

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
CLYDE BERNARD "BERNIE" FOWLER**

**COUNTY COMMISSIONER
MARYLAND STATE SENATOR
ENVIRONMENTAL LEADER**

BIOGRAPHY

INTERVIEW BY

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Richard: My name is Richard Dodds. I'm the curator of Maritime History at the Calvert marine museum in Solomons, Maryland. I'm here today because several years ago Senator Bernie Fowler contacted the marine museum about our interest in his extensive archive here and the preservation of that archive in Calvert County. I'm here today, it's December 14th, 2014 to interview Bernie Fowler about his early life starting from his birth in Baltimore to his early years growing up in Broomes Island through his service in WWII in the United States Navy and his return to Broomes Island and beyond.

We are here with Senator Bernie Fowler on the 12th of December 2014. First off, let's start with your parents. Bernie, tell me a little bit about your mother and father. Names and where they hail from.

FAMILY BACKGROUND

Bernie: My dad's name was Howard Andrew Fowler. He was born and raised in what they used to call Wallville. It's commonly known as Saint Leonard now. My mother's name was Clara Lillian Fowler. She was born on Broomes Island at the old home place right on Nan's Cove. They were a good team. We were not in the upper echelon financially, but we had a mother and father that loved us, cared very deeply for us, and both of them had very limited education. They had big hearts and they made no apology for loving their children.

Richard: Your mother, what was her maiden name?

Bernie: Mother's name was Dove. Her maiden name was Dove.

Richard: That was the Dove family that was on Broomes Island, still is?

Bernie: Yes, they were all born and raised in Broomes Island. My grandfather may have been born up the county somewhere, but he soon moved to Broomes Island as a young man and fell in love with Miss Emma, that was his wife, and they lived there happily ever after.

Richard: I believe soon after your parents married they moved to Baltimore.

Bernie: That's correct. I had an uncle who had his parents were good enough to gift him some money when they died and it was a pretty good sum of money. He kept insisting on my dad coming to Baltimore. He said, you know times are tough in the country, why don't you come to Baltimore we'll get a little business going up there and you'll do better. You'll be able to provide better for your family. His name was Arthur Kinnitz. Dad really thought highly of him. They were like

brothers instead of brothers-in-laws. He and mom packed up the kids and all, went up on the steamboat to Baltimore.

We lived over on, I don't remember the number on the street, but I remember the street name was Grindall, G-R-I-N-D-A-L-L and that was over in east Baltimore. Had the little row houses and the little steps out front they washed every day unless it was a freezing cold day. To make a long story short, Dad didn't succeed quite as well as uncle Arthur had projected and not too long after that they thought seriously about moving back. In the meantime, I was born in Baltimore. They brought me back home as an infant baby. We moved to the little house on Nan's Cove and there's where I stayed until I went into the service in WWII.

Richard: Now I know, Bernie, that's not your full name. You were born with a full name.

Bernie: Yes, Clyde Bernard Fowler. That was my original name. The people I used to work for when I was in high school from the time I was a freshman until I graduated as a senior they started calling me Bernie and then shortly everybody was calling me Bernie. It got so nobody in the country knew Bernard or Clyde, so I was talking to Judge Bowen about it one time and he said, why don't you slip Bernie into your regular name? I can do that through the courts. It's very simple. It's done all the time and then you can use that if you ever run for public office. So I did. I had them change that. It's Clyde Bernard Bernie Fowler. I always went by in my public life as C.B. Bernie Fowler, which was legal and proper.

Richard: Okay. I've never heard anybody refer to you as Clyde Fowler. I know you have siblings. Can you tell me a little bit about your siblings? Your brothers-

Bernie: Yes, we have four children. They range in age from the youngest my son is 53-

Richard: I'm sorry Bernie, I'm talking about your siblings.

Bernie: Oh, my siblings. Okay. Okay yes, there was a total of 6 in our family. My sister died some years ago. She was the oldest in the family. She was sort of the matriarch of the gang-

Richard: Her name was?

Bernie: ... Her name was Louise Fowler and then she married a Navy officer and became Louise McGaughey. Then my brother next to her his name was Howard Andrew, named after my dad, Howard Andrew Jr. And then there was Marvin next to him. He was three years older than I, and then myself. Then following me in 1928 was Edward and in 1938 was Merle. There was a total of six of us, five boys and one girl. It was a crowded little house we lived in I can assure you.

Richard: You father certainly had to provide for a large family, very important, because your mother didn't work. She kept house.

Bernie: Mother was always the housekeeper except she was one of the better crabbers in the area. In the summertime when crabs were running if we were out of school I was sitting on the stern of the skiff with her. If not she would get the house straight and go everything ready she'd go take the little skiff we tied up at grandmother's and she'd crab around and catch soft crabs and then they sold them. There were two markets for them at Broomes Island and she sold them then and one time the glut of crabs was so great they were only getting a penny a piece for them. Twelve cents a dozen for soft-shell crabs. They wouldn't even buy the peelers and busters because there was too much mortality. They died too easy. There were so many of them in the live boxes, they called them, and floats that the oxygen was soon depleted and the little animals couldn't make it. They wouldn't buy the ones that were sort of fatalistic so to speak.

Richard: Going back to your Baltimore days, your parents weren't there that long. Your family wasn't there that long. You were born there. I understand that you actually moved to Parkers Wharf when the family came back to the county, is that correct?

EARLY LIFE IN CALVERT COUNTY

Bernie: Yes, dad took a job with Mr. McNany. That was one of the steamboat stops at Parkers Wharf, one of the regular stops for the steamboats. Dad took a job with Mr. McNany who owned the McNany Oyster House there. It was never the big operation that Warren Denton was at Broomes Island, but probably like Lore's at Solomons. It was a good industry, so to speak, but it wasn't like ... Denton had 135 shuckers. At McNany's oyster house he probably never had more than a dozen shuckers at any one given time.

Richard: What did your father do for McNany?

Bernie: Daddy was sort of the manager. Mr. McNany's absence was almost constant so dad was kind of there to watch the shuckers and to watch when the oysters came in and when they bought the oysters he'd be on the dock to make sure that was all taken care of properly. Not a very pressing job as such. It was a very casual situation for him, and the money he got was very minuscule they didn't pay much money in those days. At times mom would kind of pitch in because she used to make all the gloves for the shuckers, the oyster gloves. They only had a glove on the right hand. No I'm sorry on the left hand they had the glove. On the right hand they just used, on these three fingers, they used covers. She'd make those little covers. They'd slip those canvas covers over their fingers because

that's where the shell -- sometimes the knife would slip a little bit -- and that's what they used to protect their hands and their fingers.

Richard: Hmm. Your family lived at Parkers Wharf then for a few years?

