeah.

JL: I imagine you had a team that won a lot.

KN: Well, I guess we'd win and lose ... yeah, we won some.

JL: Is there anything else that perhaps your brothers and your sisters and ... and what you all did for entertainment as young children?

KN: No ... (laughter)

(and then Ms. Neiman said something inaudible at this point)

KN: Well, there wasn't much entertainment. (laughter)

JL: Would you like to tell me about it?

KN: Oh that was just something that happened when I was a kid.

Ms.N: He was very small, he and his brother, they had an apple tree, a small apple tree over there and they were picking the apples off and eating them ... so their father told them positively not to eat another apple, take another apple off that tree. So, they didn't. But, when their mother went out and looked at the tree, the apple cores were still hanging on the tree.

JL: Now that is a very funny story. That is very funny.

MN: Their father couldn't chastise them because they hadn't pulled the apples off the tree. They ate them

JL: They ate them right on the tree?

MN: And my mother-in-law loves to tell that one.

JL: Could you tell me what stores were in existence down here when you were a little boy in Shady Side?

KN: Uh ... yeah ... well, pretty much the same ones that's in existence now. Uh ... used to be Will Owens store up there where ... uh ... Eddie's is, Eddie's store and then they had Nowell's store, which burned down around the corner and then ... then there's Will Crandell, he had a store. And Herb Crandell had one out, right across from the school where the hall is. And I guess that was about it.

JL: Would you happen to remember the Shady Side Beverage Company?

KN: Yep, yeah.

JL: Could you tell me what you recall about it?

KN: Yeah, I even worked out there a little bit.

JL: Oh, what did you do, Mr. Nieman?

KN: Washed bottles (laughter)...

JL: Uh huh. Was the soda made right there?

KN: Yeah, well they got the syrup from Baltimore, yeah, and they made and bottled the stuff right there.

JL: Did you ever, I mean if you cleaned the bottles, did you ever help them mix up the ... the ... soda?

KN: No, I never did do that. But ... uh ... they sold a lot of it, I don't know why they ever stopped.

JL: I understand that there was also a bake shop there in the same area.

KN: Yeah.

JL: Could you tell me what you recall about that?

KN: Uh ... no, not a whole lot because I was very small then. But I know there was a bake shop. She had baked bread and pies and cakes and all sorts of things.

JL: Now, this may be long before your time, but do you ever recall a saw mill being in Shady Side?

KN: I never saw it, but I knew there was one here. It belonged to old man Dick Trott ... And he done a lot of sawing, sawing ... mill work. But, I never did see. it, I guess really, he had stopped using it by the time I got big enough.

JL: OK. As you were growing up then. .uh. .with your brothers and your sisters, and when you became a young man ... uh ... what did you all do for entertainment when you were young teenagers?

KN: Well, I guess that most things was we'd go to Annapolis to the movies, when I got big enough to drive a car.

JL: Uh, huh.

KN: And before that, well, somebody would have a party, of course, every weekend and they'd all congregate around that.

JL: You all would go to one another's houses?

KN: Yeah, whoever was having parties. And they'd have one, well ... about every weekend.

JL: Did you ever go to the dances that they used to have down ...

KN: No, I never went to dances, I never did any dancing.

JL: You never went down there.

KN: No.

JL: Did you ever go to the movie theater that they had in Shady Side?

KN: Yeah, yeah.

JL: Would you recall how much they would charge you to get into the movies?

KN: I think it's a quarter, I believe, I'm not really sure, but I think that's what it was. Wasn't very much, of course it was a lot then, those quarters didn't come too easy.

JL: When you were a teeny, tiny little boy in Shady Side can you recall who you think was the oldest person living in Shady Side at that time that you knew?

KN: That would have been my grandfather.

JL: I mean, OK, your grandfather. Someone else that perhaps outside of your family, that you, might have thought was maybe the oldest person living in Shady Side.

MN: Were any of your great grandparents living.

KN: I guess ... uh ... Aunt Augusta Woodfield's mother.

JL: And where did she live in Shady Side, Mr. Nieman?

KN: Right over where Hallock's place is now.

JL: Where the Hallock place is now?

KN: Yeah.

JL: And you think she ... perhaps she was about.

KN: She was probably the about the oldest one, I expect, that I can remember, anyway, cause she was, she was ... uh ... Aunt Gussie (try to ID this person) was old then and she was her mother, so she had to be right old.

JL: Could you tell me what you think perhaps are some of the oldest houses in Shady Side, the oldest homes?

KN: No, I mean this is supposed to be an old one here...

