

**CORKEY COLLINS**  
**August 31, 2012**

Interviewers: Lisa Cannon, Janice MacKinnon  
Interviewees: Corkey Collins, Mrs. Collins

Transcriber: David MacKinnon

LISA CANNON: This is Friday August 31, and Jan and I are interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Collins. and we thank them both very much for their time. Let me just ask you were you born here on the Island Corkey?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah

LISA CANNON: Yup, okay. Your parents were they Teaguers too?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yup, they were both born here on Chincoteague.

LISA CANNON: And I know Collins is a name that goes back I know there were some lighthouse keepers who were Collinses. Is that part of your family do you know?

CORKEY COLLINS: Well yeah, all of them, just about all of them. They've all gone. They've all moved away. They and my two sons-

MC: Sister

CORKEY COLLINS: I don't recall any Collins left on the Island right now.

LISA CANNON: You're the only Collins left uh huh.

CORKEY COLLINS: All the rest of them moved north along the [undecipherable] Norfolk. After the storm, after the March storm

JANICE MACKINNON: The storm of '62?

CORKEY COLLINS: Uh huh.

JANICE MACKINNON: Well your wife was just telling us that when you first got married you were raising chicken over on Taylor Street. Did the storm hit that or did you have it at that moment,

MRS. COLLINS: No, the storm was when we came down here.

JANICE MACKINNON: Okay you were here by then.

CORKEY COLLINS: The storm took here? It was over 2 million chickens raised here on this island. And the storm took care of all of it. No chickens raised after that. Just like there were chicken houses on this street [Poplar Street]. Chicken houses on the other street. And mine was on Taylor Street. I had two of them. Two big chicken houses.

JANICE MACKINNON: I've heard it said that some of the motels have taken the old structure of the old chicken houses and renovated. Is that true? You nodding you head like [laughs]— because I heard it third hand and I didn't know if it was true.

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah, the one on Maddox Boulevard, the Seahawk.

JANICE MACKINNON: Seahawk. Yes it looks like...

CORKEY COLLINS: Them two, they were chicken houses remodeled and on Willow Street, name of...

MRS. COLLINS: Conklins.

CORKEY COLLINS: Huh

LISA CANNON: Oh, the Seashell?

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah

LISA CANNON: Oh really, that was a chicken house too?

JANICE MACKINNON: Seashell does look like that. And you know the other one that looks like it is Sunrise. I'm not sure if that was one, but the Sunrise up on Chicken City [Road] looks like an old chicken house.

CORKEY COLLINS: I sold mine. They burned it down after the storm and my mother had, she had two more. Her and her brother. She sold them. They burned them. They were just no good for anything.

JANICE MACKINNON: That was after the storm you're saying when they burned them and sold them?

CORKEY COLLINS: Uh huh.

LISA CANNON: People—did the storm—I know the storm killed the chickens. Did it wash away the houses too or damage them?

CORKEY COLLINS: No

LISA CANNON: No, just killed the birds?

CORKEY COLLINS: A few of them washed away. The chicken houses, I mean for the homes. It was not the March storm but the one before that.

MRS. COLLINS: Thirties [1936]

LISA CANNON: Oh yes, right. I know there have been other storms too, right?

JANICE MACKINNON: 1936 you're saying?

LISA CANNON: And '33 there was one too I think.

CORKEY COLLINS: That March storm blew one house over, I mean, killed a little baby.

LISA CANNON: Yes, right, I remember that.

CORKEY COLLINS: Some chicken houses on North Main Street washed them away.

LISA CANNON: Did people not go back to the chicken business after the storm because...

CORKEY COLLINS: No

LISA CANNON: ... they were afraid another storm would come and the same thing—or it was too expensive to buy new chickens?

CORKEY COLLINS: The chicken business was, when the first started, people went into it themselves. They bought their own chickens and they bought their own feed. And then it got so that they had the co-op. The big feed companies they took over and they put chickens in and you raise them for so much. And they give that up. They couldn't stand.

LISA CANNON: So the people on Chincoteague it wasn't really, it was out of their hands by that time. The companies decided what...

MRS. COLLINS: What to do.

LISA CANNON: They didn't want to reinvest in that.

MRS. COLLINS: Wasn't worth their while.

JANICE MACKINNON: Lisa had told me earlier that you were involved with the Fire Department [Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Department] through your life. Did you, did the Fire Department have a role in the 1962 storm cleaning up and helping or...

CORKEY COLLINS: Well they, everybody did

MRS. COLLINS: He's still with the fire company. [shows something] To the carnival this year.

JANICE MACKINNON: Well we'll have to hear all about the fire department now. That's a whole new story.

CORKEY COLLINS: The fire company—everybody helped to clean up.

JANICE MACKINNON: Okay, it was everybody.

CORKEY COLLINS: The fire company did all they could do.

MRS. COLLINS: Some medals [shows Corkey's medals]

LISA CANNON: Jan and I are looking at Commonwealth of Virginia General Assembly House Joint Resolution Number 404 commending Carlton W. Collins, Sr. for member—and it goes on and on. "A member of the Chincoteague Volunteer Fire Company for more than 70 years."

JANICE MACKINNON: "Pump operator and driver for the engines. Worked at the Fire Company's annual carnival serving ice cream." You served ice cream.

LISA CANNON: And it says, "As the years passed he has seen great advances in fire fighting vehicles and other first response equipment."

CORKEY COLLINS: Oh yeah.

JANICE MACKINNON: That's wonderful.

MRS. COLLINS: He go [undecipherable] for years.

LISA CANNON: Oh my goodness, that takes such...

CORKEY COLLINS: Show her on the wall [Janice and Lisa look at commendations and family photos on the wall.]

