

DEBORAH PRATT and CLEMENTINE BOYD MACON
Oyster Shucking/Rappahannock River– Jamaica, Virginia

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Date: February 15, 2013
Location: Jamaica, Virginia
Interviewer: Sara Wood
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 1:25
Project: Women, Work & Food in Richmond, Virginia

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Sara Wood: Okay; it is Friday, February 15, 2013. This is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance and I'm here with Clementine Boyd and Deborah Pratt and we're in Urbanna, Virginia. And I'm going to go ahead and start with you Clementine; will you introduce yourself for me?

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Clementine Boyd: My name is Clementine Boyd. I'm a mother of three, two boys and one girl, and 10 grandchildren.

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SW: And for the record will you tell me your birth date?

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CBM: My birthday is July 4, 1955.

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Deborah Pratt: And my name is Deborah Pratt; I'm a mother of three kids, three grandkids and here in Urbanna, Virginia and we are here with Sara Wood from North Carolina, which is a blessing.

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SW: I feel blessed to be here with you both. Will you also Deborah for the record tell me your birth date?

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DP: My date of birth is January 9, 1953.

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SW: So to start I wanted to ask you both; you grew up around here. Could you tell me where exactly you grew up and what that was like and how many siblings you have and just some memories of being in that place?

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DP: Well we grew up here in Jamaica County or Urbanna area and it's – I have six sisters and three brothers. And our parents is now deceased. And also they used to be oyster shuckers.

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SW: And what are your parents' names?

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DP: My mother's is Leah Macon-Bagby and my father is Arthur Macon, Sr.

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SW: And Clementine could you give me the names of all your siblings?

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CBM: My oldest one is James Oakley and my middle son Jermaine Brokenborough and my daughter is Sherry Brokenborough.

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SW: We're just taking a little break here. Tia wants to talk too [Interviewer's note: Tia is Clementine's newest granddaughter. She's sitting in a carrier in the living room with us]. She's like, no one asked me what I thought.

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CBM: I thought you asked me about my children, but anyway my siblings, my oldest one – the oldest one is Deborah and next to Deborah is Joan and then it's me and then it's another one in between us, Rosaline Yvonne Macon and then Arthur Macon, Jr., and Sandy and Sandra – they're twins, a boy and a girl, and Linda, the youngest girl, and my youngest brother Earl Macon and he's deceased.

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SW: And what was the name of the town that you grew up in?

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CBM: The town, Middlesex County. [*Baby Crying*]

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SW: Okay; so Middlesex County, what was life like growing up in Middlesex County?

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CBM: Hmm; it was a little hard but we made it through and like I said, we had lived in a neighborhood where it you know – other parents helped to raise – it took a village to raise, you know, children and that's what we did. My grandparents and all helped out and it was great; it was great.

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SW: And Deborah you said both of your parents were oyster shuckers?

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DP: Yes; my mother and father did shuck oysters and then that's where they found their love was in an oyster house.

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SW: Can you tell that story?

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DP: *[Laughs]* A little bit of it. Well my mother and father shucked oysters in an oyster house and they fell in love in an oyster house. And during that time there was another man that was after my mother and they decided which one would go home and get dressed – first on a Friday – they would take my mother out.

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So my father thought he was slick by keeping his clothes in the car, so he got dressed first and met my mother at her house. And he took her out and that's where they fell in love. So it's

very funny ‘cause they laughed about it and my mom and my dad, they stayed together for many, many years and it was a hard time, very hard time. We as growing up as children we didn’t have what everybody else had. I think I was like about seventeen. We didn’t even have electricity or even a bathroom. And so we used to run a cord from my grandparents’ house to our house to get electricity, so you couldn’t make my cousin and them mad because they would unplug the TV so we couldn’t watch TV. And then sometimes my brother and them would get fighting and then we’d say don’t do that; don’t fight. Then we won’t have TV tonight. And we would beg them and all and they’d get fussing.

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And then as my parents done, my mother used to work for an oyster house also and she worked as a cook at a, like a beer joint trying to make extra money. So during the time my father used to be a fisherman. He used to fish in Cape May, New York [Interview's note: Cape May is in New Jersey] and then in April sometime he would go to Louisiana on a big fish steamer there, so we’d never get much to see our parents – my father really. My mother was always home.

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And mom would go in the woods and cut wood so we could have fire, you know firewood and she did a lot of canning. So this is how I learned how to can because she taught me these things. She taught me how to cook. She taught me how to be a housekeeper and she also showed me how to raise my kids because I had to take care of my sisters and brothers while she was out there working.

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And my motto in life was that I would never shuck oysters. That was my not my goal; I always said I wanted to go to school and do something else. So even though I said that **[Laughs]** it’s like they would come home smelling like oyster mud and I said, “Oh no that’s not for me.”

And then later on in life I decided – I dated this guy and then I left home at the age of 18 and went to New Jersey and I got – I came back and came back home because I didn't like the city and I got married here. And then my husband began to drink a lot because now he's with his friends and so we're on our second child. So I figured well, my sister Clementine, she taught me how to open oysters one night on the back of her doorstep. And then I decided to go to the big oyster house and work there. And my motto was always never say what you ain't going to do because you never know where you're going to be at in life and also I support my kids then.

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So during that time I would go to the oyster house. I had to take my kids to the baby sitters and then I'd get to work at nine o'clock, so they would always call me the *banker girl*. So I'd come in at nine and it took me the longest time to get a gallon of oysters. My first day I made \$1.25. All day long. As time went by these old mens – I call them perverts that wanted to prey on young womens, and at the end of day they would pour the oysters in my bucket after they finished shucking for the day and now I could say I made \$5 with their help. And so the boss man said one day, you know if you make \$25 a week it's always your money. And so Clementine – you can talk to her –

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CBM: Oh it was – like I said it was kind of hard and like I said, most of the time my dad like he's always out of town like maybe six months out of the year back and forth and working on the scallop boat and fishing boat. And my mama, she provided for the family. And then we raised our little gardens and we was out there helping with the garden and helping her with cutting wood and feeding the pigs and *[Laughs]* the chickens and all that good stuff.

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But it was a learning experience. We learned from what we – where we came from and never forget where we came from. And that's what we all as – we ourselves as parents, we instill that in our children you know don't never forget where you come from and don't never – ever let somebody tell you what you cannot do in life, 'cause you can do it. And me, not saying that I'm all that religious but I believe in Jesus Christ, but through God all things are possible. All things are possible.

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SW: I wanted to ask you, you gals if you remember – you said that – is it Clementine (teen) or Clementine (tine)?

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CBM: Clementine (teen).

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SW: Sorry; I've been – Deborah mentioned being on the back porch with you one night when you taught her to shuck oysters. Can you talk about who you learned to shuck from right and if you remember that moment and if you both could talk about if you remember sitting on that back porch teaching Deborah to shuck?

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CBM: Well I remember it well because I remember us going out – I started going out; I was about eighteen years old and my first date [*Laughs*] and my mom told me, she said, "You go out here and get pregnant if you want. You're going to take care of it." I said "Oh my god!" So

anyway I went out and I think I got pregnant at nineteen years old. And that's when I had my oldest son. So I ended up having to go to learn how to shuck oysters, and I learned from my mother and her brother, my uncle – her brother Uncle Esther. And when I first started I had difficulty learning too because learning how to get in the oyster and cutting it with the – done stab your hand but you end up nicking and cutting your hand and stuff like that. Well gradually as I got into it, you still have little cuts and nicks and bruises and stabs in there and then just picked up the pace and picked up the pace. And then I got kind of good at doing it. And then when my sister Deborah came home and her thing is well she will never shuck oysters but don't never say what you'll never do.

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And especially when it's coming to surviving or supporting yourself or your family, and so she wanted to learn how to shuck so I showed her how to do it. So we got a bushel of oysters and went on the back door step that night and I showed her how to get in and just taking the time 'cause you're going to end up sticking your fingers because the knife that we had back then at that time they had what they call a blue steel knife and if you stabbed your hand bad where you had to end up getting a tetanus shot for that you know.

