

**Oral History Interview 2013.106**

**Date of Interview: October 28, 2013**

**Interviewee: Robert Howes III (RH) and Julia Howes (JH)**

**Interviewer: Ann Sparrough (AS)**

AS: This is an oral history of Rob and Julia Howes, October 28, 2013, at the Captain Avery Museum. The interviewer is Ann Sparrough. What would you like me to call you? Rob and Julia?

RH: That's fine. That works.

AS: Okay. I would like to get some demographic information. Rob, were you born in Shady Side?

RH: Yes.

AS: And when were you born?

RH: February 22, in 1984.

AS: Julia, how about you?

JH: I was actually born in Clinton, Maryland, but shortly after that, when I was one or two, I moved to Shady Side.

AS: And when were you born?

JH: June 26, 1987.

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AS: And were you less than one year old when you moved here?

JH: Yes.

AS: Your parents moved here.

JH: (nods) Uh-huh. [Yes.]

AS: And where did you live in Shady Side, Rob?

RH: I was born and raised, and lived in Avalon Shores, forever.

AS: Do you live in your family house?

RH: I now live ...Yes.... We got married and moved, and came back and [we] now live in the house that I grew up in.

AS: Isn't that wonderful!

RH: Yes.

AS: And the address is Chestnut Avenue in Avalon Shores?

RH: Yes.

AS: And when you came to Shady Side where did your parents live?

JH: Elm Street in Avalon Shores.

AS: When did you meet? How old were you?

JH: Um ...(thinking)

RH: I guess ...

JH: We were younger when we met. Our parents knew each other, but when we started really hanging around and stuff, I was fourteen and he was sixteen.

AS: And where did you go to school, elementary school?

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RH: I went to Shady Side Elementary. She went to Shady Side Elementary.

JH: Southern Middle, Southern High.

AS: Okay. When did you get married?

JH: August 13, 2005.

AS: And your maiden name is what?

JH: Bennett.

AS: Ok, two “N’s”, two “T’s?”

JH: Uh-huh. [Yes.]

AS: Do both of your families still live here?

RH: Yes, mine is still living in Avalon Shores. They just moved around the corner to where my grandparents lived.

JH: My parents live in Franklin Manor.

AS: You are something of an oddity, in that you’re essentially making your life as a waterman.

RH: Yes. I started when I was thirteen or fourteen I guess, we figured out. I’ve been doing it ever since, really. I’m twenty-nine years old now so it’s something that I’ve always done. [I’ve] never really got away from it. I’ve had other jobs [at] other places. I was never able to totally quit doing it. Even now, we do it full-time, more or less, and I still work at a regular job.

AS: Whom did you start working on the water with?

RH: I guess my grandfather was [the first] really. I would meet up with him. He would pick me up in the morning when I was a kid. I would go. I never really got paid for it or anything like that. I wanted to be

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there. So we always went and did it...me and my cousin. He lived with my grandfather so he worked on the boat more or less with him every day. And then I would get to go anytime that I could. Then I guess from there, I kind of started doing a little bit on my own and my dad actually ended up getting a license.

Shortly after that, I started crabbing for myself. [I] started out with 50 crab pots the first year, in a little boat. I was probably about 14 years old then. I pulled everything by hand. And the next year after that did it over again. I did it with a little more crab pots. The third year that I was doing it I ended up getting a bigger boat. And kind of just went from there. [I] just worked my way up.

AS: What was your grandfather's name?

RH: His name was Robert Howes, same as mine. I'm actually the third.

AS: And your father's name was Robert Howes?

RH: Robert Howes, he's a junior and I'm the third. My father worked with my grandfather but never really did it full-time for himself. Maybe a little bit during the summertime and things like that. It's been in the family for a long time. My uncles and cousins still do it. So it's just a family thing. I guess it's in our genes. We've got to do it, I can't get away from it. She'll try to get me away from it but it ain't going to happen. She gave up on that awhile ago. (everyone laughs)

AS: Did your grandfather have his own boat?

RH: Yeah. He had his own boat. He did everything, he fished. I think that he even oystered for awhile. That was before me, but he lived here his whole life, from Deale to Shady Side, it's all the same. That's where he has been. I still have family in Deale that work on the water now.

AS: And did your father have his own boat?