Bernie: We lived at Parkers Wharf from the time we left Baltimore and I can't give you my age at that time I could guess at probably 1 or 2 years old. We lived there and my first school day was at the one-room school at Island Creek. There were only 3 in the first grade. There were 4 siblings in the school. It was grades 1 through 7 and we were kind of scattered 1, 2, 3, 4 I think it was at that time. My sister graduated, I think, 3 years ahead of me so that make it about right. We lived there until about halfway through that first year. I was five years old then. Halfway through the first year, dad decided to go back to the water and to go back farming. We went to a place called ... it was the farm. It still exists. Mr. Joe and he was sort of the tenant farmer. Then he also had a little boat down at the second farm that he'd go and use to catch oysters and stuff like that. The water industry was in his blood, but you did what you had to do to make a living.

The Depression started in 1929. Depression had just begun when I started my first year in school. It was a very challenging time for everybody. The culture, the people were so different then because if you needed to put shingles on your house your neighbors would come over help you. It wasn't a big deal. If somebody's barn blew down or was destroyed from some reason, everybody would get together and help them raise that barn. If you needed to get your boat out of the water some of these are log canoes might be as much as 32 or 34 feet long they would get them up on skid poles so that you could clean the barnacles off them, caulk them, the usual thing you do with marine equipment.

It was so different then. The little island was about 150 homes, but there was about 5 or 6 stores, grocery stores there, and they sold gumboots. They sold hats. They sold shoes. Everything you could ... it was a one stop shop. The system was this: it was an honor system. They had what they call a tick. They had a little book with a carbon copy in it. Everybody when the river would freeze up and you couldn't make any money they would carry them all winter long on that tick they called it. Put it on a ticket. Then in the spring when the fishing started and the monies began to evolve then they'd pay the store bill. That's the way it worked and it was a very trustworthy way to do business. If you didn't pay Mr. Denton, don't go to Mr. Pitcher's to expect good credit because, they didn't have computers in those days but, they had a system to let you know who the deadbeats were. For the most part they honored their bills and they paid their bills when they got the money. That's the way we lived. Gosh, to get a nickel, 5 cents, would be like today would be like a thousand dollar bill-

Richard: Like a windfall.

Bernie: ... oh yeah, windfall is right.

Richard: Where was the Wells farm, Bernie?

Bernie: Wells farm was as you go to Parkers Wharf right down the end of the road is where the oyster house was: right on the river about halfway from 264, that's the Broomes Island road, to the end of Parkers Wharf road. About midway there's a dirt road to the right and goes down. So far it's still in agriculture. I don't know whether it's in the agriculture preservation or not, but I'm surprised by now that somebody hasn't bought it up and build homes on it. I suspect whoever owned the property put it in Ag preservation, which was a good thing for them to do and a great thing for the county.

Richard: Then if I get this right, after your father left the McNany's place at Parkers Wharf then the family moved to Broomes Island.

Bernie: Moved back to Broomes Island in the cottage. I was of the impression that dad owned the cottage, but I've been corrected since and my sister told me we never owned the home. That house was owned by my uncle Josh Dove, and he let our family move into it.

Richard: Where was the house located, Bernie?

Bernie: The house was located just as you go on the island. You know where the public landing is there, where you can put a boat overboard and stuff like that? If you look diagonally from that little foot wharf there over you'll see a gray house there. I've got a picture on the wall here I show you after we break. That's where we lived. The house does not look the same today as it did then. It was very small. Four of us slept in one-room, My three brothers and sister. My sister had a bed over here and the three boys slept in a big double bed on the other side. It was a very tight situation, but then you have to do what you have to do and that was the way life was in those days.

Richard: I imagine, as you were saying, a very simple life. Did you even have central heating in the house at the time?

Bernie: Oh we never had electricity. We never had any running water. You went to the pitcher pump, which was a handle on it, and you'd put water in it and you'd catch it, you know, so that water would come up. And that's how you'd get your water. A lot of people had dug wells where they just dropped a bucket down the well. It'd have a wheel on the top with a bucket on it. Let it down and get water. You know you'd say, my what hardships that was, but we didn't consider it a hardship because we didn't know any better. That's the way life was . . .

Richard: Everybody else

Bernie: Everybody was in the same boat. You had no oil heaters. You had no central heating. It just wasn't there. Everything was wood, wood and coal. That's one of the things the boys grew up doing, was cutting the wood, splitting the kindling wood so you'd have it to make fire the next morning in the wintertime when it was cold. It was not a ... we never considered it a hardship or why is this happening to me because we didn't know any better. We didn't know any better. We accepted this is the way life is and you go with it.

Again, repeating myself, the one thing that we had was a togetherness in the family and togetherness in the community that has long ago evaporated to what it used to be. When you had someone sick in the house, the whole community knew about it and if you went out, oh how's so-and-so doing today? Doing any better? Oh I'm glad he's doing better and stuff like that. It was just a friendly time to be alive. A time when you didn't have to worry about anybody robbing you or breaking in your house. That was unheard of. I don't remember in my young life except only one murder that ever happened in Calvert County for years and that's the way life was in those days and that's the way people's minds were in those days. They didn't have an angry attitude or because I don't have this I'm going to take it from somebody else. None of this is ... This is the way you're intended to live. This is it and you just do the best you can. That's what people did.

Richard: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Bernie: Didn't complain either. People didn't complain in those days. Now if somebody's in the room and making a little noise and another child can't hear the TV, you get a little fiasco because of the TV. We didn't have to worry about it, didn't even have TV. Didn't even have radios then. We didn't have an automobile so. Those things, they were bonuses for those who had the money to get it. I counted one time years ago I did a complete windshield survey of Broomes Island. I was counting oyster boats, the active boats that worked out of Broomes Island and also the automobiles. I got up to about 8 automobiles on the island. If you wanted to go somewhere, you had to get Uncle Johnny or Uncle Harvey or somebody to take you that had a car.

Going to the doctor's was unheard of. Doctors made house calls then. If you didn't have a phone you'd go to the neighbor's home because phones weren't that prevalent either. You'd go and you'd crank the phone and get a hold of the doctor and that maybe 9 o'clock in the morning and he may come trudging in at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. They were consistent and they were persistent. There was a dedication and affection for their patients. I remember old Doc Weems. My gosh, the house calls that man made and he was the first one that I know of

in the southern Maryland area that had a telephone in his car. He could do that because he could call the hospital or he could call his office to see if there were any calls come in so if it was in that area where there was another patient to see he'd save time. That had about a 3-page story in the Baltimore paper, in the old brown copies of the paper. You remember those?

Richard:

Bernie: Yeah, but gosh life was so simple then. So simple.

SCHOOL DAYS

Richard: Let me go back to your early education. You started at the one-room school-

Bernie: The school after it ceased to be used as an educational facility; it reverted back to the county commissioners. The county commissioners then could sell it and they sold that to a fellow by the name of Norris Hardesty, who opened up a little grocery store and a beer joint there. Added on to it, and it subsequently caught on fire, burned down one time.

Richard: So then you continued your education down on Broomes Island.

Bernie: I went from 1 to 7 grades at Broomes Island. Those days we had no middle school or junior high and you started school in the 1st grade. No kindergarten. You went 7 grades in elementary school and then you graduated from elementary school with a diploma. It was as big a deal as graduating from high school because in those days there were very few boys ever went to high school then in the early days. In fact, a friend of mine who's dead now, Herbert Buckmaster and myself were the first 2 boys ever to graduate from Broomes Island from high school.