JL: This one?

KN: It's over a hundred years old.

JL: Uh ... could you tell me who, would you know who owned this home originally or had it built?

KN: No I don't.

MN: I imagine it was a Nowell.

KN: And the first one that I know of was Captain Jim Nowell. Well, I guess, when I was a teenager, I guess, he was around 60 or 70 years old then.

JL: And this was his home?

KN: He lived here. Now whether he had it built, I don't know, I guess the only one that could tell you that would be Miss Ethel.

JL: OK. Could you please

MN: She said that this house was older than the hotel.

JL: I see ...

MN: .So ... um ... how much older, I do not know.

JL: Mrs. Nieman, would you mind telling me your ... your given name and your maiden name?

MN: Maria Jean Moneykiser Nieman.

JL: Nieman, Ok.

MN: New. . um ... Miss Ethel did say, at the time she was telling my daughter about that the hotel was 125 and this one was older, this house here ... this part over here.

JL: Would you mind telling me Mr. Nieman when you and Mrs. Nieman were married?

MN: He wouldn't know (laughter).

JL: Would you mind telling me?

MN: January the 20th, 1937.

JL: 1937. Uh, would you ... uh ... please tell me the name of your children, Mr. Nieman?

KN: Yes, Suzie, Margaret, Kenneth, Frances, Mike ... ain't it?

MN: Yeah ... (inaudible)

KN: Mike and Greg, Philip and Terry.

JL: Uh ... could you tell me if you have grandchildren?

KN: Yeah, my wife have to tell you that.

MN: 13

JL: You have 13 grandchildren? Do you have any great grandchildren?

MN: Um huh. .

JL: How many great grandchildren do you have?

NM: Seven.

JL: Seven. Uh, when you and your wife were first married, could you tell me where you lived in Shady Side?

KN: The first year we lived down with her mother.

MN: The first two years.

JL: The first year you lived with your mother?

MN: With my mother.

JL: Oh, with your mother?

MN: In Avalon Shores ...

JL: With Mrs. Nieman ...

MN: And the house that we lived in after that has since burned down and then we were in Virginia for five years.

JL: You were in Virginia ... then when you came back to Shady Side, where did you live when you came back to Shady Side?

MN: At my family's cottage until we built the house where Suzie lives now.

JL: I see. And, how long were you in that house?

MN: About five years, and then bought this one in '51.

JL: And you bought this one in '51. Would you mind telling me whom you bought this house from?

MN: Clifford Woodard.

JL: I see ok ... (laughter). Could you tell me a little bit about your home life, Mr. Nieman, in growing up? What did your father do for an occupation?

KN: He was an oyster tonger in the winter, and he done carpenters work in the summer.

JL: Did you ever go out and work with your father on the water?

KN: Yeah, yeah ... a lot.

JL: A lot. Could you recall when you first started to work for your father, I mean work with your father, how much did he used to get for a bushel of oysters?

KN: Uh ... I guess when I first started around, from 60 cents to 90 cents. And then a few years after that they dropped down to 40 cents, didn't get better ... it got worse ... (laughter).

JL: About how old were you when you started to work with your father on the water?

KN: 15.

JL: 15? During that time and around 15, 16, can you recall anything that might of happened unusual out on the water, since all the gentlemen here have worked on ... something odd or peculiar or anything strange, anybody like fall overboard and you had to rescue them or some- ...

KN: No, not really. Uh ... the only time anything unusual happened, I got caught in a storm out there one time.

JL: Well, could you tell me about it please? (Discussion aside) It was a bad storm ... you would prefer not to talk about it? Ok, we'll not talk about ...

KN: It ain't that, I just kinda get choked up for some reason.

JL: That's ok. Would you mind telling me how many years you worked with your father on the water?

KN: Oh, about six years.

JL: Could you tell me, did your father work on the water all ... your father worked on the water all of his life.

KN: Yeah, yeah.

JL: All of his life.

MN: He did go in for house ... uh working in house construction.

KN: That was just the summer time.

MN: Yeah.

JL: Mr. Nieman, could you tell me if ... uh ... after you finished working for your father, did you then work yourself on the water, or what was your occupation?

KN: Yeah, I worked on the water during the winter a lot, but then I took up boat work.

JL: Well, we going to ask you all about your boat work on the second half of this tape.

KN: Uh ...

MN: He started, he started to finish it with Dick Hartge.

JL: You served your boat building apprenticeship with Mr. Hartge?

KN: Yeah, I worked for him just summer times about uh, six /seven years.