RH: No, he never did. He would work with my grandfather. I don't think that he ever really did it full-time anyway, as a full-time thing. He would help them. It was a family thing. There were a lot of kids in that family, so they all did their part, I guess.

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AS: Do you have brothers and sisters?

RH: I have one brother and one sister.

AS: Did they follow the water at all?

RH: They don't. My brother does it some, a little bit, in the summertime, but he doesn't depend on it. He's never been that into it, I guess.

AS: Do you do anything other than crab?

RH: I do do a little bit of fishing in the wintertime. I guess we get excited about it [around] April first. [We] can't wait for crab season to start. And about this time of the year in October we are ready for it to end. [Then we] kind of start thinking about doing some fishing and things like that, hoping to make a little bit of extra money to get through the winter.

AS: And tell me about your days with your other full-time job.

RH: I get up pretty early and I'm at the boat first thing in the morning. And from there I go to my full-time job. I'm usually there by 8:30. I'll be at my "9-5 job" I guess you could call it.

AS: And your "9-5 job" is what?

RH: I do HVAC work. It's a local company; I'm five minutes from work so I'm able to get home, get the crabs put away, put them in the walk-in box, get a shower and dressed for work, and be there by 8:30. And then while I'm gone during the day, she'll take crab orders and things like that. We sell all the crabs ourselves straight from the house. She'll take care of it from there and get them sold.

AS: Okay.

RH: Then we have the weekends.

AS: What do you do on the weekends?

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RH: We get up [early]. I get more time to go crabbing on Saturdays and Sundays. I chose my day off, as far as the State of Maryland goes, [we're] off on Monday so we'd have full days Saturday and Sunday to be able to get as much done as I can. That is basically the days I get most of it done. And on weekdays I'm able to strictly get crab and on Saturday and Sunday I spend a lot of time doing all the crab pots, getting them re-baited, when we have time to wash them and things like that.

AS: Do you bring the crab pots in every day? Or do you just leave them...

RH: They stay out all the time really. Once we put them in, in April, they stay out until we bring them in to get them washed. We get them back out as fast as we can, and they stay out there. Usually we can get two weeks out of them. We hope to get two weeks before we have to start washing them again. A lot of guys wash them on the boat, and I'll do that too but the majority of the year it's better if we bring them in, wash them and then they dry out. The stuff doesn't grow out as fast. If you wash them out there, the growth comes back in faster.

AS: What grows in the crab pots?

RH: You get moss at a certain time of the year. At the spring of the year you actually get a lot of barnacles, and that kind of fades away and then you start getting moss. From there you get some hair that grows on the pots and things like that. But mostly this year we've seen a lot of moss, heavy moss, for the most part of the year. It has to be washed off. [The pots] get so heavy that you can barely pick them up if you let them go. So you have to stay on top of it. And they don't catch as well once they start to grow inside. There is a lot of work involved in just keeping them clean. This past year seemed to be really bad.

AS: Does it have anything to do with the salinity of the Bay? Or the lack of rain, or ...?

RH: The water temperature makes a big difference. We see barnacles when the water is a little bit colder and as it gets warmer you start to see all the other things start to grow. So it has a lot just to do with just the temperature I think. Fresh water, salinity and everything, I'm sure that plays a big factor as well.

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AS: Julia, when he comes home with all these crabs, what does your day look like?

JH: I pretty much just answer the phone. When people come by, I bag them up for them. Get them ready for them. We have a few things that we offer as well to go with the crabs, so I get that ready. If they need any paper or mallets or anything like that, we get that ready for them. Mostly, it's just answer the phone, answering questions, and talking to people when they stop by to pick up their order.

AS: How's business?

JH: Pretty good.

AS: Has business been good this summer?

JH: Yes.

RH: Yeah, yeah, I don't think that we could have caught enough crabs this summer, I mean ...

JH: Yeah.

RH: It's definitely one of the slower years. But overall I think that we did fairly well. The prices stayed up higher all this year than it has in the past, as long as I can remember. I've never remembered that our prices weren't as high consistently. Always [during] the holidays and things like that, prices jump up. But this year it seemed that we stayed at one price all year. That was it. So that helped with the lack of crabs, we were able to get a little more from that so that kind of offsets it.

