

JAMES HICKS
Opener, Papa Joe's Oyster Bar & Grill - Apalachicola, FL

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Date: December 4, 2005 & March 24, 2006
Location: Papa Joe's Oyster Bar & Grill – Apalachicola, FL
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 1 hour, 5 minutes
Project: Florida's Forgotten Coast

[Begin James Hicks]

0:00:00.6

Amy Evans: All right, this is Amy Evans on Sunday, December 4th, 2005, and I'm in Apalachicola, Florida, at Papa Joe's Oyster Bar, with Mr. James Hicks. And sir, would you please say your name and your birthday for the record?

0:00:17.8

James Hicks: Uh-hm; my name is James Hicks—born January 29th, 1942.

0:00:24.7

AE: And are you a native of Apalachicola?

0:00:26.0

JH: I'm a native of Apalachicola, born and raised here.

0:00:30.7

AE: How many generations does your family go back in this area?

0:00:34.8

JH: Three generations.

0:00:36.5

AE: And all working the [Apalachicola] bay?

0:00:37.3

JH: All worked in the seafood industry.

0:00:41.5

AE: Can you talk about your—the other people in your family? When they got started, what they were doing, and what that was like?

0:00:47.9

JH: Well when they got started—and they were commercial fishermen, and back in them old days, it was hard times to make it, you know. Just—and as the time progressed it—it got a little better and better and better.

0:01:10.9

AE: And they were just working the bay getting oysters and shrimp?

0:01:13.2

JH: They were working getting oysters, shrimp, crabs, flounders—the whole nine yards.

0:01:20.4

AE: And then your parents, were they fishermen or did they have a—a fish house or oyster house?

0:01:26.0

JH: My father [Henry Harrison Hicks] was a commercial fisherman; he—he fished for a company [Miller Fish & oyster Company, which became 13 Mile Oyster Company]. He was self-employed.

0:01:33.9

AE: Okay. Can you explain how that works a little bit?

0:01:37.5

JH: Well when you're self-employed, you go and you work—you catch oysters and you have to sell them to a certified dealer to their house, which they're certified through the State. And then they pay you what the oysters is going for right that—at that time and you just have to—I mean, you're commercial—self-employed in this.

0:02:11.0

AE: And then when you were coming up, how early were you out on the bay working?

0:02:14.5

JH: I was on the bay by the time I was twelve years old.

0:02:19.3

AE: You remember your first time out?

0:02:20.7

JH: Oh God, no [*Laughs*]; it's been a long time. But I remember some hard times out there.

0:02:27.1

AE: Can you share a little bit of—of what that was like?

0:02:32.4

JH: It was cold, wet, and you have to work—well, like I'd go to school every day and when I'd get off—out of school every day, I'd get on the boat with my father and we'd go, you know, in the afternoon we'd oyster and kind of get things—help [and then] meet it at home.

0:02:54.5

AE: Did it take some time for you to get the hang of using the tongs?

0:02:57.2

JH: Oh, no—no; it don't take long. It's just—it—born in you, I guess—in the generation.

0:03:06.9

AE: Can you describe when you're oystering what you're looking for and then how you bring it up?

0:03:12.7

JH: Well an old oysterman, he can take the tongs, and he can feel on the bottom whether it's oysters or shells with it—the feel of the—the iron heads on the—on the oyster tongs. He can feel on the bottom and tell basically if it's oysters or either shells—the difference in the—in the feel of it.

0:03:38.1

AE: And then once you find a spot on the bay that you want to work, about how long does it take to work a spot?

0:03:45.6

JH: Well it's—it's according to if you find a spot that's got good oysters, and it might be some more boats and they—they'll join you, you know. You might work two or three days in that—that one area.

0:03:57.2

AE: And so when you find a—a place that you're working and you're bringing up oysters, how fast can that get going?

0:04:03.8

JH: Well if it's—if the oysters is good you—I mean it's—you can—it gets—it's pretty fast but it—a lot of times the area is just what they call scraping oysters. You know, you'll pick up one here and one there and it—and it takes a while. But once in a while you'll hit a little spot and it don't—it don't take near as long to—to get your quota.

0:04:30.5

AE: And are there some stories about being out there of—I mean, I guess the good—the good ones don't drop their tongs but—I mean, things where you hit a rough spot or lose your tongs overboard or—?

0:04:43.7

JH: Yeah, I've lost my tongs overboard, and I've actually fell overboard. You'll be oystering and walking on the—what they call the walk board, you know, where you tong and just—walk overboard behind them. It's cold—just trip.

0:04:59.3

AE: Can you talk about the boat and how it's laid out and the—the sitting area?

0:05:03.9

JH: Well the boat that we had it—when I quit oystering, I had a twenty-three-foot flat bottom boat, and it just had wall boards on the side and just open in the middle and [had] what they call a culling board. You'd catch your oysters in the tongs and you throw them up [on the cull board], and then you have to cull them off and just throw them in the boat.

0:05:24.8

AE: And then what about that little covered area in the back where the motor is?

0:05:28.6

JH: That's called a doghouse; that's—that come years later. Like when it's raining or something, you know, you can get in out of the rain and out of the cold wind while you're running.

0:05:45.0

AE: Is there generally only one oysterman per boat?

0:05:48.2

JH: No. Right now—used to, but right now there's normally about two or three to the boat.

0:05:56.4

AE: And the guys who are going out now are—they mostly, you know, lifetime oystermen who have been doing it forever?

0:06:05.5

JH: They're—they're lifetime oystermen. That's all they've done all their life.

0:06:10.1

AE: Do you know anybody who has gone out there, like just to try it and—?

0:06:14.1

JH: No, I haven't—not—not like it and all.

0:06:17.0

AE: So when—when did you stop oystering?

0:06:19.7

JH: I quit oystering about—about eighteen years ago.

0:06:29.6

AE: And what brought that on?

0:06:31.8

JH: Well, we were having a lot of storms, and then they shut our bays down. And then you're out of work two or three months and you get behind on everything and losing everything and I—I thought then it might be best for me to try to find a steady job or steady pay. But I love oystering. It's—when it's born in you—

0:06:58.2

AE: Are there times you still go out there just for old times to pick some up?

0:07:01.3

JH: Yeah, I go out there occasionally. And if I want some to eat I go out there and—I go out there and get them.

0:07:07.6

AE: Now when you're talking about the bay closing, I know that it's been closed—or it was closed for a few months because of red tide [which is a bloom of dinoflagellates that causes reddish discoloration of coastal ocean waters, which is often toxic and fatal to fish]. Was that—has red tide always been around that you've been oystering, or is that a recent development?

0:07:19.1

JH: No, it's—I'll say in the last five years the red tide has really created a problem.

0:07:27.2

AE: How do you think that is?

0:07:29.7

JH: I believe the storms—whenever them storms come in so heavy, I believe it brings it with them. And it just pollutes our bay.

0:07:39.8

AE: How do you think—how else do you think the bay has changed or is changing over the years with just the geography of it and what's coming out of it?

0:07:47.7

JH: Well it's—it's changing because there's so many oystermen now. Used to—it wasn't that many and when you get so many oystermen it—you got a tendency to clean a place out, you know, and your bays get really wrecked when you get all the oystermen out.

