

**BILL AND MARY ALICE BIRCH**  
**October 21, 2007**

Interviewer: Margo Hunt and Ed Schamel  
Interviewee: Bill and Mary Alice Birch  
Transcribed By: Shirley Fauber  
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(TAPE SIDE A – 1<sup>st</sup> Side):

Margo Hunt: October 21st, Sunday, and we are with Mary Alice and Bill Birch and it's Ed Schamel and Margo Hunt doing the interviewing. (Tape Stopped).

Margo Hunt: Bill you were just telling us about carving – painting decoys. Tell a little bit about what you are going to do for Christmas.

Bill Birch: Well, this year – we have five grandkids – and I am going to make some little yellow gold finches. They are 2-1/2 to 3 inches long. And each one of the grandkids is gonna get one. So this morning when I was going out to the workshop I picked up a little tiny piece of cottonwood and I just took a ban saw and I just zip – zipped one out and I got to go home later on and sand it and start carvin' it out the way I want it and then I'll start paintin' it.

Margo Hunt: So they'll all be different?

Bill Birch: Yeah. I'm not gonna have 'em all . . .

Ed Schamel: Different poses so they'll be turned different ways?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. That way and on the bases I'll have different – different poses for the bases for 'em.

Margo Hunt: Do you have decoy carving in your family?

Bill Birch: No.

Margo Hunt: How did you learn to do this?

Bill Birch: When I was a kid growin' up a guy by the name of Dave Snead used to come over to the house and he was real good friends with my Dad. And they were sittin' to a table like we're sittin' right now and I'd sit and watch him. He would carve flounders. And I watched him and it – I just got a knack for it from that. And what I like doin'; I like carvin' 'em and then take and wood burning the feathers in there, and then paint 'em.

Margo Hunt: Have you been to the Ward Museum and seen those beautiful carvings up there?

Bill Birch: No, no, never been there.

Margo Hunt: That's a wonderful trip, those carvings are glorious.

Bill Birch: I'm no expert but I just do it to have fun. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: That's great, that's wonderful. Well where – where did you grow up?

Bill Birch: On 127 Maddox Boulevard.

Margo Hunt: Where is 127? What is there now?

Bill Birch: Uh – was a real estate agent, now it's a – it's right there at the ice cream place.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: Right there . . .

Bill Birch: Mr. Whippy.

Ed Schamel: Oh, okay.

Bill Birch: Mr. Whippy – and the next house to it.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: To the right?

Bill Birch: To the right of it.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh. Now what school did you go to?

Bill Birch: Chincoteague. Chincoteague Elementary, Chincoteague High School.

Margo Hunt: So you went to the red brick elementary school?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And you walked?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And you walked to the high school?

Bill Birch: Um – no, we took – rode a bus. On occasion we'd walk up there. Uh – my first schooling was to a Miss – I think her name was Miss Jester.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Kindergarten. On \_\_\_\_\_ Street. She had a little place there. But then we went to the elementary school and I think my first grade teacher was Miss Jester, then Miss Deal, Miss – let's see, Miss Gillis, Miss Tarr, Miss Powell, Miss Watson.

Margo Hunt: Shew! That's good. I couldn't remember my elementary school days.

Bill Birch: They were – they were elementary.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And then when we got to the high school in the seventh grade, it was – Iva Conner – I used to call her \_\_\_\_\_ (laughing).

Margo Hunt: Oh.

Bill Birch: And Miss Lee Rue.

Ed Schamel: Did you – did you go to the same . . .

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: Were you in the same grade?

Mary Alice Birch: No. Huh-uh.

Ed Schamel: You were a couple years ahead of her?

Bill Birch: Yes.

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: But you met in high school. Had you known each other or where did she live?

Bill Birch: I knew her brother. Her brother and I were real close friends.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Mary Alice Birch: And I kept askin' my brother to get me a date with Billy Birch and my brother kept sayin', "I think too much of 'im to get him to go out with you."

ALL: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: I said that's not fair.

Ed Schamel: Well how far behind him in school were you?

Mary Alice Birch: Two years.

Ed Schamel: Oh. And when did you graduate?

Bill Birch: '71.

Ed Schamel: And you were '73?

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah.

Margo Hunt: And so after high school, what did – what did you set about to do?

Bill Birch: After high school I did one year, went to college for one year. And then I got smart in college and we got married.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And we got married (loud background noise – inaudible).

Margo Hunt: What's David's name?

Bill Birch: It was David Snead, Mr. Gene Taylor, Willie Peals, P. J. Blake; they were the crew at Wallops Island.

Margo Hunt: Ah.

Bill Birch: Did that for fifteen years. Gene – Gene Taylor was the owner of the business and we'd go out and do contract work for him and then he took us over to – David and I - worked with David – five years or better.

Mary Alice Birch: Good five or six.

Bill Birch: Yeah. And there – went separate ways.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And that's where I learned my plumbing background.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: I wished I'd a never left it.

Ed Schamel: Really?

Bill Birch: Yeah.

Margo Hunt: What – what did you leave it to do?

Bill Birch: Well, I did a – what one year?

Mary Alice Birch: Managing stores.

Bill Birch: Managing stores, community stores. A thankless job. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Right here on the Island?

Bill Birch: No, it was for Bagwell Oil Company down in Onancock.

Mary Alice Birch: The Corner Mart Stores.

Bill Birch: Corner Marts.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: He supervised all of the Corner Mart Stores on the Shore.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Bill Birch: I started the one here on Chincoteague for 'em.

Ed Schamel: What is that – what's the word?

Margo Hunt: Bagwell.

Bill Birch: Bagwell Oil Company.

Ed Schamel: Oh, Bagwell Oil.

Margo Hunt: Bagwell Oil.

Bill Birch: And it was the Corner Mart Stores.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: That's – what I'm hearing – c-o-r-n-e-r? Corner Mart?

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh. Corner Mart.

Ed Schamel: Okay.

Margo Hunt: When – what – how did you land back here – you were living in Chincoteague all this time?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Oh, I see, you never really left?

Bill Birch: No. We took – when we first got married we rented places and then, I guess we were married seven years or better?

Mary Alice Birch: About seven years, yeah.

Bill Birch: We took and finally bought a piece of land up here – off of Circle Drive. And we had a trailer and we put that there. And then from there we – you know, worked at getting a nice house.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

(Unknown: inaudible)

Mary Alice Birch: Right near the Wheel House on Circle Drive, then we moved in with your grandparents for about four months.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And then we moved to \_\_\_\_\_ and then we went to Cleveland Street.

Bill Birch: Right beside Meatland.

Mary Alice Birch: Then we bought – when we – that's when we bought the trailer and bought a piece a land on Circle Drive and moved back up there and then we went to Temperanceville.

Bill Birch: That's where I lost it, yeah.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh, we bought a piece of property over there.

Margo Hunt: And you're still there?

Mary Alice Birch: No, we were there eight years. Then we bought a house on Chincoteague and moved back to Chincoteague. We lived here eight years. Then we sold our house on Chincoteague and moved back to the mainland to Assawoman.

Bill Birch: We were living on the mainland at that time period. I was – I was working the stores, Corner Mart Stores.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And Mary Alice worked over here on the Island.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Head of banking. Our daughter was just getting her license. And our son was in the police, so I said it's going to be cheaper for us just to move back to the Island. (Laughing) And that's just what we did.

Margo Hunt: But unfortunately you are not here now.

Bill Birch: No.

Mary Alice Birch: They grew up.

Bill Birch: And they've gone their separate ways.

Margo Hunt: Well, we want you to come back.

Bill Birch: Maybe. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) I hope you can. So tell us – give us some remembrances that you have of growing up. Were you around when the flood was here or tell a little bit about what you remember about the flood.