JH: We have a pretty good following. We have our regular costumers that we know who come by once or twice a month. They have their regular order that they want with us. We don't have a website yet but we do have a Facebook page that a lot of people follow. I update [it] every day with what we have available, what our prices are, and people [who] contact us on it ask us questions and place orders. Things like that.

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AS: Do you do soft shells?

RH: We do do soft shells, but not a lot. I only deal with what I catch. So some days it may only be a dozen peelers that we keep in a tank in the backyard. We man that all day long as well. She checks it while I'm gone at work, and then I check it [and] take over when I get home. So I check it usually before I go out in the morning and things like that. It's not a lot to do, but it's enough to keep me busy.

AS: And what do you do with soft shells? Once they are soft what do you do?

RH: [When] they get to a point where they are not too soft and before the point when they start to turn papery, [we] get them out of the box and the tank out back, get them out of there. We put them right in the walk-in box where we keep them with all the other crabs. They keep pretty well in there until they get sold.

AS: How long does it take for a crab to grow back its shell?

RH: If we miss one and let it harden in the tank, it can be pretty well hardened up in about a week. [In] a few days it'll be good to go, and in about a week, it will bite you and hurt you. (laughs)

AS: I'm particularly fond of soft shell crabs, myself.

RH: Yeah. (laughs)

AS: What other fish are you catching?

RH: I don't do anything with rockfish or anything like that. Mainly I don't have a license for that right now. But we mainly go gill netting for perch. That's mainly what I do. I do that on the weekends. A couple of times we have done it during the week and we got ourselves into some trouble. We were picking fish until three in the morning, so we could go to work the next day. (laughs)

AS: You get up at 4:30, right?

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RH: Yeah, during the weekdays I'm usually up at 4:30, but during the wintertime I don't have to be up to go crabbing. So we are able to sleep in until about 7am. But we will gill net in the evening times, or during the weekdays. Sometimes when we are doing good we do it, because it's worth it then. Other than that, I maybe would do it on the weekends, and things like that, when I have time for it.

AS: How much does a crab license cost and how often do you have to get one?

RH: We have to pay a fee every year to keep it going. And that price has actually gone up this year. She would know better what that price was. I know that it went up quite a bit this year.

JH: I want to say that it's between \$500-\$600 for the one license because it's now required. It used to be where we just had a little surcharge and you could sell your crabs to the public or take them to market or keep them yourself, you know. [You could do] whatever you wanted to do with them. You paid a \$5 surcharge and that was it. Well now, in order to distribute your crabs you have to be a dealer, which I want to say is \$150. So it's between \$500-\$600 depending on what you want to do with your crabs once you get them. And that's for a 300-pot license. There are higher and lower.

RH: They get much higher than hers.

AS: And it doesn't go up necessarily? For \$600, it would be double and it would be maybe higher than that?

RH: It depends on how much you get into it. If you got the rockfish quota and you've got the crab license with it, the full TFL license, yeah, I think that you can get close to \$1,000 for a license to keep it going. If you've got oystering and all that stuff with it, it gets pretty expensive when you renew it every year. I mean, especially this year when the crabs weren't going as well and it comes time for renewal and...

JH: This is a new thing.

RH: To renew.

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JH: It used to be \$200 every year and it went up quite a bit this year. They added a lot of extra stuff this year.

RH: A lot [of] little fees and things like that. You got to pay to keep in it.

AS: And is it worth it?

RH: To me, yeah.

JH: Yeah.

RH: We definitely make our money during the summertime with the crabs. I mean it's a big help to us. [It] gets us by, for sure. It's part of our lifestyle. Without it I'd have to find some other way of making money, I guess.

AS: Involving the water?

RH: Hopefully. (smiles)

AS: (laughs) Did your father also do something else? For instance, was he only a HVAC? Or something like that?

RH: No, he actually did something completely different. He does bleachers. They travel up and down the East Coast installing bleachers at NASCAR Races and things like that. I just never got into that with him. I never even worked there for a week or anything. We got to travel with him every now and then when we were growing up... I've always been wanting [to be on] the water. And that is always my thing. I don't think that I could ever stay away from it for some reason.

AS: Aside from your grandfather do you remember any of the older watermen?

