

HELEN MERRITT
September 15, 2007

Interviewer: Margo Hunt
Interviewee: Helen Merritt
Transcribed By: Shirley Fauber
Library Number: 07-09-062

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(TAPE SIDE A – 1st Side):

Margo Hunt: I'm Margo Hunt. I am at the beautiful home of Helen Merritt here on Maddox Boulevard to interview her, along with Ed Schamel. September 15, 2007.

Margo Hunt: Helen, good morning. You are a native Chincoteaguer?

Helen Merritt: I sure am.

Margo Hunt: And will you tell us a little bit about your early – where did you grow up here on Chincoteague?

Helen Merritt: I've been in Chincoteague all my life, eighty years that is.

Margo Hunt: Congratulations!

Helen Merritt: Just made it in July. Well, I was raised on the south end of the Island, called "down the marsh." And, of course, going to school, then I met my husband, Paul.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And he lived on the north end. But we – we met in school, high school; I didn't know him in grammar school. And then we were married in 1943. We lived sixty-one years together. And had a wonderful life! Wonderful. But he passed away two years ago. But I've had a lot – we had a lot a good times and mostly good times. Because Paul enjoyed life. And we liked to travel and we did so many things together. And we had this one son, Greg, who you met, and we had two grandchildren. And I don't know what else to say except that it's all been good.

Margo Hunt: I'm glad. I bet you miss him?

Helen Merritt: Oh my, yes, yes!

Margo Hunt: Now did you go to grammar school down in the south end, was there a separate grammar school?

Helen Merritt: No, no, it was right here on Church Street. Right where the old school is, that's where I went to school.

Margo Hunt: You went to the elementary school . . .

Helen Merritt: Well there was a school, but in the back of it was an old wooden building and we went in there too, when we hit the – like the fifth grade or fourth grade.

Margo Hunt: Is that the senior center now?

Helen Merritt: No. It was another building in back of it where they finally tore down.

Margo Hunt: Um.

Helen Merritt: But, no, I was in that brick building too. At the beginning.

Margo Hunt: Now where did Paul go to elementary school?

Helen Merritt: Same place.

Margo Hunt: Same place.

Helen Merritt: Same place.

Margo Hunt: And you didn't know each other?

Helen Merritt: No.

Margo Hunt: Was he older?

Helen Merritt: Two – only three years. But, you know, we were sort of divided on this Island. If you were on the north end or the south end, you really didn't know too many people on the other end, you know. We were – we were talking about that yesterday. We were sort a like, we had our own neighborhoods, you know. Every neighborhood had its own grocery store. You had little grocery stores all over this Island. And – so we stayed in our own little world, you know. I guess they didn't like us and we didn't like them maybe. (Laughing) I don't know. But it was – that's the way it was, we were in our own little groups. Ridge Road, Rattlesnake Ridge, and Snotty Ridge.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: You know, it was all different sections and it was just so different. But, of course, we're all one big family now.

Margo Hunt: Now how did you get around in those – in those early days when you were young?

Helen Merritt: Well, my Father always had a car, some way, he was a waterman. But he always had a car. Now Paul didn't have a car. A lot of the young people didn't have cars then. We walked. I mean he walked from this north end to my place down the south end. He would walk and we would go to town and then he'd walk me home and then he had to walk back.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: So he – he's the one who had it so hard. But – and then my Father always had a car and like I say, we – we were all, I guess you might say, we were all poor but we didn't know it because there was no – you might have had two or three people in the community that was – you thought were wealthy. Which – they had more money than we had. But very few. And it was – that's the way we were and we had all our needs. I never remember being hungry or cold or without clothes, food. We had plenty of food because my Grandfather lived with us. He raised a garden, we had all that. They raised pigs, they raised their own chickens. We had so much, you know, that – and, of course, my Father worked on the water and we had seafood galore and I didn't even like it then. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But I eat anything. I was never picky – a picky eater. And I still love seafood. But we had a good life. And in the summertime – now this channel over here, my Father was the foreman on Assateague for the man that owned the oyster ground over there. And he would take a boat from over here on this side and pole across, it was no motors, he poled across there every morning to go to work and came back home at night.

Helen Merritt: But in the summertime, this is where the fun began for us. (Laughing) In the summertime we would go to the beach with him 'cause it was a big old Coast Guard Station that was just – not used. And we lived in it. A beautiful old big home.