Bill Birch: Well, like I say, I grew up on Maddox Boulevard. Mary Alice grew up on the corner of Church and Willow.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And Maddox Boulevard is not like it is this day and time. We could ride a bicycle up and down there, not worry about getting' hit by a car or truck or anything like that. It was a real good place. And I could ride my bicycle from there to my Grandpop and Grandmom's house over on Anderton Avenue. Used to do that on Friday night, or Friday afternoon after school and

stay all weekend to John and L. C. Jones. But we - you could – from where I lived you could walk to the elementary school. We'd cut through people's yards, some people's yards. But anyhow, we had these shortcuts you could do it or you'd walk out on Main Street and then go around. But it was real good. One of our tricks that I thought about when I was comin' over here this morning was in the summertime we had the mosquito truck we called it. And that – we used to take and when that would come down the road – they say all it was was burnt oil and they would take and make a smoke like a fog.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: Is that the same thing that they have now?

Bill Birch: Sort a kind a but this was a little bit older than that. But they would take and go down the road and us boys we'd get on our bicycles and ride in back of it. (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: Got smoke in your face. We did the same thing on Willow Street.

Bill Birch: It was just – and when we were kids, like in the wintertime, it was colder then than it is now. We could go from my house and ice skate. It was a little glade right beside my house where the park place is. We could skate that, cross over Taylor Street, beyond that little gut we could ice skate clean up back behind the high school. That is what we used to call Salt Pines Knob.

Margo Hunt: Um.

Bill Birch: But it was – it was fun! I mean – all – the families were real close. I mean if you were having fried chicken for supper, your neighbor knew it, and you could tell they were havin' friend potatoes or whatever, I mean everybody was real close.

Margo Hunt: So you had a lot of picnics?

Bill Birch: Sort of, yeah, um-hum.

Margo Hunt: Didn't we both. Tell us about the flood a little bit.

Bill Birch: Well, I was in the elementary school and my Mom, she was working at Dr. Shelly's. She was a nurse at Dr. Shelly's. He had his office on Willow Street. And I can remember it rained real hard, real gray nasty day. And my Dad he was driving a truck I believe at that time. So my sister and I, we'd get out of that elementary school and we would go to my Aunt Edith's house, which was right next door to us. And then Mom would try to pick us up or we'd walk over to my Grandmom and Grandpop Jones' on Anderton Avenue. Well we stayed there that night and I can remember Dad parked his car, it was a street light, street telephone pole, right out in front of Grandmom and Pop's house, and Dad parked his car there. Well, they kept saying the weather was going to be real bad and all like that. Us kids, we thought, hey no school, nothing like that you know.



Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: And we stayed there and the water started rising. Well the next morning when we got up we could look out Mom-Mom and Pop-pop's house, it was real high off the ground, and the water was halfway to Dad's car. And it was parked right out there on the road. And you could see it lapping across. So we watched that and my Grandmom, she always had a gas cook stove. So she fixed breakfast for us and everything. And the water kept rising like this. And my Grandpop, he had a white picket fence coming all the way across to his friend's house. And my Grandfather and I we were sittin' on the back porch there. He says, "Look." And I looked out there, and we watched these rats.

Ed Schamel: Oh.

Bill Birch: It was weird, but we watched these three white rats get on top – they used the pickets – and go to the top.

Ed Schamel: Hop across it?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh, hop across them and then eventually the water kept on rising and they went away. But during that storm the only reason water got into my Grandmom and Grandpop's house was they had great big windows underneath their foundation, 'cause they used to open 'em up 'cause my Grandfather always had a garden and he'd take the potatoes and vegetables and would store 'em in the wintertime underneath there. But the windows finally give way because of the pressure, but when the water rushed in underneath this house, he had what they called a floor furnace, and that popped the floor furnace up out of the floor and that's how the water come in.

Margo Hunt: Um.

Bill Birch: But the water only got about six or eight inches in his house.

Ed Schamel: And how high was it on the ground where you were at?

Bill Birch: Oh . . .

Ed Schamel: Five feet or so?

Bill Birch: Yeah, at least five, uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Wow. But Anderton is not very high.

Bill Birch: Huh-uh, no.

Mary Alice Birch: But their house was really high.

Bill Birch: It was real high, yeah. And we took and went there. We went upstairs and after a while, it kind a like simmered down, and Dad he went out with a guy named Jack Dempsey and I want to say it was Frog Watson or somebody like that, they had scow boats, and they would – just started pickin’ people up that were in smaller houses and were in peril. And they were takin’ ‘em to the Union Baptist Church around the corner there. Well, eventually they – I think a lot of my Grandpop because my Grandpop he – he sort a kind a like raised me. My Dad was away on the truck and in the service and all and my Grandpop he taught me all my values in life. Carpenter work, right on up. Well, Pop-pop said he was gonna stay there to his house. Well, I said well, he’s the man of the house and I was gonna stay there with ‘im.

(All Laughing)

Bill Birch: But I ended up going to the Baptist Church. We stayed there a couple days I think.

Mary Alice Birch: Then the helicopter.

Bill Birch: Then the helicopter come. The water went down, the helicopters come and we were flown over to NASA and put in those barracks over there.

Margo Hunt: So the helicopter came, where did it land?

Bill Birch: It landed right there in the church parking lot.

Mary Alice Birch: Where the parsonage is, right directly behind that.

Margo Hunt: So that wasn’t so high, that wasn’t so flooded?

Bill Birch: Huh-uh, no.

Mary Alice Birch: Well, it was flooded.

Bill Birch: Huh-uh, no. Well, it was flooded but the water had receded, it had gone down.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Mary Alice Birch: They had to carry us on their shoulders to the helicopter.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: How many did the helicopter hold? Do you remember?

Mary Alice Birch: I can’t remember - it didn’t hold a lot.

Bill Birch: Eight or ten people. Eight or ten people.

Margo Hunt: Was that pretty exciting for kids?

Bill Birch: It was! (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Ed Schamel: They took you to Wallops Island?

Bill Birch: They took us over to the base at Wallops Island.

Mary Alice Birch: The Base. We stayed there a week.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Oh my!

Bill Birch: And the bad part about that, you got them shots.

Mary Alice Birch: When you come back to the Island you had to go to (farm?) house before you could go to your home to get typhoid shots.

Ed Schamel: Yeah, everything was – there was dead birds all over the place?

Mary Alice Birch: Animals and gosh.

Bill Birch: We had a dog, my Mom – on Maddox Boulevard we had a little collie dog. And Dad, the night before, let it loose. And, you know, hoping it would stay around the house there. And we lost that little feller.

Margo Hunt: Awe, too bad.

Bill Birch: But over on the – on Assateague, there wadn't a horse herd. None of 'em. I can remember Dad talking about it, 'cause Dad had something to do with the fire company then.

Ed Schamel: Yeah.

Bill Birch: They just plain drowned and they had to go over and graze and cut 'em up and everything.

Margo Hunt: Um-um.

Bill Birch: And a lot a people of the Island here, they had chicken houses. I mean flocks and flocks of chickens. I mean they just couldn't do nothin'.

Ed Schamel: Oh yeah.

Margo Hunt: Because that was the primary industry wasn't it here?

Bill Birch: Well, you had – ever body was workin' on the water just about.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Bill Birch: Okay. Either oystering, clamming, fishing, having dredge boats, fishing boats. And what didn't had chicken houses. And it's just like Chicken City Road, I mean that was nothin' but chicken houses down it. And on Maddox Boulevard, from my house where I lived, maybe forty yards, was startin' up chicken houses. New chicken houses up there.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: You know, on Taylor Street, they had chicken – I had a chicken house right behind us. Mr. Taylor used to have it. He had one, two, he had three chicken houses behind us.

Margo Hunt: Were those the long ones that we have now?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Wow!