RH: Yeah. I know that a lot has changed since I've been here and grown up. A lot of the guys that we knew passed away and [others] got to the point where they can't do it anymore. Most of them who I know now, would give anything to be able to go back out, but their bodies won't let them do it anymore. Still to this day I know some of the older guys

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around and you look to them sometimes for advice. The only problem with them getting up in age is when they die, their knowledge dies with them, and you don't have anyone to look to now for advice and little things. You know, we don't make a killing at it so if the boat breaks down and we have to call somebody, usually I'm calling one of them guys. Saying, "Hey, what do you think that the problem is?" Most of the time they either know or they have an old part laying around the yard somewhere that would fit and get me back going again.

AS: Who do you know? Where are they? ...in Shady Side?

RH: One in particular would be Benjamin Dennis. He is an older guy and was really good friends with my grandfather. My grandfather kept his boat at that guy's pier. When I went down there, you know, I remember when he was crabbing, still in business, and they used to sell crabs right at their house. He did oystering, a little bit I think. They used to do a lot of pound netting and things like that. But he's the guy who can go out there and if something is wrong with an old wooden boat he can re-board it, you know. Whatever he had to do, he knew how to do it. Unfortunately they're at a point now where it is probably too late for me to learn all that from him.

AS: Is your boat wood?

RH: No. (smiles) I got away from that too. Actually when I got bigger and bigger boats, I actually went back to a smaller boat because it is just easier, less maintenance, less expense. I can put it on a trailer I'm not at the mercy of a marina to get me in or pull the boat up out of the water, or things like that. I'm a little more independent, I guess, that way.

AS: Do you keep it in the water during ...?

RH: Actually, I keep it in the water all the time. I pull it up, of course, in the wintertime. [I] pull it up and put it on the trailer. [I] definitely do keep it in all summer long. [I] try not to pull it out because when it's out of the water, it's not making money. I keep it at my cousin's house in Deale. So I actually drive down there and go out on Broadwater Creek, which is a very shallow creek. In order to run out of that creek

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I had to get a smaller, flat-bottom boat so I can work out of that creek. I need to be in that creek because I could be crabbing within five minutes of leaving the pier. Anywhere else in West River, it takes a little bit longer to get out to the mouth of the Bay where I can start crabbing with the crab pots. So the way that we got it set up it works for us and I'm able to get crabbing right away, first thing in the morning. Do as many as I can, to get home to go to work...

AS: It is a very long day isn't it?

RH: Yeah. (smiles)

AS: So when you come out of Deale, do you go by the jetty?

RH: No, actually Broadwater Creek is actually before, if you go from water, it is before you get to the jetty in Deale. Rockhold Creek is before you get there. It's kind of in between. It's close to Franklin Manor. So where I come out, it's right alongside there. (daughter makes noise)

AS: What do you see are your biggest challenges of continuing to do this?

RH: Well, the population of the crabs would be one thing. If they keep declining like it has this year, we may be in for trouble in that aspect of it. But as far as I can see, it always runs in a cycle. The crabbing might be down. For this year for instance, crabbing was down, but it was one of the best rockfish seasons. So, I mean, it kind of weighs itself out. It runs in a cycle, it will bounce back I'm sure. It's done it before. I don't really see anything that can stop us from doing it as long the regulations hold up for us from the State of Maryland, [if] they allow us to keep doing it. That would be our only problem. I think the more time that goes on now that they talk about stricter regulations; they talk about making quotas for us, instead of just giving us a go-ahead to catch as much as we can. They may put a quota on us so if we have a good year, catch all our quota early in the season, we may be halfway through the summer. We don't want to see that happening. We want to be able to crab all the way through [the season]. So, I think that the regulations are going to be our biggest setback. In the event that we ever have problems and we can't crab. That would be why.

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AS: How do you feel about the challenges?

JH: Probably the same thing, the regulations and being able to keep going. It is a lot of money for the maintenance of the boat and to keep the boat running, the bait, the licensing, just everyday wear and tear on the boat, on the truck, keeping the equipment at the house, to be able to keep it going. You walk in and see all the stuff that we need to prepare. It is a lot of money to keep all of that going. If they cut back our regulations and we were not able to catch as much, it may not even out in the end.

AS: What about the cleaning up of the Bay and that whole morass?