JL: Where did Mr. Hartge have his boat yard down here?

KN: In Galesville.

JL: Oh, in Galesville?

MN: The big Hartge boat yard over there. . . He built boats; sailboats and cruisers.

JL: What was the first thing he let you do in helping building boats? I mean, you know, since you ... in learning?

KN: Well, when I first started I was doing painting. He give me a paint brush and then as time when on, you know, little odd things and finally got into the wood work ... So, takes a while.

JL: Were they hand tools then, or were they power tools?

KN: Some power, mostly hand. And I'd drill ...

JL: Could you tell me what some of the hand tools were?

KN: Well, just the everyday hand tools, hammer and saws, planes and we had ... uh ... drill holes with a ratchet drill, uh ... didn't have electric drills then. And most everything was nailed anyway so you didn't have to drill too many holes. So ... really the only power tools they had was joiners and band saws and they took care of the heavy work.

JL: And you worked for him six years?

KN: Yeah, around six, seven, it wasn't full years, just half of years.

JL: Could you tell me what you would recall of any of the boat, early boat builders in Shady Side? Would you know who they were?

KN: Yeah uh ... I guess they all ... the first one, I guess, that I know anything about was ... uh, Uncle Perry Rogers.

JL: Uh. .would you mind telling me ... where his boat yard was down here?

KN: Yes, it was where Jerry Joyce lived, that was it there. And then there was old man Will Lee up there where Sam Lee's living now. And there was old man George Proctor, he built some and I think Ed Leatherbury built a few.

JL: Did you ever go down in their boat yard as a young person and watch them build boats?

KN: No, no, just over to my uncle's ... I did go over there some - to watch them.

JL: Were they the ones that inspired you to be a boat builder?

KN: Well, I liked it, yeah. I ... uh ... got a big kick out of looking at boats.

JL: Well, before we go on the other side of this tape, is there anything else you might want to tell me about your home life?

KN: Well, not really, I mean just everyday occurrence, just day in, day out. No, no, nothing unusual.

JL: Were there just dirt roads down here then, Mr. Nieman?

KN: Yeah, yeah. When ... uh ... I guess when the first car that came around here the only time you can run it was in dry weather.

JL: Does your father have a horse and buggy?

KN: No ... Never did have.

JL: So you had to walk everywhere you went until you got a car?

KN: Well, living down on that point, we had to come up the road; up the creek in a boat.

JL: Oh, OK. There was a ...

KN: It was a skiff, just had a skiff. And that's how you went to the store cause all the stores was right here.

JL: But you didn't have that far to go though, did you?

KN: No, just up ... you row up the creek and didn't have too far to walk and of course in dry weather you could take the old Model T Ford and drive to the store.

JL: Well I guess, I imagine, it was very exciting, then when your father got his first car?

KN: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. That was a big thing then in them days.

JL: I remember your, your mother and father telling me that all the young children in their family couldn't wait to go for a ride in the car.

KN: Oh yeah.

JL: Could you tell me where you just used to go? Just around here or ...

KN: Just anywhere there was a road you could travel on, it wasn't too many of them, no ... uh ...

JL: Did you ever get stuck in the mud with a car?

KN: Oh yeah, plenty of times. (laughter) yep.

JL: You all had to push to get out or someone, had someone pull you out

KN: And of course they used to have chains they could put on the wheels and that would help pull you out and, but ... uh ... joyriding then, there wasn't always a joy. 'Cause sometimes you had to work hard to get on, to get out.

JL: I imagine you did.

KN: Yeah.

JL: Could you maybe describe ... uh ... Christmas time at your house when you were little?

KN: Oh yeah, that was a big time. Everybody, well you didn't sleep much that night. (laughter) Most time you'd catch Santa Claus trimming the tree. Yeah, that was big time that day, that day was.

JL: Did you like to ice skate when you were a young person?

KN: Yeah, we done a lot of ice skating.

JL: Could you tell me where around here you used to ice skate?

KN: Right here on the creek and then in Flag Pond, down ... there's a pond down next to Snug Harbor, we used to go down there a lot, that was fresh water.

JL: Do you recall some of the people you used to skate with?

KN: Yeah, all the fellows them, uh ... went to school with and, well, just about everybody in Shady Side really.

JL: And you used to skate at night time as well?

KN: Yeah, yeah. Most the time at night, the evening and night we had to do something during the day, like working, so ...

JL: Oh, I just remembered something. A gentlemen told me that all the men used to get, get together once in a while and sing.

KN: Not me ...

JL: Not you. Not you, no you were never with any of them singing?