Richard: That's remarkable.

Bernie: We graduated in 1940 before you were born, but it gives you a little identity with the period of time. First graduating class in Calvert County was when I was born 1924, but then it was only for those who ... there were no school buses, it was only for those who could get ... the father may have a car or they could find transportation to get up to. . . . They had a library. It became a library later on in Prince Frederick but that I am told served as the first high school in Calvert County. Just a little one-room building.

Richard: Tell me about the school in Broomes Island. At the time was it a one-room school there as well?

Bernie: No, it was a two-room school. The first school that I went to the second half of my first year in school was up adjacent to the Broomes Island cemetery. It was an old, old building. Obviously no insulation. It wasn't finished off too well inside. No water. Boys had to go to the spring to get the water and bring it back. Go in the woods and get wood so the teacher would have wood for the fire the next day. That was 7 grades. There was 1, 2, 3 in the one-room and 4, 5, 6, 7 in the other room. When I was in the 3rd grade they built the new two-room school at Broomes Island, which still exists. And the community has that now as the civic center and they are doing a good job with it. A lot of good memories there. Had good teachers. We only had 2 teachers. One teacher in the one-room that taught 3 grades and Ms. Grace Dorsey in the other room who taught the 4 grades. You graduated from there. You got your diploma like I said and you dressed up in blue white pants with a blue tie, white shirt and you got a little diploma all rolled up with a ribbon on it. That was for the most part the end of many of their educations.

Richard: Were you a good student?

Bernie: I was fair. I was good in my early days in school because I remember the first part of my school year in the first grade at Island Creek, the one-room school at Island Creek, there was a Miss Ireland. She later got married to Mr. Gray, but when I went in that school that day I was a little apprehensive. You know you're 5 years old. Although you've got your other 3 siblings with you, you still don't feel quite comfortable and she got a hold of me and my hand and walked me over and showed me where I was to sit at. She had me sit right up in the front seat there. There were 2 other students behind me. Penmanship was a very big part of it then. Penmanship, you've got these, we call them scratch pads now, but they had the double lines in them and you'd have to make your capital A's up here then below you'd have to make your little A or vice versa. All through that first half a year of school, every paper that I did got a VG in red on it and got hung up on the board and she'd show the students now this is the way I want you to do it. You don't pay any attention to it, but looking back over it that was a very flattering time for me, only I didn't have sense enough to be flattered, you know.

Reading, writing and arithmetic I think by the time I was in the 3rd grade we had to know our multiplication tables up to 12, 1 through 12. I don't think they even teach them anymore. It's all, you know, they use the new technology or little calculators and stuff. They allow the use of calculators now when they take a test. You do square root on them. We had to do all of that.

Richard: Were there any teachers you remember that were quite an influence on you when you were growing up or any other adults?

Bernie: Oh yes, there's a number of people. Miss Ireland made me love school the first day I walked in that door. And when I got older in the upper classes, a lot of times you'd be called out of school because if an oyster bar opened up and a lot of oysters out there to be caught – you could load the boat with oysters. It took every able body you could get so I'd get out of school occasionally and help the family. It was a life that I don't think I'd necessarily want to go over it again, but I wouldn't trade the experience that I had. I think that kind of culture builds you into manhood and builds you into an independent -- not that you're the kingpin or anything – but you learn to do things on your own. You don't expect somebody to do something for you the rest of your life. There were no handouts in those days. The handouts that they had during the Depression, my parents wouldn't let us take them. You could get a pair of shoes if you wanted them, but we weren't allowed to. We were not allowed to accept poverty. That was pride. Whether it was false or not, use your own judgment, but we were taught 'No we're going to make it on our own.' Now it's a different interpretation altogether.

Richard: As you got into the upper classes during the summer recess, summer holiday, did you [inaudible] or did you work? What did you do?

Bernie: Well all during elementary school, yes I either crabbed. Dad would take the boys out on the flats. My sister would stay home with my mother and they would take care of the housework because in those days there were no washing machines. They did all the washing outside under the shade of a tree. They'd boil the water on the cook stove in the kitchen and take it out and put it in the tub bucket by bucket. But we would crab. The boys would get on the flats unless it was windy and you couldn't see the bottom. If it was a little windy and too many ripples you couldn't see the bottom.

When you're wading like that your eyes are pretty close to the crabs and if you're up on a boat looking down you can see much easier. We would crab from there up to a place called Battle Creek, you know where that's at, and that would be by that time the tide would have turned and we'd come on back. Each one of us dad made a live box for each one of us. You tied it around your waist and that's what you did. You'd be abreast each other the oldest one be on the outside. Oh man, that was fun. When you'd hit a spot that nobody had been to that day and you could catch a crab here and look down about 15 feet in front of you see another old soft shell sitting by its shed there, you know? It was a fun time.

Richard: So you were actually contributing to the family income though too?

Bernie: Oh yes.

Richard: [crosstalk].

Bernie: Yes, and in those days the children's income wasn't theirs. That money -- this sounds strange -- but I never kept any of the money that I made when I was a child. That went into the family pool to help pay the bills and keep things going. I never will forget when I first went to Washington. I went to school at the Washington Navy Yard up there. College was out of the question. My stipend that they paid you, you had to work, at the same time you had the school mostly in drafting, orthographic projection, stuff like engineering stuff. When I got my paycheck at the end of the week it was \$15.44. They paid you 40 cents an hour or \$3.20 a day, but my take home pay was \$15.44. Cost me \$5 for my room and board. No, it cost my \$5 for my room and I only got my breakfast then I had to buy a meal ticket with \$5 you got \$6 worth of food for \$5. Buy a meal ticket, lasted us the week. Then I had \$5 left. I would hitch home on the weekend and give mother half of that money.

Richard: It was a different life.

Bernie: And she took it.

Richard: Before we go off the subject of schools, schools obviously at that time were very much segregated. Was there any interaction between you young people, white people, and young black people at that time?

Bernie: Oh yes. Yes, yes indeed. When I went to Island Creek school there was a school that's still there. What are they using in for now? I think the police are using it now. They put a newer school there, but it was the old pink school house they called it. It was painted pink. Old wooden, shabby building. Half the glass is out in it, window glass. The blacks would come up early and we'd all get together out there in the yard, the older boys in particular. Most the time I was watching them, and they'd play dodge ball or they'd play . . . fox and hounds was one of the favorites. Then the blacks and the white mingled and played together, but when Miss Ireland came out and rang that bell, cling, cling, cling, cling that meant you had to stop and get in that school and don't hesitate because you'd get good tongue lashing if you did. Then the black boys and girls would go on off to the pink school house which was about a mile from where our school was at Island Creek. They'd go on off. Yes, there was intermingling. You know it was done in a very friendly way. We didn't feel estranged. We didn't feel like you can't touch these, . . . They were our friends. We were their friends. But when that bell rang, Boom! It was two different worlds.