Bill Birch: Very similar. They were – well it went from basically halfway of our – back of our house – clean on to the other side of Taylor Street. And it was like three of 'em. And then, like I say, Newman Snead, he had one, two, three – I think six of 'em on the end of Maddox Boulevard and Ocean Boulevard.

Mary Alice Birch: Who was it that had the chicken houses that's left where Mariner Motel – not Mariner . . .

Bill Birch: Across the street from the Mariner at that hotel there.

Mary Alice Birch: What's the name of that?

Margo Hunt: Sea Hawk?

Mary Alice Birch: Yes!

Bill Birch: Sea Hawk.

Mary Alice Birch: They were chicken houses originally made.

Margo Hunt: Really?

Bill Birch: They are original.

Mary Alice Birch: See how long they are?

Margo Hunt: And they are now a motel?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Oh my gosh! I wonder if they fumigated them. (Laughing)

Ed Schamel: What's the name of the hotel?

Bill Birch, Mary Alice Birch and Margo Hunt: Sea Hawk.

Ed Schamel: Oh, okay.

Mary Alice Birch: You'll have to go look at 'em, they look like 'em.

Margo Hunt: You are kidding.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Gary Watson has it now.

(Inaudible)

Bill Birch: But they were originally a chicken house.

Margo Hunt: Oh my gosh!

Mary Alice Birch: I keep wondering how many people know that are staying there.

Bill Birch: Well . . .

Margo Hunt: Nobody. (Laughing)

Bill Birch: (Laughing) But that's – they were.

Margo Hunt: Boy, and so – so it was exciting but dangerous, so they made you have typhoid shots?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And then you came back and was – things must have been chaotic?

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Well, I think they lost, if I'm not mistaken, if memory serves me right, I think they lost two bridges coming to the Island. Two bridges washed out, or right before you get to the bridge the land forming the highway.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh, the causeway?

Bill Birch: The causeway. And it was people's cars were on the causeway, they lost them. Uh – and boats in town.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: All these old big dredge boats and ever thing, they were laying crisscross in the road and on the road.

Mary Alice Birch: Right on the street.

Bill Birch: In town at that time, right where the park is now, Reed Memorial Park.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: There used to be a Silco Store there.

Ed Schamel: A what?

Bill Birch: Silco. S-i-l-c-o. It used to be – it's like a modern day Wal-Mart.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: But it – that used to run right here, right beside it was a Western Auto Store, then it was Alice's Dress Shop?

Mary Alice Birch: I think so.

Bill Birch: And then it was . . .

Mary Alice Birch: McCready's.

Bill Birch: McCready Ross, he had a IGA.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh. And Sunday Sub Shop.

Bill Birch: And the Sunday, yeah, they had a Sunday Sub Shop. But during the storm one of the boats broke free and it took and demolished the Silco store.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: I mean it was gone.

Margo Hunt: Whoa.

Bill Birch: I mean it was nothing! Part of the Western Auto Store stood. Bicycles were ever where and I can remember all of that.

Margo Hunt: And at that time those bigger boats were tied up then by the bridge?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And I don't know exactly where they were tying up, but the Town Dock or on this side of the Town Dock, must have been.

Bill Birch: Well, a lot of the guys, like I say, they made their livin' off the water.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: They had their fishing boats – they had mackerel fishin'.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And all kind of net fishin'. And they'd just tie up along the waterfront there.

Margo Hunt: Yes.

Bill Birch: And that's what happened. I mean it just come up and . . .

Ed Schamel: Did it come up pretty fast? I mean you said there were cars trapped out on the – out on the causeway.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: It must of . . .

Bill Birch: Well, what happened – see we had – we had – it was almost a full moon.

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Which makes regular high tide.

Ed Schamel: Yeah.

Bill Birch: Flood at regular high tide. And the wind come around with this like nor'easter for lack of better words. And all that coming together just made for an astronomical quite high tide.

Margo Hunt: And it came fast?

Bill Birch: Yes!

Mary Alice Birch: You could watch it. Sit out there and just look out and just watch it come up.

Ed Schamel: Yeah.

Margo Hunt: So you – your family made a decision to stay on the Island that night?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: But they could have gone off?

Bill Birch: Oh yeah!

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: It's not that we wanted too, but yeah.

Mary Alice Birch: No one thought it was gonna be that bad. Very – a majority of the water started risin' close to dark. It was late in the afternoon and by the next morning some of them realized . . .

Ed Schamel: And then you wake up and there's water everywhere.

Mary Alice Birch: We woke up and our furnace had popped up out of the floor and was floatin' around in the living room. We got . . .

Ed Schamel: So your living room was - had enough water in it to float?

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: You must have had two or three foot of water at least?

Mary Alice Birch: We had – it was comin' up the stairs. And we lived across from Sayler's Funeral Home.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And it's low area there.



Margo Hunt: You must have had to do – the whole Island must have had to do so much repair work.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh!

Bill Birch: Well – my - the first thing was, you know, get the causeway back.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Bill Birch: And the State did that. And then even when you come home. I mean, I can only speak for myself, we got home, my Mom and Dad used to get these little Golden Books that we kids used to have.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: We had I don't know how many of them. And I can remember Mom takin' them and just throwin' 'em outdoors and she said, "You can't have 'em, they've been in the water and ever thing." And clean, golly day!

Margo Hunt: And – and so much of that water must have been contaminated.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Because of the septic systems – were not really very good?

Ed Schamel: And all of the dead animals.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Dead animals, yeah.

Bill Birch: Well, the worst thing – the worst on the Island here was I guess you would say would be from the chickens.

Margo Hunt: Ah.

Bill Birch: Like the horses and stuff would have been over on Assateague.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: Well the chickens would all be stuck in those buildings?

Margo Hunt: Yeah, ewe-wee.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Oh!

Bill Birch: Yeah, you're right.

Margo Hunt: And so you didn't get – your life didn't get back to normal for a while?

Bill Birch: No, because the elementary school.

Mary Alice Birch: Stayed closed a long time.

Bill Birch: Yeah. 'Cause we went – was that the time we went to the . . .

Mary Alice Birch: No, that was when it caught on fire.

Bill Birch: That's right.

Mary Alice Birch: We went to the Methodist Church.

Bill Birch: Methodist Church?

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: So when did you – when did you get back to school after the flood?

Mary Alice Birch: I don't remember, but I know it was a long time.

Bill Birch: Yeah, it was a long, long time.

Mary Alice Birch: I think it might have been April, end of April or some time.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: I'm not sure exactly. I know it was a long time in between.

Bill Birch: Yeah, because for a while there we had – Firehouse did meals and ever thing.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And the day of the flood was?

Bill Birch and Mary Alice Birch: March.

Mary Alice Birch: Ash Wednesday.

Bill Birch: Ash Wednesday.

Margo Hunt: So it came in 1963?

Mary Alice Birch: '62.

Margo Hunt: '62, March.

Ed Schamel: You were – how old were you? You would have been . . .

Mary Alice Birch: I was seven.

Margo Hunt: And he was nine.

Bill Birch / Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Somethin' like that.

Margo Hunt: The next – the next huge event was the fire I guess, right?

Mary Alice Birch: At the elementary school?

Margo Hunt: Yes! That's – it was the red brick elementary school?

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah, uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And do you remember when that date was, when was that fire?

Mary Alice Birch: That was in like (pause) fourth – fifth?

Bill Birch: I was gettin' ready to say I think I was in the fifth or sixth grade.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: Sometime in that area.

Margo Hunt: So it was before the flood?

Mary Alice Birch: No, it was after the flood.

Bill Birch: Right after the flood. Not too long after the flood.

Mary Alice Birch: Several years after.

Bill Birch: Not too long after the flood.

Margo Hunt: Awe.

Mary Alice Birch: A couple a years.