KN: I guess there was some of them that did.

JL: Do you recall when the uh, uh, ... people ... the boarders used to come down in the summer time?

KN: Yeah, yeah, used to come down on the old Emma Giles.

JL: Did you ever ride yourself on the Emma Giles?

KN: One time. (Unintelligible) went to Annapolis ... that was a big trip.

JL: Can you recall how many passengers you thought the Emma Giles would have carried?

KN: Oh, I guess it would carry a couple hundred. Then, of course, freight and stuff. But I really ... it was kind of ahead of my time.

JL: OK, do you recall the showboat coming into Galesville?

KN: Yeah, yeah.

JL: Could you tell me what your recollection of it is?

KN: Well, that was big time, too. It was up there a good week and you got up there every night you could, every night you could afford it.

JL: Every night they had a different show?

KN: Yeah, yeah ... yeah cause I know I'd go up two, three times a week.

JL: What type of shows did they have?

KN: Oh, just some kind of vaudeville and you know, I don't even remember what they were, but they always had shows and I guess the biggest thing was with us, they had a box of candy with a prize in it. And I guess most of the people went up there to get one of them.

JL: Oh, well what would be a prize in one of the boxes of candy? Could you recall?

KN: No ... uh ... I don't remember what was in them, I do, all I remember is that they had prizes in them. But, I think that some of them was fairly good.

JL: Oh, that's interesting. That's interesting. And the boat used to stay for about a week then, the showboat?

KN: Yeah, it would generally stay a week.

JL: You wouldn't recall from what area the showboat came?

KN: No, it would come in the Bay and then it would go to Galesville and then I think it went to Annapolis and it hit all different places and then I guess then it went back on the Eastern shore, I don't know. ...But I know it would hit different places up and down Western shore.

JL: How many people do you think that they could seat on the showboat when it came and would put a show on?

KN: They could seat quite a few. I guess a couple hundred. It was a pretty big boat. I think the scow was big. I guess a hundred feet long.

JL: Could you recall how much it would cost to go to a show on the showboat?

KN: That I don't remember, but I think it was around maybe 40, 50 cents. (laughter)

JL: Oh my goodness. Oh my goodness.

KN: It wasn't higher than the movie was.

JL: When you would go to the showboat, would everyone get in their boat and go across to Galesville or ...

KN: No, not all the time. Sometimes drove around in the car, but at that time the roads got a little better, and you could get around on land a little bit better. A lot of times you'd go up in the boat.

JL: Uh, could you tell me what you all used to do, maybe at Halloween?

KN: Uh, we ...

JL: Did you used to play pranks on people?

KN: Yeah ...

JL: What type was that?

A: What they called "rubbin rosin" ... all you'd do is take a long string and shove it up underneath the well board along somebody's house and get off in the bushes and take a rosin and rub it on the string and that would make a hell of a racket. (laughter) And some people didn't like it . Of course, some people didn't care, but, you'd get somebody that, they'd even shoot at you. (laughter)

JL: But nobody was ever hurt?

KN: No. Un uh ...

JL: They just shot at ...

KN: They didn't, they didn't shoot at you, they'd just shoot to scare you off.

JL: Anything else they would do at Halloween?

KN: Well, they always had a Halloween party.

JL: Where would they have it?

KN: Like a social at the school house.

JL: At the school ...

KN: At the school house or if they had a hall ... most time everything was held at the school house.

JL: Would they dress up in costumes?

KN: Yeah, some of them would.

JL: Did you ever?

KN: No, I didn't, I never did dress up, I just went as I was.

JL: You just went as you were.

END OF SIDE 1 OF TAPE

JL: Mr. Nieman, when you were a young man and you used to go to the stores out here they had a pot belly stove, some of the stores, didn't they?

KN: Oh, all of them, yeah.

JL: And some of the men would sit around the pot belly stove and talk? (Laughter)

KN: Every night.

JL: Could you imagine maybe, could you uh ... uh ... think of something in particular they talked about or some story that you could tell me?

KN: No, not really, I mean it's just whatever happened that day, they'd discuss it.

JL: They would? Would they sit there and catch oysters and fish?

KN: Oh yeah, well that was about the biggest topic, oystering. How much you, how many you caught, what the price was, price was a big thing cause everybody might get a little different and everybody wanted to get the big, top dollar, if he could.

JL: Would you mind telling me when you had your very first boat, what was the name of your very first boat?

KN: Oh it didn't have a name on it, just, just had the Coast Guard numbers and that was it.