0:08:10.3

AE: So you think they're—they're over-oystering now because there's so many?

0:08:12.9

JH: At times, yes.

0:08:17.1

AE: Hmm. When you were first oystering, did they oyster in different parts of the bay like I'm understanding they do now, where they'll go—?

0:08:23.2

JH: No; it's basically the same thing. It's all-State-bottom [meaning the state of Florida owns parts of the Apalachicola Bay] except there's two or three has got grants you know—I mean grandfathered in what they call leases. And they plant their own leases, you know, and then let their men that work for them harvest the oysters off their leases. But basically the state bottom is like it is.

0:08:49.8

AE: Can you describe the different parts of the bay that are the locations where people oyster?

0:08:55.7

JH: Well we have what they call the—the West End—the Miles and then you—you come up and you got Dry Bar off the end of the bay and then you—on the other side of the bridge you got Eastpoint, you got Cat Point and all that oystering over there. And it's split up—you got what you call a summertime oystering and wintertime oystering, and the wintertime is from the channel back west; and during the summertime, they close that and then open up Cat Point and all that over there on that side [to the east]. That gives the oysters a chance to grow.

0:09:44.7

AE: Can you talk about the actual oyster and what it's all about?

0:09:48.4

JH: Now what do you want to know about them?

0:09:53.5

AE: About the—the animal that is the oyster. I mean like the biology of it and how it—how it grows?

0:10:00.7

JH: Well the oyster has got to have a lot of salinity of the river, which we have right here that flows into our bay. And real cold weather is when our oysters grow good. And in wintertime, you know, they'll grow—grow real fast.

0:10:21.3

AE: And so you've been eating, I would guess, oysters all your life?

0:10:23.7

JH: All my life.

0:10:24.6

AE: And you love them?

0:10:25.3

JH: Never been sick on them.

0:10:27.8

AE: What do you love about them?

0:10:29.1

JH: [*Laughs*] I—just the texture and the taste of them.

0:10:39.1

AE: And now you're shucking oysters here at Papa Joe's [Oyster Bar & Grill]?

0:10:40.0

JH: I'm shucking oysters at Papa's Joe's.

0:10:43.0

AE: So is that—when you say you quit oystering eighteen years ago, what did you do right after that?

0:10:48.1

JH: I worked with the State [of Florida] for a little while—toll bridge and—and then I worked at an oyster house, running the oyster house for a man [Tommy Ward at 13 Mile Oyster Company], and then I got out of that, and then I come and worked in the—for the public.

0:11:09.9

AE: And what did you—did you like working in the oyster house?

0:11:13.2

JH: Yeah; it was—it was all right, but it was hard work.

0:11:15.1

AE: Will you say what house that was—can you say?

0:11:17.6

JH: Thirteen Mile.

0:11:19.4

AE: Okay, with Tommy Ward?

0:11:20.8

JH: Tommy Ward.

0:11:22.5

AE: I saw him the other day. So you were working out there and decided to come and—and
shuck here at the restaurant?

0:11:31.1

JH: I shucked at one restaurant before they opened here [which] was Boss Oyster [on Water Street in Apalachicola]. I worked there for seven years and Stanley [Stan Norred, the owner of Papa Joe's] was a real good friend, and he wanted me down here, so the day he opened I—I come and worked for him.

0:11:46.8

AE: And how long have they been opened here?

0:11:49.1

JH: Five years.

0:11:48.6

AE: Okay. And then is that all you do for him is shuck, or do you do other stuff too?

0:11:52.4

JH: Well I run the errands for him, you know. If he needs somebody in there to cook, I'll go in there and cook.

0:11:59.6

AE: Do you like to cook?

0:12:00.2

JH: Oh, I love it.

0:12:01.9

AE: What do you like to make?

0:12:03.9

JH: Well I love to short-fry you know; I love to fry food.

0:12:14.4

AE: Do you cook at home a lot?

0:12:16.5

JH: When I can get my wife to let me.

0:12:19.3

AE: Do you have children?

0:12:20.5

JH: I have two boys.

0:12:21.8

AE: Are they here?

0:12:23.1

JH: One of them is here and one lives in Tennessee.

0:12:27.7

AE: And the one who lives here is he working on the bay, or what is he doing?

0:12:28.0

JH: No, he works—he drives a tanker truck for Amerigas.

0:12:34.9

AE: Okay. Did he ever want to go on the bay, or did you take him out there?

0:12:38.5

JH: No; on the weekends whenever they was going to school I made them go with me on the boat oystering, and they didn't like it. And I'm glad they didn't like it where they wouldn't have to depend on the bay as their living. So my youngest son, when he got out of high school, he went straight to the military, put his four years in and he lives in Tennessee now.

0:13:09.4

AE: What about Apalachicola and the changes that are going on in town?

0:13:12.4

JH: There's a lot of changes. I guess some for the good and some for the bad. I hate to see it because it's not the little seafood industry that I'm used to.

0:13:27.1

AE: There's a lot of the—the old-timers who have been working the bay—how do—what do you think the general feeling is?

0:13:34.3

JH: Well they feel like—the same way I do about it. They—there's nothing we can do about it; we just have to live with it and—and deal with it.

0:13:44.2

AE: And then there's a younger generation. Has anybody taken after the older guys?

0:13:50.5

JH: The younger generation, most—a lot of the kids is falling right into their descendant's footsteps there. They're working the bay.

0:14:00.5

AE: And you think the—the bay will hold out and the people to work it?

0:14:04.9

JH: I hope it does; I just hope they don't put too much here to where they close the bays down.

0:14:14.6

AE: What about the other stuff that you brought out of the bay over the years fishing and whatnot?

0:14:20.6

JH: Well I brought—other than the oysters, I brought flounder, speckled trout, mullet—

0:14:33.1

AE: Do you go out or did you go out primarily in the bay or did you go upriver some?

0:14:38.6

JH: No; I went—well I went to the river some but mostly in the bay.

0:14:41.7

AE: And what's upriver?

0:14:42.8

JH: Well it's—in the wintertime your speckled trout and red fish and all. They get in those holes and—in the river and you can go up there and catch them in the—in the river.

0:14:55.0

AE: Does anybody go grappling here where you hand-fish?

0:14:58.0

JH: No. Noodling?

0:14:58.8

AE: Yeah.

0:15:01.0

JH: I don't think so.

0:15:01.2

AE: Noodling you call it?

0:15:01.4

JH: Yeah.

0:15:02.7

AE: Okay. But you know what it is, though. [*Laughs*]

0:15:04.9

JH: [*Laughs*] Huh?

0:15:06.4

AE: You know what it is, though?

0:15:08.3

JH: Yeah, with catfish? [Noodling is the practice and sport of fishing for catfish using only one's bare hands.]

0:15:08.6

AE: Uh-huh.

0:15:09.4

JH: Yeah. No, not around here.

0:15:13.5

AE: Does anybody catch turtles upriver or anything to eat?

0:15:17.2

JH: Used to; we used to have a man here, we nicknamed him Loggerhead because he—that's what he caught was Loggerhead turtles and—and that's phased out now. He don't even do that no more.