Bill Birch: 'Cause that was in the boiler room that caught a fire.

Mary Alice Birch: I remember all the kids were so sad.

Bill Birch: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: I mean we were kids. We heard 'em from far away "YES"!

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: (Laughing) And that's when we went to the Methodist Church for weeks.

Bill Birch: Yeah.

Mary Alice Birch: They had classrooms. We thought we were out of school.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: I remember doing that.

Margo Hunt: Oh dear.

Bill Birch: But during the flood it come so bad and – that they actually took and floated caskets up out of the graves.

Margo Hunt: I'll betcha.

Bill Birch: They were floatin' through town and ever where.

Margo Hunt: Um.

Bill Birch: I can remember people telling me that.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: I didn't see it myself, but I mean . . .

Margo Hunt: What a huge reconstruction must have taken place.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Everybody must of just spent there whole lives – everyday at it.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: Well, did they – did they tear down a lot of old buildings and things like that or start over with . . .

Bill Birch: The worst one, like I say, I knew it demolished the Silco Store.

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: They tore the Western Auto Store down.

(Pause)

Margo Hunt: So they – were they on Main Street?

Bill Birch: Right on Main Street.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Right in – right in the heart of town.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Uh – I don't think it was that many other buildings that were tore down. They were the only ones that come in my mind real bad.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: I mean ever body had water damage.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: It was like – at that time you usually had a floor furnace or like a Siegler heater inside. And people's floor furnaces they just had to get them all fixed up.

Margo Hunt: Wow.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: You mentioned your – your Grandparents whose name were Jones.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Was that your – those were your Grandparents?

Bill Birch: Yes, uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Were they related to Ralph and Roy Jones? Is that the same families? They had come from originally a town – tell me about them.

Bill Birch: Well my Grandpa Jones, see my Grandma Nelson, she lived on Assateague.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh. In the little village?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh, in the little village. And MomMom, they had Uncle Ralph – let's see, Aunt Ruth, Uncle Ralph, Elizabeth and then my Mom, Faye. And they – she had one son that died I believed at childbirth and he is buried right at the foot of Assateague Bridge. But . . .

Ed Schamel: Do you have . . .?

Margo Hunt: David Snead is, you know, working on restoring that cemetery.

Bill Birch: I hope he does.

Margo Hunt: And he's working very hard on it. So maybe your old friend is going find the burial ground of your late, which would have been your late brother.

Bill Birch: No, uncle.

Margo Hunt: Uncle, uncle.

Bill Birch: As soon as you go across - the Poplar (inaudible) straight . . .

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: As soon as you go across the bridge it's right to your left maybe- not even a hundred yards.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: If that.

Margo Hunt: Well, I talked to him very recently about this and the Park Service is very interested in working with him.

Bill Birch: Well, it's my understanding there's a couple burial lots over there.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: There's that one and there's another one up close to the lighthouse, it used to be.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh. You don't remember those days?

Bill Birch: Huh-uh, no.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) Yeah. But did you hear some good stories from your grandparents?

Bill Birch: Well, my Grandmom used to tell me one and this is kind of appropriate for this time of the year. She said her and her sister, my Aunt Edith, they lived right there by the lighthouse because her dad was a keeper there. And they lived in the house. Well there was a trail goin' down to like a root cellar they had there. And I get goose bumps (laughing). They were goin' down this trail and she says that she saw a ghost. I mean a real live ghost. That's what my Grandmom used to say.

Margo Hunt: Hum.

Bill Birch: She said we looked at it and it went through the tree and come out on the other side and my Aunt Edith kind a verified it. And that is what she used to tell.

Margo Hunt: Wow!

Bill Birch: But I mean it was – and my Grandfather, at this time of year, he used to say, Annie through the keyhole and we gotta go and tell us little ghost stories and stuff.

Margo Hunt: Oh my.

Bill Birch: But that was kind a cool.

Ed Schamel: Would you have pictures or, you know, any kind of letters or anything from these – from your Grandmother or Grandfather? What was her name, he was a Jones.

Margo Hunt: Elsie Jones.

Bill Birch: John Burke Jones.

Ed Schamel: Yeah.

Bill Birch: Elsie Quillen Jones.

Ed Schamel: What was her name, did she grow up in the area?

Mary Alice Birch: Yes.

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh, okay. What was her maiden name?

Mary Alice Birch: Quillen.

Ed Schamel: Quillen, oh, okay.

Mary Alice Birch: Um-hum. And how about Sandra Quillen who was the keeper of the lighthouse?

Bill Birch: Her dad was.

Margo Hunt: Her dad, yeah. Do you remember any stories about him?

Bill Birch: No, I don't.

Margo Hunt: They are working on a lot of lighthouse history now.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And I imagine you went to that program that . . .

Bill Birch: I – we were in Lancaster that week.

Margo Hunt: Oh, you couldn't go.

Bill Birch: No, so we didn't make it.

Margo Hunt: That was too bad. But I guess it was an interesting program. Myrna Cherrix is really really interested in old lighthouses.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Well she's – she's been keeping us abreast of it.

Margo Hunt: Oh, that's good.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Great.

Mary Alice Birch: With pictures and all.

Bill Birch: But my Grandmom and Grandpop, they lived there; I think they moved over here in the 40's. 1940's when they moved off Assateague.



Margo Hunt: How did they move do you suppose?

Bill Birch: Well . . .

Margo Hunt: By boat?

Bill Birch: The government actually took and bought their land and they come over here and I can remember my Grandmom saying they took and rented a place 'til my Grandpop built their house on Anderton Avenue. Him and his brothers they come together and come built the house. Because my Grandpop's house was here. Almost across the street was Dan Jones, who was his brother, and about three houses down the road from there was Fred Jones, who was my Grandpop's brother. So I mean ever body just kind a stayed together.

Margo Hunt: A whole family compound?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: Do you know whether those houses are still there?

Bill Birch: They are still there now.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

(Tape stopped and then restarted)

Margo Hunt: Okay, talk a little bit more about Assateague and the old people – the people who lived on Assateague and how they lost their land there.

Bill Birch: Well, there's been, what my understanding was, the government bought the land and told them they had to move off the Island.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And if memory serves right, I think my Grandmom and Grandpop lived there until the 40's. And they built their house on Anderton Avenue. I don't know exactly why the government bought it, but . . .

Margo Hunt: But you had a different memory Mary Alice?

Mary Alice Birch: Well this is just things I've heard in the last couple of weeks.

Margo Hunt: What did you hear?

Mary Alice Birch: Just that Burton Mansfields his name was, he bought a lot of property over there and wouldn't allow some of the people there to use the water.

Ed Schamel: Right. I've . . .

Mary Alice Birch: Or rights or something there so everyone started selling because of it to the government, and they took it over.

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And when they moved, did they have to move by boat because . . .

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: The bridge had not been built?

Bill Birch: No.

Ed Schamel: But they didn't bring their houses along right?

Bill Birch: Some of the people did. They took and they cut down like big pine trees and made rollers and would take the house and roll it down to the edge of the marsh and take 'em and go up with these monitors and they would roll the house onto the monitor.

Ed Schamel: Like a raft you mean?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. And they would take and actually float it from Assateague over to the eastern side.

Margo Hunt: Shew!

Mary Alice Birch: They brought the school house over that way.

Bill Birch: They brought the school house, yeah.

Ed Schamel: Which school house was this?

Mary Alice Birch: The one on Assateague, the old school house.

Ed Schamel: No, I mean where is it here?

Mary Alice Birch: It's right beside Tarr Lane on Eastside. The big house as you go down Tarr Lane there.

Ed Schamel: Um, I don't know that.

Mary Alice Birch: That's the old school house they brought over on a boat, it's a house.

Margo Hunt: I know there are a lot of houses, a number of houses here which had been on Assateague.