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But she learned and as she gradually got into it and learned and learned, so she picked up better; she picked up better and I picked up better and then you find yourself making \$20, \$30-\$40 a day, or \$100 a day after oysters got better and better. So we used to shuck oysters from off of the Rappahannock, beautiful oysters and we always used to get oysters from Maryland. And the big oysters - at the oyster house that we shucked at it would hold about thirty or forty people, and when the oysters are good on a good day you can make close to \$100, \$200, or \$300 a day.

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SW: That sounds pretty good.

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CBM: But now gradually the oysters – after the years have passed and a lot of the big oyster houses on the Rappahannock, most of the people that owned them they done deceased and passed on. But we have a little small oyster house that maybe holds about six or seven or eight but we still have one oyster house that's large and that is Ruark & Shores [Interview's note: The oyster house is called Shores & Ruark Seafood] in Urbanna on the Rappahannock and they still have the many – a large numbers of people that shuck there. And we get oysters from Louisiana and we used to get Texas oysters and all the Louisiana oysters are so hard but they are pretty big oysters but you made a living off of them.

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SW: I have a whole bunch of questions to go back but since we're on that how are you know you've shucked oysters from all different states. What makes the oysters from the Rappahannock different from say, Louisiana?

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DP: I can say that. When we're talking about different oysters and different species of oysters we always say Rappahannock oysters were the best oysters. First thing, Rappahannock oysters are very easy to get into. Louisiana and Texas and Florida oysters are much harder because the waters are very warm. Here in the state here in Virginia the oysters get cold in the wintertime. It's a different type of temperature that makes the oyster different. And we always say

Rappahannock. Rappahannock is one of the famous oysters. People just love to hear the word Rappahannock oysters. And so in the [19] '80s or something we came down with this disease that started killing our oysters and then we imported oysters from Louisiana and Texas and they are very, very hard.

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And as we were saying, the question is how did we start competing shucking oysters? That was on a Saturday afternoon. Clementine and I had decided we was going to go and take our kids to a soccer game. So we – and then she looked at me and she said you know there's a contest going on in Urbanna, let's go. I said, "We got the kids on the field." We didn't have the first knife or gloves. So we made us some gloves and knife and so we decided to go to this competition in Urbanna. So I had an aunt there and her name was Sara Hammond and she was one of the famous women here in the town of Urbanna that did go to England [Galway, Ireland] and compete.

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Maryland's is International where you have to go compete and if you win there you can go to England [Ireland]. But you have to win state [Virginia] first. So my first year, entering in the state in the competition I won. I was excited! And then this old man at the oyster house he said, "Deborah, why don't you go to Maryland and compete there? I will sharpen your knife and I will buy you new gloves. I know you can beat them womens out there." "Oh no," I said. So that first year that I did go to Maryland and I competed there, I didn't win first. But as time went on and I won International but I never won overall. In order to win to go to England [Ireland] you must win overall, which means you have to beat the man out.

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So it took a long time. I will tell you honey it took me ten years to be number one. That means I had to beat the man in order to enter the International, the world competition. And it has been a lot of fun. I mean I've been to the world [competition] four times. I met people all over the world. Then I ended up with this beautiful photograph that tourists of Virginia [Virginia Tourism Corporation] did and we did that and I went to Canada with this picture and did a promotion for the tourists of Virginia [Virginia Tourist Corporation] and after that we came back and I've been competing and competing and I've been to Boston, Connecticut, and I have even been to Alabama to do *Southern Living* with a portrait that I did. So I had just been traveling and seeing different places and different faces. And to me shucking oysters has become my favorite job.

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I'm also a nurse assistant but I would take shucking oysters over being a nurse's aide because it's a lot of fun. I used to work for Christ Church School with all the kids and they'd get excited. Sometimes I'd have to show them how to open oysters and as you would say that Virginia and Maryland are the only two states that I can think of that open oysters from the lip. Most states further south always open from the hinge. A hinge shucker doesn't shuck a very beautiful oyster because it damage it up so bad, but a person that's shucking from the lip of the oyster has a beautiful clean-cut oyster.

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Sometimes it's tough and sometimes it's not. So Clementine is always on my back, "Cut it clean, cut it clean. Scrape it from the bottom, scrape it from the bottom!" Because I'm very quick about it – that I'm faster than my own self and I can hear her yelling, "Cut it from the bottom, cut it from the bottom!" And presentation means a whole lot when it comes to this competition. It's not just how you open an oyster or how fast you are. You must open it so the

person can eat it with their eyes. They can look at it and know it's a beautiful oyster. A lot of people don't think the idea, they just want to be fast. Presentation and the way that oyster looks that you want that person to eat and a clean-cut oyster, believe it or not will steady still drink water after you had cutting it from the shell. But if you stab it or cut it. And the judges are very tough on this competition. They look for broken shells, grit, and mud, blood and then they penalize you. And there's some people that can't count. They have when they say missing oysters there's oysters that are not placed on half-shell and they must be placed on the shell that it's not sliding off. Sometimes you can't help that. But being in that competition has been a lot of fun and we've met different people.

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CBM: Yes, being in the competition is, it's great and we met a lot of different people in different states and as the years went by I mean when we meet every year in Maryland we asked sisters and brothers, we as a big family and it's wonderful. And then at the time when we – when I first started Deborah went before I did so she said, "Come on sis, you can go on up there. Come on and go up to Maryland with me." I said, "Okay. I'll give it a try." So from that day on when I went the first time that's when I kept gradually going but at the time that's when my mom, when she was still living, she used to go with us all the time. **[Laughs]** Then she tried one year in the amateur and then she kept going and kept going and then it was Deborah and her two kids and my kids, they actually went until they actually got grown and when off to their selves, but sometimes they would come and visit and sometimes they still come.

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But we had been in it so long for so many years and actually to see our kids just grow up and going onto their selves, and then only one we have left that goes with us is my daughter's

son, my grandson. He loves going so he's the only one in the little family gathering that goes with us.

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And now it's been so wonderful. It's just been enjoyable. It just seems like you know a weekend tradition to just go away for that weekend. And then we go to different places like Charlottesville and West Virginia and do a little, you know, gathering like that and little parties and stuff. But the thing about it, it's the idea of going and the excitement and the joy that people get they're actually eating oysters off a half-shell and they just love it, but I don't eat them off – I don't eat them raw, so, ooh. Every now and then I might the Rappahannocks, now when I shuck Rappahannocks and it just got that – I can tell when it's time for me to get some because it's got that Rappahannock oyster smell to it. They got that smell to it and then I might get me a quart or a pint. That's the only time I eat them then and then if I fix them and eat them I cook them single – you know put them in a little batter or fry them single and put a little flour on the batter on it and fry them that way kind of crispy, like that's how I like mine's.

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SW: What is that smell? Can you describe it for someone who doesn't know that smell?

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CBM: It's just almost just like you can smell the freshness of the ocean, the water 'cause I used to go fishing a lot on party boats and go fishing. And one year when I went just that the smell of the water and that's the first time in my life I ever got sea sick. **[Laughs]** Out there on the boat that day we were fishing I got so sick and just the idea – 'cause I had been away from this, you know, I wasn't around it you know so when that time when that season come in it's just a certain

smell to it. So that's how I do when I do the oysters, the Rappahannock oysters when they start getting fat and pretty and just got that smell to it. And normally just that smell to me is almost like I can see how the people, the taste is to the people that eat the raw oysters, you know on the half-shell. And they say they're so good. So that's how the smell is.

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SW: So you will eat the oysters?

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CBM: Yes. The only ones I eat is Rappahannock.

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SW: And Deborah you said you do not eat them. Can you talk about that?

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DP: [Laughs] Excuse me. No, I don't eat oysters and don't have the tempt to eat oysters because you shuck so many of them. And in my heart, oysters are for the oyster lover. I'm an oyster shucker. I love shucking oysters and I enjoy watching people being happy how they enjoy eating oysters. I tried to eat oysters when I was a little girl and it's not my tea. People, I can hear people talking about oyster stew, oyster fritters, or oyster briddles or oysters on the half-shells. Y'all welcome to it. [Coughs] Excuse me and then old mens all will talk about aphrodisiac. You can eat them 'cause it's many times I said to them if that is so true then I ought to have a houseful of mens 'cause if oysters are going to make you that happy I haven't seen one yet. [Laughs]

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But no, I would love to eat oysters. Very little seafood that I do eat. It's very – a lot of seafood have iodine in it and I'm allergic to iodine for one reason that I don't eat any oysters. Certain fish I can only eat, too, so, no.