RH: I think that is a sore subject over and over again. I think that when it comes to that, everybody has got their own opinion. I think overall that the Bay's not any worse to me than it was when I first started. I don't see any major changes. Sure the shore line has changed a lot, the marshes used to stick out a little further into the Bay than what they do now. That's a sure thing. I've seen a lot of erosion. I think, in my personal opinion, one of the biggest problems with the Bay right now is the sewage treatment plants. I think that's...

AS: Which one?

RH: All of them.

AS: All of them?

RH: I think that that's our biggest problem. As long as I have lived in Avalon Shores the same pump station has been there. And when I lived in Avalon Shores when I was a kid, we had about 70 percent less houses. So is that facility still able to keep up with that? Every time we get a certain amount of rainfall, they shut down the ... the guys can't overflow. The reason behind that is that everything that runs off from that and the sewage treatment plant gets overrun and they end up pumping out untreated. I think that that's a big thing, and that those things need to be updated and we need to get away from the fact that we're... it shouldn't even be a possibility for them to be able to

[Type text]

overflow. I mean, that's just beyond me to think that can even happen. I think that's a major thing.

Crabbing near, even crabbing near where the outlet is, you know when you are close to it because the crab pots there get way dirty a lot faster and it enhances the growth on them. Hopefully they are doing their job and it's treated the way that it should be; there are not chemicals and things like that. I've done work in the plant, the one locally, and I don't know but there is just a strong smell of bleach when you're in there. You know that the chemicals are there. Hopefully that is all cleaned up by the time that that goes out. I think that the biggest thing is that they need to be up there or something because I don't think that raw sewage should ever, ever be pumped into the Bay. That's just red flags all over. If any of us were doing that from our house, or our septic were overflowing, the fines that we would get! But they turn around and do it when we get a big rainfall. So I think that's a big downside to what's going on here. [It's] time to update that kind of stuff. Make sure those things aren't happening. But that's my opinion. There are a lot of other things in play that affect the Bay too. There's pollution I'm sure.

AS: As far as you know, is there any movement afoot to upgrade the sewage treatment?

RH: Not that I know of, I haven't heard of anything. I know that there has been discussion on it. I know that I'm not the only one who feels that way. I know that I've heard that from other people. So I think that there is something there but when you talk money and politics and everything else, things move slowly.

AS: Is there anything else about your life and crabbing that you think is interesting that you'd like to talk about?

RH: I don't know. It's what we do every day. It's just life to us. I mean it's nice to be able to do it. And I know that it interests a lot of people. It's kind of nice when people come to the house [to] pick up the crabs. They always want to talk. [They] ask questions and want to know where the crabs are coming from. It's kind of interesting to know how many people don't know where they come from. I mean we get crabs all the time. [People ask] where did you get these crabs from?

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Where? Well, right here, that is where we get them from. You know, we get that question a lot. I mean people are so used to the big crab companies and things like that. The fact is, they get their crabs elsewhere: Louisiana, South Carolina, Florida and Texas, and all the other places we get crabs from to Maryland. A lot of [the out-of-state crabs] are passed off as Maryland crabs.

I think that's one of our issues. People do get used to Louisiana crabs and things like that. A lot of times they are much bigger crabs than we can even catch here in the Chesapeake Bay. We get people who come expecting "swamp dogs" as they call them sometimes when they are selling them in these big places here. They are paying \$110 a dozen or whatever for it. Most of the time those crabs aren't coming from here. We catch big crabs but not enough to compare with what they are getting, you know. I think that's our biggest interest is that people aren't aware of that. They expect that we can do the same as other places. I had a guy come down the other day that was, well, he knew the situation. He said that he could tell the difference. I mean, I've never ate a crab from anywhere that I hadn't caught, you know? We aren't going to go a crab house. We aren't going to go out and buy crabs.

AS: (laughs)

RH: I mean we got them sitting at home. But he was aware of that and he said, "I can tell the difference." He said that he could tell the difference, if it was a Maryland crab or not, he says. So hopefully more people become aware of that, and I hope to see in the future that they find that line and appreciate where they come from. For a lot of people, that may not matter. But I think to people that are big on buying local and things like that, I think that it's a big deal now. They've done a lot of projects. Those [people] were [the] ones [who] tagged all the restaurants and tried to find the one restaurant that only sells Maryland crabs. I think that they played heck finding one that only sells all Maryland crabs, but I think that they found a few.