Bill Birch: Right at the end of Maddox Boulevard, this is what was told to me, at the end of Maddox Boulevard where you've got the – you've got the – used to be The Mariner Motel, what is it now?

Margo Hunt: Yeah, something like that.

Mary Alice Birch: The Internet Café.

Bill Birch: The Internet Café. That house there, that was brought over here from Assateague.

Ed Schamel: Yeah, I've heard about that.

Mary Alice Birch: That was your Grandfather's?

Bill Birch: I believe it was my Grandpop's.

Mary Alice Birch: He was born and raised in.

Margo Hunt: Hum.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Well those people were really – I think they were very brave. First of all to have lived on Assateague.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And everything had to come by boat.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: To them.

Bill Birch: Well, I've got a tape that I just recorded recently that my Grandmom had and my Grandpop give an interview to a lady.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And some of the tape that I've listened to, they – for schooling – they used to take and come over here every morning they'd row over here, dock the boat, go to school, get off – get out of school, and go back to the boat and row back to the Assateague. I mean that's how – and all of the food and supplies they'd come over here and get their food and stuff and then go back to the Assateague.

Ed Schamel: I'm going to have to turn this. (Change of old tape, still same side of this tape).

Ed Schamel: Okay. You were talking about how people lived on Assateague.

Margo Hunt: Go ahead Billy.

Bill Birch: Okay.

Margo Hunt: We're still here with Bill Birch and Mary Alice Birch.

Bill Birch: My Grandmom used to say they would do – when she was a little girl – they would take a boat, her and her brother Grayson, and he would scull the boat over here and, over onto the eastern side, stop the boat, then they would take and walk to school, go to school, and one day during the week I can remember my Grandmom on this tape that I've got, saying that she took and had music lessons and it would be nightfall before she would get back home – onto Assateague.

Margo Hunt: And did her brother wait for her?

Bill Birch: Yeah.

Ed Schamel: I wonder how old she was – I mean I wonder when this would be that she was a – in 1900's or?

Bill Birch: Yeah, it had to be.

Ed Schamel: Something like that?

Bill Birch: It would have to be I'm certain.

Ed Schamel: Well I remember Nathan Hill told me that his – his ancestors that lived on Assateague and were – descendants of Assateague Indians.

Bill Birch: Um, I don't know about that.

Margo Hunt: Well, anyway, let's go back to – any more stories about your Grandmother?

Bill Birch: I can remember that – well, I did know one thing that was very interesting. My Grandmom and Grandpop – (laughing) they took and run away and got married. And I never knew that until this past week.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: They lived here on the Island – or not here – they took and, let's see they come across to Franklin City and they went to Greenbackville to get married. Just on the other side of Maryland.

Margo Hunt: They took a ferry?

Bill Birch: Yelp!

Margo Hunt: Why did they have to go to Maryland to get married?

Bill Birch: Well, that is where the license were issued from then.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Bill Birch: And that was something interesting to me to hear about from my Grandmom and Grandpop. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh, uh-huh. (Laughing)

Bill Birch: But a . . .

Margo Hunt: Now tell us a little bit about the neighborhood. You had some – you had some stories about the neighborhoods that were on the Chincoteague Island.

Bill Birch: When I was comin' up was – different parts of the Island have different names. Like you had Mad Calf, you had Deep Hold, you had Snotty Ridge, you had Dodge City. Uh . . .

Mary Alice Birch: Ticktown.

Bill Birch: Ticktown. You had down the marsh, up the neck, different places like that. And what it was it was just the general vicinity of the place. Like a – Snotty Ridge was what we called Ridge Road. Okay. Chicken City was actually, the road is named Chicken City Road. And . . .

Margo Hunt: Deep Hole.

Bill Birch: Deep Hole. Ticktown was on the other end of Willow Street.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Where – it's up where you live.

Ed Schamel: Why did they call things like Dodge City, why did they call it that?

Bill Birch: I can't answer you. The only thing – the only thing I've heard, and this was from my Mom and Dad, is that on like a Saturday night, some of the, and I don't know this for a fact or if it's fiction . . .

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: But some of the people would get very happy.

Ed Schamel: Rowdy?

Bill Birch: Yeah! (Laughing) And they called it Dodge City.

Mary Alice Birch: And where was Dodge City?

Bill Birch: Dodge City was over there by Harry Tarr Lane. You know where Harry Tarr used to have his store?

Mary Alice Birch: Okay.

Bill Birch: That little road went back there.

Margo Hunt: Now in each of these neighborhoods as I understand it, there usually was a cemetery and a store, is that right?

Bill Birch: Well, I don't know so much about the cemeteries, but everywhere on the Island there was a store.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: There – just like where Union Baptist Church is right now, right across the street was Jester's Store, Leon Jester's store, right at the end of the road there. Well, right up the road on Pension Street, about halfway was Raymond Carpenter's store.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Because that's where my Grandmom and Grandpop used to go. Then you had . . .

Mary Alice Birch: Sachel's.

Bill Birch: Sachels. Right down on the other end of Willow Street you had Sachel's. Then on the Shorefront there I can remember Wheatly Watson had his store on one corner and there was another one on the other side and I can't remember who that was.

Margo Hunt: Now these people were all in competition with each other?

Bill Birch: Right.

Ed Schamel: These were all general stores mostly?

Bill Birch: Stores where you go and buy your milk and bread. And on the Eastern side you had Harry Tarr's store, then down the – like you're going to the high school on the left-hand side – there was a store up there.

Mary Alice Birch: That was Twilley's on the left-hand.

Bill Birch: That was. And then when you're heading past the carnival ground, Dave Birch had a store out there.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And it was another one down there. So I mean ever – it was like each location on the Island . . .

Mary Alice Birch: Barrett's.

Bill Birch: Barrett's had a store.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And there was one up here by Deep Hole (pause) Edgerton. Edger – Edger Dickerson's store.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Right up here by Circle Drive. You had his store there. And they would have milk and bread, whatever.

Margo Hunt: Now what – did your Grandmother ever go out – go for a big shopping some place and, if so, where did she go?

Bill Birch: Well, when I was comin' up, I don't know about Mary here, but when I was comin' up out big trip was to go across the Causeway and go to Pocomoke City. That was the place.

Margo Hunt: Ah-hah.

Bill Birch: I mean I can recall that, you know, comin' up.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: So that was the trip. I mean it was close. Because on the Island here right at the foot of the bridge there used to be an Angler car dealership and that was owned by Wyle Maddox I believe. That was on one side of it and on the other side Ed Tull had his pool – poolroom and the place.

Mary Alice Birch: Oh yeah.

Bill Birch: Remember that?

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah. We never did go off the Island. When we were young we never left the Island unless it was something important.

Bill Birch: Well, you had ever thing here. You had – well, Mr. Ralph Selby he had a men's clothing store and a women's clothing store. You had Gillis' – what was Mr. Gillis' first name – Jack Gillis' dad. He had a men and women's clothing store.

Mary Alice Birch: Bobby Tim.

Bill Birch: Bobby Tim. The Ben Franklin Store. You had ever which we needed here. We had a Colonial store on Cleveland Street as far as big groceries. And you had the IGA in town for groceries. The hardware stores were like – Cummin' Brothers was down on – by the Coast Guard dock. Then you had Showard Brothers which was right in town here was my Uncle Rod's store. So I mean you had – one then on the eastern side you had Harry Tarr's store. Oh, there was one that we forgot. I can remember down by the carnival ground, that little store there where Paul used to go, Charlie Gall's.

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah, Charlie Gall.

Bill Birch: Charlie Gall's. He had everything from food to little pot belly stoves, everything.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: That was . . .

Mary Alice Birch: That was near the Pittsburg place.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.