LISA CANNON: That must be a record, 70 years. Has anyone else done that? Does he still go to meetings?

MRS. COLLINS: No, he has problems with steps. We are mostly [undecipherable]

LISA CANNON: Does he listen to the dispatches?

MRS. COLLINS: He just does it for me to say he keeps up with things. [laughter]

LISA CANNON: We have so much in common with [undecipherable]

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah he has a scanner. He knows just when they're going to do anything.

L I love this house. It's so lovely. Well we saw all your commendations there.

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah better move this or something otherwise it will blow. And he was gone and a lot of times it was on the mainland and I'd have to take the two kids and walk clear up Taylor Street to get home.

LISA CANNON: You know, you lost me there. You mean the fire was on the mainland or you were on the mainland?

MRS. COLLINS: The fire, it was on the mainland

JANICE MACKINNON: So the fire company here on Chincoteague went to the mainland to help at times? I didn't know that, that's very interesting.

CORKEY COLLINS: Almost about all of it was the mainland. We'd go there two, three times a day more. See it was only Pocomoke and Parksley and Chincoteague in this. And they had to take care of all of it.

LISA CANNON: I didn't realize that. So there was no New Church, didn't have...

CORKEY COLLINS: No, no Atlantic, New Church, and Bloxim and all them. They got 20 something now, you know.

LISA CANNON: Yes. Isn't that interesting. I never heard that before. Well then you were busy plus anything that happened here on the island. Is there an experience you had that stands out in your mind that is very scary or you weren't sure what was going to happen?

CORKEY COLLINS: Oh you didn't know what was going on. No radios, no communications at all. The only thing you knew when you got to the firehouse—the first one there answered the telephone and the operator; the telephone operator told you where it was. Didn't know what it was. And you didn't know what it was until you got there. And now they know, pretty well know what they're going to. And we didn't have but two fire engines then. One of them was old. A tank [truck]. And the one that we went to the mainland on all the time didn't have any cab on her. She just had a windshield. And when it was freezing weather—I mean—the ones that were riding they'd get up on top and throw coats over, so that you know, for to keep warm. And the one

driving they had sheepskin gloves, sheepskin jackets and goggles. It looked like you were going to the Mars. [laughter] But that's the way it was, I mean no doors on. So the air just blowed right around and right on to you. And we had colder winters than we have now.

LISA CANNON: I've heard that so often, yes.

CORKEY COLLINS: But we done all right. We got by, they got by. They growed, they done good. And I was proud to be a fireman. She didn't like it too much me being in it. But I was proud to be a member of it.

MRS. COLLINS: I didn't like it but they come first. He was really in love with it.

JANICE MACKINNON: Did you work in the carnival as well in the fireman's auxiliary?

MRS. COLLINS: I was in the auxiliary.

JANICE MACKINNON: What kinds of things did you do?

MRS. COLLINS: Everything. I'd take—he used to drive a chicken truck, pick up, catch chickens. And I would take that and go to the mainland and carnival stuff and pick potatoes up off the farm and some stuff and bring back.

LISA CANNON: To make for French fires, to cook them?

MRS. COLLINS: Yes

LISA CANNON: Wow. So you did all them—yeah in those days you just did all the work yourself, right?

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah.

LISA CANNON: You couldn't buy the frozen French fries.

MRS. COLLINS: The older ladies would sit there nice and peel them.

CORKEY COLLINS: They had three or four, five older ladies would sit there outdoors and peel them potatoes.

MRS. COLLINS: Because they wanted to do something!

CORKEY COLLINS: Then they would cut them and make French fries and stuff. And the old hens—I tell you old chickens, you know, like for to make chicken and dumplings and stuff. They had [undecipherable] a day for her chicken and dumplings. She'd get the chickens. She helped get the chickens and carry them around to people and they would clean them. It was a lot of work. It's a lot of time put in for the fire company. I put a many hours in it. And it's all volunteer. And I drove the ambulance too. I was ambulance driver. The first ambulance they got was Pontiac station wagon—1957 I think it was. They fixed it in the back and carried people to the hospital and that until the got Cadillacs, started getting in Cadillacs.

LISA CANNON: And what hospital did they go to?

CORKEY COLLINS: Nassawadox and Salisbury,

LISA CANNON: Okay, okay, same as now.

CORKEY COLLINS: We went where ever the doctor sent us. We went to [? Ferry, we went to Richmond, we went to Norfolk, [undecipherable], Baltimore, up in New Jersey. Where ever they had to go we carried them.

MRS. COLLINS: But then you didn't call the ambulance and it would come here like now. It had to have the doctor's orders.

LISA CANNON: No 911.

CORKEY COLLINS: See they had one man took care of the ambulance. He was good at it. Well they had several drivers, not a whole lot of them, but. Now he'd give us orders. "When I call you don't say"—he'd just tell you who it was and where to go. He said, "Don't ask questions what this and that the other [undecipherable]. Just say yes or no." He said, "That's the answer I want." That's what we'd tell him.

LISA CANNON: So you wouldn't know how far you had to go or what, who, what was involved; just had to commit.

CORKEY COLLINS: No we didn't know, I mean until we got to the houses to pick them up if we were going to Salisbury, Nassawadox or Baltimore, or where.

LISA CANNON: What did they have in the ambulance in those early years for people? Did they have an oxygen tank?

CORKEY COLLINS: Well, see there was nobody in the back except the family. Might could have been somebody if it was real bad. And whatever they done—they had oxygen tanks, but if you got bad you had to stop and put it on them, see. But ordinarily [undecipherable] or nothing like that.

LISA CANNON: So you'd have the driver—they didn't have an EMT in those earlier years. So just the family had to just deal with it.