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SW: Now Clementine you said you were – you fish as well?

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CBM: Yes; I used to years ago this man that we used to shuck oysters for a little small oyster house that held four people and he used to go out with his boat and fish nets and put the nets out over the boat. So he asked me to go out with him one day so I went out with him and god knows I can't swim, but – **[Laughs]** I went out there with him that day and we got – put the nets in. It was fun. I enjoyed doing it. And one year we went out and we went across the river called Tin Cup and he had three nets and when we went out there that morning about five o'clock that morning and what we did – we pulled the nets in and we had a net that almost had over 800 pounds of fish and they was croaker and they were so pretty. And we couldn't just pull it in and pick them and pull it in and pick it. What we had to do – pull the whole net in the boat and put it in the bottom of the boat and then come to shore in order to get them out that way.

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But it's – my dad, like my dad – my dad was a fisherman and it's – everybody in the family practically loved fishing and doing, you know, oystering. Our family was very athletic and everybody in the family did sports and all so it was just – it just was natural – oysters and sports. And we just, that was our thing for the family and all, so yes, I went fishing. I loved going fishing down there.

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SW: Can we talk; I'm interested because you both grew up in Middlesex County and the river seems so integral here. It's just part of life. Can you kind of talk about – I mean – your family made its livelihood you know you talk about your dad fishing and your mom working a couple jobs and she shucked? I mean can you talk about the importance of the river in terms of like making money and having a livelihood, just something you know to support yourself with?

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DP: Yeah; a lot of fishermens that's one of the jobs here in the Middlesex County, Gloucester, Mathews. They do crabs, they oyster. These are the two largest industries here in the county. There is not many other jobs here. And these mens find their way from feeding their family or taking care of their family and then when something goes wrong there is nothing there for these families to have which is a sad time like in the [19]'80s when the disease hit the water. That destroyed a lot of families and they had no jobs, you know.

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But back in the day when we used to shuck oh girl, we used to always wait for the ice storm come so we could get a break and go and stand in the – stand in the welfare or unemployment line and you know we going to get a check, so this is how life was you know back in the [19] '80s. We used to shuck and if an ice storm came in you're still going to get a check because you go to the unemployment and then they're talking about unemployment today is – I mean it's sad but now if they would have been back in the [19] '80s, but then back then you knew how to survive you know. We wasn't going to Hardees and McDonalds. We stayed home and cooked our meals and fed our family. And as today's children are much different because our

family we always had a dinner sitting at the table; we – there was no such thing as sitting in the living room or going to McDonalds every day. We fed our children from the table if it was fish or – I can't say crabs 'cause I didn't do crabs but we did a lot of seafood. And we did a lot of garden 'cause our parents raised their garden and then this is how you ate. And it's just how we are taught to do.

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If a hard time came in today I'm going to make it but the young people behind me can't do it. And this is why we need to turn around and go back and teach our young folks how to cook, how to can, and stop – and you wonder why the kids are so obese today – because they're eating fast-food or junk food. But if they ate like we did you didn't have junk food. You rarely had a cookie unless your parents made a homemade cake and so this is different. And they worrying about the economy. It's sad because if you had to turn around and go back and get the wood stove and get in that kitchen and have them hot biscuits coming out of that oven it would be a very different thing here. But nowadays you know people look at it as sad times and hard times. That's not true. It's because you got to learn how to sacrifice and our kids get everything that's come up in the store. Back then all we had is wood sticks for a gun or playing in the sand or climbing a tree or even using a tree for fruits and vegetables from the garden. And if they went back they wouldn't think that. It's too much – everything is just going crazy now. So we can make it if they knew how to.

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SW: Do you think that because your father – because this project is all about women, work, and food and in terms of your father being gone, you said this – you talked a little about it – this a little bit when we were standing by your car Clementine, but your mother really raised you all

and she was working a couple of jobs herself. Can you talk about the role that she played in both of your lives now and how you know how that's impacted you in terms of your work and your children?

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CBM: Well it impacted my life because my mother was a strong woman. She was a very strong woman. And I miss her dearly and I think about her all the time and we get together sometimes and we be talking about it and say, "Mama said this and you just like your mama and you're acting like your mama." But she plays a major role in our lives. And I thank God for her and I can't say that for a lot of people because some young women and men – boys don't have the mother because today's day they're on drugs and you know the alcoholics and stuff. But I thank God for my mom 'cause she played a major role and from her hard work that's how we learned from her to survive and to raise our children, to care for our kids and her father was a farmer – most likely a home farmer but he worked for the state back in the – way back in the years on the highway. And she learned from him. He taught her so she had four sisters and two – one brother, two brothers and they all learned to do the gardens and raise the pigs and do the chickens and all that stuff. And so seeing how they survived and what they did when they came up, so we kind of follow. See my thing is today our kids and kids before them they are not – we call them not made out of the hard stuff and born out of the hard stuff like we was, because, like Deborah said, we was brought up on the gardens and the fruit trees and stuff like that. But nowadays it's not like that for which it's not bad if you still kind of have some of it but you still have some people that raise gardens and learn how to can from them so that's what we do.

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And back in the time when the hard times came, when the wintertime came mama had all kinds – she had a shelf with tomatoes, corns, you name it. It was canned in jars and stuff. So you didn't have to worry about going out into the stores and some of this food now that we have there's so much chemicals and stuff in it and it's affecting a lot of our children and our adults, so we needs to kind of get back not so much of the chemicals and the poison that we – that is being used in this society now. You know, a lot of kids are getting cancer and Alzheimer's and a lot of – probably because of the chemicals and stuff that are being used today.

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SW: Can you talk a little bit more about – I mean you talked about traveling around and doing the competitions, but I'm curious, do you see – you know you said you never want – you would never shuck and then you said never say never, but can think – I mean oysters in terms of shucking, what – how have the oysters changed your life? I mean if you could imagine a life without oysters how would your lives be different? I mean what have these oysters in a way – what kind of role have they played for both of your lives?

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CBM: Well really because we – we just right in the area. We're home girls, we call it. You know we never really left out of town and went anywhere. And as far as the impact it had on my life, like I said traveling to Maryland every year, going to West Virginia – before I had never went to West Virginia, went to Connecticut last week – a couple weeks ago with Deborah and had never went to Connecticut. It was exciting. And it was a joy and it was a girl thing that Deborah and the sisters and her two daughters – her youngest daughter got the trip together for us and it was enjoyment because Deborah and I, we live closer and the younger sister, Linda she lives closer,

but my other sister, Joan she lives in Fredericksburg. And then we have a sister that lives in New Jersey. Two sisters live in – one lives in New Jersey and one lives in Philly [Philadelphia]. So we don't really get together now like we used to as – when they was closer. But when we used to have family gatherings and stuff like that we all get together.

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But as far as the oysters, doing the oysters, like I said you go to different places and you get to travel for which we never did when we was coming up as children 'cause we never had that.

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DP: And she's talking about what difference does the oysters play in my life. I would say that if I never shucked oysters I would have never left out of the State of Virginia or the United States. Oysters played a great role in my life and I would tell any child on this earth that twenty four oysters took me around the world. That's my motto and one day I will write a book that twenty four oysters took me around the world because if you look at shucking oysters I have many jobs. I do parties. I'm trying to tell these young folks now today is – if you learn to shuck oysters you can always get a job in a restaurant or – and I don't want to put a kid in a bar or something but oysters plays a big role in the bars and the restaurants now, oysters on the half-shell. You'd be surprised how much money you can make. You set your price; they pay you.