Margo Hunt: Can we see that still? Is that the same one we see?

Helen Merritt: No.

Margo Hunt: Okay.

Helen Merritt: No. And I only played – only thing – only way I can remember it, where it is on Assateague – where it was! – when you turn into the pony trail, the first trail, there is a big (and I think it might be covered with grass and weeds now), there is a big – what we called a big cistern.

Margo Hunt: I know.

Helen Merritt: Where they got their water, where we got our water.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: That's where the house stood. And that is the only way I can remember where Assateague – where we lived on Assateague. And right back in there they have a, one of those benches we had made for my Father, has his name on it.

Margo Hunt: Awe, that's good.

Helen Merritt: So, of course, my brother and I we were about I guess maybe ten or twelve years old. I don't know, but we were just thrilled to death. We loved it. We had chickens and horses and everything you could want as a child, you know. My sister was different. She was older and she was in the boys and she hated it because she didn't – she didn't want to be away from home, she wanted to be at home having a good time. And she would stay home with my Grandmother most the time. She didn't like it. (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But we'd get a friend to come over with us and we could play, oh we had lots of things to do. It was just – it was great, really was.

Margo Hunt: Did you ever go to the mainland?

Helen Merritt: Very little. Pocomoke. We would go to Pocomoke and when it came Christmas time I remember my Mother and Father. We would go shop for three – I don't know – well, it's four of us. And they would Christmas shop now Christmas Eve. . .

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: To Pocomoke. And come home and my Grandmother kept us while they went shopping and they'd come home and, no heat in that living room, you know, the living rooms were just parlors. And go in that cold room and when she finally got us in bed and trim a tree. We didn't see our tree until the next morning.

Margo Hunt: Wow.

Helen Merritt: So it was – it's been a great experience I guess. (Laughing) But it's been a good one. I'm so glad I've lived in these times because I think I've seen the best of it and it – this might be the worst of it.

Margo Hunt: Why do you say that?

Helen Merritt: Well, things are so bad all over the country. You know, it's just terrible. And things – cruel things that you – we never even thought about, you know, doing to people and hurtin' ever body and killin'. But I just – I'm glad I lived in this time.

Margo Hunt: You had a happy childhood?

Helen Merritt: Oh yeah! It was . . .

Margo Hunt: And when you went to the mainland, how did you get there?

Helen Merritt: Car.

Margo Hunt: By car, you had a car . . .

Helen Merritt: Now before me, before my time, my Mother and Father, when they wanted to go to the mainland, they had to go by boat.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: See the ferry took 'em across to Greenback.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: But I don't remember that.

Margo Hunt: You think they'll ever put that ferry back?

Helen Merritt: No.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: We're too advanced now. I don't think you'll ever see that any more, no. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But it was - I guess it was a chore for them to get anywhere to do anything. In fact, that is where my Mother and Father were married, on a boat – on the boat going – they went over to Greenback there to be married.

Margo Hunt: So now you and Paul were married, what year were you married?

Helen Merritt: '43.

Margo Hunt: '43. And then Paul – what was his business?

Helen Merritt: My, he had so many business. He went in the service for like three years. That wasn't the thing for Paul. He wadn't happy. He stayed on the West Coast and overseas. He never got back to the East Coast. So I think that just disheartened him. So he came out. In the meantime he had worked – he was – when he came out then he was working over here at the Base when the Navy was so big. He was comptroller over there. And, of course, then you know what happened there. The government comes along and closes that down.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: So – but he had already started a part-time insurance business. And had a big – was pretty good size built up and we were doing it right out of our home. And so he had, well – they wanted him to go to California when the Base left. And he said, “No, we're not gonna leave.” So he said, “I'll just go on into my insurance business now.” So he went down to – he bought – rented a – in the back of the firehouse it's an office back there, I think the Town used it at one time too. And he had a little office back there. Had a great big sign out front, Nationwide Insurance. And stayed there until after the storm of '62. The water in there so, I mean, it took all of his equipment, all of his desk, it was over ever thing.

Margo Hunt: Oh, oh.

Helen Merritt: And we tried to clean up what we could. We had a man to go in and try to clean some of the equipment, but he lost a lot.

Margo Hunt: Oh.

Helen Merritt: So he stayed – I don't know how many years he stayed there, but wadn't too many years after that. I'd say around '65, '64 or '65. He said, “I want a place of my own.” So we came up here and on that corner he built.