0:15:37.0

AE: Uh-hmm. So did you ever consider leaving Apalachicola, or are you just tied here because your family is tied here?

0:15:44.9

JH: Well, the only family I got here is my wife and my one son, now. If things [were different] I would consider leaving but, you know, this is home.

0:16:03.2

AE: Yeah, it's a beautiful place.

0:16:03.9

JH: It is home.

0:16:06.8

AE: Well what—you want—I know there's plenty of questions that I'm not coming up with to ask. So what is there about your life here and life on the bay that maybe is something that I wouldn't know to ask?

0:16:23.7

JH: [Short pause] Well, you probably covered it all. You asked about on the bay; it is hard work. I don't think there's a job around much harder than it is working on the bay, because you've got to fight the weather and everything.

0:16:49.3

AE: A hard life but the people who do it seem to love it.

0:16:52.6

JH: Love it—it's a hard life. It's an honest living.

0:16:58.3

AE: And working out—out in Mother Nature and being independent.

0:17:02.8

JH: Independent, that's right; that's the reason most of them does it because they're their own boss, you know. They go when they want to, and they stay as long as they want to, and when they get ready to come home they come home.

0:17:14.9

AE: What about like the prices of oysters over the years? When you were harvesting in the early days and would sell your oysters, as opposed to now, what is the price difference?

0:17:24.3

JH: Well whenever I was coming up—excuse me—I worked with my father and we got 90-cent a bag for oysters, and that's where you counted the oysters. You had to put 300 to a bag. And back—back then but now they weigh the oysters to 60-pounds to a bag, and I think they get about fifteen dollars a—a bag now. So there's a lot of differences in the—in the oysters now.

0:17:58.8

AE: Have you noticed—because I understand that you have to—you can only harvest and sell oysters that are three inches long.

0:18:05.4

JH: Three inches long and that's the law.

0:18:07.0

AE: Has that—how long has that been on the books?

0:18:09.8

JH: Ever since I—I can remember.

0:18:13.3

AE: Okay, okay.

0:18:15.1

JH: You have a law—it's three inches and you're allowed, I think it's ten-percent of small oysters in—in with your [regulation-sized] oysters.

0:18:23.8

AE: And then how big of oyster have you seen in your day?

0:18:27.4

JH: Oh God, I've seen some big ones—eight, nine inches, you know.

0:18:40.9

AE: Do they taste good that big?

0:18:41.5

JH: No, the big ones don't taste as good as the little ones. Now a lot of people likes the big oysters. But I prefer a small oyster.

0:18:50.0

AE: Yeah? And I've been hearing this weekend everybody talking about how salty the oysters are right now, and that that's really the taste that you pay for.

0:18:58.8

JH: That's the taste of the oyster—whenever it gets cool weather then the oysters get real salty, that's when everybody wants to eat oysters.

0:19:09.5

AE: And so shucking oysters here, what kind of—and all the—the tourists and people coming through in the summer months do—do all of them eat them raw mostly or fried or—?

0:19:21.1

JH: No, we have a lot of customers that eats them cooked. We—you—you probably seen our menu where we got like toppings for our oysters, you know. A lot of them eat them with the toppings on them, but I'll say 70-percent of them eat them raw.

0:19:40.1

AE: Now are the toppings—is that something kind of recent or—?

0:19:41.9

JH: Well it's not been in too long.

0:19:46.0

AE: Yeah, kind of like—it seems like it might be kind of like a fad of the way people want to decorate—

0:19:49.1

JH: Yeah; you—you can—you can make up your own, you know, oyster, you know, with different cheeses and different stuff on it.

0:19:58.7

AE: How do you like to eat them?

0:19:59.1

JH: Raw.

0:20:00.9

AE: With anything on them?

0:20:00.8

JH: I like hot sauce.

0:20:02.5

AE: All right, because I was in here—when I was in here the other day that man at the end of the bar, I noticed he put it on a cracker and just smothered it with ketchup.

0:20:09.7

JH: Yeah.

0:20:09.6

AE: That looked like—*[Laughs]*—that wasn't a good idea.

0:20:11.3

JH: *[Laughs]* Yeah, a lot—a lot of them eats it with ketchup. I like them with the hot sauce.

0:20:17.1

AE: And I know—I saw behind the bar there you've got a whole rack of “Hicks Hot Sauce.” Is that yours?

0:20:21.5

JH: Uh-hm.

0:20:22.6

AE: What is that all about?

0:20:23.4

JH: That's—I've had a lot of people give me them because I collect sauces, you know—the real hot sauces—and that's the reason I keep that on the back wall back there. I got some sauces back there that will hurt you—bad.

0:20:35.4

AE: Do people know to ask for them?

0:20:36.4

JH: Yeah.

0:20:37.1

AE: Will you share?

0:20:38.2

JH: Yeah. Some of them will come in and they will be real brave, you know, and they want to try one of my hot sauces.

0:20:44.2

AE: [*Laughs*]

0:20:43.9

JH: And I'll give it to them.

0:20:46.8

AE: Yeah? How else do people—you know, have you seen anybody do anything kind of weird with an oyster or unusual or—?

0:20:54.7

JH: No. Other than just eating it.

0:21:00.0

AE: How about quantity? has somebody eaten—like they had the Seafood Festival, and they had the oyster eating contest.

0:21:06.0

JH: Oyster eating contest.

0:21:06.8

AE: And somebody ate like 140 oysters or something?

0:21:10.0

JH: Yeah, I have—I have customers come in here. Some of them will eat five and six dozen, you know, just sit at the bar and eat five or six dozen oysters.

0:21:19.0

AE: And how about that saying that oysters are an aphrodisiac? I heard some other people talking about that—eat oysters, love longer and all that kind of business.

0:21:29.4

JH: [*Laughs*] That's an old fad. I mean, eat seafood and live longer and eat oysters love longer, you know. That's been around ever since I can—it might help some people. [*Laughs*]

0:21:45.4

AE: And what about the Seafood Festival? That was—it was the 42nd year this year?

0:21:50.6

JH: Forty-second year.

0:21:53.4

AE: How has that changed or grown since you remember?

0:21:56.2

JH: Well it used to be real big, but I think the last couple years it's come down some. I don't know whether to do for the gas reason—the gas prices are so high people didn't travel or what but it—you could notice it. It's been down a little the last couple years.

0:22:18.2

AE: Do I understand correctly that it used to be like a free community meal like to feed all the people who worked in the industry and the community?

0:22:25.9

JH: The churches used to years ago—would have the booths and it wouldn't cost nothing to get in and the donation for the—for the plate.

0:22:39.4

AE: Have they always had a—a king and queen or—?

0:22:42.2

JH: Always had a king and a queen.

0:22:45.7

AE: And is there—I heard somebody say a red seal award or something—red—were there other kind of crowns they give out?

0:22:59.2

JH: Well they give out a crown for—for the King—King Retsyo [oyster spelled backwards]
he's—

0:23:01.9

AE: Oh, that—okay.

0:23:03.8

JH: —he's the—every year you'll have a King Retsyo.

0:23:06.7

AE: Okay.

0:23:08.8

JH: And the lady that's nominated for Seafood Festival Queen—him and her—.