Margo Hunt: Now I wonder how many people populated the Island then. I mean these were a lot of stores to . . .

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: I don't know if you Fifteen Hundred . . .

Bill Birch: No, no more than Fifteen Hundred if that.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh, yeah.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh. And if people wanted something they could either go across the Causeway up to Pocomoke or they could take – and the ferry wasn't working then was it?

Bill Birch: No, huh-uh. The Causeway – when was the Causeway put - I can't remember when the Causeway was put in. Because at first when it was put in it was a toll road.

Margo Hunt: I wonder – 1900 and – let's see . . .

Bill Birch: That was put in as a toll road.

Margo Hunt: Oh, was it?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: A toll road?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Yeah, because it was mud and planks that was put on top for to make the road going across.

Margo Hunt: Ah!

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: I can remember Pop-Pop tellin' me that.

Mary Alice Birch: For many years, Dad said – he was – his Dad was oystering.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And was out there with them and Dad said, of course, you had to work from sunup to sundown, and Dad said that – his Dad was doing the oystering and he told him to look up to watch 'em put the bridge up, and his father hit him on top of the head and said you can't waste them hours, get back to work. And Dad said he couldn't watch 'em do it 'cause his Dad wouldn't let him.

Ed Schamel: Ump.

Margo Hunt: We interviewed Ms. Rosalyn Carter; she was a Taylor from Atlantic.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: This week. And she was at the dedication for the Causeway, and she was four and that was her birthday and she thought all that celebration was for her birthday.

Bill Birch: (Laughing) That was cute! That was really cute.

Margo Hunt: I should know that date.

Bill Birch: Well the – well, one of the stores like we were sayin', each part of the Island it was almost like clans. I don't want to use the word clannish, but ever body, you know, kind of stayed in – and the young boys at that time – if you took and went and across somebody's clan, you had to fight your way back. (Laughing)

Ed Schamel: Did you two grow up in the same area?

Mary Alice Birch: No.

Bill Birch: No.

Bill Birch: No, huh-uh. I grew up on Maddox Boulevard and she grew up on Willow Street.

Ed Schamel: I mean – that was not part of the same . . .

Margo Hunt: No.

Bill Birch: At that time no, we got more civilized then, no fist-fightin' or nothin' like that.

Ed Schamel: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: But you notice on the Island there is different speech. I mean – that's like - we even talk different. Some things I say people will say, "You really got Chincoteague in you."

Ed Schamel: Yeah.

Mary Alice Birch: But we both grew up here, but it is according to what part of the Island you grew up on that you learned to talk. Now down to Ticktown.

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: No, Snotty Ridge, that area. Those people, oh my goodness! You think I talk bad.

Ed Schamel: Ticktown.

Mary Alice Birch: Ticktown, that is off of Willow Street.

Ed Schamel: Where do you think that name came from?

Mary Alice Birch: A lot of ticks and things I think.

Ed Schamel: Really?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: Different. I always heard Snotty Ridge got it because all of the kids down there stayed sick and their parents never kept 'em clean.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: I've always heard that.

Ed Schamel: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: But just my guesstimate.

Ed Schamel: Well, that's interesting. Where these names came from. Mad Calf.

Bill Birch: Mad Calf was right there on Park Street.

Mary Alice Birch: And what was – Grier's?

Bill Birch: Oh, you had Wild Cat.

Mary Alice Birch: Wild Cat.

Ed Schamel: Wild Cat. That's always been Wild Cat?

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: That's always been Wild Cat. You know when I was a kid . . .

Ed Schamel: Did people live out there?

Bill Birch: No.

Mary Alice Birch: No!

Bill Birch: The only thing that grew out there at Wild Cat was mosquitoes.

Margo Hunt: That's all that grows there now.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Well see Wild Cat, when I was a young kid, my Dad and Mom, there was only one place on the Island that Mom and Dad would never go, they said it's taboo. Because a guy by the name of Grier Derrickson, he had wild boars up there and he raised 'em up there and they said you stay away from there so we never did venture that far.

Margo Hunt: Does he – is he the person who had a mink farm too, do you remember anybody who had a mink farm?

Bill Birch: Grier probably did. He was into – he was an entrepreneur.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: He tried a little bit of ever thing.

Margo Hunt: \_\_\_\_\_ (inaudible)

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. He – I'll tell you what I've worked with him and you couldn't ask for a nicer man. He worked over there with Gene. And clams and oysters, about raisin' em and ever thing. I've watched a clam grow on pine needles. I've seen it with my own eyes.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: I kid you not! It's unbelievable, but I've seen it.

Margo Hunt: Wow.

Ed Schamel: Grow clams on pine needles?

Bill Birch: In other words – he had those buildings up there, water comin' off that, would take and float down on the pine needles and go back out to the Bay and I actually seen a clam growin' on the pine needles, I kid you not.

Ed Schamel: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: It was interesting. But growin' up here, it was – it was real good. I . . .

Margo Hunt: Did you go to the movies?

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah.

Bill Birch: Cost you a quarter.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And it wasn't called the Roxy then – what was it called?

Mary Alice Birch: The Island Theatre.

Bill Birch: Island Theatre.

Margo Hunt: Island Theatre.

Bill Birch: Well, they say at one time you had Powell's Theatre, Island Theatre, and what, there was another one?

Mary Alice Birch: Isle Theatre. I-s-l-e I think was the first name.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Wait - and they had . . .

Margo Hunt: Where – are these three different places?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Okay, let's see, you know where the Island Medical Center is?

Margo Hunt: Yes.

Bill Birch: Okay. Going south maybe two or three buildings.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: There was a theatre there.

Mary Alice Birch: Where the laundry mat is now.

Bill Birch: Where the laundry mat – right in that area – it was called the Powell Theatre?

Mary Alice Birch: No – yeah.

Bill Birch: Yeah, that was Powell.

Mary Alice Birch: That was Powell.

Bill Birch: Then the Island Theatre is where it is right now. And then . . .

Mary Alice Birch: The Isle Theatre was really small.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Three in very close proximity?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Mary Alice Birch: But there was only two workin' at a time though. One of them closed.

Bill Birch: They also had a bowling alley.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And that was down there by the Powell I think it was.

Mary Alice Birch: I'm not sure.

Bill Birch: I do recall Dad saying they had a bowling alley.

Margo Hunt: Huh!

Mary Alice Birch: And a skatin' rink.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. The skatin' rink was on top of the municipal building the Town uses now for the fire truck.

Mary Alice Birch: The garage.

Bill Birch: The garage.

Mary Alice Birch: On Poplar Street.

Bill Birch: There was a skatin' rink on top of that.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: And there was a jail right beside that.

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah, they had a jail.

Margo Hunt: I hear there's still a jail there?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: Little thing, but . . .

Bill Birch: That little building is not much bigger than this room right here.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: But it was the jail.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And it had three cells in it.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh. And we had doctors.

Margo Hunt: And you had what Mary Alice?

Mary Alice Birch: Two doctors. Dr. Shelly and Dr. Cabelee (?).

Bill Birch: Dr. Shelly was on Willow Street and Dr. Cabelee (?) was at the end of Maddox Boulevard.

Margo Hunt: And so you didn't have the Island Medical Center.

Bill Birch: Huh-uh.

Margo Hunt: Was Dr. Amaron's present office where those other doctors were?

Bill Birch: Dr. Amaron's office was the original Dr. Shelly's place.

Margo Hunt: Okay.

Bill Birch: And my Mom, like I said my Mom used to work for him, and he lived up here off Main Street. And we had a dentist, Dr. Hawkins.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: He was at the end of Maddox Boulevard, right where the pharmacy is now. And when I was a kid growin' up, in town you had H and H Pharmacy. That was where Dr. Henlich (?) that was the original that was right there in town.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Because when I was a kid growin' up I used to take and go – after school I was workin' to the Silco Store which had been rebuilt on the left-hand side where the T-shirt place is now, I used to be a stock boy in the afternoon after school. But on the way to takin' the mail to the post office I had to – it just called me in there to get this orange slush like.