CORKEY COLLINS: Family was the EMTs. [everyone laughs]. If something happened I was too or the other driver. We had a little bit of training, so we never had no training like you got now. It's a good thing they've got that training because we got no doctor to send them to here. She knows every time now, I mean we listen on the scanner. I listen to all the—every time they blow if I'm here.

MRS. COLLINS: He's still got it in his blood.

JANICE MACKINNON: Yeah, you can tell.

CORKEY COLLINS: I would still like to go just like I told them. See I was engineer from time I went in until they got all this training. And I told them if they need me anytime just call on the scanner "Cork, bring us a fire truck." So I told I can't do it. I can't even get into the fire truck. I ain't supposed to get on. After all that time.

LISA CANNON: You must have a record with 70 years as a fireman. I don't think anyone else...

CORKEY COLLINS: Well I'll tell you, I'm not bragging. I think I done a good job.

JANICE MACKINNON: And your wife thinks so too.

CORKEY COLLINS: And they think so too. They got my record.

LISA CANNON: What do you think it takes to be a good fireman. What are some important qualities you would have to have as a person.

CORKEY COLLINS: Well the only quality we had is what we learned our own self. See, just like when I went in in 1941 they put me operator, driver and operator. The other things too, see I didn't do that all the time because somebody else beat me to it. But we had to—every Monday night we had to go drilling, had to go training every Monday night.

LISA CANNON: That's a commitment.

CORKEY COLLINS: And we had the chief—I mean then he was right on to you, I mean he—well they're all good but this an older man.

LISA CANNON: Who was that Corkey, who was the fire chief when you started?

CORKEY COLLINS: When I started, Mr. Eave Jones. He was a Coast Guard man too.

LISA CANNON: And he was a volunteer too, was he, or was that paid job.

CORKEY COLLINS: No. There was no paid in the...

LISA CANNON: No paid.

CORKEY COLLINS: There's never been no paid that I know of.

LISA CANNON: I just wanted to make sure I understood that.

CORKEY COLLINS: It's all volunteer.

LISA CANNON: So the chief would watch your training every week to make sure you were...

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah, we had assistant chiefs stuff to...

LISA CANNON: So I was asking you about what kind of personality does it take to be a good fireman? You said you have to rely on yourself.

MRS. COLLINS: Dedication

CORKEY COLLINS: All I know is when then whistle blows go. And to know you had go or you should go, see, because somebody's in trouble. And you figure somebody's in trouble and you got to help all you can. So that's the only quality, i mean try to be a good person, a good personality, and they all seem to like me. And all the people on Chincoteague, I knew all of them. I don't know just...

MRS. COLLINS: He could go down to the Meatland [former name for Fresh Pride supermarket] and no matter how many is ahead of him, those girls wait on him first.

LISA CANNON: Aw, I think you've earned that.

MRS. COLLINS: He go to the doctor's office and they'd holler, "Oh here's Corkey [undecipherable] friend."

CORKEY COLLINS: See I put 8 1/2 years in NASA fire department. Went over there in '64 and stayed there 8 1/2 years.

LISA CANNON: Well that's something I never thought about. They have their own fire...

CORKEY COLLINS: That's crash and rescue over there. They had to go to school for that. There was a lot of training then going to that school. You had to go in a burning airplane. They had all that.

LISA CANNON: Did you ever—were you ever injured yourself or did you ever have any...

CORKEY COLLINS: Not, not going to no fires, I don't remember.

LISA CANNON: Uh huh. So you never had any injury yourself, or any accident.

CORKEY COLLINS: I've had all kinds of injuries.

LISA CANNON: But not related to the fire company.

CORKEY COLLINS: No, not related to that. I've had 16 operations.

MRS. COLLINS: Make you strong, break the record.

LISA CANNON: Well lyou seem to be someone who likes to do that.

JANICE MACKINNON: You broke the record as a fireman and you're breaking the record with...

CORKEY COLLINS: I've had two broken arms and two broken hips.

MRS. COLLINS: It was fun when he had two broken arms.

LISA CANNON: At the same time?

MRS. COLLINS: At the same time.

CORKEY COLLINS: These arteries in your neck that goes to your brain—both of them operated on. Both eyes operated on.

LISA CANNON: Well, you're doing pretty well.

MRS. COLLINS: It's tender loving care.

CORKEY COLLINS: In '57 I had to go to Hahnemann [best guess] hospital in Philadelphia. Had both of them operated on. If I hadn't gone there I would have been blind.

LISA CANNON: How did you break your arms at the same time?

CORKEY COLLINS: I was working on a house and I fell off the roof. I thought I could fly. [Everyone laughs]

LISA CANNON: Gosh, that must be tough?

CORKEY COLLINS: It wasn't tough on me.

LISA CANNON: You had a very good nurse here.

CORKEY COLLINS: It was tough on her. When you have both arms like this [demonstrates positions]

LISA CANNON: You're helpless.

CORKEY COLLINS: You're helpless. You can't do nothing. You can't feed yourself. But still, when you think about it, here I was with two broken arms. But here's somebody else with both arms gone. So there's always somebody worse than you are. [Janice and Lisa agree] Always somebody worse than you.

LISA CANNON: What do you think has changed about Chincoteague? What is something that you miss from the old days? Can you think of anything that...

CORKEY COLLINS: I liked it in the old days. I would like for Chincoteague to go back just like it was. No beach, no beach, just Chincoteague.

LISA CANNON: No beach, no tourists?

CORKEY COLLINS: See it's not helped us a bit. It's hurt us because it's cost us more money. I get nothing from the tourists. But you can't stop progress. So that's the ways things goes, I mean, motels, hotels [undecipherable] and T shirts.