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If you want to travel, learn to shuck oysters. And oysters can take you many places. Now like I have a youngest son. He had no job so one day he – I didn't tell him to go shuck oysters. That was not for me to do. I want you to find your way. So one day I was sitting in here and the phone rang, and said, "We reviewed your application," and I got to thinking, whoever someone

have an application in an oyster house? That's something new to me. You just walk in the oyster house and say, "I want to shuck oysters," and they'll put you to work but to have an application, well darn. And I came in and I said to Davila [Redmond, Deborah's youngest son], "They said you got an application to come to work at five o'clock in the morning." Well we always went to work at like four o'clock or five o'clock and sometimes we shucked oysters at two o'clock in the morning and you get home earlier. You got plenty of time in the day to do what you want to do. And we used to shuck for this older man. He liked to hunt, so he would ask us would you come in and shuck early in the morning? And we'd say what time – twelve o'clock, one clock, we was there. And to say that making, shucking oysters, we shucked by the gallon. Oysters is piece-work. And if you don't work or you don't shuck you don't get anything and nobody going to give you nothing. And this is one thing to keep you in mind to make you a stronger person and make you hard to the world because whatever you made that's what you got.

00:34:19

If you went to work at seven o'clock in the morning and you played around, no one is going to give you anything. You have to earn what you make. And this is a true job, that is just what I'm saying that young people need to get back into things and if they want to learn to shuck oysters my sister and I are willing to teach you, show you how to shuck oysters and shucking oysters is your money. You get paid every Friday. If you made twenty-five cents it's yours. And to learn – and my son is so happy now that he learned how to shuck oysters. He shucks a beautiful oyster. Clementine and I both taught him. He started out somewhere else but we had to change his style of shucking 'cause he came in shucking from the hinge and we said, "No man is shucking oysters in here from the hinge." He looked at us like we're crazy.

00:35:09

So then we changed his knife and fixed him up, so I even bought him a new knife in Connecticut, so he can understand this is what you can use to make things better. And he's doing – he almost to be honest with you – he almost beating me but I'm not going to let him know that. **[Laughs]** He's almost catching up with me. He's beating me. I got to shuck extra fast now to get out of his way because he's there. And you know one day I'm hoping that he would take my place and keep the tradition going on because doing – there's not many young folks shucking no more. A few older people and they're dying out, so oysters are going to still go on because men have not made a machine yet to open oysters. They made everything else but not a machine. They made a breaker and you break an oyster you get a lot of shells in there but if you stabbed the oyster and complete the cleaning you have a clean oyster without shells in it. So yes, oysters played a great role in my life because I met many, many people far and near and I'm well known in the county. I don't boast myself about it, I just walk swiftly with it and be happy because God has set this in my mind that he had been my God all over the world because you know there's crazy people out there. So he's always my protection and I get on a plane and fly here, there and everywhere, but twenty-four oysters that took me around the world.

00:36:36

SW: I'm wondering how you both feel about being women and working in this world. Is it hard? Are there are a lot of men? I'm curious as to what that's like for you – if it's even an issue?

00:36:49

CBM: No, not really because back then I mean you – it was more womens in the oyster house than it was mens. And like I said, now we don't have very many people – young people that shuck oysters now and like I said, the oyster industry and the oysters are growing now more and

we was invited about two months back to teach a bunch of older people how to shuck oysters and they was just like little kids and they were excited. And they had their little knives, some were long, some were short and we had to actually stop and take time and help them break their knives and fix them and file them in form and we hope there would be a group of young children that would love to experience to learn how to shuck and like Deborah said we are willing and I'll be glad to help them to teach them how to shuck oysters.

00:37:47

And it's – it's just great. And we just needs more 'cause like I said, the restaurants and all – her son and my son, I think my son he started before her son but they work together in Urbanna, shuckers, and that's where they started learning how to shuck oysters. And they come popping them from the hinges and like I told you earlier, no, no, no; we don't go that way. I said, "Who in the world taught you how to shuck oysters like that?" I was shocked to learn that he was shucking oysters. I said, "Lord, Jermaine!" I said, "Who taught you how to shuck?" I said, "No, no." Then after that after when he kept doing it and once I showed him the way to get in the proper way that we do and now we have both of them back-to-back coming on our back [Laughs]. I think we're going to be outnumbered by them two young mens and as long as they continue to practice and shuck in the competition they're going to beat their mamas. Indeed they are. [Laughs] They going to beat us.

00:38:45

DP: And another thing about you was talking about the oysters and stuff you know, I was just sitting here thinking if there are more young people getting into it, shucking it's not a hard job. It's more easy once you learn how to do it and young people out here today talking about they don't have a job. And this is one – I don't care if you have a criminal record. I don't care if you

been to jail or – if you just learn how to shuck oysters, nobody is going to worry about your record as long as you're not a killer or whatever. But you can, you can get a job. And this is one of the jobs that I know out there that you can go in and make your own, make a living. You can make a good living out there if you know how to value money.

00:39:32

These folks nowadays tell me there's no jobs. There's always a job for any man that wants to learn, I mean all over the world. These oysters go; They go as far as you can see, all over and anybody that wants a job and, you don't even have to be a college-educated – you know people tell me you got to have this and that. If you can't even afford to go to college to be honest with you, those that have been in college sitting behind a desk eight hours a day, if you learn how to shuck oysters can make more than a secretary making in one day sitting down on their rump. But you stand a lot. Your feet might hurt. Your hand might hurt. But you can make a very honest living in shucking oysters.

00:40:22

And like I said you don't even have to go to college and spend all that money there. You know I wish I had gone to college but now I'm okay 'cause I figure I can make it from here. At sixty years I'm happy. I am very happy because God has brought us a long ways. I mean there were times that we didn't have food on our table. I hate to say it but that was a hard time. And in my life I kept saying if I raise kids I hope my kids never want for nothing. And honest to God, I have gave them the best. Not only did I gave them the best there are people out there that helped me along the way. You know if there was not money, there's always a way to get your money. There's always someone there to help you. The only thing you got to learn is how to respect and respect others and people love you. **[Phone Rings]**

00:41:20

SW: I want – I asked this question and Clementine answered it and you mentioned this sort of with talking about the competitions but you know you said that there were lots of men in the competitions and there weren't so many women, so I'm kind of wondering – is being a woman rare for you? Has it ever been rare for you in terms of oyster shucking, in terms of either working or the competitions?

00:41:48

DP: Well most of the time, as you would say being rare about we have more mens than we have womens competing. I been a lot places where there was only one woman or two womens. I don't know if they been intimidated or they're not fast as certain people. But I go against like twenty to thirty mens in the competition where, and I don't let them intimidate me. I go up and do the best I can. You know they'll sit around and wonder who is shucking. I don't say Hi – because everybody knows who I am because someone done told them or they done found me on Facebook or created me in and Googled me in and they know who I am. And the first thing they will try to come up talking about, “Well I know who you are.” And I'll, you know, I'll just laugh about it because I don't just go to say, “Yeah I am the fastest woman,” or “I'm this, that, or the other.” I just go and do what I got to do because I represent the State of Virginia and this is what I carry on my back because I love my little town so much that they loves me and they do whatever they can do to help me when I'm traveling or when I got to do something. They're my great supporters here, even the fans, the people here are great supporters to me, so I always try to carry myself as a lady. Because sometimes I know I'll be swearing and other stuff but I don't argue about it. I take it as a woman and walk away. But I have had a lot of – a lot of fun doing what I'm doing.

00:43:21

SW: Okay. For those of us who don't shuck, can you both tell me how to shuck an oyster? What is the right way to do it? You talk about the lip, so can you sort of – I know this is sound and you can't actually see but can you walk me through shucking an oyster and how you go about doing it if you can explain it?

00:43:40

DP: Okay; the first thing you want to do is make sure that, we prepare ourselves. You have to wear gloves. And on your right hand you have a finger stall on two fingers and you also wear a rubber glove. She wears three [Clementine], I only wear two. And on the right hand you have another inserted glove inside, a latex and then a whole glove. Back in the olden days we never wore latex. So we're wearing latex inside this rubber glove because it keeps your hands from getting wet most of the time and try to keep them dry 'cause back in the day these older folks that shucked so many oysters in the cold, and the oysters are cold, they end up with arthritis in their hands and really your hands does hurt after a period of time if you constantly shuck eight hours a day. You do have cramps in your hand and it will keep you, wake you up at night. So these are some of the bad problems about shucking oysters is you does get arthritis or what else?