Richard: Interesting. Going back the Broomes Island again when you were growing up there I can see where you started very early your interest in the river and what the life in the river because you were helping your father. You were crabbing. Is that correct to say that's where you first started your love for the Patuxent River? Your interest in the river?

Bernie: I really think it was and one of the things, you know, recreation was you choose up sides and sometimes you play a little ball with a rag ball one of the parents would make. We later on got sophisticated and got some hard balls and started playing baseball, but you got so involved in swimming. That was a daily recreation and the water was so clear and clean then. You had sea nettles, had plenty of sea nettle, particularly in the hot weather when the salinity was up. Yes, you're right on target I think that it's almost like the Patuxent River water gets in your blood and it stays with you. You never get rid of it. I've often heard some of the old-timers say once you get that oyster blood on you you'll never leave it, you know? That's when I fell in love with the river and that love I don't think has drained much over the years. I've had a lot of disappointments, but I still try to keep my optimism up and I'm not totally discouraged. Unhappy sometimes and disappointed on many occasions, but never, never, never give up, you know.

RELIGION

Richard: I've heard that one before. Switching a little bit then to I know you are quite religious and very faithful. When you grow up in that sort of religion background with your family or was that something that happened later on in life?

Bernie: No. No. As a boy dad went to Waters Memorial Church and I never knew -- he never talked to me about it -- but he very rarely ever went to Broomes Island church. Made sure we were out the door on Sunday mornings because of Sunday school and church and so did mother. Now mother very seldom went too because they were two peas in a pod and it was sort of, well if my husband's not going I'm not going to go either. While there was prayer in the house and mother, I can hardly recall a time when she didn't take time to read her Bible some, and that gave me good vibrations to kind of build a foundation on. We were taught at home, much by our parents,

Particularly my mother because I remember one time she said I was thinking about quitting school because my uncle wanted me to seine with him and it was enticing because his children were my cousins and we all recreated together. We were good friends. It was kind of fun get out there with them on the water and spend the weekend over on the bay and that sort of thing. Mom said to me one time she said, "You know I pray for you. I want at least one of my boys to graduate from high school and so I hope you'll change your mind. I hope you

won't quit school." That stimulated me and I never knowingly disobeyed mother in my life or my father. Dad had a heart as big as a giraffe, but he could be rough when he wanted to be rough.

Richard: It sounds like your mother particularly and her reading Bible readings at home-

Bernie: Yes.

Richard: ... certainly started your interest, but was there anything later in life that increased your faith or change it in some way or did you just continue that trend?

Bernie: Richard, every year at Broomes Island the church at that time was known as the Broomes Island Pilgrim Holiness Church. It had Methodist leanings. It is now the Broomes Island Wesleyan Church which is very close to Methodism. That church every year in the late fall, like in November and again in the spring of the year, they'd have revivals they called it. They'd have visiting evangelists and entertainers come. By entertainers I mean these were talented people, had good voices, good singers and they usually played the guitar. Sometimes they'd have an accordion or play the piano. Believe it or not that was a real attraction in those days. It was, I don't want to compare religion to circus, but when a circus used to come to town all the kids would run out and watch this old pipe organ coming down getting ready to setup shop for the circus. Not comparing the church to the circus, but it was a real attraction. You didn't have to drive people there that was ... remember there's no entertainment at home except the family conversation. There's no radios. There's no TVs. What do you do? You do the best thing you have and at the time the evangelistic services were very good.

They had some good preachers come in and had some great talent. A lot of them I remember. I recall back in 1938 I was a sophomore in high school and was in church and this Evangelist, his name was the Reverend P. F. Elliot, actually he'd worked for the FBI for a while and then he said in his sermons from time to time that God had called him to be an Evangelist. He felt that's what he wanted to do and he was a very good one. He always brought good entertainers with him. I remember he had one lady by the name of Marie Holmes. She played the guitar and sang and oh man. If Nashville got a hold of her she'd never got away. She had a beautiful voice. The entertainment was so good.

I remember this one service in 1938 in November that she sang a couple of songs and then the minister started preaching and I don't even remember the sermon too much, but at any rate, something got me that night. And I believe truly it was the Holy Spirit. And we'd gone because we used to sit with the girls we went to school with. We'd all sit in the pew together, the boys. That night when the evangelist gave the altar call it was just like somebody yanked me out of the pew

and I went up and knelt at the altar. A 14-year old child hasn't had too much time to do too many bad things because I wasn't ... no such thing as drugs. Coke was a Coke-a-Cola that you drank in those days. I went up and I just asked God to forgive me for any sins I'd committed knowingly, unknowingly. And that this is for real. I do believe there is a God. Went through the whole prayer. Gave my life to the Lord. I've told this story many times, but I've also been quick to say that I've been as imperfect as everybody else.

There's no perfect person. We're all you, Mike. We're all sin, sometimes unknowingly. Your wrath will get to you. Anger will be in you. You say something you'll feel sorry for saying or you do something wrong. Not real bad stuff, but there are times when you do these little things unknowingly. To me there's no ... I don't know of any Saints walking around in the United States of America, but it's an ongoing challenge to try to do God's will, and one of the things that is the most helpful thing that I've found is to make sure you take time every day to read the scripture. I like to take the time, like if my wife's off somewhere I'll go in the living room, that's my favorite place, and sit in that chair where I can see the family, my dad, grandfather, my son and I'll just lay back and kind of meditate. Occasionally, I'll say and this is scripture, "Dear Lord speak. Your servant is waiting." Actually waiting for God to say something to me.

I have to be honest with you I've never had God openly converse with me like I've heard people, God told me this and God told me that. Well I have been led by God to do certain things. The chemistry that takes over in your body that you know in your heart it's the right thing to do. You ought to do it and you'll never regret doing it. That is kind of sanctimonious logistics here, but that's what I've tried to do and yet I've been wild and woolly at times in me young life, in the Navy and whether you're going to get back home or not, get a little few extra beers in you, which I shouldn't have drank to start with, but I did. Like I say it's just a matter of constant cultivation and constant affection, respect and honor for deity that drives me. At least I interpret it as being that.

HIGH SCHOOL

Richard: Thank you, Bernie. Just going back now to Broomes Island again. Children your age when you're about to get ready to graduate from elementary school there the boys particularly they were almost all ordained already to follow their fathers on the water and most of them did that and that was the normal life, but you, thanks to your mother, it sounds like, went to high school. As you said you were one of the first two boys from Broomes Island to go to high school. That must have been quite a major step in your life?

Bernie: Well at that time I didn't think it was too important and I didn't think it was such a gigantic step, but looking back over it, I know that it was the formulation of my

future. Had I not gone on to high school and I've taken a number of college courses. I have honorary degrees. I've got a doctorate from Saint Mary's and one from the College of Southern Maryland, another one in the making that I'm not allowed to say anything about. It was that basic education, and you did get a good education in high school in those days, contrary to popular belief because there was no technology and there was no this and none of that. You were full force into whatever it was you were doing. If you were in an algebra class, that's where you were. Your mind wasn't floating somewhere else because your algebra teacher would keep you on your toes. They had time to be personal then. The schools weren't overcrowded. I mean the rooms weren't overcrowded. You didn't have 35 kids in a classroom with one teacher.