JL: I see. Now I would like to talk about your boat building business. You told me that you worked for a gentlemen as an apprentice for six years and then did you start your boat building business here in Shady Side?

KN: Yeah.

JL: On this property?

KN: No, it was started over to my fathers

JL: What year would you say that was?

KN: Uh ... '47, I think it was '47. My brother and I, well two or three brothers we all worked over there for, oh, three or four years until I bought this place and then I branched off to myself.

JL: I see. Would you mind telling me, excuse me, would you mind telling me when you were born, Mr. Nieman?

KN: When I was born?

JL: Yes sir.

KN: 31st of December, 1912.

JL: 1912. OK. At what age did you start boat building business on your own?

KN: Damn, I don't remember now. I'd have to figure back. (laughter).

JL: But, ok, you started your boat building business here, then, on your own?

KN: On my own, yeah, uh huh, that was in '51. So you would have to go from 1912 up to '51 to get that.

JL: And then you started alone. Did you have any helpers?

KN: Uh, yeah, I had people working for me. I had, I say, as much as eight people at one time.

JL: Uh, would you know who some of them, gentlemen were?

KN: Yeah, a boy called T-Lee Wilde, there was a James Atwell, Smith Lee, uh. . .Cottie (Carter?) Phipps, and I had a couple colored fellows that done bottom work, stuff like that on the railway ... Courtney Denny.

JL: The very first boat you built here, who did you build it for, Do you recall?

KN: I don't, I don't. I don't remember. Uh ... I believe it was for a fellow in Baltimore and I can't even think of the man's name.

JL: Was it a pleasure boat or a working boat?

KN: Yeah, it ... no it was a pleasure boat, in fact most all of them were pleasure boats.

JL: OK on the very first boat you built, do you recall what size boat it was?

KN: Yeah, she was 36 feet.

JL: And ...

KN: And she was just for, strictly for his own private use.

JL: And how long did it take you to build this boat?

KN: Well, it's hard to say. We generally ... generally wound up about, anywhere from seven hundred to a thousand hours in a boat, depending on how much, you know, how much they want to get done on it.

JL: Would ... the boats that you built you say the majority of them were pleasure boats?

KN: Yeah.

JL: But you did build some work boats as well?

KN: Yeah, I built work boats, but ... uh ... at that time people just couldn't afford a work boat, wasn't making ... they wasn't making much money out there.

JL: Could you tell me what type of wood work boats were made from?

KN: Well, oak and white cedar, mainly. Some of our ... mainly white oak and white cedar.

JL: Could you tell me where the, what area the wood came from?

KN: Yeah, the white oak came from local, Jim Johnson up here in Highlands cut it and he had a saw mill and he sawed it.

JL: And the pleasure boats, what were they made of? What type of wood?

KN: That's it.

JL: The same type of wood?

KN: Same thing, uh huh.

JL: Same type of wood?

KN: Yeah, used the same thing in all of them.

JL: I understand you are still building boats?

KN: I still, yeah I just got one half built in the shop now.

JL: Could you take a guess how many boats you have actually built?

KN: I guess around 40.

JL: Around 40.

KN: I would say around that, yeah.

JL: And were they built to people's specifications or did you build the boat from plans from your head and then sell them the boat?

KN: No, most of the time I'd draw up a rough sketch and work from it and they'd just give me the length, the width, whatever they wanted.

JL: But you had the blueprint, so to speak, in your head?

KN: Yeah, I drew it up, I drew it up on, most the time on a piece of plywood so it wouldn't get wrinkled up and I'd use the measurements from that. I'd draw it out ... the profile and if they liked it, then we'd work from that. If they didn't like it, I'd draw another one.

JL: Mr. Nieman, have you kept any of these pieces of wood?

KN: I doubt it. I might find one or two, maybe, but I doubt it. For one thing, a piece of plywood sits around, somebody's going to use it.

JL: I see. When you first started building boats then, uh ... you were using ... uh ... hand tools as well as power tools, or was it just all power tools?

KN: No, used hand tools, then, you can't get by without some hand tools.

JL: Could you tell me a little bit about building a boat, I don't know it, I would be interested if you could tell me.

KN: Well, the first thing you got to do is get, lay the keel off. Then you get that cut to the shape you want and your stem and stern and you set that up. Then you got to cut frames and each one is a different shape. And you got to outline them on the drawing just how much curve goes in each frame and you saw them out. And you cut your chine and your center. And then you go from there and when, once you get them all lined up then you start the planking on it.

JL: But how would it, how long would it take you to build a boat, let's, I don't know what size length, you ... you ... would you like to give me a length and tell me how long it would take to build that boat?