00:44:47

And the other thing about shucking, the next thing you would have is a knife. There are two types of knives you can have. You can have a short blade knife or a long blade knife. Mostly it depends on the size of the oysters. And then after that you would try to go into your oysters from three o'clock, six or nine. It depends on the shape of the oyster. The oyster has a back and a front. The back is very rough and the front just looks flat. So you place the oyster on a board or

on a table or a cloth where you have control of it, where you'll stab it so that way you won't stab your hand. So you place one – your left hand on the oyster and you take the right hand and the knife and you'll go in at three, slant of an angle, and you're reaching for the muscle or the gristle piece in there and you swipe it to the left of your big thumb. And if you do it like I said, like if you say "I love you" and cut and scrape it really hard from the bottom you can see the oyster liquor running out and you can pry it open. And then you flip it out again and hold it in your left hand and you cut it to your right. And this is the way you serve out the oysters on a half-shell.

00:46:11

SW: So can you explain the "I love you." Is that like a rhythm you use, "I love you?"

00:46:16

DP: These are some of the secrets you have in you. *[Laughs]* This is one of the secrets that you can have when you go in and you would – you're swiping it real hard. If you do that you go "I love you" with a lift and you tilt it out and then you cut it again and it'll be served on a half-shell. And Clementine might have something better. You know we all have our little scheming games we play, so she might have something else she could tell you about her, how she opens her oysters.

00:46:44

CBM: Well I go about the same way but sometimes it's a certain way – it's sort of like a little rhythm and instead of just kind of push I just tap it a little teeny – just tap and then I go in and just when I go in, once you're in there you're going to – that muscle, you're going to hit that muscle anyway and just when you hit the muscle the oyster will come open a little bit anyway

and you just take your index finger and put it on top of the shell and you turn it over and flip and cut, flip and cut.

00:47:07

But as for people that does it from the hinges, we had tried it, I have tried it a couple times, but you – one of the hinges you pop it and but you got to come all the way back around and turn the oyster all the way around to cut it. But see that is harder and more, putting more work on my wrist when I do that. But so when you go stabbing like six, three, and nine, you always going to go mostly to six ‘cause the muscle like Deborah says is always on your thumb and once you enter, cut; enter, cut. It’s just so easy. Once you get in the habit of doing that it’s so easy and goes so smooth. And then when I first, when we first started shucking oysters I said I wonder why these peoples will be rocking and rocking and shucking and rocking and shucking and rocking. Then all the sudden it just was a movement, just a thing, but some people just stand straight still and shuck, shuck, shuck. But we had a thing that we go just rocking; pick up and shuck, pick up and shuck, and it just gave you a rhythm. So that rhythm to me when I first started doing it and got better and got faster it just sort of gave me a rhythm in my hand and so that’s made you get better and faster, better and faster, better and faster. *[Laughs]*

00:48:09

SW: Do you really move along with that rhythm?

00:48:11

CBM: Yes; shuck, take an oyster, stand and shuck, stand and shuck, uh-hm yes and that’s what we do when we’re doing the competition. But sometimes when I’m doing the competition I try not to do too much of that ‘cause when we shuck the table got to be a certain length, about waist

length but sometimes the table is a little bit too low, so when in the competition, when I do it and the table is too low, my thing I got to bend over, stoop down and bend so I have my move where I can get in. So if it's too short, I mean it's kind of hard 'cause you got to bend over to do it. So the table got to be even with your waist, so –.

00:48:50

SW: I wonder if you both could talk about well, I have to ask you this; who is faster?

00:48:58

CBM: We both are. [*Laughs*]

00:49:01

DP: [*Laughs*]

00:49:03

CBM: We both are put it that way –

00:49:04

DP: We go head to head.

00:49:05

CBM: Head to head.

00:49:07

DP: Yeah; there's good days and there's a bad day so –

00:49:09

CBM: Yeah; sometimes you get finished before I do, but it's okay. The onliest thing about it you know when – our thing is when we go places she kind of – she kind of is scared of me a little bit, you know, but.

00:49:19

DP: Very close.

00:49:20

CBM: When we competing, she kind of gets nervous 'cause she thinks I'm going to beat her but anyway sometimes it's back and forth. She wins; I win. She wins; I win. And it's just there's just a love thing we have for each other. When we get up on the stage and it comes time to shuck, we greet each other with a hug and say, "Take it home," or "bring it home" or – sometimes I say "I'm going to beat you." Boy she – when I tell her I'll beat her that's when she wears me out. *[Laughs]* But it's just a love thing, just something you know on us. And as you asked me earlier about other womens, there is no other womens that want to compete against us. It's just us two have been going for, god it been twelve, thirteen years and don't nobody else want to shuck against us, so –.

00:50:04

DP: No womens want to shuck against us. They think we're the best. It's not that. It's you got to put the challenge there because first thing, even you might be the best anything can happen. Mostly times you worry about breaking your knife and that can be easily done. We don't have knives done turn up in our face and she had a knife to bend in your face and but you got to

continue to you're finished. We're allowed two knives on stage. Even though when you're in the competition. One day I think I broke a knife and I did the dumbest thing in life is I stabbed the knife in the board and I'm wasting time 'cause I got to pull it out, so I don't do that anymore. I lay the knife on the table in case I need it because like I was in Connecticut. I picked up – you know you take two knives and there are knives that you think is your favorite knife. I found out I had the wrong knife so I had to throw that down and pick up the one that I really want because the blade was a little shorter for the oysters that I was using 'cause at that time you don't need that much oyster – knife for these oysters that they're raising today because most of the oysters are raised on reefs or in the river where they don't tumble. So it makes the oyster shells very thin. So it doesn't take a lot of pressure to open that oyster like back in the day where the – the oysters and the lip – the front of the oysters are very hard. Nowadays that oyster will be and people don't understand that you can't go through the hinge with these new oysters that they're raising because the shells are very thin and easy to break. That's the best way to open oysters from the lip because it doesn't take much to get into it and they are very, very brittle.

00:51:47

And they're very shelly and they're in deep color; they're beautiful. They fill the shell out, but nowadays like I said you can't do a lot of pressure or pushing 'cause the shell will break. So now you got to learn how to shuck – to me to shuck all over again because you want to learn the technique of how to open this new oyster. And it doesn't take much. People will be saying that the oysters are no good. They're breaking all up. That's not it. You got to learn how to shuck that oyster. There is no such thing as a bad oyster. There's a bad hand that went to the oyster – just learn how to shuck it with a thin knife or a thin blade. These big blades, knives is not going to get into it. You see a lot of the big oysters people will bring you; "This is what I use." Well

you can't make it with those big blade knives. You got to turn your knife around to be a thin knife, short knife, and a very, very sharp knife is the best way to get in new oysters now.

00:52:43

SW: Do you want to add anything?

00:52:46

CBM: No; just about what she was saying 'cause like I said the shells are very thin and in order to do that you got to have a real sharp knife, thin blade, and not just thick because the thicker your blade is the more you push you're going to be having shells breaking, shells breaking. But the knife got to be like the ones that we fix ourselves. We just you know file them down real smooth. But now the new oysters, most likely has – have at least two nice thin blade oysters for the shell – you know for the shell to be shucked down 'cause they're brittle. The shells are brittle. And most likely there are deep **cut** oysters now that are being grown on the reefs and stuff.

00:53:23

SW: I wanted to ask just so I have this for the record, just some names of some of the – 'cause you were talking when Deborah dropped Davila off you were talking – you said your mom worked in one oyster house and you worked another. Could you give me the names of those houses again?

00:53:41

CBM: Back in the day they was located on the Rappahannock River down there in Waterview, Virginia and the one that I started off with – at was James Orlando Seafood Company and the one across the street not too far was Parker – CK Parker Seafood. So that's where we started at when I first started there, when I first started shucking when my mom taught me.