0:23:19.7

AE: I'd like to go back a little bit to when you were growing up and like the kids that you came up with and what kind of trouble y'all would get into on the water and you know go crabbing or—.

0:23:29.0

JH: Well we used to have a lot of fun. We—a lot of us would get together at night and go to what they call flounder gigging, you know, and gig flounders at night and come in and build a fire on the hill and put a piece of tin on it and roast oysters, you know, and have roasted oysters and just—

0:23:54.3

AE: And what's gigging for flounder? What is that exactly?

0:23:56.0

JH: A flounder feeds at night and—only he'll come into shallow water—shallow waters and you have a lot on your boat with a gig and you pole around in two-foot of water, and you see them laying on the bottom with your light and then you gig him.

0:24:18.0

AE: Sounds like a good time.

0:24:20.7

JH: And there's a lot of the people that does it now for a commercial living, flounder gigging.

0:24:30.2

AE: What about shrimping? Did you ever go out shrimping?

0:24:31.1

JH: I've been shrimping a lot.

0:24:32.9

AE: What's that like?

0:24:35.8

JH: It's rough, especially when you're married, which I've been on the big boats and I'd leave—what they call a freighter boat; you wouldn't come home for 30—40 days. And you'd be out there in the Gulf [of Mexico] that long.

0:24:54.2

AE: What about—is that different from these little shrimp boats here that are docking here?

0:24:58.0

JH: Right. These little—little shrimp boats go out, they work like tonight and they'll come in—in the morning or either they work during the day and then they come in at night.

0:25:06.8

AE: But you go for long periods of time—.

0:25:09.6

JH: But the big boats go for a long period of time.

0:25:10.9

AE: What's the difference in the shrimp that are caught out there as opposed to here [in the Apalachicola Bay]?

0:25:15.6

JH: Normally, in the bay they're a little bit smaller. I've left here on shrimp boats and [gone] all the way down to Texas. Road out Hurricane Camille on a shrimp boat in Patterson, Louisiana.

0:25:35.6

AE: Oh, man. What was that like?

0:25:38.9

JH: [*Laughs*] It was mean. You didn't know whether you was going to make it.

0:25:44.3

AE: Glad you did.

0:25:46.6

JH: It was bad.

0:25:47.2

AE: Yeah? How long were you out there stuck in it before you got back on land?

0:25:50.6

JH: We was—we was docked at the time of the hurricane. We was inside the locks; it was about two days before we could get out where the sea had run down where we could get out and come back toward home.

0:26:09.1

AE: And then y'all just went through [Hurricane] Dennis here [in Apalachicola].

0:26:11.0

JH: Dennis—Dennis is what brought the red tide. We [are] set about fifteen-foot off the water here [at Papa Joe's], and we got water inside our restaurant up to our baseboards. So Dennis was about 600 miles from us, but you can tell the effects that far away.

0:26:37.6

AE: Yeah. Well tell me about your job here and shucking oysters.

0:26:41.2

JH: I love it.

0:26:43.7

AE: What do you love about it?

0:26:43.8

JH: I just love my job; I love to shuck oysters, and I love to meet the public. And my—my people I work for is super. They—they're great.

0:26:57.3

AE: Can you tell me about Papa Joe and this place?

0:27:00.3

JH: Papa Joe, he worked at—well he first started off a commercial fisherman and then he worked the docks—Port St. Joe Paper Mill—and he's deceased now.

0:27:16.6

AE: When did he pass?

0:27:18.3

JH: He's been gone about eight years. And Mr. [Stan] Norred, the one that owns the restaurant, he named the restaurant after his father and it—it goes a long ways.

0:27:33.1

AE: What's their last name?

0:27:34.5

JH: Norred.

0:27:36.0

AE: How do you spell that?

0:27:36.7

JH: N-o-r-r-e-d.

0:27:39.1

AE: Okay;. And so Stan has this place. And it was his sister that was here the other day; is that right?

0:27:46.3

JH: The lady who was hosting? Vena?

0:27:47.5

AE: Vena?

0:27:49.9

JH: Uh-hm.

0:27:49.5

AE: Okay. And her daughter Reagan?

0:27:51.2

JH: Reagan.

0:27:51.4

AE: Okay. And they were real nice.

0:27:55.4

JH: Yeah, they are.

0:27:56.3

AE: So I could ask Stan but was—how did he get into the restaurant business?

0:28:00.8

JH: Well out at Breakaway Lodge years ago they had a small restaurant out there, and him and his wife run that restaurant, and they run it for years. And after they got out of it and Breakaway was sold and everything, they still wanted to be in the restaurant business, so they leased this place here. They had to remodel the whole thing.

0:28:26.1

AE: From what I understand it's real popular. I know I'm here off-season but—

0:28:28.1

JH: Yeah.

0:28:28.2

AE: —I know a lot of people come through here.

0:28:30.4

JH: It's—it's going good.

0:28:35.9

AE: Now are you—do you consider yourself a fast shucker?

0:28:37.1

JH: Well a lot of people thinks I'm fast, you know. I don't try to be fast; I like to shuck an oyster where it's—the texture of the oyster looks good when it goes out. A lot of people [who are] real fast, they cut the oyster getting—you know, and I don't like to serve an oyster like that, and that's the reason I take my time with it. But yeah, I'm pretty fast.

0:29:05.5

AE: And I guess speed isn't as important when you're—

0:29:06.8

JH: Speed is not in everything; no, it isn't.

0:29:08.7

AE: —when you're at a restaurant and not at an oyster house.

0:29:11.3

JH: The texture of it is when it comes out.

0:29:14.4

AE: Can you talk about the steps to opening an oyster and what you do—describe—describe that?

0:29:19.9

JH: Well I'll pick the oyster up, and it's got a hinge and then back—and I always look—and there's a little slit in the hinge and—and the—you know, you look for that where you put your knife in it to—to pop it open.

0:29:40.1

AE: And then I was watching you the other day, you kind of take your knife and run it around [the meat of the oyster]?

0:29:44.2

JH: I run it around [the meat]. I clean the shells and the mud and everything off the oyster and that goes back, you know, trying to put the [good] texture out.

0:29:55.3

AE: Uh-hm; and did I notice that—that y'all use Tommy Ward's oysters here?

0:30:00.4

JH: We use Tommy Ward's oysters—Thirteen Mile.

0:30:04.2

AE: They're good oysters, then?

0:30:04.5

JH: They are the best.

0:30:05.9

AE: [*Laughs*] What do you think that makes them the best?

0:30:09.0

JH: Well I was born down there at Thirteen Mile [thirteen miles west of Apalachicola]; that's where I was coming in the world at, and that's where my father and them lived—had a little settlement, and we all grewed up there and it just—it's just home, you know. That's—when I get oysters I might be closer to oysters here, but if I have to go get oysters, I go to Thirteen Mile and I go out for them there.

0:30:33.6

AE: So you think his beds just produce a different kind of oyster?

0:30:37.8

JH: No, it's—it's State-bottom but it's just—the oysters is—seemed to me like better down there.

0:30:47.8

AE: Because he was explaining to me, I—I spent a little time with him on Friday, and he was explaining to me how he puts down scallop shells for them to grow on and—.