I think my high school in a way was probably as helpful to me and to most people as maybe a small 4-year liberal arts college would have been because that's the way they trained you. And your mind was mechanized because you had to learn your multiplication tables. You had to do the square root. You couldn't take a calculator and push a couple buttons and get it. I think that kind of sensitizes your brain and I think it helps your brain to grow and develop. It kind of nurtures you into a mode of intellect that helps you compete with people of all levels of education.

Richard: Your parents must have been very proud obviously when you graduated from high school. I mean that was a major thing back then.

Bernie: Oh yeah, they were. Mom cried that night. I have to tell you a little story about that though. See in those days it wasn't a big deal, like they didn't have a big prom and all the fancy gowns and the boys dressed up in tuxedos. We graduated from high school over at the old Seaside Ballroom, which subsequently now is condos are there now. When it was an amusement park they had what they call the Seaside Ballroom there. No sidewalls. It was all just a big tabernacle type of thing with the open walls. You graduated. After you graduated, then the band set up, and that was your prom night the same night.

I never will forget we were looking forward to that night. And remember we didn't have a car. My dad had borrowed my uncle's car and we all went over and grandmother Dove went with us. Just about the time we got graduate and the band got set up I just got on the floor with this little girl I was holding hands with in high school. She's still living incidentally. My wife knows her, but it was never a very affectionate thing. We were just partners. We started dancing. Mom came on the dance floor and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "I hate to tell you this Bernie, but mother's sick and we're going to have to go." There's nothing left for me to do but go so my prom and graduation night turned out to be a real zonker.

Richard: Well after all that, but you graduated at obviously when events in the world were taking a major change.

Bernie: Oh yes.

Richard: You graduated in 1940, WWII had broken out in 1939, the year before. U.S. entered the war in 1941 the year after you graduated.

Bernie: I didn't go in until early '44.

Richard: Early '44, so you had a few years after you graduated.

Bernie: Yeah .

NAVY AND WORLD WAR II

Richard: During those few years what did you do?

Bernie: Well after graduation from high school I had taken civil service exam for entrance to the Washington Navy Yard and it was a good move because college was out of the question for us at that time. Scholarships were unheard of. The GI Bill of Rights, I obviously wasn't eligible for that at the time. In fact that didn't come on until I think about half way through the war. I went up there and I stay there for 28 months. And I had 2 brothers, my oldest brother was drafted, one of the early inductees from Broomes Island, one of the very first, and that was in May of 1941. Then my second brother enlisted in 1942. My oldest brother enlisted in the Army and he ended up in the infantry and subsequently he was up in Washington with the Honor Guard with the 29th Division for a period of time. He was there when the war broke out and it wasn't long before they got them all wrapped up and bundled them up and sent them over to England. He went with the 82nd Airborne then.

My other brother was in the Air Force and he trained in Love Airfield near Dallas, Texas. From there he went to the China/India/Burma campaign. Just before they left I tried to resign the position I was in up there, and they would not let me resign because I was working on a very classified project. I can say it now, but in those days it was all sworn to secrecy and they examined you before you went out of that room to make sure you didn't take anything with you. It was the Norden bombsight. They only built 1/4 of it there and the other parts were built somewhere else and it was assembled somewhere else. That's how good it was. It was good in those days. Today it's a piece of junk. Probably in a museum somewhere.

I finally, after badgering the man in charge, he finally called me at the office one day and he said, "You know I got thinking about you last night." I told him, "If something happens to one of my brothers and I'm back in a deferred job I will never be able to live with myself. I don't want to get myself killed. I'm not looking for that, but I just can't ... I can't handle it. I could not handle it." So he finally agreed to let me go and he gave me a hug when I left there.

The next day I was down to the Navy recruiting office on G street, signed up and ready to go. Boot camp and engineering school for a few months and then from there right overseas in the Pacific. That's a quick thumbnail of what did you do after you graduate. Went to Navy Yard stayed there, enlisted in the Navy, went out and then I took an early out. I should have had to stay in at least another year because I didn't have enough points to get out of the Navy, but if you lost a sibling, a member of your family in the war, you were eligible for what they called "an early out," because once the war was over, the war was over, and that was the end of it. I took the early out, which got me back home so I could kind of help the folks out a little bit.

Richard: You had one brother went into the Army, one brother into the Air Force, you decided the Navy. What made you decide the Navy?

Bernie: I guess it was because I spent so much time on the water. I'm not sure they had a choice. I know my older brother was drafted. He was drafted and you report to such-and-such a place, such-and-such a date for physical examination to be inducted in the Army. But I did have a choice. I could pick and choose under the circumstances I was in.

Richard: What did your mother think that she had three sons in the military.

Bernie: She wasn't happy. She was not happy. Dad wasn't happy. That's one of the few times I saw him cry was when I ... you know men weren't ashamed to kiss each other in those days on the side of the face so he kissed me on the side. I kissed him on the side of the face and gave him a big hug. Of course, mom was different, she'd hold on to you and shake like as Aspen leaf you know. "I didn't want you to go. I didn't want you to go." We all had a job to do. It was important. It was very important that we didn't lose that war, for many obvious reasons which you already know. Hitler was a mean demon, a mean demon and so was the Emperor Hirohito. They were two of a kind. When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the heinous way that they bombed that sneak attack, December 7th of 1941. Almost like it was inhuman.

Richard: Tell me a little bit more about your naval service. You went to boot camp and then went to training school and then you went where? Where were you stationed?

Bernie: I went to the ... they sent me Chicago. I left Chicago on a train and went to Shoemaker, California. I was trying to think of the name that's why I was stalling. Shoemaker, California, which was a staging area for the Navy. That's not too far from San Francisco. Then that's where I got my orders to pick my ship up at Mare Island Navy Yard in Vallejo, California. Of course they transported me there. Got on board the USS *Engstrom* and we stayed there for several weeks getting the new camouflage on for the Pacific because the ship had been in the North Atlantic.

Richard: What kind of ship was she?

Bernie: A destroyer escort. Main mission was to try to keep submarines out, to hunt submarines down, escort men and supplies into the beaches and all. That was their big job. They had good sound gear and K-guns on the fan tail and then the ash cans you rolled off on a big rack. Not a big large ship, but it was comfortable. We kind of thought, though, because if you hit a storm you was under water half the time. I recall one time and I may have told this story. If I have, stop me.

I recall we hit the tail end of a typhoon and that old ship was going like this when you go sideways because when you're an escort you go zig-zagging back and forth. And I was in my bunk. I had served my watch and I was in my bunk. All of a sudden this water comes gushing in. Oh my God, we've been hit. Everybody scrambling around in there trying to get out. And what had happened was all the below deck had scavenging air that was pulled in by air pumps. The pumps run constantly. They'd pull air in and put this fresh air down in the compartments. What happened: the ship leaned so far, listed so far they tell me the chronometer read 68 degrees. Now that's pretty far. It just scooped the water up and floated down. I really thought we'd been hit by a torpedo. I really thought we had had it. I was trying to get out. I grabbed my life jacket and get out.