JH: It's the true blue program.

RH: Yeah, the true blue program.

[Type text]

AS: I think that there were three.

JH: There were three.

RH: Yeah.

AS: That was it?

RH: Yeah, that might be it, I don't know.

JH: Yeah.

RH: It's kind of sad, but at the same time you've got to understand that they have to stay in business. If they don't have enough crabs coming from here, then they've got to get them elsewhere.

JH: Another myth that people don't realize is that they think crabs run from Labor Day to Memorial Day. Our season is really April 1<sup>st</sup> through December 15<sup>th</sup>. So technically, we can crab those [months]. During the October, November and December months, it's kind of scarce. [It's] a little bit harder to find the crabs, but they are still there. We usually run our business April-November. But a lot of people die off after Labor Day. And they're surprised that we are still open. They're surprised that we can still have crabs. But that's certainly something that we try to stress to our local people. You can still get crabs right here for the football game or anything like that you might need. (daughter talking in background)

RH: My grandfather used to say that September 1<sup>st</sup>, or when the kids go back to school, that was the end of it because all crab sales for some reason dropped out when the kids go back to school. I mean all the expenses, people get tied up in other things. The other weekend, we figured that we had a slow weekend in sales at the house so we wrote it off to be the pumpkin patches. Everyone is off to these big pumpkin patches so all that stuff plays there but we are still here, we're still selling. This past weekend I don't think that I could have had enough crabs at the house, so it bounces back and forth. Every weekend's different. It's interesting. It definitely keeps us busy and we meet a lot of different people.

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We don't just get local people coming. We get people from Springfield, Virginia, and I had a guy come from Silver Spring, things like that. I can't imagine how many places that he passed on the way down to us that he could have gotten crabs from. But we kind of got those people set now. They know what they are getting and they come to us. So I mean, bigger than what I thought that we would ever do from the house, we just got. I used to sell to the markets, I used to deal with all that, but we got to the point when I had a good day, the other guys had a good day too. So first come, first serve. You got a truck-load full of crabs and they say, "Well, we only need three bushels now." Because the other guys get there [first] and then I end up trying to sell them myself anyway.

JH: Uh-huh. [Yes.]

RH: So, we just started selling them at the house, about three years ago. I don't think that I'll ever go back to selling them on the market. I don't think that I would need to. We get more money from the house. It is more work, but we get paid for it.

AS: You only have the one child?

RH: The one little girl who is running around like crazy right now. (smiles)

JH: And she helps a lot. She helps.

RH: Yeah.

JH: She helps get the bags ready for us. She sprinkles seasoning on sometimes. [She] talks to the people. They all love seeing her there.

RH: Uh-huh. [Yes.] Everyone has gotten to know her.

AS: When are you going to start taking her out crabbing?

RH: She's been out!

JH: She's been out!

[Type text]

RH: She goes [on] short trips sometimes. She hangs in there for awhile. When people come to the house and they got kids with them picking up the crabs and stuff, she always takes them outside and shows them the crabs in the tank. [She does] things like that. She has a tank and all that, and it's nice to see everybody show an interest. It's not like they don't find it interesting, they still have a lot of interest in what goes on. I just don't think a lot of people [have opportunity to] see it. It's behind the scenes. People don't think that you go out and catch them yourselves, you know. All that work is still there. I think that it's started to be forgotten about. One of the biggest things, I think is interesting, is everybody talks about on one hand, you see in the papers over-harvesting, and things like that, and on the other side you see the historical side of it. There are less and less watermen. So I always find it funny how that evens out. There are less and less watermen, but too many people taking. I always found that interesting, that it could be a problem. But in the end it's how that works out.

AS: How many watermen are actually working this area? Do you know?

JH: I want to say 1,200. There are 1,200 commercial licenses out in Anne Arundel County.

AS: Alone? Wow!

RH: But, I mean a lot of them are not working.

JH: Right. I don't know how many are not working.

RH: Some of those older guys that I talked about earlier, they're not all gone. They're not letting them [their licenses] go, so they still maintain them. They still have them and they may not be working them, but they aren't going to let them go.