00:54:07

DP: And we had JW Ferguson Seafood and then you had B & B and then you had – and then you had little people that came out with little oyster houses that only hold like three or four shuckers. We done been there; it's like Roosevelt Winfield –

00:54:32

CBM: James Hugg.

00:54:33

DP: James Hugg, Walton's Seafood, Tony's Seafood, Tony and Sons Seafood, and then you have the other large seafood that is still in – still in there is Ruark & Shores [Interview's note: Shores & Ruark Seafood]. They are the largest one here in the town of Urbanna and then you – MO Marshall Seafood is the small one. So I think I done been in every one except for JW Seafood in Deltaville. That's the only one I have not been in. But all the small ones, yes we've shucked them and night shucking. And the thing to make you a good oyster shucker, back in the day they used to run two shifts. We used to work – especially Christmas, Thanksgiving, and New Year's. They used to have two shifts. We used to come – we used to go in like five in the morning and we was shucking 'til three. We would come home and get the kids dinner and we'd go back at four o'clock. And we're shucking 'til eight. This will make you a good shucker 'cause

you're steady shucking and you're steady shucking. And the oysters was packed and shipped out by tractor trailers back then. Now you don't even see a tractor and trailer shipping out. Back then you saw tractor trailers coming down, they were bringing the oysters in by – from Louisiana and Texas, Mississippi. And I think we had some North Carolina – and we used to shuck oysters of different rivers like the Rappahannock, the James River, Chesapeake Bay, Maryland, Wacom; what was the other one? Those are most of the ones that we usually shuck.

00:56:26

SW: I have a question; why were they bringing in oysters – I mean so this area was big for oysters, like not just Rappahannock oysters but oyster shuckers, people would – could shuck and they'd bring them in from other states to have them actually shucked?

00:56:38

DP: Yes; we brought in extra shuckers, yes they came from other states because we didn't have oysters at that certain time. You know when the harvest time – yeah but now that you're talking about how the oysters are being brought here is now that the government is controlling the water they might can go shuck here in January – January to February and they have to move. They can't just stay in that one spot anymore. And they got certain places to – to drudge or to catch oysters.

00:57:11

Back then they didn't care; they just had the whole river. But now there's twenty to thirty boats in one spot now, they have just claimed that spot. It's not like they're all over the river anymore. So they have – they have certain spots they have to be in and then they'll close them down. So things really have changed.

00:57:30

CBM: And when they close them down and they can't get oysters so they get oysters from like Louisiana and different places – Maryland and like that so – in order to bring them here to have to do their orders and you know to – to continue their business you know during the week. But like I said around here it's seasonal for the Rappahannock, so a certain time they're open and a certain time they're closed, so if they still want more oysters, like I said most likely they will get them from Maryland or Louisiana or something like that.

00:58:01

But now I guess since they got some of these farm-raised oysters they can get some from them, all depends if they want to go that way.

00:58:10

DP: Because first thing they have – we used to shuck oysters from it's like kids go to school. We start in September and they close in June. That's the way they used to, we used to start in September and close in June. And now we start like in October and May – May most likely is when they shut down for the year. One time they used to go all the way the clock around. Some oyster houses still go – very few that still shuck oysters year-round, but the small houses they shut down because the mens go crabbing then.

00:58:41

SW: Oh so I was going to ask you; so you know what do you do when the season is over?

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DP: I'm a nurse assistant. I work at – I work at a nursing home. I work eight hours – I'm a full-time nurse assistant.

00:58:56

SW: So you will – can you explain how you'll go shuck at Walton in the morning and then do a shift over – like you work two jobs?

00:59:02

DP: I work two jobs. **[Laughs]** What I do, I shuck oysters – I come – well I work at night shift. I go in at eleven [PM] and I get off at seven-thirty [AM] and I run home and change and then I go shuck oysters until twelve [noon] or one [PM]. And then I come back home and I catch a nap. Sometimes I'll over-nap. **[Laughs]** Sometimes I wake up and it's five o'clock, I say, "Shoot. I ain't did nothing all day!" You know I wanted to do something in the house but then I just sleep out and nine o'clock [PM] I wake up and then go back. And sometimes I work part-time at a funeral home. I work for Tidewater Funeral Home and you know I'm on-call and when they need me I'll go do that. And then I have a little patient that I take care of, on the weekend I'll swap out if the oyster house is not open. And this is what I do. I take care of patients – home care I does that.

00:59:55

SW: And what do you do at the funeral home Deborah?

00:59:58

DP: Oh my heavens. *[Laughs]* At the funeral home I help get them dressed and then we – I drive the flower wagon to the churches and stuff, or sit there and console the family if they are down heartbroken, so I do that. So I enjoy that. So I help to get the patients – the patients – *[Laughs]*; got patients on my mind. Yeah; I help to do that.

01:00:24

SW: Uh-hm.

01:00:24

DP: And it's just a job. You know it took a while to work at the funeral home because you know everybody is scared of dead people. But then I learned how to understand everything is dead and it's all right. You know they ain't going to bother me and I can't bother them. So it's always a job for everybody – everybody.

01:00:44

SW: Clementine, do you still shuck – do you shuck at the houses around here or – ?

01:00:49

CBM: No; uh-um, I'm off for right now due to an injury to my shoulder. Other than that I would still be shucking yes. And I'm a nurse aide but I'm not doing that right now either because I can't do no heavy lifting.

01:01:03

SW: Did you injure your shoulder by shucking?

01:01:06

CBM: No; janitorial work, uh-hm. Yeah; but then it's always a little something you can always do to pick up. See the thing about it is once you learn to do one thing you always can pick up and learn to do something else 'cause if one thing don't work out and that one fails you always can fall back. And like on oyster shucking there is always going to be our oyster shucking. So it – and then there comes up – or whatever you're doing that – having to close down or whatever we always can go back. Like I say, you never forget where you come from 'cause you always can fall back on something.

01:01:37

So that's another thing about teaching our young kids and telling our young kids is a lot of them looks at the – they love sports and all and sure, you can get a career or go to the NBA you know and all these different places. I heard a young man from our school in our area just signed on with Miami, I think, and he's a great football player and a good basketball player but you got to have your education, these young kids got to have your education nowadays but once you get that goal set that what you want to do but always pick up another trade 'cause if that don't pan out or you're hurt or something then you'll always have something to fall back on and then you still got a job, so. Always. Don't never forget where you come from.

01:02:21

SW: I wonder if we could – both of you talked a little bit about this but I want to know more about the day that your kids were at the soccer game and you guys took off to go compete. Can you tell me more about that day and what happened?

DP: That day that we was at the soccer game –

01:02:37

SW: What year was that?

01:02:40

DP: 1985; I won't forget it. *[Laughs]*

01:02:41

CBM: It was my first year going to Maryland, '85.

01:02:44

DP: 1985 was our first year competing opening oysters. So we left our kids on the soccer field. We asked somebody to watch them 'til we come back from town. And which is crazy leaving your children behind and we fled over to Urbanna. And we got in the competition. Back then you only had to shuck twelve oysters. Twelve oysters, and it was funny. And I was the first one to finish those twelve oysters. And when you compete in state competition then state will send you into Maryland which Urbanna furnished everything to go to Maryland. So we won. And off we went – in October is when their competition in Maryland – so we went up there in Maryland and compete there. We packed up all our kids; it's just like we were going on vacation.

01:03:36

From that day forward we been traveling with our kids every year. They look forward to go to Maryland. They had skate – what is it skateboards and everything. They thought that was the greatest thing in their life and this was our kids' vacation every year in October. We always

went to Maryland I been going to Maryland for twenty – be going on twenty-six years coming up this year.

01:04:01

SW: Is it in Baltimore?

01:04:04

DP: It's in Lexington Park in Maryland, twenty-four – it'll be twenty-six years going there and competing. I think I'm getting too old for it but I'm still going. **[Laughs]** Still going as long as I can win second or first place I will always go.

01:04:21

CBM: 'Cause that's what I been saying about Urbanna, I say I been going there for so long and we don't have no other womens that want to come up here against us. And I said this is getting old.