Richard: Well, serving on destroyer escorts I know you have to have a strong stomach. You adapted all right to the?

Bernie: I did get a little bit one time in a storm and that's the time -- I forget the name of the hanger -- it wasn't too far from us. It actually rolled the front of her deck up. Rolled the front of her deck up, that's how hard the wind blew. A number of ships were damaged. We weren't damaged I guess because most of the time we were under water. We had a standing joke on the *Engstrom*, you know, they ought to pay us submarine pay because we spend half our time under water.

Richard: What position did you hold on the ship, Bernie?

Bernie: I was when I started on fireman first class and then I guess I did the right things and old Chief Clover, he said to me one time, he said "I'm gonna take you off

standard watch, your duty station. I think you're a good person. I'm not satisfied with the way things are being run. I'm gonna put you in charge. We're gonna make you the oil king." That meant all the oil that was taken on when ships got fuel from the tankers, you need them or in the islands like Saipan or Guam or wherever they were at. You had to be there to make sure that the tanks were filled properly, that you had the right ballast. Same way with water. I was oil and water king is what they called me.

I was also the roving watch. My job was to make sure that every engineer, whether it was electric, motor machinist mate or machinist mate, when they were on duty that they were awake. I was instructed one time that if you catch anybody asleep you take that 45 and just lay that cold steel right against the face until they wake up and they wouldn't go back to sleep anymore. I never had to do that. I never had to do that. They'd either hear me coming or they'd be awake, but that was my job: was making sure that men and engineering force were all on duty where they were supposed to be doing their job.

Richard: You were onboard when Japan surrender I presume?

Bernie: Yes. We were at Iwo Jima when they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. Some people say Hiroshima. We were taught to say Hiroshima. Again, I was asleep. I'd had a pretty rough night. We'd had slept and when I woke up I was kind of groggy and they were talking about this bomb that had killed thousands and thousands of people. I didn't know whose it was. I mean is it Japan got that bomb or who? Finally, when I found out it was us, it was a sigh of relief. We were at Iwo Jima then when that happened. Then they dropped another one on Nagasaki. You remember that? Then we left. We got orders to go to Okinawa. We were on our way from Iwo Jima to Okinawa when one of the main engines blew up. Our flank speed was probably not more than 15-18 knots at the most and that's too slow for battle conditions so we had orders to go back home and go back to port. Guam was our home port. Go back to Guam and then we got orders in between that mission going back to Guam.

We got orders to go to the island of Truck and join the other escorts there surveying that because they expected them to surrender at any moment. They didn't want any submarines coming in or going out there. That's what we did. We patrolled Truck for some time. I've got the last battle orders that was issued around. I've got a copy of them. The Captain issued orders he wanted everybody at GQ, general quarters, and wanted all guns unmuzzled, loaded magazines in place, and standby I still don't trust these damned Japs. Everybody they had 40 mils, we had 350s on and everybody was at their station. I was at mine. I was on a K-gun incidentally. That's one that it's a two-man operation. You put the ash can up in this thing shaped like a K. You set it in there. Then you have to open the breech, put a projectile in it, slam it shut. Then you take a lanyard and stand

back and pull it and that fires the projectile and that shoots the ash can off. It's all computerized now. Seaman do it all now. Officers are there to keep everything straight, but most the seamen up in the war room handle everything.

Richard: For a young man your age, you were brought and raised up in a very isolated part of the county in Calvert County and then you all of a sudden you're with the Navy. You're travelling to California. You're going to different places in the Pacific. It must have been quite an eye-opener in many ways [crosstalk].

Bernie: Oh yeah. When I left, I've never told this story to many people, but when I left , I really got word, I think we were at Saipan at the time, and I got word through the system they had that my oldest brother had died in action. Then I just kind of lost it to a certain extent. I loved that guy. I loved him. He was a good looking man and good person. 26 years of age is much too young to get slaughtered because of a crazy war. At that point in my life I just kind of lost my stability. I said, "I don't care whether I live or die. I don't care if the kamikaze drops on this big iron ship. I don't care what happens."

After I come to my senses, maybe a week or so later, I got to thinking. Thank God that you've been merciful. You ignored me. Then I really wanted to get home because I got to thinking about mom and dad, the blows they were taking. Dad was a very sensitive person. He was rough and gruff, but something wrong with one of his kids he could break down in a hurry. So my desire then was to be cool, play it safe, do the best you can to make sure that you get back to your parents. That was my ambition, my desire, my love and expectations at that time, but it wasn't always like that.

Richard: You were discharged in 1945? Later in 45?

Bernie: I was discharged in May of 1946.

Richard: 46 okay and you came back to Broomes Island?

Bernie: Came back to Broomes Island and spent a little time with the folks, kind of recuperating. Incidentally, when we came back to the states, to show you how appreciative America was in those days, our division landed at Long Beach, California. They had a band playing. They had a big sign. I mean a huge banner up there. Good job, well done. All these girls, all from the USO was throwing these little cartons of milk. You don't get any fresh milk over there. There's no cows aboard ship. It's all powdered milk. They were throwing this up to us. Fortunately, we had an ice cream maker aboard ship. They called that GeeDunk. In the Navy you call ice cream GeeDunk. Candy is pogy bait, and so we had the GeeDunk machine and we could get soft ice cream every so often. Whenever the

Captain wanted to give us a little bonus for being good boys he'd let them fire up the ice cream machine.

It was such a warm feeling to see that sign, to hear those bands, to see all these ... because we hadn't seen anything but even if you went ashore on Guam or somewhere you see the islanders, but you hadn't seen any Americans. We came back, we brought 59 Marines back from Iwo Jima that were pretty war weary and some had mild wounds. They were nothing critical because if they'd been critical they'd carried them another way, but we brought them back to the hospital ship in Guam. We saw them nurses on that hospital ship. My God, I thought they was the prettiest things in the world. Then when you get back to the United States and you really see some good looking girls, what was I thinking about. I hope you don't put all this in the movie. Streamline it if you will. These are sea stories now.

Richard: There will be some editing. You came back to Broomes Island, . . .

Bernie: Yep.

Richard: ... We're going to finish up soon here Bernie, but you came back to Broomes Island. It wasn't long after that that you started a business there did you?

Bernie: Yeah.

Richard: Can you tell us a little bit about the business you started?

Bernie: When I got discharged, I was discharged in Bainbridge, Maryland. They wanted to keep me because I had an injury to my ear and they wanted to keep me and see if they could ... and also I had ruptured myself on a K-gun. One time at GQ the guy with me he slipped and lost his balance and I had the whole weight of that thing. I felt something snap down here and of course you do your job. You do what you need to do, but they caught both of that. The caught the hearing in the left ear.