JH: They are supposed to update the numbers in February. We have until February to renew our license for this year. With all those increases, we have a feeling that the older generation and people who are not using them will go ahead and turn them in. Because for them to go crabbing once or twice a year just to get their Fourth of July crabs or something like that, they're not going to spend the \$500-\$600 that the

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fees are now. I don't know how many recreational trot liners there are out there, but there're quite a few. The problem is that they don't have to record any of their catch. So we, every day that we go out, we have to write down in a book: this is how many crabs that we caught; males, females, and the sizes, and anything like that. Every day. We have to mail it in. They (recreational crabbers) don't have any controls like that. They have their limit of how many feet that they're allowed. They are supposed to catch one bushel a day and they are not allowed to catch any females. Other than that, they have no clue, you know. That is one of our issues. Why don't they at least send in some kind of report stating how often they crab and how many they caught, or even at the beginning or the end of the year, if they just wrote down a number? Nobody knows how many crabs they catch a year.

RH: To add to that, when you come out of West River or any of these rivers, South River, take notice how many are recreational and how many are commercial in that creek. The commercial guys are way outnumbered. I don't have any problem. Everyone is entitled to be able to go out there. I'm not trying to get them out of there by all means, but there is a big difference there, I think. As far as the State goes, they should know how many or at least have some kind of idea. Even if five out of ten people with a license, with a recreational license, are actually recording it, at least they are getting some kind of idea. Even with the commercial guys, there is always a thing with the reports. Is it totally correct? Is it not? You never know.

The State has scared everybody so bad in the past with "use them or lose them" kind of thing, the buy-backs and things like that, people are afraid not to write down a catch. So there may be guys who aren't even crabbing but they are recording something because they are scared about what might happen in the future from the State. If they [the State] find [that] you aren't using your license, [the assumption is that] you don't need it anymore,[so] give it back. So it's kind of a messed up program, really. When you get that involved with how they do everything with the State of Maryland... I'm sure that there is somebody in there that is trying to do their best to make it fair, make everything work. But what scares us is, with the quota thing or the "use it or lose it" kind of attitude, is what they just did with the rockfish. The guys that weren't using all their quota, or they were leasing their licenses, that was a mess, what they just did. It wasn't

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fair to a lot of people. If I was using her license and catch a rockfish, I was given more quota and she lost hers. So even if she has been paying for the places and maintaining the places all these years, she lost her quota, and I was given more. So even if I was catching her fish for her, she was still making a living off that, she was still counting on that money. A lot of those guys counted on that money, then they got their quotas [and] they lost a lot of their money. So I don't know what they are going to do with the rockfish here. My cousin is big into that. That's how he makes his living. Unfortunately, the way that they want it, they don't want him to take any rockfish from the Bay. [It would be the] same thing if they could do that with the crabs, they will eventually do that too. [The State would say] "No, you guys can't take anything out of here."

AS: It's hard to catch and release crabs.

RH: Yeah, exactly. Hopefully it is not what it comes to. Hopefully they will work with it and figure out a way for it all to work out. And be fair to everybody. But we can only hope.

AS: Just because I happen to be interested in the town of Shady Side, tell me a little bit about Avalon Shores in the '80's.

RH: The '80's.

AS: Yes.

RH: I don't really remember that because I was born in '84.

AS: Well ...

RH: But a lot has changed, a lot changed, definitely a lot has changed. We used to play in the woods down there and now there aren't any. When we were kids we used to run wild down there. It's all houses now. I mean it's changed a lot. A lot of the old beach houses have even been renovated or knocked down. I couldn't imagine seeing an aerial view from then to now, I mean, it's a big difference. My grandmother has pictures of when they lived down here, and when they looked down the street and it was still a gravel road in front of their house. It's not anymore. It's all paved over, it used to be a gravel road in there; you

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could see two or three houses. And now it's all houses all the way around there, so I mean a lot has changed and that's every neighborhood down here. A lot of new developments have come through, a lot of new people, so a lot of the older people have left and gone. I mean my grandparents, they moved down here the late '70's probably, no, the early '70's on my mom's side. They moved down from Pennsylvania and they lived down here, and my mom, right in Avalon Shores.