0:30:55.2

JH: Scallop shells is one of the fastest things for an oyster to grow on. They put it out—you know, planted his bottom with it, and it does—it really likes an oyster where the oyster will attach to it.

0:31:14.3

AE: Now can I ask you because I—I know he uses a—what he calls a cultivator to harvest the oysters, and it seems from—and I mean, I don't know everybody but it seems like most everybody else tongs. Is there an opinion with the old-timers of how that works and—?

0:31:30.1

JH: Uh-huh, they don't like a cultivator.

0:31:30.9

AE: Why is that?

0:31:32.8

JH: Well it can tear—I mean, you catch so many oysters so much faster and—say I'm on a cultivator, which you can't use a cultivator on a State-bottom; you have to use it on your own leases; you cannot go out where I'm working to catch—catch oysters with it. But you catch oysters so much faster with a cultivator.

0:31:57.6

AE: But do you think like since it's Tommy Ward's beds, and it sounds like he really—or his lease—that he really is conscious of what he puts down there and what he takes away—

0:32:10.0

JH: He is.

0:32:09.1

AE: —that he manages it a little bit more so it's—?

0:32:14.3

JH: Well see, he—he got two leases. He's got one right out in the middle of the bay, and he's got one at what they call Big Bayou. And he won't open up Big Bayou until probably the summertime for his men and all to have something to fall back on, you know—the oysters in there and he—after they get through oystering there, he'll replant that bottom with scallop shells and it—it really grows an oyster.

0:32:43.2

AE: How fast do they grow? I mean, to get that three inches, how old of an oyster is that?

0:32:47.8

JH: You take an oyster as big as my thumb and [in] eighteen months he'll be three inches long. I mean if the water is cold—if everything is right, he grows that fast.

0:33:03.1

AE: So if he were to not have people oystering in Big Bayou and save that for summertime, would he have planted that last year or that—would have that already been setting for a couple years or there's—?

0:33:13.4

JH: No, he planted it last year. You know he plants it, you know, about every year.

0:33:18.0

AE: So the oysters that are growing on top—I mean, how does that work? You want to get the older oysters, right?

0:33:23.8

JH: Well what he does, he'll work this area with a cultivator and clean it up, and then he'll plant that with shells—with scallop shells and everything. He's got it staked off where he knows where he's—he's working and everything.

0:33:39.0

AE: Okay, so he can do the Big Bayou like in stages.

0:33:40.3

JH: Right, he—he works it in sections.

0:33:42.5

AE: Okay, I get it. Okay, that—so how many oysters do you think you've eaten in your lifetime?

0:33:50.1

JH: [*Laughs*] There's no telling. This room wouldn't hold them.

0:33:56.6

AE: And how about that view? [*Looking out the window*]

0:33:59.6

JH: It's a beautiful view, isn't it? That's—that's your little boats going out at night. They'll be back in at daylight in the morning.

0:34:07.5

AE: Well there's—I mean this part of Florida is so pretty, and I've never been here before and it's just—you know, for people who have grown up here and been out—I mean, you're really out in nature every day. What is—what do you think that does to a person or for a person?

0:34:23.6

JH: It brings the good out in me. I don't know, you know, because I've been—been around a lot of places but, like you say, Apalachicola is a beautiful place and it's—everybody is friendly. Normally they used to be friendly; I don't know what the new generation is going to be. But it's a friendly, friendly place.

0:34:49.9

AE: What about hunting? Do you do much hunting?

0:34:50.2

JH: I used to hunt, but I don't hunt anymore. I used to go squirrel hunting, deer hunting, but I—I don't eat it, so I don't—I don't—I don't hunt anymore. I like to fish.

0:35:04.7

AE: Where do folks go to do that—to go hunting?

0:35:07.4

JH: Up the [Apalachicola] river. They go—like Mr. Norred now, he's got a houseboat and everything, and two weeks ago hunting season opened, and the river is full of people. You see fires everywhere on the hill, and I go with them just to go for the fellowship, you know, and I'll fish and a lot of them hunt and we cook—might drink a little bit, you know, but—but that's a tradition every year. November. It's the first day of hunting season.

0:35:42.6

AE: Yeah, I've noticed that a lot of people that I've been trying to call are out hunting. **[Laughs]**

0:35:45.3

JH: Yeah, right. Yeah. **[Laughs]**

0:35:48.0

AE: Well and then since you've spent your life by the water and on the water, is there stuff that you just know as—as a fisherman and an oysterman about the way the water works and what's in it and what's going to come out of it?

0:36:01.8

JH: Well, you don't really know what's ever is going to come out of it. But I know the—I know the bay, I guess, about as good as anybody around. And—and what goes in it but you—like I say you—you don't never know what's going to come out of it because, like the old guys say, the tide runs one way and then the other, you know. You just—you just don't know.

0:36:31.9

AE: All right. Well is there something that I didn't ask you that you'd like to add?

0:36:39.3

JH: No, I can't think of nothing. [*Laughs*]

0:36:41.2

AE: Any way you'd like to end? With a final thought?

0:36:42.9

JH: Be fine.

0:36:44.9

AE: Okay. All right. Well thank you. Well I know I want to ask you about your last name because I was in Eastpoint and there—

0:36:51.3

JH: No relations.

0:36:52.4

AE: Okay, different Hicks.

0:36:52.4

JH: Different set of tribe.

0:36:55.4

AE: Okay, okay, just checking. I didn't know if they separated across the bridge or what.

0:37:00.2

JH: Yeah, they separated.

0:37:00.2

AE: Okay, different tribe.

0:37:02.2

JH: I hope I've been a little help to you.

0:37:04.1

AE: You have been very helpful. I appreciate your time. Thank you for meeting me.

0:37:07.0

JH: You're welcome.

0:37:06.5

AE: Okay. It was really nice of you to invite me. [*This interview was conducted just prior to the Papa Joe's employee Christmas Party.*]

0:37:09.3

[End James Hicks]

[Begin James Hicks-2]

0:00:00.4

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Friday, March 24th, 2006 and I'm in Apalachicola, Florida, at Papa Joe's Oyster Bar. And I'm revisiting my buddy James Hicks, and it's about eight-thirty in the morning, and we have a couple cups of coffee and some pictures of Thirteen Mile, which is why we're meeting again—to talk about the place. So James, tell me about these pictures that I—that Tommy [Ward, owner of 13 Mile Oyster Company] let me copy and that we're looking at. [*It's a photograph of eight men unloading a truck filled with bagged oysters; "Miller Fish & Oyster Company" is painted on the side of the truck; gallon cans are stacked on the ground.*]

0:00:32.0

James Hicks: Well this here is the one that I don't exactly know what—how old this picture here is. It's when oysters come in gallon buckets, and they was unloading them there. And I have some relatives in the picture. And this one standing there, the little short fellow [standing in the

middle of the back of the truck, wearing a cap] is my brother, and that's my father there [standing on the far right of the photograph, wearing black boots and a hat], and I know a couple more is about all.

0:01:00.8

AE: What are your—your brother's and your father's names?

0:01:02.4

JH: His [my brother's] name is Grover Hicks, and everybody just called him Shorty because he was real short. And my dad, his name was Henry Harrison Hicks. And that's a long time ago.