MRS. COLLINS: When you need go to the beach, you wouldn't have to go. There to Deep Hole and go and walk through marshes and the mosquitoes eating you up to get to the beach.

LISA CANNON: To get across Assateague to this side of Assateague?

MRS. COLLINS: Uh huh.

JANICE MACKINNON: You would go from Deep Hole over to Assateague?

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah.

JANICE MACKINNON: Oh where—I live on Deep Hole.

MRS. COLLINS: We would leave from up the Deep Hole, Reeds [family property at the end of Deep Hole Road].

JANICE MACKINNON: Oh the very—yes where the—I understand there's a really deep hole there, is that true? You would know Mr. Collins.

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah. And take the boat. Just sail across there and leave her there and walk through all the these marshes and run—try to get rid of the mosquitoes and drag lunches and...

LISA CANNON: To actually get to the surf, all the way to the surf?

MRS. COLLINS: Uh huh.

LISA CANNON: Yeah that would be quite a trip, I can see that.

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah we did walk where we went on to the beach as we got on Assateague it would be about a mile we had to walk through the marshes and it was—you wouldn't walk in any water. You might splash a little bit. And you walking through it and mosquitoes...

LISA CANNON: I can imagine.

MRS. COLLINS: Eat you up [laughs]

JANICE MACKINNON: Well

LISA CANNON: The bridge now is coming up on its 50th celebration, so did that change—now could go over the bridge rather than going through Deep Hole and—the bridge changed a lot of things?

MRS. COLLINS: Yes. See where the bridge is that's where we would have to leave this side and go across and walk from there where the bridge is clear over to the ocean.

JANICE MACKINNON: Okay. But now you could go walk across the bridge or...

MRS. COLLINS: You could take the bridge and...

LISA CANNON: If we didn't have the bridge and the tourist industry, would people be able to—what would people do on Chincoteague? Could the men make, still make enough living from being watermen? Or I always felt that tourism was necessary because the oysters, the clams, the crabs—there wasn't enough anymore. Is that correct or not do you think?

CORKEY COLLINS: Well it wasn't no tourists, it was just a few tourists. But after they built this bridge here they came over in '21. After the built that bridge they had a lot of people come here fishing in cars and stuff like that. They had, maybe in the later years, they had a few motels, the small ones and boarding houses or inns or whatever you want to call them. But it wasn't nothing like it is now, I mean just that traffic we got now. But the Chincoteague people got along, they got along good, I mean the business they had, just like chicken business then oyster business and clam business. Her [Mrs. Collins] father was in the oyster business down on that dock where that motel is now.

LISA CANNON: Yes, I can remember at time when there were more...

CORKEY COLLINS: They called them shucking houses. They had 24 people opening oysters to get there and buying them whole. And he done that.

LISA CANNON: What was your maiden name?

MRS. COLLINS: Justice.

LISA CANNON: Justice.

MRS. COLLINS: But it seemed like when the younger crowd started growing up they left from home to go somewhere else. To college and stay.

LISA CANNON: Well that's been a problem for small towns everywhere I guess, rural areas, right.

CORKEY COLLINS: Years ago they had been into seafood. See they had scallops; they had plenty of scallops here. They caught them right up the bay. And they had scallop houses. They opened scallops and people would go get them and bring them home by the tub fulls and open them and carry them back to the—but they had this here grass they called it, crabgrass.

LISA CANNON: Ell grass, the ell grass.

CORKEY COLLINS: Ell grass. They had it so thick that it would stop their motors. They couldn't run their motors. And people—well I'm just saying what I heard. They people cussed it. Wanted to go and leave. Well they left and scallops left. The scallops growed in that.

LISA CANNON: Right. I've heard a little about that.

CORKEY COLLINS: The oyster business and clam business stayed until 1965 or something like that, '63.

JANICE MACKINNON: Are there any shucking houses on the island now?

CORKEY COLLINS: Oh we had plenty of them on here.

JANICE MACKINNON: We had a lot then and your father had the one behind—where the Comfort Inn is. But are there any now?

CORKEY COLLINS: No.

JANICE MACKINNON: Nobody is doing it now?

CORKEY COLLINS: No.

JANICE MACKINNON: Not even.—when I pass by Chicken City there's a white building that says...

CORKEY COLLINS: I think they—yeah, well they do open some oysters, and McGee down by...

JANICE MACKINNON: On the east side?

CORKEY COLLINS: Down Ridge Road, side road, McGee, yeah they open some, but the oysters come from somewhere else. They get a few Chincoteague oysters, but most of them come from Louisiana and Texas and West Coast. All around. There are still Chincoteague oysters. They call them Chincoteague oysters.

LISA CANNON: And they're the best. Were you a waterman?

CORKEY COLLINS: Me? I never done much work on the water. I only went with my daddy on boats. He had freight boats you see. He had big boats and hauled oysters from James River up here and people planted them. And they'd come from Bridgeport Connecticut here. And I went with him on the boats.

LISA CANNON: Oh, that must have been fun. I know it's hard work.

CORKEY COLLINS: That's a long ways on a little boat. They were little boats compared to what boats they got.

LISA CANNON: What type of boat was it? What would you call his type of boat? A freight...

CORKEY COLLINS: Freight boat, a buy boat.

LISA CANNON: A buy boat.

JANICE MACKINNON: Yeah they are smaller.

CORKEY COLLINS: They go to James River and buy oysters and bring them up here. Then they had—most of the oysters that were planted in Chincoteague Bay come from—they called it down the bay, down around Exmore. All them bays down in there. The people would go to, leave Monday morning on a boat with a monitor. You know when it's towed behind the boat like a barge. And they would go down Monday morning and they'd work down there the whole week. They come back on the weekend and plant them right here in the bay. And it would take them a year or two to grow.