KN: Well, a 40 foot boat, 12 foot wide with a working cabin on it, you run about 900, well then it would run a little more than that cause using monnel nails you got to drill for, so that adds another couple hundred hours onto it, but just ordinary nailing, about 800 to 1,000 hours and then with the monnel nails it would run you another two or three hundred hours more.

JL: Do you think that the very first boat that you built is still in existence and being used?

KN: The very first one? No, I doubt it. I doubt it very much.

JL: But if you are still building boats, there are a lot of boats now that you built that are in use.

KN: Yeah.

JL: Could you tell me ... uh ... who has some of these boats?

KN: No, I really don't know because I haven't seen any of them in years, but I know there's some still useable. But the big disadvantage was when we first started, you had to use galvanized, and then after twenty or twenty-five years, the galvanized nails got soft, ... And the result is you start them to rot and the boat wouldn't last as long, today the ... a boat will last much longer than it used to, it's just one of them things.

JL: Do you still have people help you build boats, Mr. Nieman?

KN: No.

JL: You do it alone?

KN: What I do, I do by myself. I just got out of the boat building business, it was too much of a hassle for what you got into it, you didn't make a whole lot.

JL: When did you stop, actually stop, so to speak?

KN: Well, really, I stopped the majority of boat work around in the first part of the '60's because I could go clamming and make a lot more money.

JL: Do you still do clamming?

KN: No, clamming died, dead too. (Laughter) Everything's dead.

JL: Why do you think it is, Mr. Nieman?

KN: Now that's a political problem. The big problem is chemical companies. Stuff washed in the Bay and settles on the bottom and kills stuff ... and I don't know what the hell you're going to have to do about it.

JL: They've killed the oysters.

KN: Well, the, they killing it because the rivers and things is where you get all the spawning from and the bottom's so bad they just don't get a spawn. And if you don't get a spawn, you don't get no oysters. Now the clam, they'll spawn and come back, but you're getting about half size and then they all die again.

JL: Did you ever do any eeling?

KN: Yeah. Done some.

JL: Now, I don't know anything about that. Could you tell me about it?

KN: Well ...

JL: How do you catch them?

KN: You make a eel pot and then you bait it with, well crab, clams, old horseshoe crabs and stuff like that. And you catch some, there's not that many now, but I guess about '72 to 3, there was a lot of eels and I think what drew them up there was a rush of fresh water we had from that storm. Man, there was one fellow came up here from down in Southern Maryland and he was catching a thousand pounds a day. That's a lot of eels, in fact he caught two thousand pounds two, three, times.

JL: Was that, that wasn't a fellow from Shady Side

KN: No, no...

JL: He was from some other ...

KN: The most I ever caught was about a thousand pounds. I caught that a few times, but I would catch anywheres from 250 to 500 pound most every day.

JL: And then who would you sell the eels to?

KN: Uh, Robochek, down in Virginia was buying them to start off with. And then a fellow from up here at Rock Hall, name of Edwards, he started coming around in a truck and picking them up and we ... I worked with him for a couple winters, a couple summers until they got so scarce I just give it up. You can catch a few out there now, but it ain't nothing like it used to be.

JL: I mean, Mr. Nieman, this sounds like a dumb question, but what did they do with the eels, do the people eat them?

KN: No. They didn't eat them here. He used to ship them all live, clean over into Germany, Ireland, England and that's where they went.

JL: And people ate them?

KN: Yes sir. They wanted them, but they wanted them alive.

JL: But the people around here never ate them.

KN: No, they never ate them, they didn't want them. Oh, there'd be somebody might skin one once in a while and cook it, but ... nobody want an eel.

JL: OK. Let's go back to your boat building business. That, that to me is very, very interesting. Uh. .anything else you can tell me about your boat building. . . that you would like to tell me.. .without any ... me asking you any questions?

KN: Well, there ain't a whole lot, I mean to me, it's just a job, somebody else might be real interested.

JL: But you liked it Mr. Nieman.

KN: Oh yeah, I'd rather do that than house work.

JL: Well. . . (laughter)

KN: I just had a choice. But ... uh ... no I always liked build boats and I like change the style of them and try to get something to look pretty good.

JL: When you built work boats, what type of work boats were they? I mean was there ... uh ... uh ... called a deadrise or what ... what ...

KN: Well, I guess when you come down to it, they all of them is deadrise, because that's what a deadrise is, it's in the bow of it. Now Uncle Perry used to build a boat with a kind of a tuck stern, the stern set out of the water, and it was for tonging oysters the best type built boat there ever was. But ... uh ... just ordinary running, they didn't go very fast, because they'd pull down pretty bad in the stern, but for oystering you couldn't beat them.