[Laughs]

0:01:18.4

AE: And you were born out there right at the Thirteen Mile?

0:01:19.9

JH: Yes, ma'am; I was born there at Thirteen Mile.

0:01:21.9

AE: How long had your dad been out there?

0:01:22.9

JH: They had been there approximately five—six years there before I was—before I was born.

0:01:39.8

AE: And where did he come to this area from?

0:01:42.9

JH: He was from Pensacola [Florida]; he was risen around Pensacola.

0:01:49.9

AE: Do you know if he just knew there was opportunity out here and he just got with the Millers or—?

0:01:53.4

JH: No, what he had done, he used to have an old boat, and my mother and my oldest brother though they'd come down-river, and they'd oyster for two or three days on that boat and then run back up the river. And he'd have orders like people has milk orders, you know, door orders. He'd have orders at different houses, you know. He'd drop off oysters on the way back, and he done that for a while and then decided to move—move down. So they just moved to Thirteen Mile.

0:02:31.7

AE: So was he harvesting out here in this part of the bay for the—the Miller's part of the bay before he was working for them, or how did that work?

0:02:41.5

JH: He—he had oystered, you know, that end of the bay—part of the bay but it wasn't Miller's—no leases or nothing; it was all State[-owned]-bottom, you know. Everybody could oyster it.

0:02:57.7

AE: Do you know how far back the Miller's Fish and Oyster Company goes?

0:03:02.3

JH: Oh, God. [*Laughs*] I don't even—it goes back to the late [nineteen] thirties, I know. I don't know exactly what—what year or—. I haven't really been—caught up on it.

0:03:28.3

AE: Yeah. Do you have an idea of when it changed over to Buddy Ward and Sons?

0:03:31.7

JH: Buddy Ward come to Thirteen Mile in 1956. And he took over. Because Millers was his wife's uncle, I think, that had Thirteen Mile.

0:03:53.0

AE: Martha Pearl Ward's uncle, okay. [And wife to Buddy Ward]

0:03:54.7

JH: Uh-hmm.

0:03:54.7

AE: Yeah, so Buddy and Miss Martha Pearl got married.

0:04:00.8

JH: They was living in—late Buddy and Martha Pearl was living in New Mexico, and they was already married. And that's when they—they come down and moved to Thirteen Mile.

0:04:14.7

AE: What were they doing out in New Mexico?

0:04:16.4

JH: You know, I—I think he was a truck driver or some kind—I have, you know—again I haven't questioned it, you know, nothing on it, you know, but I think—I think he was truck driving out there.

0:04:32.6

AE: So tell me what that area was like when you were growing up. Because I know they had a bunch of houses for the people who worked at the oyster houses?\'.

0:04:40.0

JH: Oh, yeah. There was about twenty-two families [that] lived down there and kids [would] run wild. And when I would go to school, we wanted to take the school bus and a whole load just picked the kids up to go to school. And it was—it was an experience. Which I love it down there, but I wouldn't want to go back to them days again.

0:05:07.2

AE: Hard living?

0:05:07.4

JH: Hard living, yeah, but it brings back a lot of memories.

0:05:24.2

AE: Do you know any of those pretty ladies in that picture? [*A photograph of eleven women posing in two rows outside the oyster house; two men are on the bottom left.*]

0:05:27.8

JH: Let me get my glasses where I can see that.

0:05:30.6

AE: Okay. *[Laughs]*

0:05:34.3

JH: Where did you get that one from? Tommy?

0:05:35.2

AE: From Tommy, uh-hmm. He has a bunch of old pictures. And like I was telling you, I saw Mr. [Bobby] Shiver last night [who was also born out at Thirteen Mile], and he had some pictures of the houses down there and—and some just fun pictures of kids playing on the water and stuff. Mr. Shiver thought that this woman, I think he said, which he thought was his aunt.

0:06:22.4

JH: You know, I have—I have no idea.

0:06:28.6

AE: Hmm, do you remember that contraption that water-tower thing? *[Talking about another photograph, which is of about a twenty-foot water tower with icicles hanging from it.]*

0:06:31.2

JH: That was the water tower; no, that was before my time there. That was—that was before my time. I don't remember that.

0:06:49.6

AE: Yeah, well what do you remember about the general operation of things down there with all these folks and families living [there], and what kind of buzz was around the oyster house and all?

0:06:57.7

JH: Kind of what?

0:06:58.7

AE: Buzz? Activity?

0:07:01.4

JH: All they—all they did was just, you know—was work, all the kids. And they'd shrimp and oyster and they'd come in and they'd have a bunch of shrimps on bay boats, and the kids would

get down there and help them break heads on the shrimp and whatever—help unload oysters, you know, and just—and just run wild and have a good time.

0:07:24.8

AE: Just grew up in it, huh?

0:07:26.7

JH: Grew up in it and—it was something.

0:07:35.0

AE: So when exactly did you start oystering?

0:07:38.7

JH: I was approximately thirteen years old when I was—I started helping my dad on the weekends.

0:07:51.3

AE: And so just coming up you just stayed out there at Thirteen Mile? I mean and you went to school and stuff, but—

0:07:57.0

JH: Yeah.

0:07:57.6

AE: —you just grew up out there and worked out there?

0:07:59.1

JH: Just grew up—just grew up out there, and we—we had moved and—when I was about fifteen or sixteen, we moved to Panama City [Florida] and for about two years, and then we moved back to Thirteen Mile. It was home down there.

0:08:25.5

AE: About when did all those houses down there disappear? or are some still standing back there?

0:08:32.2

JH: They just—well like the one we first started living in was there—was a tarpaper house. It was from the mill—the paper they made at the mill that just—the walls and all was made out of that and it just eventually just rotted down and—

0:08:59.4

AE: And so those houses were something that the oyster house supplied for the families? It was kind of like—

0:09:04.3

JH: Yeah, Mr. Miller, he, you know had them put there, you know, and for the—for the families to live in.

0:09:11.9

AE: So how did you meet your wife [Oddys]?

0:09:14.7

JH: [*Laughs*] Well my brothers—well we're living now right across, he—he had built a home there, and she was going to school, and I lived with him for a while, and I met her and

aggravated her. [*Laughs*] And—but we went—we went together about let's see—about seven, eight years. She graduated [from high school], and we got married.

0:09:56.6

AE: And so when you—when you married her and you were working out at Thirteen Mile then, that business relationship [of harvester and shucker] starts where you're harvesting oysters and she's shucking them for you?

0:10:06.2

JH: Right. She—I caught the oysters and she shucked them for me, you know, and we worked there for a while, and then we'd come to town and—and then I moved to Georgia, and I was up there for about eight months, and I come back and started all over again with—with Tommy—with Tommy's daddy, Buddy [Ward]. And then when Tommy took over, we just kept the routine going, just—.

0:10:43.5

AE: What can you tell me about Mr. Buddy Ward? Since part of the reason we're meeting this morning is that he's not doing real well, and I didn't get a chance to talk to him.