All: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: And they had the best orange drink - that was H and H Pharmacy.

Mary Alice Birch: And shop . . .

Margo Hunt: Downtown?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. It is – right now – let's see, on the corner, you know where Kevin McBride is?

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: It was in between Kevin McBride and that dress shop on the end of the corner there.

Margo Hunt: Ocean Pearl?

Bill Birch: Something like that.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh, hum. And so then finally H and H moved up to the . . .

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. But it was H and H. At that time, when I was a little boy growin' up you had Gallagher's, which is right, you know where Don's Seafood is right now in town?

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Right next building going towards the bridge, that was a boy called John Gallaghers. That was the meetin' place where - for ALL men in the mornin'.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Going in there for coffee, small talk and ever thing.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: That was John Gallagher's. And if they weren't to Gallagher's then they were to Bill Clark's which was right on the corner – like you're going to –

Mary Alice Birch: Next to Bill's Seafood.



Bill Birch: Bill's Seafood. They had a little restaurant there that was called Bill Clark's. They were the two meetin' places for the men in the morning. Other than that, right across the street where the Shore Stop – or Valero's - whatever you call it now – there used to be Jones and Mason's gas station. That, and at night, you would find a bunch of the guys out there. . .

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Talkin' politics and ever thing. I mean that's where all the older guys used to go Jones and Mason's.

Ed Schamel: These are guys from all over the Island?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: All – all of the communities?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. They'd go there and talk politics or tell you what happened during the day and ever thing.

Margo Hunt: They're still meeting on the side.

Mary Alice Birch: (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Just different places.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. But I mean as a kid that's – I can recall that.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And you worked there for a while didn't you?

Bill Birch: I worked to Mason's for a while, pumped gas.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Ed Schamel: What was his name Booth Jones?

Bill Birch: and Masons.

Ed Schamel: Jones and Masons.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: And Mason still owns a gas place?

Bill Birch: That's Mason Oil Company. Different set of Masons.

Margo Hunt: Oh.

Bill Birch: The Mason's, let's see. Ernest, it was Ernest Jones on Jones and Mason, it was Ernest Jones, because he was married to Ms. Betty, they lived across the street from my Grandmom. And the Mason's were Roy Mason and he had a brother, Bill. They were the two Masons that had it. It was two Masons and Jones is how they got the name, Jones and Masons. Two brothers named Roy and Bill Mason, and the Jones fellow was Ernest Jones.

Margo Hunt: What relation is Roy Mason to Tommy Mason?

Bill Birch: Uh- I'm not . . .

Margo Hunt: Roy is his brother.

Bill Birch: Okay. It was Tommy, Floyd, Bill Mason, they are related, because like I said, the original was Bill Mason and, I lost it now.

Margo Hunt: That's all right. I shouldn't have asked the question.

Bill Birch: No, no. It was Bill Mason; he lived on – on Pension Street. And his brother, that was Floyd's daddy.

Margo Hunt: That is what I was thinking.

Bill Birch: Okay, that's Floyd's Daddy.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Because Bill Floyd was the original owner and then Bill Mason had – his son was named Bill, and then it was Floyd, he had a son named Floyd, and one of 'em, I can't remember which one, had the one named Tommy like you were saying. I can't remember which one it was though. But the Jones guy, it was Ernest Jones, and he had a boy named Dickie who works up to Tom's Cove Campground.

Margo Hunt: Well, if you go back just a little tiny bit, most everybody is interrelated in some way on this Land.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Tell a little bit about what you did when you were young for amusement. What did – what kind's of things did you – did you – were you allowed on the water, did you go fishing, did you go to the beach?

Bill Birch: Well, Mom, she didn't allow us to close to the water. That is one thing I can say, I never learned how to swim.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: I do know that. My Dad, he was always on the water. In the summertime we had our bicycles, we could ride, you know, anywhere you wanted to. But it's not like this day and time now. When we were kids growin' up we had chores to do. And in the summertime we made extra spendin' money. What I did, I used to cut grass for people.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And when I wadn't doin' that I was over to my Grandpop's helpin' him with his garden, or I would go with him and, he was, like I say, a carpenter by trade, and I'd help him, you know, remodel people's houses and stuff. But we still had fun playin' and all, but you always had something – some kind of chores to take care of.

Margo Hunt: There was not much television and so forth?

Bill Birch: Huh-uh! Not like you have this day and time.

Margo Hunt: No PlayStations.

Bill Birch: Huh-huh, no. No PlayStations.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: Uh . . .

Mary Alice Birch: We all got our TV's about the time that the – oh, shuttle went up or something, remember?

Bill Birch: Oh . . .

Margo Hunt: Gemini?

Mary Alice Birch: The very first one.

Margo Hunt: 1960.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh, yeah.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh, right.

Mary Alice Birch: We didn't have as much as a TV. It was in the 60's before we got ours.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And yours was around the same time.

Bill Birch: About the same time, yeah.

Ed Schamel: It was – the only channel you could get was Salisbury?

Bill Birch: Channel 16, Salisbury.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And I can remember my Grandmom, my Dad's mom, she was workin' for Mr. Norman Hastings up in Berlin, Maryland. And one year she was going to surprise us with a brand new Christmas tree. It was one of those space age Christmas trees. I don't know if you can recall 'em. It was the silver trees.

Bill Birch: And my Mom and Dad, they thought it was the most beautiful thing and had those great big blue balls on there. I thought it was the ugliest Christmas tree I ever did see. (Laughing)

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: And I – it lasted maybe two years I think. (Laughing) I can remember that. I didn't like that.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: But some of my most memorable things was shooting her father.

Ed Schamel: Shooting her father?

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: You were what about eight?

Bill Birch: Somethin' like that.

Ed Schamel: Oh.

Bill Birch: (Laughing) I played innocent to this and I'll let her tell the story on this.

Mary Alice Birch: You were innocent. No, my Father worked for the Town of Chincoteague and he went around each month and read the meters, the water meters in the ground. And he

looked and read and he'd reach down and he said he got to the point he dreaded going to Atlantic Boulevard because this little boy was shootin' him with an air gun, a little B.B. gun. And he said he went there one day and he looked up and he was down there and somethin' told him to look up and he said when he did the little boy shot him again. And when I started datin' Bill we came home one day and we got to talkin'. Dad didn't know who he was, he knew his family but he didn't put it together. So he told him exactly where he lived, Dad said, "You're the little boy that shot me all the time!" (Laughing)

Bill Birch: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: And we got the biggest laugh over that. So to this day Dad says you ought to know my daughter married the man that shot me all the time.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) And why did you shoot him?

Mary Alice Birch: Target practice.

Bill Birch: Hard to say.

Margo Hunt: Oh my gosh.

Bill Birch: It didn't hurt him too bad. (Laughing) Shoot him in the butt.

Mary Alice Birch: Yes, Dad said he waited until he was getting' ready to go and he would shoot him.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) Awe, right in the butt! Oh my gosh.

Mary Alice Birch: But he was so quiet at the time you wouldn't believe it.

Bill Birch: Huh-uh.

Mary Alice Birch: They all were, I mean – the Birches - just very shy.

Margo Hunt: Shy, they were shy?

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: They didn't get out much. They stayed . . .

Margo Hunt: Well, look at what happened, they repressed everything, took it out on shooting your Father. (Laughing)

Bill Birch: Yeah, buy they were the good ole days.

Margo Hunt: Did you ever go to the beach? Now you had a beach somewhere here.

Bill Birch: No. The only time I went to the beach was when I started datin' her and we went – you were workin' with Mr. Stucker.