LISA CANNON: And did your father harvest too, or was he just the buyer? Did he harvest?

CORKEY COLLINS: I went in—he took me the last couple of years, he took me with him. And we had oysters planted. He buy them and plant them and had people take them up. I mean he'd buy other people's oyster too which he did bring in. We planted 1,000 bushels a month, everybody planted them. The next to the last year the 1,000 bushels, they growed and we took up about 2,000 bushels. Made good money. And the next year after that we planted and never got an oyster. Nothing but dead shells. That MSX got into the oysters and killed them off.

LISA CANNON: Oh gosh, that was terrible wasn't it?

CORKEY COLLINS: So he got out of the oyster business. I went and worked for the base. He went and worked for the base. That took care of the oyster business.

LISA CANNON: Yeah. But they're coming back some it seems. There seem to be a little better harvest.

CORKEY COLLINS: I understand [undecipherable]

MRS. COLLINS: Coming back, the oysters are coming back

CORKEY COLLINS: Coming back. The only kind of oysters you're getting now is what you grow your own self. They grow them on floats. I mean around here. Now Chesapeake Bay maybe they're growing some now.

LISA CANNON: Has your church community been important to you in your life? Has that been something, your church. Has your church been important in your life here in the community?

CORKEY COLLINS: Real important. Most important. Not just about. More important than anything I mean.

MRS. COLLINS: He was late getting started [laughs].

LISA CANNON: What is your church that you attend?

CORKEY COLLINS: Island Baptist Church. I mean that's on my early mornings, late nights and all that through the day.

MRS. COLLINS: They have [undecipherable] being the revival service. All except taking collection.

CORKEY COLLINS: I love to sing hymns.

LISA CANNON: Oh do you?

CORKEY COLLINS: I ain't no singer but I' talking about...

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah, have to sing two hymns every night.

CORKEY COLLINS: I love to sing hymns and I like old time gospel hymns. I don't like this new fandangle stuff. You can't understand the rhythm. Can't understand the words.

MRS. COLLINS: Just old fashioned.

CORKEY COLLINS: I'm just a little—I was brought up in the church that my family was brought up. Old time religion. And I still like it that way.

MRS. COLLINS: He cried out one morning, "I always in church ever since I can remember my mother dragging me."

CORKEY COLLINS: I ain't no angel...

MRS. COLLINS: He said, "Get up and I'll go to church with you." Usually stayed home and ate dinner warmed when I'd come home or something. But I jumped out of bed and he went and he joined. And then when they built the new one down—because we worked in shirt factory. Even after all the rest of the men went home working on building it, he'd stay until way late. And he has really devoted himself to it.

LISA CANNON: What did you say about the shirt factory?

JANICE MACKINNON: The T Shirt Factory. I would like to...

MRS. COLLINS: We started

JANICE MACKINNON: It's over there...

MRS. COLLINS: On Willow Street

CORKEY COLLINS: The bowling alley is...

JANICE MACKINNON: Across from the bowling alley?

MRS. COLLINS: No, in the bowling alley.

JANICE MACKINNON: Oh, in the bowling alley.

CORKEY COLLINS: The same building. They rented it...

MRS. COLLINS: From the Bernsteins. [shirt factory]

LISA CANNON: I've heard that name. I remember that now.

CORKEY COLLINS: They cleaned it all out. I mean they worked there. I didn't belong to no church then. But I helped them.

JANICE MACKINNON: When was that?

MRS. COLLINS: '88

JANICE MACKINNON: That recent?

LISA CANNON: Were they making T shirts there or were they making men's dress...

CORKEY COLLINS: They made robes and shirts

LISA CANNON: All kinds of things.

CORKEY COLLINS: I don't think they made too many T shirts there.

LISA CANNON: It was a regular shirt.

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah.

LISA CANNON: And you worked there?

CORKEY COLLINS: No I didn't work there.

MRS. COLLINS: No when they were changing it, making a church in it.

LISA CANNON: Okay, so you helped with the renovation.

CORKEY COLLINS: I worked there making the church change there. Building classrooms.

Like I say, I'm no angel and I'm not perfect. And nobody is. No, not one in perfect. But I tried to live the best life I can live. That's all you can do.

LISA CANNON: Well it sounds like you have taken that more seriously than a lot of people do.

JANICE MACKINNON: Very devoted to community.

MRS. COLLINS: Yes. He's got to repeat verses and he's got to talk about them and sing.

LISA CANNON: Are you still able to go to church?

MRS. COLLINS: Yes

LISA CANNON: Jan and I interviewed someone else last year and he said he missed sitting out on his porch and talking to people. He said in the old days everyone sat outside, or they sat outside the stores downtown. His wife was teasing him. She said he was a store sitter. And I wasn't sure what that meant. And he said he missed that. Now everyone sits inside. And people don't sit outside.

MRS. COLLINS: We don't visit like we used to. No, it was two stores right here. Right out in the street where you sat.

JANICE MACKINNON: You're pointing toward Main Street. And so the stores were actually on Main Street where that motel is.

MRS. COLLINS: Yeah.

CORKEY COLLINS: See that big yellow building right across the street with the big window in it? That was a store.

MRS. COLLINS: And right across the alley was another.

CORKEY COLLINS: I bought it one time. I bought and run a grocery store for nine months.

MRS. COLLINS: That was enough. There was too much competition.

CORKEY COLLINS: The store on this side—it's just an alley. They had sitters. Afternoons and nights. Benches in there. They're sitting there and talking. They'd try to, you know, take care of everything, in Washington, and everything's okay. They'd take care of all the world's problems.