JL: Well, I bet you the very first boat you ever built you were just as proud as you could be that you built it by yourself.

KN: I suppose so, cause to tell you the truth, I never built one totally by myself, my brothers always helped me, but ... uh ...

JL: But it'd still make you proud, whether your brother helped you ...

KN: Oh yeah, yeah, it was ... uh ... something that I had done myself.

JL: Well, when you built these boats for people and it took you so long to build them, I'm sure you almost hated to see them go after you took so long in building them.

KN: Well, the only good part about it was when you got it finished, then you got finished paying for it.

JL: Well, that's true too. That's true too.

KN: You just had to let it go.

JL: Well, of course, of course. Was there any specific kind of boat you liked to build best of all?

KN: No, I guess really the 40 foot working boat would be as simple to build as any, because you didn't have a whole lot of cabin to bother with, I mean it's a pretty small cabin for shelter, and it was a whole lot less trouble. So I guess the work boat was really the best, but even though it wasn't many of them sold because it's a lot of time and money involved and when you're not making much money, you just can't afford it.

JL: You just don't recall any of the people around here who would have any of your boats?

KN: Well, Norm ... uh ... Donald Sheckelles has one. He's Mrs. Nowell's son—in—law and Doug Hinton and Steve Trott, they have one that I built, not here, but I built that over to the old, my father's place. I built it for Louie Wilde. And that one was built in the '47 so she is got a little age on her.

JL: But it's probably still a good boat then if they had her all these years. You must have been a very, very good boat builder.

KN: She didn't wood shave neither.

JL: Well it, sometimes it doesn't matter whether a guy builds a boat real good or not, the people that own it have to take care of it.

KN: Oh, they do, yeah, if they don't take care of it, then it ain't going to stay good long.

JL: Mr. Nieman, could you tell me a little bit about ... uh ... oyster tongs ... I mean oyster shaft making?

KN: Well, I can't tell you a whole lot, I'll tell you what I do know ... Great grandfather, far as I know, made tong shafts.

JL: In Shady Side?

KN: In Shady Side.

JL: Ah. .do you know where in Shady Side he did it?

KN They lived down, you know where Lerch Crandell, I guess you wasn't down this way ... that's where they lived, in that house. And, after he got, I guess too old to fool with them, then my uncle, his son-in-law, Uncle Jimmy Atwell, he made them.

JL: What was your great grandfather's name? His last name?

KN: Rogers ... And, of course, after he stopped my uncle took it up, well he made them for, you know, 20, 25, 30 years and when he gave it up, then my uncle, my ... Leonard Rogers, that's my mother's brother, and he made them until he died in '39 ... uh ... '49, I think it was 49 around that time. And, wasn't nobody else to take it up, so I took it up, and I made them for about 10 years until the lumber got so bad you just couldn't get the lumber. And now nobody over here makes anymore.

JL: So when your great grandfather started building them here, he probably ... how did he build them just for local people here in then the word spread that they were good?

KN: No, he just build them local because there was no way to get them anywheres else. Maybe people from Annapolis could run down the boat and get them or Deale, you know local ... uh ... Galesville and places like that. But Uncle Jimmy used to sell them Eastern shore a lot. But he used to send them over on a boat that used to go over there and buy oysters and he'd take shafts over ... and, hell, when I started, I was even selling them in Delaware.

JL: How long were the shafts?

KN: Well, up to 30 feet was the longest I ever made. (laughter) That's a lot of wood to be shoving up and down in the water.

JL: Could you please tell me how you went about making them, Mr. Nieman? I mean what type, what type wood, for beginners?

KN: To start with, you got to get yellow pine, what we call Georgia pine. You had to go to Baltimore and pick out a load and they sawed it up in boards and if you got a good load, you made some good tong shafts. If you got a bad load, you lost money. And it got to the point, to the end, where I was getting more bad loads than I was good ones.

JL: How many years did you make tongs? I mean the shafts?

KN: About ... about 10 years. Until I just couldn't get anything to make them out of. I could make some money right now if I could get the lumber.

JL: Could you tell me exactly how you made them?

KN: Well, yeah, well you ... you got a good three inches in the pin tapering off to an inch and a quarter down the end. You rip them out and then you run them on a joiner, shape em, get them down to size, then you take a hand plane and finish them up. And you'd do more work with the hand plane than you do with the power ones. It's just one of them things where you got to get them smooth, you can't leave rough edges, and you can't cut them too small cause then they'll be too limber, so it's a real ticklish business.