When I was growing up both of my grandparents lived in the same neighborhood so we didn't have to travel very far for holidays. But a lot changed, even since they were here. They moved to Deep Creek just because my grandmother got tired of living with too many people... had to get away from it all. So they live in the middle of nowhere and they are bored out of their minds now, but a lot changed, a lot. A lot of where we used to see fields are houses, and it doesn't seem to be stopping. It ain't slowing down. A lot of the older people have passed away. I mean where I used to keep my boat where I first started. She's gone. She passed away about five years ago, six years ago and, you know, it was nice having them around because they knew everything about what was here, what went on. You know, I found that interesting, to see how things used to be down here and how's it's changed. It's gone, that little fishing village isn't a little fishing village any more, and that's what Shady Side has always been known as, I think, as that small fishing town, one way in and one way out. [It's] still one way in and one way out but it's a lot different.

AS: When you were a kid, were a lot of people still summer residents only, or were they mostly year-round?

RH: A handful of them were still summer but most of them I guess by that point had retired and moved down here permanently. I think that the lady where I used to keep my boat at, you know, that is how that was. That was their summer home to start and once retirement rolled around that became their permanent home. I can think of a few people who are still around now, and that's how it was. A lot is different... there are people who have gone, new people have come. Their houses have been remodeled and changed and everything. So, yeah, it's hard to even imagine the way that it used to be. We used to ride our bikes around the neighborhood and we knew everybody. I don't have a clue

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who anybody is anymore. That day is gone, come and gone. There are too many people now to even try to remember who everybody was.

AS: Do you think that there is any tension between you running a business out of your home and some of your neighbors?

RH: Yeah, yeah. What we got is a lot of people who come in from the city and they wanted that quiet life down here, that quiet weekend home. And when we go down in the morning and start up our boats and head out, they get that reality check—that, hey, this is still a fishing village sometimes you know. I mean, they got to deal with that. We're here. There have been several issues with guys putting up pound nets and things like that in front of water-front homes that these people have paid a million dollars just to have this house built there and that site has been given to them. You can put that net there. You come to find that they don't really like it, but you walk into their houses and they got pictures of workboats on their mantles, you know, and all the old decoys. It's all for looks. They don't really want to live that life....

I remember when I was right there in Avalon Shores, I kept my boat down there. I had a guy come down and say, "Is there anything that you can do to make that thing quieter because I don't want to get up at 6:30 in the morning every day?" I said, "Well it's as quiet as it's going to get in this lifetime." So you know, he was a nice guy just joking with me, but for him to say something, you kind of understand that not everybody is here for that. But unfortunately, that's here and that's always been here. So they are going to have to deal with it.  
(laughs)

AS: Is there anything else that either of you would like to say?

RH: I think that's about it. You know, it's what we do. It's kind of become our life and she married into it so she's stuck with it now. (laughs) So I think that it's just what we are going to continue to do as long as we can do it. We'll keep going with it.

AS: And is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to do if something happened and you couldn't do it? Not be on the water anymore?

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RH: I don't know. I guess that I'd become more of an angler, weekend warrior or something, if that's what the case was. I guess I never really gave it any thought to not being able to do it. It's kind of our day-to-day life now. It's how we get through, get by. We just got back from out of town this weekend. We got to go to Ocean City for the first time all summer. So doing what we do, we get tied down; we don't get to go nowhere. Our vacations are in the spring and fall not in the summer. So by the time that we get to go to Ocean City, the water is too cold to get in, so we don't want to go near the beach!

But I guess that's just the way that our life has become. It revolves around the water, so I don't want to think about life without it. Really, you know, I think, hopefully, one day my little girl will be able to go right out there and do the same thing. It was probably the best summer job I could have ever gotten. When I got out of school, during middle school and high school, that's what we did. I went back to school richer than any kid that had a grass-cutting job or paper job or anything like that. I was doing pretty good. I was able to buy my own truck when I turned sixteen. I don't regret any bit of it. I mean I never played sports. I never did any of that stuff because that would have gotten in the way of my crabbing. So I think that it's the way it's going to be.

AS: Well, I thank you so much.

RH: No problem.

AS: This has been a very, very, very good interview.

RH: I appreciate it. Hopefully I covered everything that you needed.  
(smiles)

AS: I think so. Thank you.