Margo Hunt: The corner of Maddox and Deep Hole Road?

Helen Merritt: Where I have my shop now, Pony Penning Enterprises.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: That's where he started again. So then in the meantime – my - he sold mobile homes. We went to Pennsylvania and got – fell in love with these miniature horses. We just went to look and he said, “You know, that's something we could do at home.” “We could have a miniature pony farm just like this.” Huge thing, I don't know whether you've ever been there or not, but it's nice, in Gettysburg.

Helen Merritt: So we got into that. Bought all these miniature horses, didn't know a thing in the world about miniature horses. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: And brought 'em home. At the time my Mother still had an old chicken house down there 'cause they used to raise chickens down on South Main. And at the time it was empty. That's where we took these—all these ponies until we could get the barn built. And so . . .

Margo Hunt: So you attached the barn to your – and your horse farm – to the Nationwide Insurance business?

Helen Merritt: Well, no. That's a different – you know where it is now, you see where the – Crystal, my granddaughter, has the Capt. Zack's carry out?

Margo Hunt: Yes.

Helen Merritt: All right. Then the building next to it – across from it is now the Flower Shop.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: All right. That was – I went in there with a shop.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Helen Merritt: And the barn was in the back.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Helen Merritt: I just had that torn down about three years ago.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Helen Merritt: 'Cause it was gettin' so bad.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: But – that was an interesting thing. And then we had all the Misty Family ponies. See in the meantime the Beebe's had died, Ralph Beebe died. His wife couldn't care for 'em. And she asked did we want Misty and all the ponies. So we said, of course. We did. So we took all of them too. So we must a had about thirty-five animals to feed and care for.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) Oh.

Helen Merritt: But – so we got into – it was really nice, we enjoyed it because Paul loved animals. And we had a little shop in the front, right where that flower shop is, and we sold tickets for like Two or Three Dollars to go in and see all the horses. And Paul learned – we had

a German fellow to come and train ‘em – and Paul learned to do the shows himself. And he showed every day. We had like a couple a shows in the afternoon.

Margo Hunt: And – what – what did the shows consist of?

Helen Merritt: They had these horses who could do tricks and just little things you know. They could stand on a box and he’d talk to ‘em and they’d shake their head at him you know.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: He – he just loved these horses to death. And then we had the Misty that did it too, one – Cloudy - which was a grandson of Misty, and he was a ham, he could show. And it was just – just a good thing and we had a lot of families you know. It was family-type, children thing. And everybody enjoyed it. And he did too; he enjoyed it as much as they did. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Did the children ride the ponies ever?

Helen Merritt: Yeah, once in a while we’d have – let ‘em ride a little one, yeah. Not – not too much. But it was a lot goin’ on then. We needed – that was needed – we felt like it was needed here on the Island because they’d go to the beach sometimes and never see a pony you know. And they could come there and see ‘em all.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And they were thrilled to death. And that was – it was rewarding, but . . .

Margo Hunt: Were some of these miniature ponies – or were they all regular size ponies?

Helen Merritt: No, no, they were miniatures from Argentina.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh!

Helen Merritt: They were a different breed entirely.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Helen Merritt: I don’t know what you call – maybe thirty-two inches high, something. And, you know, I was always petrified of horses, I was the only one in my family that didn’t ride. My sisters rode, my two brothers rode, and my Father. They were always in the roundup and all this. And I was just petrified of ‘em. I remember getting’ on – the one and only time I remember getting’ on – I wanted to get one and get my picture taken so that I could think I was ridin’ too. And when that horse begin to move, I liked to had a fit. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: And I screamed and my Father said, “Get off, and don’t get on anymore.” And I didn’t. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But when we got these miniatures, I got real brave.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: If he could have seen me in the stalls with these ponies he’d a never believed it. And they can hurt you too, some of them were kind a wild, kind a bad, but I just kind a felt like they were my size. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But I never did ride. They all rode but me, but I just – I never wanted – I liked ‘em, wanted to see ‘em, but I never wanted to be on ‘em. Huh-uh!

Margo Hunt: Now Paul was famous for another thing. He was – he was a famous town councilman.