01:04:30

DP: Just us two compete.

01:04:31

SW: And they're –

01:04:33

CBM: This is getting old and the only thing about it and the funny part, the fun part now picking up on it is that like I said, her son and my son, when they come down there now we gots

to try to get a couple more years on them. So once we get too old then we can let them have it.

[Laughs]

01:04:46

DP: I just said if my – if either one of them beat me I’m going to retire. I told my nephew, I said, “I’ll retire and I will give you my knife,” ‘cause I’m always in Urbanna parade. They won’t let me not be in – I have to be the Honorary. I have been Grand Marshall. To be honest with you I’m the first black woman that ever been a Grand Marshall in the town of Urbanna. I’m the first black woman that ever said – they would call you; they will tell you I am their celebrity. I am whoever I want to be. I put them on the map in 1993 when I first won my first competition in Maryland and I went to England [Galway, Ireland]. I went to England [Galway, Ireland] back-to-back three times. There’s no woman nowhere around or man been to Maryland to the competition three times in a consecutive row. I was the only woman.

01:05:45

Then I went my fourth year to England [Ireland] and I came second in the world. It’s not an easy competition but it’s fun. To be in England [Ireland] the people is very, very nice people. It was like I lived next door. That’s the way they treated me. The kids would run up to me and call me “Miss USA.” They would take me outside and show me – “we want to go to the candy store,” and I followed them and “oh yes; this is the same kind of candy that the United States have.” I have the same thing and the Coke and you know you would think you’d see something different. I had to learn my money because their money is in big paper and exchange. These kids was ripping me off my money ‘cause I would give them my change not knowing that I’m giving them two dollar bills in coins and stuff like that. Those kids loved me and they would wake me up in the morning knocking on my door. One morning you’re talking about “Miss USA, there’s a

bike-a-thon. Do you want to watch it?” And they’d be rubbing me on my arms and stuff. And I’d get to thinking you can’t get that off. That’s a natural bruise; that’s natural. And they were just fun there; it was like we had to go to a ball. And I had to dress up and I dressed up and the only woman that was out there with all these mens. And what make it so bad, I would never tell no one that they rolled out the red carpet and they were soldiers standing on each side to escort me into the building.

01:07:19

Like I told the children that I rode in a limousine. I had soldiers. And then the mens had to walk up to me and bring the United States flag to me. I had to be proud of that because I had to take this flag in this big building and put it in a box, so the mens had to touch it – all the mens, but not a woman. And I have made my heart in it over there. Those people there fell in love with me. They didn’t want me to come back to the states. I had to go home.

01:07:53

But it was just amazing how we had a grand time over there. We toured the country. I saw stuff that I don’t never see. I was walking on the Cliffs of Moher on the rock and this man said, “You better get off before you fall over.” And I tilted my head and looked over, “Yeah I better get off that rock” ‘cause all I saw was water down there. **[Laughs]** And I’ve built – I visited a lot of castles and I visited one castle that they turned into – it used to be a Civil War or something and where they turned it into a private school where kids went to school there. It was beautiful there how they made it into a school for – for all girls and I thought that was really neat.

01:08:39

Things they were just much different, but I had fun. That’s why I said, oysters – anybody can go wherever they want to go. But I found oysters took me where I needed to be.

01:08:51

SW: Do you all – do either of you ever think back and I – I’m just wondering from that moment that you were both sitting on your back porch together and Clementine you taught Deborah how to shuck oysters, like did you – can you even imagine how like that moment changed everything? Do you ever think about that like how that impacted just teaching your sister how to shuck oysters or your – your father and your mother shucking and teaching you? I’m just curious if you guys ever think about that, the impacts of that? It seemed something that was just something you did and you had to teach someone else for their – you know to get by or to make some money but really it kind of took you all over the place in the end?

01:09:33

CBM: Well it impacted me because this is my heart here and I love her. And I’m very proud of her. And I’m glad that she decided she wants to learn how to shuck and then it does my heart joy because she’s the big sister. Daddy always called her Miss Ann [*Laughs*]. So Miss Ann you know she sets a good example on how like for the family that you cannot quit but just keep forward, just going forward. And like she said that oyster took her around the world and different places around the world. And that is showing – instilling in her kids and her grandchildren who come up – that you don’t do one thing and just quit and don’t go on, just continue to move on, and pick up you know – and one day god forbid she still be with us she will leave a legend here for her children and her grandkids and my kids coming up and they can always go back and see what their aunt did and my sister done.

01:10:41

You know it’s – it’s hmm; it’s a joyful thing that she learned that and I’m glad I was here to help her and teach her that. And then I mean we pick on each other sometimes but we just love

each other. I mean we don't – we don't pick on each other in an ugly way. It's just that we love each other and whenever she needs to go somewhere or when she does a job and she be too tired sometimes then she'll call me and she says I need you to go. And I say "Okay, fine." But I do the job and she be keeping that one eye sleep 'cause she's so tired. But it's impacted my life because we are closer. We are – always been close and we – we always will be close and that's how it impacted my life.

01:11:19

DP: Yeah; and I thank – I thank God for her too because I'm one of the person that gets excited about stuff and I'm the one that cuts up and I go – she's quiet going and I be cutting up so bad that I – she protects me. She knows that – she be saying, "Where your knife?" "Oh I don't know." Well she will say, "Did you leave your knives over there?" She'll go get my stuff and bring it to me and she said, "Deborah you can't be doing that." Well I give people my knives or I'm over there teaching somebody that I shouldn't be teaching and she's like my daddy. She be saying, "You can't do that. You can't show them all your tricks, you can't do that." But I would give away my heart. But she's very quiet about that stuff. She's – but I – I show anybody anything because I feel like this. I done gone there; I done – done that. You know and I did one day shows this girl how to do oysters the way I shuck oysters. That girl beat me and I got mad. **[Laughs]** And she looked at me and said, "See what I told you?" "Yeah, right," but I'm up there saying "but" – she's saying "But-nothing Deborah; but-nothing."

01:12:33

But she is one of my great you know – I know it's hard for her sometimes; wherever I go I always include her in helping giving somebody – I'll take her and I will say my sister can come too. I always look out for her. If I got a competition or if I got somebody, a party to do I make

sure that I choose her to go. And this is to help her. Or, if I'm tired, if I – if I went and shucked oysters and it only paid me \$100 I split m,y pot because it's not because it's the money, it's where I went to make somebody happy. So I usually take her and whatever I make I always give her half or you know make sure – because if it wasn't for her getting me there I probably wouldn't have made it there. And sometimes I try to do things by myself. It's dangerous out there. I done gone places and did parties and stuff. Before I'd get home I pull off the side of the road or go to a service station somewhere where I think I'm safe and go to sleep because I never try to make it all the way home. And she's always fussing, "You shouldn't do that, you shouldn't do that," but I always say "God is out there with me." She said "I don't care." **[Laughs]**

01:13:46

She says "That's dangerous; that's dangerous." I went somewhere one night and I woke up and it was like five o'clock in the morning and I was on the road at twelve [midnight] but I always pull off. I said "Well boo you know what? It was raining hard, but when I got on the road there weren't nobody on there but me and God that time." She'll fuss; she'll fuss. But she is my heart; she is one of my greatest of all my sisters and I – you know I love her. There's nothing that can become between us. We might have a spat and we might fuss maybe once in our entire life. We get along and in my heart that I always think of my sisters and brothers, we all should stay together and love one another because we don't have any parents. We don't have – we're not young people and we don't have parents. We don't have grandparents. We don't have no one to fall back on if something went wrong. So I feel as though we need to stick together. We need to help out each other – no matter how – we didn't have much when we came up and we still ain't got it all now but the little bit that we have we need to share. You know you can't take it with you.

01:14:52

And you know I know there's hard times for everybody but we need to pitch in and help one another out when things go wrong. And God loves us for that 'cause it's not the money that makes the world; it's the love that makes the world. Love is the greatest thing that a family needs.