0:10:50.5

JH: He's—he's a fine man. I mean, he's—he's been a hard worker all of his life, and Buddy is like what they call like one of the old pelicans, you know. If you—when he goes, he's going to be missed. He's—he's a root—one of them of Apalachicola. He's one super guy. I don't think he has many enemies in Apalachicola. And they had an unfortunate—you know, they lost one of their sons in a boating accident, and we was working there at the time that happened. He's had a hard time coming.

0:11:38.1

AE: Has he been proud of [his son] Tommy keeping things going?

0:11:42.3

JH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, Tommy is—he's bull-headed. **[Laughs]** You probably know everybody—that's the reason—I worked for Tommy, and he was bull-headed, and I was bull-headed. And we'd stay in trouble, you know, at one another until I had to quit [working for] him. Oddys was shucking; I run Thirteen Mile for him, and something come up, and I fired her one day from working down there.

0:12:16.1

AE: You fired her?

0:12:15.2

JH: Yeah.

0:12:17.2

AE: [*Laughs*] You fired your wife from Thirteen Mile.

0:12:20.5

JH: He turned around and fired me [*Laughs*] because I fired her.

0:12:26.0

AE: [*Laughs*] James! Oh, man.

0:12:27.0

JH: Which he tried to get me to go back to work, and I wouldn't. And then he turned around and hired her back.

0:12:32.2

AE: What did you fire her for?

0:12:35.9

JH: Well Tommy had—said, you know, he was going to close down during this part of the summer and that part of the summer and I told her, you know, get her—you know, come to town and I'd get her a job, and she still wanted to shuck and all. Then he decided he was going to stay open, and then she started bickering and finally I told her to just get her stuff and go home. You know, I was tired of hearing her. And he didn't like that too good. Tommy loves Oddys. She calls him Mr. Teddy Bear.

0:13:13.7

AE: [*Laughs*] Well and I was hearing good things about her yesterday when I talked to—

0:13:17.4

JH: Who? Oddys. She's—she's a sweet woman.

0:13:18.0

AE: —Janice Richards [another shucker at 13 Mile], yeah. Uh-hmm, and a hard worker.

0:13:20.2

JH: She is that; they don't make them like that anymore. She is one hard working gal.

0:13:33.1

AE: Yeah. And we were saying when I got here this morning that—that—well, Janice was telling me that Oddys gets there an hour before Janice does every day and has a gallon [of oysters already] shucked at four in the morning.

0:13:42.9

JH: Uh-hmm, she likes to get down there because it's quiet and she's by herself and—then she knocks off early, too.

0:13:54.3

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:13:56.5

JH: But she's—

0:13:57.6

AE: I was hearing, too, that some people request her oysters because she's such a good shucker.

0:14:01.7

JH: Oh, yeah—yeah.

0:14:03.9

AE: That's really impressive to me that shucking is that important.

0:14:06.6

JH: It is because she'll shuck all day long—and I tried to do it myself. If you cut an oyster, he looks bad, you know; and she takes her time and leaves no shells in it and—and that oyster is just perfect.

0:14:27.9

AE: Well she takes her time, but she's got to be fast, too.

0:14:31.3

JH: Well she's pretty fast, too. And a lot of people goes down there and requests her oysters that she shucks.

0:14:39.9

AE: That's amazing. And so now she's shucking somebody else's oysters out there now, since you're not—?

0:14:46.9

JH: Yeah, she shucks for Janice's husband [Johnny Richards] and Hoyt Thompson. They work together and he—she shucks for him.

0:14:57.3

AE: Can you help explain that relationship to me a little bit more because I think I keep confusing myself. But—and especially for Oddys' situation, since she's not shucking for you. But the oysterman brings in the bags of oysters and gets paid for the bags and then the oysterman pays the shucker?

0:15:12.1

JH: No. Like them two [Johnny Richards and Hoyt Thompson] oyster together, and they'll come in and they'll just put the oysters in the house for them. They don't get paid for nothing until they [the shuckers] shuck the oysters out. They get paid per yield of the gallons out of the oysters.

0:15:32.5

AE: Oh, okay.

0:15:33.2

JH: And Tommy and them pays Oddys, and so Hoyt and them gets, say, I'm going to throw a figure in there; say they get twenty-five dollars a gallon for the oysters. See, Oddys and them gets eight dollars, so that leaves a difference of twenty-two dollars, you know—something like that. So that's what the oysterman gets for the gallon of oysters. So they don't get paid by the bag and then turn around and get paid—.

0:16:07.6

AE: Okay, so the relationship with the house is that they get paid by the gallon shucked?

0:16:10.3

JH: Right, the yield.

0:16:13.6

AE: And the shucker gets paid by the gallon—

0:16:15.4

JH: They shuck.

0:16:15.5

AE: —not by the hour or anything?

0:16:16.1

JH: Yeah, they get paid by the gallon they shuck.

0:16:19.4

AE: And the shucker is paid by the house?

0:16:21.0

JH: Uh-hm.

0:16:24.0

AE: Okay. Complicated. Or it seems so—

0:16:24.9

JH: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

0:16:26.6

AE: [*Laughs*] —to somebody like me.

0:16:28.6

JH: Yeah. No it's—

0:16:36.1

AE: So if you're an oysterman—if—if you're a husband and wife team coming in, you would want to marry a good shucker, wouldn't you? I mean is that part of—?

0:16:42.9

JH: Oh, yeah.

0:16:45.0

AE: *[Laughs]*

0:16:45.1

JH: *[Laughs]* Well that's like when I married Oddys, she couldn't even shuck oysters.

0:16:51.8

AE: Really?

0:16:54.1

JH: My sisters was shucking oysters at Thirteen Mile, and she wanted to learn how to shuck oysters. And my—my sisters—that's where Oddys learned how to shuck oysters was from them.

They were like Oddys shucking oysters; they were very tactile with it. And Oddys' first day, she shucked one gallon of oysters all day long. And then she just kept—kept on at it.

0:17:22.9

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:17:23.6

JH: But I wouldn't—them bunch of women, they—they're tough. But I wouldn't stand there all day long shucking oysters. I mean, which I do here, but you know I get—but like they do, no.

0:17:39.9

AE: Uh-hmm. Well here you have people around you and—.

0:17:42.4

JH: Yeah, I couldn't—

0:17:43.6

AE: So how is it—how have you seen it change and especially with Oddys working and that personal experience of hers? Did she use the mallet and all for it, or has she always used the machine or—?

0:17:58.4

JH: No, she used to use the—the hammer and block and every—everybody was—started going to machines and so she wanted one. And I told her—I said—well I said, “I’ll get you one but,” I said, “you have to be very careful.” I said, “Because they’ll give you a manicure fast.” So I buy her a machine and—and I put it in her stall, and I come in from oystering that day—the machine was out. And she—I said, “What’s the matter?” She said, “I’m scared. I don’t want—.” I said, “Well I’m going to sell it, then.” “No, you ain’t selling it!” I said, “Well I’m going to sell it, or you’re going to put it in the stall, and you’re going to learn to use it.” I said, “That’s the onliest way you’re going to learn how to use it.” So I set it back in the stall, and I said, “Use it. “ So she went and used it.

0:18:45.5

AE: And those things are expensive from what I understand, too.

0:18:48.1

JH: Yeah, they are.

0:18:49.0

AE: That's an investment.