We were at GQ. A 3 1/2 inch gun and I was close to the gun. The K-gun wasn't too far from the 3&1/2 inch gun. You had 3 of them aboard. One there, one up amidships, and you had one on the fo'c'sle. They had fired the gun so long, the breech was hot and when they gave orders through the phones, computers didn't cut them off, through the phones, when they opened the breech they slammed another one in and that was in a cease fire and that was in. I took my battle muffs off and it wasn't only a second later that thing went off. My head for weeks felt like it was this big around. I couldn't hear. My head was ringing and everything. Nothing serious or life-threatening. I didn't even complain about it. Of course, the medics knew it and all. They caught it over at Bainbridge and

wanted to keep me there. I said no. No, no, no, no, no, no, I want to get home. I'm going to see my mother and father, my friends. I really want to go home. I'll get it taken care of.

HOMEcomings AND BERNIE'S BOATS

Well, that let the Navy off the hook so I came on home. Stayed with mom and dad for a little while, and then I went back to my old station which they had to give me my place back in Washington, but it was a different world then. The conduct and the atmosphere in Washington had changed so drastically. There was high incidence of crime at that time and all. It just kind of took away the hunger I had for living in Washington because that is a beautiful city and it was so nice there. We'd go to the concerts three nights a week at the Capital. Didn't have money to go anywhere else. Anyway, I finally went to the headman and told him again I said, "I'm gonna have to leave. I can't stand the city. I want to go back to the country."

I had dreams overseas of opening up this boat rental place. Another guy from Baltimore who's a very dear friend of mine, he's still living, Bob Rigger. He and I used to talk all the time. He said, "What are you gonna name it?" I said, "Well, I've been thinking about Bernie's Boats, Bernie's Better Boats, Bernie's Boat Basin." He said, "I like Bernie's Boats. I like that." So that's what we ended up naming the little place down there.

I did come back home and I had some money I saved before I went in the service. I had some money that I'd saved while overseas because there was no place to spend it. Went to the bank to borrow some money and the president in the bank at that time took my application and all and kind of patted me on the back like he didn't think it would be any problem. My mother got a call to tell me they had denied the loan. It was a GI loan for \$10,000. Could be unsecured, the Federal government stood behind that money. The bank would never lose a dime on it, but in those days they had just a handful of directors and they had them strategically located geographically in the county. They pretty much called the shot. Bernie Fowler's name came up for \$4,000 dollars and it went down.

When I came out of the bank I ran into Louie Goldstein who was starting his run for the Senate. He was in the House of Delegates. Louie was in the House of Delegates and left the House of Delegates to go into the Marine Corp in WWII and he served very admirably. Good man.

He always used to call me young Mr. Fowler. "Young Mr. Fowler how you doing?"

"Pretty good." "
"We all got back all right."
"Yes sir, we sure did."

He said, " What are you up here in town for today?"

I said, "Well, I went in to get some money from the bank, but I've been refused on the GI loan."

He said, "What do you mean refused? They can't refuse you."

I said, " Well, they did. They wouldn't loan me the money."

"I'm going back in there with you."

We went back in the bank. He got a hold of Claude Owens, he was president of the bank then, and you know how Louie had the gift of gab. He could make you think black was white. He was a very honest man. I don't mean anything detrimental about it, but he went and jumped all over the bank president. "This boy's been overseas fighting for his country and another brother and one brother he lost in the service and you turned him down?" He said, "I'm gonna loan him the money myself." He said, "I'll loan him the money myself. This boy deserves it."

When I got home the bank had called and told me my loan had been approved. He called me a little later and wanted to if I had affiliated yet. "No," I said, "I really haven't given much thought to it yet." He said, "Well I know your mom and dad are both Republicans, but if you would affiliate as a Democrat just to get me through the primary election. Once I get through the primary I'll be okay."

I looked at him and I said, "Louie, I'll have to talk to my dad but I'm sure I'll do that. I owe you one." I've said to dad and he said, "Son, there's two things that I've never badgered you about: your religion and your politics. That's very personal. That's your choice. You make that choice yourself." So, that's why I'm a Democrat.

Richard: I never knew that. You launched Bernie's Boats in I think 1947 [crosstalk].

Bernie: Yes, 1947 yeah.

Richard: How did things go? How did the business go?

Bernie: It went pretty good because remember I'm single and all I owed was the money I borrowed from the bank the \$4,000 GI loan that I borrowed from the bank. It

was going good and, of course, as you know in those days slot machines were legal in Southern Maryland. And I wasn't open 2 or 3 days before I had one of the agents or whatever you call them, brokers, whoever loaned you the slot machines, anyway, came over and wanted to know if I wanted to put some slot machines in. You get 50% of the take. I said sure go ahead. Not thinking anything about it, but I regret that I did that because I had some experiences with that later that kind of pricked my conscience.

Had one man in particular that was kind of addicted to playing the slot machines. He came in one day and he had \$20 worth of quarters and put them in, \$20 worth of quarters put those in. He did \$60 worth of quarters. That was all the money he had. Then he came at me, and said, "Want to buy a row boat?" I said, "Oh I'm interested in buying row boats, yeah." I said, "Who's got it?" He said, "I have." I said, "Where's it at?" He said, "Right out on the pier." I said, "It's a brand new one you just built." He said, "I'm gonna sell it. If you don't buy it I'm gonna sell it to somebody else." "What you want for it?" "\$60." So I rang the register, gave him \$60 and he come back \$20 worth of quarters. I'm ahead of my story.

He came up to me ... let me get it straight ... he came up to me and said ... No, he put that money in the slot machine. Now that's \$120. If he'd a won it he would have only gotten \$25 dollars. That's his max. That's how bad it was. Then he came up to me scratched his head and he said, "Would you do me a favor?" I said, "If I can, I will." He said, " Would you loan me \$20." I said, "Yes sir, I will." I rung \$20. I said, "I'm gonna loan you this provided you don't go to that slot machine to put another in. [inaudible]. He looked at me and he told me where I could go. He never came back in my place after that.

That bothered me because there are people and there are today that are so addicted to those slot machines and to gambling. It creates domestic problems. It creates all sorts of hardships for families who can't afford it and I think that it's just inherently wrong for the state of Maryland or any government to perpetuate gambling as a source of revenue to provide public service. I think it's wrong. I experienced it. I know it's wrong in my heart and one of the things that kind of divided the governor and I a little bit was his big push for the casinos all in Maryland and everything. I just think it's wrong. Anyhow, we're getting off track here now.

Richard: Just a little bit. We're almost [crosstalk].

Speaker 3: But how long did you have the slot machines then?

Bernie: I had them until I sold the place. I opened the place in '47, sold the place I believe it was '57, ten years. After I got married, it was a 7-day-a-week operation. Of course, the winters I had vacation, but it was a 7-day-a-week

operation and by that time I'd met my sweet wife and we'd gotten married. We had our first child a year later and the second child two years later. I just decided when I'd send him off to Sunday school and church it didn't seem right. Sunday was my busiest day and I just finally decided I'm going to get out of this. I'm going to get them in an environment. They'll be going to school before too long and this is just not going to work for me. I love it and don't get me wrong. I loved it down on that beach. I sold it in '57 and tried to buy a piece of land on several occasions in Broomes Island, up the creek on the high land. I couldn't get the land so I ended up becoming a resident of the Dare's Beach area and been here ever since.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE

Richard: You jumped into my last question, which is how did you meet Betty?