Helen Merritt: He ran for the Town Council about the time – while he was down at the Firehouse in the insurance business. And he was still working for the Navy. And he was going – he had got Vice Mayor and he was gonna run for Mayor. But at that time, of course, we were staunch democrats and we were in a republican town. They always supported Paul regardless of party, you know, didn’t matter. But when he decided he was gonna run for Mayor, some of those staunch republicans – at the time you could not hold a government job and run for town office. Some way, I don’t know if it was law, or what it was, but that was what was going on. So some of these men made the remarks, and they were older men, that they would cause him to lose his job if he did it. So he had to back off.

Margo Hunt: Wow.

Helen Merritt: He would have been Mayor, he’d a loved it. But – and shortly after that he got into Supervisor, and, of course, he remained in that for thirty-two years.

Margo Hunt: Wasn’t – isn’t he the longest running Supervisor that we’ve ever had?

Helen Merritt: Oh yeah. And I think he’s the longest, and I have asked my lawyer to look this up for me, I think he’s the longest running candidate in the County for any position.

Margo Hunt: Wow.

Helen Merritt: Any elected position.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And I – I don't know of another one and I've even – I've even written and I put a piece in the paper one time to ask if anybody knew any different would they please contact me. But I never heard. And my lawyer said, Lynwood Lewis, who is the Delegate.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: Said he would look – he would like into it but he never has.

Margo Hunt: Well, he's busy himself now. (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: Yeah, he is, he is. But I think Paul was the longest ever that I know anything about.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And he was in with some of the older men when he got there. In fact, they called him boy because he was the youngest one that had ever been on the Board, you know. It offended him I think. (Laughing) He said – he told one of the old ones, he said, "You know," he said, "I got elected to this job and I don't want you callin' me boy any more." (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Good for him. (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But he got along with all of 'em. They – he had a great time of those thirty-two years.

Margo Hunt: Can you think of any of his major accomplishments during those days?

Helen Merritt: Well, he was in – when they first got the Oyster Museum, he helped with that. Both schools, when we got our schools, he was fighting for that.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: The Civic Center. He went through a lot with that, because it was a lot of opposition on that.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: They didn't want it, a lot of the older people said, no, we didn't need it and it was just money and – he said but – he tried to get it across that if it – if we didn't do it, the County would and they would get it all. Whereas, he thought we should be in it and let the Town derive money from it.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: So.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: He stuck it out so we did get it. And he and Donald Leonard worked together on that.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: Real close. So, I don't know, Paul, he was in to so much on that Board and he was on every committee - almost he'd been on. And it was a lot of work. It got to be a lot of work.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh!

Helen Merritt: See when he first went on, it was only five of 'em I think. And they met once a week - once a month, you know. And regular business but it got so Paul was going to Accomac, oh my dear, several times a week!

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: It was meet, meet, meet, all the time.

Margo Hunt: Yeah, yeah.

Helen Merritt: But he enjoyed it. He enjoyed it. But he - he got off in 1995. And he said - he told me he wadn't gonna run any more. And I said, "I can't believe this," you know.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: And I said, "Are you sure this is what you want to do?" And he said, "Yeah, I've had it." So - and I'm just thankful that he had the knowledge then to know . . .

Margo Hunt: That it was time to stop?

Helen Merritt: He wasn't feeling . . .

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Yelp.

Helen Merritt: Yelp.

Margo Hunt: He must have been very smart and very able.

Helen Merritt: He was! In fact, some of ‘em, they hated to admit it, but some of ‘em did say finally, down the County, one older – one of the older gentlemen that was on it, he said, "He’s the smartest damn man that ever got on the Board." So (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But Paul did have a lot of knowledge.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: He was very – self-educated.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: He – he took – he never went to college, he was going but – but then he decided not and just go in business and – but he took college courses. He – I found some not long ago where he took this LaSalle University, he took a course. And they would write, very good, excellent, his work was perfect you know.

Margo Hunt: Huh.

Helen Merritt: What he could a done in college you know.

Margo Hunt: Yeah, wonderful.

Helen Merritt: But – so but . . .

Margo Hunt: Well, thank Heavens we had him here.

Helen Merritt: Yeah. (Laughing) He did just as well without education I think, you know. Now some people I think maybe they need it, I don’t know. He – he learned so easy you know. Paul could look at anything and he knew it, where I’d have to struggle for it. But . . .

Margo Hunt: Now what was your life like? You’ve talked a lot about Paul. What was your life like? You were interested in a lot of things, you’re smart too.