0:18:49.6

JH: They're about, I imagine, the time you get the blades and everything on it, it costs you about 300 dollars for one of them machines.

0:18:58.6

AE: She likes it now, though, huh?

0:19:00.8

JH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, she wouldn't—if she had to shuck with a hammer—no, she wouldn't do it. She'd quit.

0:19:09.9

AE: So are y'all both going to work you think until you just can't work anymore?

0:19:14.0

JH: You know, I've been wanting to retire but not completely retire because, you know, I—I don't feel like I can just sit down. And I can—I wish she would, but she won't. She'll just—she'll continue working. I told her—I said, “Well ain't nobody home but me and you now, let's enjoy life a little bit; let's travel a little bit.” She thinks she's dedicated to Tommy and them down there, so I let her go.

0:19:46.8

AE: Well what do you think is going to happen in the next ten, twenty years or something? Because like this picture of all these women out at Thirteen Mile, you know, you had twenty shuckers and now there—there—every time I've been out there, there have been about four and five. And that generation of—?

0:20:00.5

JH: Ah, I think in another twenty years, oystering will be obsolete here.

0:20:07.1

AE: Because it's such a network of—

0:20:07.6

JH: And it's sad, too.

0:20:09.0

AE: Yeah, it's such a network of folks that have to be involved in the process that—I mean, I haven't seen a young shucker.

0:20:17.9

JH: No, you—you don't see many of them. But you—you—excuse me, the younger generation just—they don't want to get into it. And I think eventually it will be nothing but condos and everything here. It will be all over. I hope I'm not—not around to see it. I mean because it's—it will be sad. The little old seafood industry will be gone.

0:20:58.6

AE: Uh-hmm, so you said you go down there [to 13 Mile] with Oddys sometimes in the morning?

0:21:03.1

JH: Yeah. Well she'll go down there, and then I'll get up, and then I'll go down there and visit her a few minutes and have coffee and eat me a dozen oysters.

0:21:16.0

AE: Uh-hmm, [*Laughs*] that's a good way to start your day.

0:21:17.0

JH: Yeah, [*Laughs*] breakfast four o'clock in the morning. Oysters.

0:21:21.0

AE: [*Laughs*] Are there some old-timers that go out there and just kind of hang out and—?

0:21:26.5

JH: There? There at the oyster house?

0:21:27.4

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:21:27.8

JH: No, they don't—they're not too many people hang out there, you know. They—they just used to when it was real cold they'd come around during the morning and build a big old fire on the hill out there, you know, and sit around the fire and BS for an hour or two, but that don't happen no more, you know. They—they come down there; if they don't go oystering, they get in the truck and go hunting, so you know they don't—they don't really hang out there very much no more.

0:21:59.5

AE: Are there any oystermen that work for Tommy that their families have a history over there like yours does?

0:22:04.2

JH: Well Johnny and Janice [Richards], when you talked you know they—his family goes back with mine. And—and I think that's about the only—only one left there that does because was grewed up at Thirteen Mile, too. He was there.

0:22:37.9

AE: Tommy also showed me some pictures of a man casting for mullet right there on the shore.

0:22:42.9

JH: Yeah, in roe—what they call roe season, when the mullets roe and they get real thick they used to have the boats and they'd catch the mullet for the roe, and they used to be a big—big deal there. But they've also stopped all that too. There's no more of that.

0:23:11.3

AE: When the guys would be out there and get a big catch of mullet, would there be ever like a big kind of Thirteen Mile fish fry or anything like that or was it the roe to be sold or—?

0:23:23.1

JH: They just—just the roe. Well they'd sell the mullet, too, but a lot of them just split the mullet for the roe and [would] sell it. And then they'd have the mullet salted and have salt mullet, which is pretty good. You know, you didn't have no ice back then, so you had to salt it—salt your meat.

0:23:51.2

AE: Mr. [Bobby] Shiver was telling me about a—a store they had there at Thirteen Mile.

0:23:54.4

JH: A what?

0:23:55.6

AE: A store?

0:23:56.4

JH: Yeah.

0:23:56.6

AE: Like a commissary kind of thing.

0:23:58.5

JH: Yeah, right there when you turn off the road—that little block building.

0:24:03.4

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:24:03.8

JH: That used to be where Mr. Miller lived, and he had a grocery store there and, you know, you'd buy your—few groceries there and soft drinks and candy and stuff like that.

0:24:26.1

AE: Well do you have anything else that you want to share or end on about Mr. Ward and Thirteen Mile?

0:24:34.3

JH: No, the only thing it's just, you know, home to me and—and instead of Buddy Ward a friend, he's like another daddy to me, you know. He's—he's family—him and Martha Pearl both. It's a sad thing, you know, the way he's—the way he is now.

0:24:58.1

AE: Were he and your daddy close?

0:25:00.6

JH: Yeah, they—they—they was close. I don't think they really knew one another, you know, because my dad died let's see in about [nineteen] sixty-seven or sixty-eight and Buddy come in fifty-six. So, you know, they was—they was friends. That's about it.

0:25:43.7

AE: About it—Tommy has got a picture of your daddy out there. Have you seen that?

0:25:46.5

JH: Huh?

0:25:47.3

AE: Tommy has got a picture of your daddy.

0:25:48.8

JH: No, I haven't seen it.

0:25:50.8

AE: Yeah, it's a neat picture.

0:25:54.8

JH: There's a lot of history on that place down there, you know. I'd like to have time to—to go back and try to dig up everything on it. It's an old post is what it is.

0:26:19.2

AE: When [Hurricane] Dennis hit and did all that damage out there—or even a storm before—had there been—that you know of, like records and photographs out there that had been lost, or is that something that Mr. Ward might have around?

0:26:29.9

JH: I'm sure there's stuff that—that's been lost, you know, that—because back years ago, they couldn't detect the hurricanes and stuff like we today, you know, prepare for it.

0:26:49.3

AE: Uh-hmm. Well Tommy told me he's working on writing up a history of the place for this event in May for all the folks who are coming [for the Southern Foodways Alliance's annual field trip], and you're going to be frying some fish for us or something out there, aren't you?

0:26:58.9

JH: As I understand I am.

0:27:01.8

AE: [*Laughs*] Put you to work. It will be a good time.

0:27:04.8

JH: Is this going to happen at Thirteen Mile?

0:27:05.2

AE: Yes.

0:27:06.2

JH: Well Stan said he's going to do one at the Armory.

0:27:08.9

AE: Okay, yeah, they're different events so—yeah.

0:27:11.5

JH: Oh, okay; I'll be in that one.

0:27:13.5

AE: That one too? [*Laughs*]

0:27:14.4

JH: Yeah.

0:27:14.8

AE: All right, well we'll see you all weekend. [*Laughs*] Well James, thanks for sitting with me again.

0:27:20.3

JH: Sure, it's my pleasure. I hope I helped you out, you know. It's—you know you—you think of a lot of things, but somebody asks you a question and after you leave, you know—dag-gone-it, I wish I could have thought of that, you know.

0:27:36.1

AE: Uh-hmm.

0:27:37.3

JH: Well, there will be other times.

0:27:39.7

AE: Yeah. Well thank you again.

0:27:42

[End James Hicks-2]

[END]