MRS. COLLINS: Take care of all the world's problems.

CORKEY COLLINS: And they got nothing done.

LISA CANNON: Now why didn't you like the grocery business?

MRS. COLLINS: Too confining. He's an outdoor person. He'll go out one door and walk to the back door and come in the other door 25 times a day.

CORKEY COLLINS: I had another job. Hauling chickens. My father and uncle bought chickens for Swift and Company. Me and my brother-in-law we took care of getting the workers for to catch them and drive—and we drove the truck too to Georgetown, Delaware. Every day except Saturday and Sunday. On those jobs, I was raising chickens. She had to take care of them—she didn't have to but she did. I guess she had to.

MRS. COLLINS: That's more like it!

CORKEY COLLINS: Anyway, we'd start out about ten o'clock nights and we'd go anywhere from down as far as Exmore and up in Maryland and around. Had four trucks to deliver them. It took over an hour to catch the chickens to put on the truck. We had to go get the crew, the men for to do it. And then we always—the last truck, one of us had to take that last one. Before that we'd take the last one and we'd start out like I say, maybe ten o'clock nights. We wouldn't get home no more until three o'clock in the afternoon, maybe something like that. That was a hard, tiresome job. She had to work. And she had to do hard work in the chicken house. Lifting 100

pound bags of feed. But we done all that and made a living and got by. And now we're still here and we're still surviving. And pray the Lord the Social Security will keep coming and Medicare pays out. And that's what we've got to look forward to now. Social Security and Medicare. That's all we got coming to us, is Social Security. I worked over at the base for 8 1/2 years and I worked for contractors. Nothing but Social Security now.

LISA CANNON: No pension.

CORKEY COLLINS: No pension. And I didn't go into Service. I just went in for a time. I went for to get into the Coast Guard. Went to Norfolk. A bunch of boys from here went. I got turned down. I went to Richmond and they turned me down. They turned me down once for a heart murmur. The other one turned me down for old age and I don't know what else. I mean then didn't turn me completely down. I only had limited military service and they said if they called you you'll only go to work around the base.

LISA CANNON: Well, I don't know who could have worked harder in their live than you, so I'm sure you could have done that too.

CORKEY COLLINS: Done what?

LISA CANNON: Well the military if—when you have a heart murmur I know.

CORKEY COLLINS: We tried. My father took me back to Norfolk and tried to get them to waiver it. They wouldn't do it.

JANICE MACKINNON: We haven't heard about your early life. Where exactly you were born on the island. Were you born on the island? Your growing up years here on the island. Were you both born on the island?

MRS. COLLINS: I wasn't. I was born in Maryland.

JANICE MACKINNON: Maryland. And you came here when?

MRS. COLLINS: A baby.

CORKEY COLLINS: She was born in Stockton, Maryland. But she moved here—they moved here when—her mother was from here, but her father wasn't.

MRS. COLLINS: My mother was raised back Russell Street there. My grandmother lived back there. She was 106.

LISA CANNON: My goodness, that's very amazing.

MRS. COLLINS: She was short and she was really something.

CORKEY COLLINS: She was no bigger than a nothin [undecipherable]

JANICE MACKINNON: Were you born here on the island?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yup

MRS. COLLINS: Grandpa wouldn't take a nip of whiskey every once and a while and she went down to the bars one time and busted him all up and done a mess to him and Carrie Nation sent her a medal. [laughter]

CORKEY COLLINS: My mother was 102.

JANICE MACKINNON: Gosh you have good genes—102 and 106...

LISA CANNON: And people work so hard too.

CORKEY COLLINS: 102, she lived right on this next street. [there are two conversations going on at this point. One between Corkey Collins and Janice MacKinnon and the other between Mrs. Collins and Lisa Cannon]

MRS. COLLINS: My grandma had 10 kids. I used to love to go sit back there and she'd tell me things, how she would take one youngin's clothes and remodel them for the next one and stuff like that.

LISA CANNON: How many grandchildren did she have?

MRS. COLLINS: Too many to count? [laughs]

JANICE MACKINNON: She lives here on Clark Street or...

MRS. COLLINS: She was born here and lived here and she died here, right in her home. She had a big home. Her mother and father had a big home. That's where I was born. Up on North Main Street just before you get to the high school. On the corner of Lewis Street. When I got married I left there.

LISA CANNON: I think people worked every minute of the day in those days.

JANICE MACKINNON: Did you go to school—where was your schooling? Where was your school at that time? Did you go to school over here before it was torn down?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah, I went over there. I went there the whole time.

JANICE MACKINNON: Was the high school located there as well?

CORKEY COLLINS: I guess the high school. I don't know, I mean 1921—'28 say. You had to be seven years old to go to school. I was born in '21, so I went over there. Yeah I was there before they built that one up there. I was going—I was old enough for to vote. Had youngins.

LISA CANNON: How old were you when you got married?

CORKEY COLLINS: Twenty—I liked [undecipherable] being 21. She liked—being 17.

MRS. COLLINS: We were both born in July.

LISA CANNON: Wow, well that's what people did. I mean it wasn't unusual. My mother got married when she was 18.

MRS. COLLINS: Been married 70 years.

CORKEY COLLINS: Seventy years. You know when two people stay together for 70 years its got to be a little bit of something there. See, and it's just like I tell her, "It's LOVE." You think about love, how much love is, see. Just like this house we live in was given to us by love. Her father loving her. See we didn't have much, so he built this house. He built it because he loved her, he loved me. They loved me I think about as much as he loved her.

JANICE MACKINNON: That's really obvious. It's just a wonderful story.