JL: How long would it take you to build a set of shafts?

KN: Well, take 22's for instance, I could make four pair in a day, that is; if I just kept right at it and if I got interrupted I wouldn't make more than a couple - two or three.

JL: How many pairs, and they were in pairs?

KN: Yeah, it was two shafts to a pair.

JL: How many pairs would you say you have made?

KN: Good Lord, I made, I wouldn't have the slightest idea. Uh ... I expect in one season I could make a hundred. Cause I'd start in September, well, I'd start in August, because a lot of people would want them for the first of September and I'd start in August making them up and I'd go right on through the whole winter.

JL: Did your uncle teach you this trade, or did ...

KN: No.

JL: Will you tell me how you learned?

KN: Just by taking a shaft and making one like it. No, nobody showed you nothing.

JL: And that you did in your head too?

KN: Yeah, well, when you tape another shaft where you got something to work with and you get your distance from your pin to the bottom, cause that's important, and then when you go from there up to the top and you taper it down, you got to have it tapered just right. And it's a whole lot work to it.

JL: Do you think that any of your shafts are still in use?

KN: I wouldn't doubt it. I expect they are. Because a good tong shaft will last a long time, and my father's got some over there that he's had ... I guess they was made back in the '40's and he's got three pair over there, still in use, I mean that could be used. In fact I'm going to get a pair of them and cut them down for little boy.

JL: Well, now that's, that's very interesting. I'm glad that I asked you about that.

Kn: Well see, the tong shafts, if you got longs one,s 90% of the time you can cut off and shorten them, if they get so they ain't no good long. You never throw them away.

JL: Never throw them away?

KN: The only time you throw them away when it's broke up ... You just keep cutting them down till, well 18's about as short as you go.

JL: They don't really used too many hand tongs now-a- days do they?

A: Not over here, don't use, well South River you can go up there and two, three little bars, if you don't get too many up there, you can make something out of it. But Eastern shore, there's a lot, there's a lot over there. And, I could always sell a lot of shafts over there.

JL: Do you still make them Mr. Nieman?

KN: No, couldn't, had to stop because lumber got so bad, in fact the ones that's making them are using fir and that ain't much count. Not for ___ tong shafts.

JL: They won't last very long?

KN: They break easy and they get limber, you just bend those damn things. A pair of shafts today cost \$6.00 a foot, where, when I was making them, they were 50 cents ... So that's the difference.

JL: Indeed it is a difference. So what you were making them from was a lot better.

KN: Oh, it was good lumber, yeah, it was good. I always had people come from the Eastern shore wanting my shafts cause they was better than what they could get over there.

JL: Well they're probably sorry you went out of business then.

KN: Oh they was, yeah. But, there was nothing I could do about it, I just couldn't get the lumber. The places used to supply most of it for ... uh ... uh; Louis Smith in Baltimore burned down. It was down in Louisiana and when the mill burned down, they went out of business. They just stopped. So, yellow good yellow pine is just about non-existent. You can get some yellow pine, but it ain't not good, not for that.

JL: It's not good for the purpose you need to have it for.

KN: Yeah, yeah. So, it's just one of them things.

JL: So you, you were building tongs ... uh ... I mean shafts at the same time you were building boats?

KN: Yeah, yeah.

JL: When your great grandfather started building em ... Did you know your great grandfather?

KN: No, no, I didn't.

JL: You wouldn't have any idea of what he would have charged for a pair of em?

KN: No, would have no idea, fact I don't even know what my great uncles charged.

JL: Mr. Neiman, is there anything that your parents or your great ... great grandparents told you about Shady Side when you were little that you would like to share with us? Did they say it was a nice place to live or something in particular?

KN: Well you know how it is, they always would come back home, but no really I guess they just took everything for granted, lived here, liked it, and that was it; but I mean, far as anything outstanding there just wasn't anything outstanding.

JL: It's just a nice place to live.

KN: It's just everyday the same thing, pretty much except for the weather. (Laughter) You couldn't control that.

JL: Boy that's true, that's true.

KN: But no, I don't know a thing. I didn't grow up with anything that really I thought was unusual.

JL: Other than to say that Shady Side was a nice safe place to live.

KN: Yeah. They always wanted to come back anyway, you'd never stayed away long.

JL: OK, thank you Mr. Neiman, we appreciate it very much.

KN: Oh, I'm glad you did.

JL: Thank you

END OF TAPE