Bernie: Oh that was a very pleasant experience. Her mother and father, they were from Washington DC. She was born in Durham, North Carolina. Her mother was born in Georgia. Her father was born in Georgia. They got married and they moved to Durham, North Carolina. I guess a couple of kids was born there as was Betty. Later on they moved to Washington DC, for whatever the reason. I think she had brothers up there and came Washington DC. How I met her was: her mother and father were two of the best customers I had. Every Sunday afternoon they came and went fishing. They'd rent the boats and play the slot machines. Her mother loved to play the slot machines, played the slot machines, and get crab cakes and stuff. They were really good customers. When she'd come back in I didn't have a public telephone. My phone was in a little apartment in the lunchroom. She'd come in and say, "Bernie, may I use your phone? I want to call my daughter." I said, "Oh sure." I unlock the little apartment. She'd go and use the phone and come back. This went on for a whole summer almost.

Then in September I believe it was. September, yeah. They came down fishing and it was on my wife's birthday. No, it was October. It was fall fishing. October is her birthday, October the 3rd. I was taking the ... those days you bought all your ... there were no throw always, you bought all glass bottles and you had to pay 2 cents deposit on them so you were careful to make sure they got back in the crates and you got your credit for them when your distributors came in to refill them. I was going out the back door piling all these cokes up and the orangeade and the other stuff that I had. This blue Oldsmobile, which her father owned, drove up and this lady hollered at me said, "Bernie, you got a minute?" I said, "Well, I'll take it." I was so tired. I'd been up all Friday night, all Saturday night on my last leg. I went over to the car and she said, "I want you to meet my daughter." She steps out of the car and I said, "Oh my gosh." I didn't know Liz Taylor was coming here today. She was so pretty. And 65 years later here we are still traveling that road. That's how I met her, but it was a very . . . I don't know

sometimes when I haven't been too kind to God he's always been kind to me. He's never lost his love for me.

Southeaster came up, flood tide and a southeaster. Well, it gets pretty choppy on the Patuxent with that , and I knew they couldn't go out in a small boat. I told them, I said, "You're not going to be able to fish in the row boats today." "Oh my gosh well I'm disappointed. You really think it's that rough?" I said, " I know it's that rough captain. I'm telling you I've been here a long time. I tell you're not going out today." Then I got thinking well you know dad's boat is here. His party boat. I'll see if they want me to take them. I was thinking. I suggested to them. I said, "You know, dad's boat is here. I use it all the time. If you all really want to go fishing I'll take you out in a big boat, but I won't let you go out in a small boat." They were overjoyed with that.

Well, that was love at first sight. We got acquainted that night and every weekend she'd come down to go fishing. They'd go fishing and we'd stay in. Had a jukebox and we'd dance. All the kids would come down with us. That's how I met her. About a year and a half later we were hitched. Proposed and the first time she turned me down and then later she said, "You know if you ask me the question you asked me some time ago my answer today would be yes." That's wonderful. That's what we did.

Richard: Well, that's a good way to end I think.

Bernie: There you go.

BERNIE'S BOAT BUSINESS

Michael: Let me ask just a couple quick things. Bernie's Boats, besides renting of boats and you had the slot machines, did you have a restaurant there?

Bernie: Yeah, well it was all in one.

Speaker 3: What was it? Just describe everything that was there.

BERNIE'S BOAT BUSINESS

Bernie: Well it was not too large. It wasn't too large. The building wasn't too large. We had booths in there like you'd have in a regular lunchroom and it had a counter. The cook top and all was all visible. You could watch the crab cakes and hamburgers being cooked and everything. We never sold any booze. Two things I decided I never wanted to do in life: I didn't want to sell booze and I didn't want

to be a politician. I reneged on the second one, but I never reneged on the first. I've saw booze destroy too many families in Broomes Island in my young days.

Anyway, it was really cozy there, and as business picked up I had my mother working for me, I had my brother working for me, down to take care of the boats and all. We were doing all right, but yeah the slot machines was ... I could give the food ... We'd make a pure crab cake out of crabs that I caught. This is Patuxent River crab, nice fat crabs. All crab meat. No stuffing in there. I sold the crab cakes with a slice of tomato and a piece of lettuce on it and a handful of potato chips for 35 cents. We made money on it, but the idea was to get people in there so that they would work the slot machines because the slot machines was all clear money and easy way, but not a proper way.

Michael: That was more profitable than the boats and the food.

Bernie: Oh yeah. You'd take in a pretty good piece of change. Washingtonians got down there playing them slot machines. They don't know when to stop.

Michael: Now nowhere in our interviews have we mentioned how you lost your fingers.

Bernie: I'm sorry? Oh the fingers?

Michael: Yeah.

Bernie: Oh now that was an accident. This didn't happen during the war.

Michael: No, but [crosstalk] we haven't mentioned that anywhere in any of the interviews.

Bernie: Yeah, it was ... I was making a door frame for my father's boat. The second boat he had, the pilot house was so wide it had a window in it. It was too hard for him to get the pole out the window to fish and he loved to fish with the people that he fished with, the parties. So he asked me if there was any way I could cut a hole in the side and I said, "Sure, I'll do it." I used a table saw to do that and the table saw was dull and got a little rambunctious and the next thing you know I'm two fingers short. That's how it happened.

Michael: How old were you when it happened?

Bernie: How old? That as 1954, I think I'm right on that.

Michael: So 38?

Bernie: Somethings I don't quite remember the exact dates. About 1954.

Michael: One other just follow-up question, when you were working at the Navy Yard what were you working as? What were you doing? I didn't quite understand [crosstalk]

Bernie: I was learning to be a machinist. Yeah, run all kind of equipment that makes metal things. Of course they build guns there and the gun sight and all that stuff. You got good experience, but you spend half your time in the shop working and half the time in school, learning to read the blueprints, learning how to draw the blue prints and all kinds of stuff. I had to go to night school up there to keep from flunking out because I didn't have strong geometry background. I went to Hines Junior high school at nighttime so I wouldn't flunk out of the class. I just didn't have geometry II, and I needed it.

Michael: Now, you had the GI bill and you since got the honorary degrees from colleges. Why didn't you think about going back after college?

Bernie: Well, after I'd spent my time overseas and I got home, I loved it so well. I loved the river so well, it just never really ... it never come down as a necessary thing. I figured well I'm going to make money at business why do I need to go to college? I went back. I went to University of Maryland for two semesters and took courses because I had planned on maybe taking a school teaching job and all I needed with the experience I had, all I needed was 18 semester hours to be certified as a teacher. I think I've got the report cards around. I did real good in the time that I went. Again, that was mostly drawings and stuff.

Michael: Okay.

Bernie: It was nobody's fault but mine that I didn't get a college education after the war.

Michael: I think you've done quite well without it [crosstalk].