CORKEY COLLINS: Without that we wouldn't have nothing. Without Jesus. For he is love.

LISA CANNON: Well we should probably stop here.

CORKEY COLLINS: Is somebody else going to hear it? Please put that story on that library.

JANICE MACKINNON: It becomes part of the library. In fact I was just going to say, it becomes part of library and people are able to listen to it or read your words because everyone wants—people like me—I'm a tourist originally, but we love Chincoteague and we want to hear that history. We want to hear what made this place so special.

MRS. COLLINS: I wish that I had written down all the things that my grandmother told me.

LISA CANNON: I was going to ask you, can you remember one thing that your grandmother told you that you...

MRS. COLLINS: That sticks out?

LISA CANNON: Anything or small thing or anything about her. Her daily life. Did she have electricity? She probably didn't have electricity for a long time in her life.

MRS. COLLINS: Probably not.

LISA CANNON: And she lived in the house on Russell Street?

MRS. COLLINS: You go down here and then you cut between these two houses and it's the house back there.

CORKEY COLLINS: It's over there.

LISA CANNON: It's still there.

CORKEY COLLINS: Still there.

LISA CANNON: When you don't write things down...

MRS. COLLINS: I think about it. I wish I had written it down so much but I didn't.

LISA CANNON: One thing I wanted to ask you Corkey at the beginning. Did you have family on Assateague?

CORKEY COLLINS: No

LISA CANNON: No you did not, okay.

CORKEY COLLINS: My mother used to go over there and say once in a while with her uncle. He runned the store over on...

LISA CANNON: Bill Scott store?

CORKEY COLLINS: I forgot what his name was now. Anyway he run the store over in that village and she'd run over there and she'd stay the weekends and stuff like that. And my father, he—was courtin'. He had to take a boat from over eastern side and go over there and see her when she stayed over. Her, my mother's mother and father lived out here on Main Street, just around the corner.

MRS. COLLINS: Where the gift shop's at.

JANICE MACKINNON: Threadgoods, yup, the gift store?

CORKEY COLLINS: He told them he was going marry her. And they said, "no, they don't want you to get married. He said," I don't care what you want or not, I'm going to marry her."

LISA CANNON: Without the parents' blessings. So they did it. But it worked out. Well thank you both so much. It's been a real joy talking and sharing...

CORKEY COLLINS: My family used—in the summer time—they had boats and they went to Atlantic City. To start with, my father used to bring the passenger boat from Franklin City over here. And he brought mail and he brought passengers. When they built this bridge he had to something else with this passenger boat, so he—that was for the Pennsylvania Railroad.

JANICE MACKINNON: Was that to Franklin City? Is that where he went?

CORKEY COLLINS: So he went up to Atlantic City New Jersey. And they crossed that inlet from there to Ocean City, New Jersey. He ran passengers across there. He done it for about 40 years they did, every summer starting July 1st, or July the 4th and he quit Labor Day. And he come home.

LISA CANNON: Taking tourists on that?

CORKEY COLLINS: He just took passengers from the lower end of Atlantic City all the way down to the end. And it's called Longport, name of that. And he carried them to Ocean City, New Jersey. And he had buses meet them on that side. Had trolleys on Atlantic City side. They done that for 40 years. They sold it in 1941. They sold the boats to another feller on Chincoteague. He lasted one year.

LISA CANNON: Well, your father was very enterprising. It sounds like he did a lot of different things.

CORKEY COLLINS: They were watermen. They were boat captains, the whole family. And some of the best. People talk about them today. The younger people know is what they heard, you know. Because they went up and down this coast. And when they come from Atlantic City they overhauled it to get the plates [undecipherable] the boats and stuff. And they'd go to Miami, Florida with them boats, Pawleys Island. They've been in all kinds of business, my family. They done pretty good all through their life. They had, during depression, everybody had it bad. I've been to school a lot of times my heels be out of my socks and I'd have running down. You people don't know nothing about that. Then your socks put it under your toes and put your shoes in it

and go to school with holes in your heels. Some people, a lot of them had it tough. But we done good. They done good. They were good to me.

LISA CANNON: Well, you said something about being self-reliant and I think that is a quality of Chincoteague people. You had to be self-reliant here. You had to depend on yourself a lot I think if you grew up here in the earlier days. Because it was isolated. You had to know how to do things.

CORKEY COLLINS: Well I've done all kinds of work. I've been in the carpenter business, I've been in the trucking business, and I've been in boats, with boats in most all of them.

LISA CANNON: Raising chickens.

CORKEY COLLINS: Raising chickens.

JANICE MACKINNON: Grocery store, everything. Do you remember a time when boats would come from Wisharts Point [near Atlantic, Virginia]. Do you remember a time when they would come in Wisharts Point, ferries.

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah. They had a man come from Wisharts Point, yeah.

JANICE MACKINNON: Very few people remember that.

CORKEY COLLINS: His name was Al Jester. He's the one that run that boat. My father runned the black boats. Called the black boats from Franklin City.

JANICE MACKINNON: And I heard also, perhaps that's the boat then—there was a south dock that the Wisharts Point boat came to? Were there two docks over here?

CORKEY COLLINS: Two docks?

JANICE MACKINNON: Were there, I don't know?

CORKEY COLLINS: Oh, this whole side of the channel had docks. See they had a big hotel downtown and the boats stopped in front of there.

LISA CANNON: What was your father's—do you remember the name of your father's ferry boat?

CORKEY COLLINS: Ferry boat was the Manzanita.

both Janis and Lisa exclaim "Manzanita?"

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah, you see pictures of it. It was a black boat.

LISA CANNON: Oh yeah, that's a famous boat.

JANICE MACKINNON: Very famous.