01:15:11

CBM: But you can't say that for a lot of families, so you know some – every-est family that you know the sisters and the brothers are fighting and cursing and getting in sprawls and knocking their mom down and all that stuff, but we never had that in our family. I thank God we didn't and I don't think it's anybody – my baby brother and he always about us being together and getting together and his main thing is loving one another.

01:15:36

And just like I told my three children one time, my two sons got in it one day and I hear all this bumping and thumping through there. And when I walked in there and seen them fighting each other and it hit me so hard, I said, "Let me tell y'all one God-blessed thing right now. If I *ever* see y'all up here fighting again!" – I was angry that day – and I had the broom in my hand, I said, "I will take the broom and I will beat the snot out of the both of you." I said, "You do not fight each other." I said, "And the main thing y'all need to do is to love one another as God says he loves us. We're supposed to love one another." And I said, "Now suppose something had happened to one of y'all and y'all doing sports and going to school and different this and that I said now suppose something had happened to one of y'all and one – and God-forbid and one of y'all had gotten hurt or got killed or died then what? You would have to live with that for the rest of your life that you shouldn't have – I wish I hadn't."

01:16:28

But that's – that's not a place in your heart for that to be in your heart for that. The place in your heart for it is to say "I love you" every day or call each other and say "I love you" or hug each other. But like I said some families are not like that, it's sad but it's true, but as for us we get together and we talk and we love each other. The holidays and stuff like that we'll text and call each other. Even though we are – my oldest brother he lives in Chesterfield, birthday, we text each other or holiday, Happy New Year's and all that kind of stuff, I mean that's what it's all about is to love one another 'cause you got to love one another 'cause if not it's – I mean it's a lot going on now in this world because some places – some people in some places because of lack of love for one another and respect for each other.

01:17:16

SW: I have exhausted all of my questions for the two of you but is there anything else you want to add that you think is important, anything we've talked about that we didn't hit on or anything else that's come to mind?

01:17:31

CBM: Hmm; no.

01:17:34

SW: Just so I get – so what is Jermaine's last name?

01:17:37

CBM: Brokenborough.

01:17:38

SW: Can you spell that?

01:17:39

CBM: B-r-o-k-e-n-b-o-r-o-u-g-h.

01:17:47

SW: And how old is Jermaine right now?

01:17:47

CBM: Hmm; 37 – 37, yes.

01:17:54

SW: And what is Davila's last name?

01:17:55

DP: His is Davila Redmond and he's 31.

01:18:01

SW: And it's R-e-d-m-o-n-d?

01:18:03

DP: Correct.

01:18:05

SW: And the other thing I just want to ask while I have you tape, did you say your aunt competed?

01:18:10

DP: Cousin.

01:18:11

SW: Your cousin and what was her name again?

01:18:12

DP: Sara Hammond.

01:18:15

SW: Is that H-a-m-m-o-n-d?

01:18:17

DP: Yes; it is.

01:18:18

SW: And she's from here as well?

01:18:19

DP: She's from Urbanna, yes.

01:18:21

CBM: She's my mom's first cousin, uh-hm.

01:18:26

SW: Okay; wow. And then what is – so you guys first competed in 1985 and then could you just talk about some of the – you mentioned some of the states you've been to but could you just talk about – just give me a few of the competitions and where they were and the titles that you guys have won?

01:18:44

CBM: Most – mostly it was Urbanna where I got most of my titles as state champion about eleven states. And once we leave – go to Urbanna we go to Maryland but it's kind of awkward. We go to Maryland first and then we do Urbanna, so Maryland is – every third weekend of October and then we do the national in Maryland and then we come back and we do in November, the first weekend in November we do state. So in Maryland I'll say about eight – nine into national for me and – . As far as going to any other just Maryland and Virginia but Miss Pratt got it all. *[Laughs]*

01:19:33

DP: Well as far as me I think I got like eleven in the national, maybe fourteen states. Boston I got one, Connecticut I got two – three – three in Connecticut and I got four in the competition in the World Competition. And I just have many magazines. I've been on TV a lot. I've been in the newspaper numerous and numerous and numerous of times and many stories I did to be told.

01:20:13

SW: When that happens do you get lots of requests for you know – you talked about ‘cause I know you’re at Walton in the – some of the mornings when the – when it’s not windy and it’s in the season but when – when those things happen like you’ll get into a magazine or you’re interviewed or – do you get a lot of – I’m curious in terms of the private parties, are they here locally or do you get them in Richmond or how does that work?

01:20:36

DP: We – as far as the private parties like in West Virginia, Roanoke, Virginia, D.C., Virginia Beach, Newport News, Williamsburg, and here around town in Urbanna just on the side of Kilmarnock, Reedsville, and most of those places are where I go. A lot of them are in Richmond; almost – most of them are in Richmond. Just a few in D.C.. And whoever calls they – and it’s so funny how they look for me. They’ll be saying – they’ll leave messages on my phone like, “Did I reach the home of the oyster shucker Deborah Pratt,” or – and I laugh you know. And then sometimes it takes me a while to get back to people because I’m busy doing something – I come in and I got to sleep and forget to listen to my voice mail. But there’s always a party somewhere that somebody wants – and they will say “I – we’re looking for that famous woman that opens oysters.” And then when I get to parties they will say, “Oh, this is that famous woman?” And so people – some people are in denial at how fast you shuck oysters or someone calls me up and says well we need like four people to shuck. And I ask them for how many people? They say 200-300 and I say, “Excuse me sir, I think you only need two.”

01:22:05

And we go to Virginia, or the Commonwealth of Virginia and we do oysters there for 500 to 600 people. And we two, we can keep up shucking for 600 people. At first I didn’t think so but

my mind fooled me. **[Laughs]** But we can; we can shuck for 600 mens that eat, that really eat oysters. And people will be – they’ll be standing there and people just stare at you just – sometimes they – they will come to eat oysters but then when they find out it’s two women shucking they’ll stand there and they will just stare at you. And they will say, “Oh my god. You’re fast. Oh my god. I like your technique.”

01:22:43

Or they will come around and try to copy off and try to see how you open that oyster. And they will tell you, “Oh I shuck from the hinge,” and I look at the sir and say, “Sir, I’m sorry. I’m not going to change your style but that’s a no-no, you know.” But then they want to know how you shuck oysters. They want to know – see your knives and all that but it – it’s a lot to it. It’s – I would never thought I had been this famous. Really I – really didn’t know that but it is real – it’s a real story, something that I will always remember. And my kids will. My kids are very proud of me. Yeah. They always saying “You waited ‘til we graduate and gone to college and you get to be famous.” **[Laughs]** Yeah; I had to find my way. Y'all was in my way. How could I go somewhere when you’re always here? I need a baby-sitter. I need this, but now God made – blessed me with that. I catch a plane and I fly.

01:23:40

I was dating a guy you know; that’s another thing in life. You have these strikes in life where someone thinks that well you can't do this or you can't do that or – I don’t have a man to tell me what I can't do. I come in and I go and I come in and I go. It would be good to have a companion but you got to be on that same note. You know you got to be with that person. People can change your lives and people can think that you are – you know some people think they’re better than you but that’s not life. A man and a woman should be able to work things together instead of pulling away. You don’t ever think that you’re better than one another. You work it

together and always be peaceful in the home. You always should support each other instead of pulling away. Don't ever think that you are better than one another.

01:24:33

Just 'cause John makes more money than Sally that's – the money doesn't have nothing to do with it. The great thing is love. It's a true love. You know, there's a lot of people that's fake with love. So I can't deal with love like that. If me and God love each other then let it be. If my four kids and I love each other that's all I need and my two little grandkids – two grandkids. You know I would love to have a companion but it's tough out there. You got to find someone that's honestly that's going to be with you – not to pull against you, so I'm all right. **[Laughs]** I'm all right.

01:25:09

SW: Well is there any – is there anything else you guys want to talk about?

01:25:12

CBM: Hmm.

01:25:16

DP: Well we gave you a good story.

01:25:18

SW: I really thank you so much for sitting over here with me. This has been so wonderful. I'm very grateful that you guys both have time to do this today, so – .

01:25:27

DP: Thank you Sara. It was great to have you here.

01:25:31