Mary Alice Birch: When I worked over to Assateague when they used to have the restaurant there, which has been a long damn time ago.

Margo Hunt: Now tell me about that.

Ed Schamel: A restaurant?

Mary Alice Birch: They used to have a restaurant right on the water, right on – when you go over to the beach to the left-hand side, that big parking lot. Well now, of course, if the building was there it would be off in the water because that's how far it's come up. It would be way out in the water. It was a really big building.

Bill Birch: You had to walk almost two to three hundred yards before you got to this restaurant.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Because it was . . .

Ed Schamel: It was facing Chincoteague?

Mary Alice Birch: No, it was facing the ocean.

Ed Schamel: Oh, it was facing the ocean – it was clear over there?

Margo Hunt: What kind of a restaurant?

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah, we did, well you walked up some long steps, I think you had to go up probably fifteen to twenty steps to get inside. It was really up high. And once you got inside it was very large. It had a big open area and we did hamburgers, hotdogs, French fries, drinks. You got seafood, you know, as far as just fish sandwiches. And then they had one area you'd pick up your food and the other area you could sit in a big dining room and eat it.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Beautiful view.

Mary Alice Birch: Oh, it was!

Bill Birch: It was right there along the Atlantic Ocean.

Mary Alice Birch: And I worked there for one summer. And it wasn't, I guess, two years later when they condemned it because water and ever thing. The water was startin' to come up closer and they eventually tore it down.

Margo Hunt: When do you – when – do you remember when that might have been?

Mary Alice Birch: That was about 59 -- about '70.

Margo Hunt: That late?

Mary Alice Birch: About '70.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Wow!

Bill Birch: Yeah, I started datin' you - that is when . . .

Mary Alice Birch: We started datin' in '71.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: No, it was about '60 – no, '70, 1970.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh. Because you were workin' there, 'cause I remember us ridin' our bicycles over there.

Mary Alice Birch: Uh-huh.

Bill Birch: Remember, for a picnic and ever thing.

Mary Alice Birch: Right. Tell 'em about your first date you took me on.

Margo Hunt: Okay, tell about your first date.

Mary Alice Birch: When you took me to the movies and what you did, surprised me so bad. Oh you forgot it! Oh boy, forget that.

Bill Birch: Uh –

Mary Alice Birch: No, he took me to the movies, that's when I knew that night I was gonna end up marryin' him or doin' something 'cause he picked me up, took me to the movies, we were sittin' in there, we weren't there what ten minutes, when all of a sudden the movie started,

something came up that was inappropriate I guess, and Bill just gently reached over, and he hadn't touch me or anything, reached over and took my hand and he said, "This isn't for girls to watch." And he stood me up and walked me out of the movie.

Bill Birch: Awe.

Mary Alice Birch: And I was like "wow"! (Laughing) We didn't even get to stay. We left and he took me for a ride and then we went to the carnival.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And I went home that night I told Mom, I said, "I'm gonna marry him."

Bill Birch: Oh. My buddy and I, we had just graduated June of '71, and we – the carnival started that season so we were out on the carnival ground and we were walkin' along and Mary Alice and her cousin were walkin' too. So somehow Greg, he was my buddy, we stopped there and we started talkin' to 'em. What you all doin', this, that and the other. The whole time she was sittin' from one foot to another, kind a antsy and I said would you like to go on a date with me, you know, the next night. So she said yeah. Well, we left – and they all left. Well come to find out a little bit later why she was so antsy. She was gettin' ready to go to the restroom.

All: (Laughing)

Bill Birch: But she had time to talk.

Mary Alice Birch: And I always had to have permission. I wadn't allowed to go out on a date without first asking my Mother if I was allowed to go. And that night when he asked me out I said, "Yeah!" So he said, "What time can I pick you up?" And I said, "Oh what time do you want?" And he said, "Sixty-thirty or seven." And I said, "Okay, I'll be ready."

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And I went home and told my Mother, I said, "I'm going on a date tomorrow night" and I said, "Okay, please say yes." But she knew I had a crush on him for two and a half years before he asked me out.

Margo Hunt: So you had had some other dates before that?

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah, I dated someone before that.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) But not the same as him?

Bill Birch: (Laughing)



Mary Alice Birch: No, the one before him was a preacher's son. And I said that was my last preacher's son.

All: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: He was the worst one I ever dated.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Mary Alice Birch: But now he was good.

Bill Birch: It was fun growin' up here.

Ed Schamel: Well, I never heard about that restaurant on the ocean before. Is that – had it been there a long time?

Mary Alice Birch: It was – Mr. Stuckey owned it.

Bill Birch: Stuckey . . .

Ed Schamel: Oh, Stuckey's, it was a chain brand?

Mary Alice Birch: No, it wasn't Stuckey's.

Bill Birch: It's not Stuckey's like on the mainland.

Mary Alice Birch: It was the man's last name. He was from up in Maryland.

Bill Birch: Yeah.

Mary Alice Birch: I can't think of his first name. Lou!

Ed Schamel: Lou?

Mary Alice Birch: Lou Stuckey - Stucker.

Bill Birch: Stucker.

Ed Schamel: Was it from people who went to the beach would go up there and get hamburgers?

Mary Alice Birch: Yeah.

Bill Birch: You could go right there and get it. Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: You could walk the whole length of the beach and come up there and get somethin' to eat and take it back.

Bill Birch: When I was a kid them sand dunes were almost as tall as your ceilings here. Not like what you see now.

Mary Alice Birch: No.

Bill Birch: I mean right now – now . . .

Ed Schamel: There isn't any right now.

Bill Birch: Now it's just like a marsh flat.

Ed Schamel: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: And they had grass all over 'em.

Bill Birch: Uh-huh.

Mary Alice Birch: They were covered in marsh grass.

Bill Birch: But I guess that's one of my beef's. Up in the Maryland side of Assateague, Maryland people, they took and built the jetties out; they trapped the sand that comes down.

Ed Schamel: It doesn't come down here now.

Bill Birch: And I guess that is one of my beef's right now. I mean I can see – it hurts that they can see – just like the pine beetles over there. One whole section – when we were kids growin' up, the pines were thick and beautiful over there and now they're dieing.

Margo Hunt: Mm.

Bill Birch: And it seems to me like the government is not taking time to take and fix things up. In other words they won't put the jetties out to trap the sand so that you have more beach. So you can have sand dunes. Because you've got to think of it this way – if you lose Assateague and they have a big storm.

Ed Schamel: Yeah.

Bill Birch: Guess what is going to happen to Chincoteague.

Ed Schamel: Right.

Bill Birch: It's goin' bye-bye. And that's . . .

Margo Hunt: But you'd have to deal with Ocean City, Maryland, to get those jetties out.

Bill Birch: Well . . .

Margo Hunt: Wouldn't you?

Bill Birch: No, because I mean it's far enough from Ocean City – Ocean City that we could put our own jetties out and trap the dirt. Because I remember my Grandpop, he told me that when he was a young – young kid comin' up, right where the lighthouse is was like the inlet.

Ed Schamel: Yeah.

Bill Birch: And the Cove would come in there. Because there were three-mast sailing ships used to come in there. It was that deep a water. But you can see how it's built up. And you can see right now that as soon as you go across to Assateague on the right-hand side, where water had washed over a couple times inside the Cove, how it's cuttin' out more and more each time. Eventually it's not gonna be no Tom's Cove I wouldn't think. I mean nature . . .

Ed Schamel: Yeah, you're – sounds right.

Margo Hunt: Well, I want to thank you very much for telling your stories today. They are very interesting.

Bill Birch: Thank you.

Margo Hunt: We appreciate your coming, both of you.

Ed Schamel: It was really very interesting for us.

END OF TAPE.