LISA CANNON: That was his boat? That was his ferry boat?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah.

LISA CANNON: Well you remember Killick Shoals [1886] when it was operating I guess. The Killick Shoals lighthouse?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah I remember it. I've been out to a lot of times.

LISA CANNON: I wish I could have seen that.

CORKEY COLLINS: It was a pretty—it was a pretty building on that.

LISA CANNON: I've seen a model of that. I wish they'd kept it.

CORKEY COLLINS: The neighborhood I lived in, a man took care of it. I mean, he didn't stay there but he just took care of carrying stuff and doing stuff. The keeper—they had to stay to it. I've been out with him a lot of times and even been to lighthouse.

LISA CANNON: That must have been fun.

CORKEY COLLINS: It was—I don't know why they tore it down, but I guess it cost too much money maybe to operate. See the boats used to go from where they leave they'd go up where the bridge is now and they would turn and go out around that lighthouse. And then they would go up

towards north maybe a mile, and there was another beacon we called it. You'd go around that beacon and then go to Franklin City. I've been with them.

LISA CANNON: How long take?

CORKEY COLLINS: To tell you the truth I don't know. See boats weren't too fast. It wasn't too long. He had a passenger boat named Colonel. He bought her. The Manzanita he went to Florida and he traded her for this big passenger boat. I had a picture of it here on the wall.

LISA CANNON: The Colonel?

CORKEY COLLINS: She took it down. She took it down and put another picture on the wall. And I didn't want her to take it down. This was a big double deck boat. And they used her in Atlantic City a long time too. But she burned up in Atlantic City. She had a load of passengers and had just gotten away from the dock. Just got a little ways. We were always about—maybe I was about seven years old. I don't know, I was playing on the beach, not the ocean beach but the inside beach. And she had just pulled away from the dock with a load of passengers and smoke was just pouring out of it. She burned right down, clear right down even to the water line.

LISA CANNON: Did everybody get off?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah.

LISA CANNON: What caused it?

CORKEY COLLINS: My uncle took another boat and he went out there.

LISA CANNON: What caused the fire, do you know?

CORKEY COLLINS: Yeah the engine backfired and I guess some gas down in the bottom there. But boy he loved that boat. He cried. She was pretty to see.

LISA CANNON: Probably didn't have insurance.

CORKEY COLLINS: No. I remember him crying.

LISA CANNON: That was a sight to see for a little boy, for you.

CORKEY COLLINS: I remember it very well. I can remember about Atlantic City about what went on up there. The work I done up there with them. I can remember more about that than I can remember anything else. It's a funny thing. I don't know why.

LISA CANNON: What age were you then, this time you remember so well? What was your age then?

CORKEY COLLINS: When I worked up there I was about 16, 1931. On one of those boats I fell down on it, a hole into it and I broke my hip. I often remember that. Then the other boat had burned up. They got a different boat. And I started a little while after that. Seemed no time after that I started working up there with them. I was a mate. I done that for, I don't know, four or five years. They sold out. I come home. I got hungry after that.

LISA CANNON: Well you two are something. You've had a good life.

CORKEY COLLINS: I tell you. It's like that one word I told you. That's it. LOVE. And patience.

LISA CANNON: Patience is important.

CORKEY COLLINS: Many of time I could make her wish she was courtin'.

CORKEY COLLINS: Many of time I could make her wish she was courtin'.

LISA CANNON: Oh our husbands always say that.

CORKEY COLLINS: We've been all right here lately. When you get old you can't do nothing. You can't get out and walk. And nothing you can do about it. You're here and you got to stay here until you die. You can't kill yourself. You can, but you'd go to hell. And I certainly don't want to do that.

JANICE MACKINNON: Not after the good life you've had.

LISA CANNON: Do you still have friends, I'm sure you do?

JANICE MACKINNON: From church probably.

MRS. COLLINS: Sometimes he'll go up to McDonalds or go into the harbor and set.

CORKEY COLLINS: See we used to take a few trips. We'd go to Williamsburg twice a year. We go to Pennsylvania to the Amish country twice a year. Then we'd go to Atlantic City once in a while. We've been to Florida a couple of times. Now for the last—what would you say, the last ten or twelve years now since you had that heart attack? We've not been to Williamsburg or Pennsylvania.

LISA CANNON: You have children.

MRS. COLLINS: Two boys.

LISA CANNON: We talked about them at the beginning I guess. Have they both moved away?

MRS. COLLINS: No.

LISA CANNON: Oh, they're here. Oh, okay, excuse me.

MRS. COLLINS: One's retired from the wildlife [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service] and his wife, he lost his wife to cancer. And she worked over there too. Now his daughter works over there.

JANICE MACKINNON: Is it at the Refuge [Chincoteague Wildlife Refuge] where she works?

MRS. COLLINS: Yes. And the other one he can't do much. He got run over by a big, what do you call it, backhoe or something. Hurt his legs real bad and they had to fly him to up in Maryland to a hospital up in there. Thought he was going to lose his leg but he didn't but he has problems.

LISA CANNON: Gee I'm sorry.

CORKEY COLLINS: They're as good as gold to us, both of them. They're real good boys.

JANICE MACKINNON: That's very nice that they live here with you.

MRS. COLLINS: We see them every day.

CORKEY COLLINS: One of them is now about 70 and the other one about 65.

LISA CANNON: What's your birthday Corkey?

CORKEY COLLINS: July 25<sup>th</sup>—Pony Penning.

LISA CANNON: 1921?

CORKEY COLLINS: 1921. I say this year come right on Pony Penning.

LISA CANNON: Well we should go. Thank you so much. It's really been lovely to meet you.

MRS. COLLINS: Nice to have you.