Helen Merritt: No, I’m not that smart. Of course, he was always in politics, so I got involved in that. He wanted me to run for (laughing) - who was it - said you should run for Wanda’s job. I said, “No thank you.” Eighty year olds don’t belong in office, I’ll tell you.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But – I've been active. I've been active in my church.

Margo Hunt: What – which church is that?

Helen Merritt: Union Baptist.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And I – I taught Sunday School for about fifty years.

Margo Hunt: Oh my!

Helen Merritt: Third grade – second grade children.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And loved it. And – but you know, your time comes, that you – they need younger blood, so we got out, me and my friend here both of us were in it together. And I think you – you know when it's time you know. And I still like – I still like a mixture of the old with the young. I don't think ever thing needs to be turned over to young people. I think some of the experience of older people is very important.

Margo Hunt: Very valuable.

Helen Merritt: Very, very.

Margo Hunt: I agree.

Helen Merritt: And I know a lot a time they don't – they don't believe it and don't want to listen at us, but I think that's the way it should be. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Now what are you thinking about. What are – what do you see as the most important improvements that have been made on Chincoteague?

Helen Merritt: Oh, I don't know.

Margo Hunt: In the last . . .

Helen Merritt: I don't know what to say about that.

Margo Hunt: The bridge to Assateague? The . . .

Helen Merritt: Well, yes. That was a big thing. Now a lot of the local people don't think so 'cause they don't like tourist.

Margo Hunt: Hm.

Helen Merritt: A lot of the older people don't like tourist. When we – we were in business, involved, we needed tourist, you know. But not only that, it – it was good. It was a good thing that we could – 'cause a lot of us, people that didn't own boats never got to Assateague. And – yeah, we were thrilled about that bridge, yeah, I was. And it's just so many things now that we don't like. It's too much building. The way we feel that it's not going to be livable for our children and grandchildren. Prices have gone so rocket, you know, that they are not going to be able to afford to stay here without help. If they got help in their family, okay. Otherwise, they'll not be able to – and, of course, I don't like all these condominiums. You know, we are just so sick of condominiums. (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: And if that's the way of life, that's the way it's gonna be and I'm not worried about it, even this bridge made me sick. I didn't want that bridge here on this street naturally. But I thought, well, you know, I'm not gonna be around much longer, here I'm eighty years old it is not going to matter a whole lot to me. But I do worry about what is going to happen to my grandchildren. I don't know. But changes are not for older people.

Margo Hunt: It's hard.

Helen Merritt: It's hard.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: Because we've had such a good life here that it's a lot of it has been disrupted, you know.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: Yeah, it's just not the same. But that's prosperity. And anywhere you see tourism move in, and we have to have it now, 'cause that's all we have left.

Margo Hunt: Hum.

Helen Merritt: The water – the water is gone. Nobody can make a living on the water like we used to. Nobody can raise chickens like they used to. So tourism has to be it now. We have to depend on it. And I'm not – I'm not mad about it. I like – I really like a part of it. I like dealing with the public. And I've had a good little business. I – it's more like a hobby to me now because I open when I want to, you know.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: In the summer months now – I'm closed now - and I'll – I open maybe a pretty weekend I'll go down. I had a good weekend this weekend 'cause the bicycle – the cyclists were here you know.

Margo Hunt: Oh yeah, that's right.

Helen Merritt: But otherwise, it's like a hobby to me. I don't have it to do thank goodness. But a lot of these people, it is bad in the winter months, it's a struggle.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: 'Cause they have to pay their rent and all just the same.

Margo Hunt: Sure.

Helen Merritt: And like my granddaughter went in this carry-out seafood – she couldn't a done it without me.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: Because I had the land, I had the building, she couldn't a gone out and rented a building.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And all the expense that went in to that.

Margo Hunt: How is she doing up there?

Helen Merritt: She's done – this is – well, this see is her fourth season really.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: Really third. The first one we had a very short time 'cause we fought so long with the Health Department getting things right, you know. The summer was just about gone the first season before we got going. This has been her best season. This has been the first year that I can say she's really made a profit.

Margo Hunt: Now her – this is Capt. Zack's Seafood. Now her Grandfather was a waterman?

Helen Merritt: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Now where is she getting her seafood now?

Helen Merritt: (Laughing) Well, I'll tell you, she gets all she can local.

Margo Hunt: Hum.

Helen Merritt: But, of course, a lot of this stuff now comes from Sysco, what people – all the restaurants have.

Margo Hunt: Um.

Helen Merritt: But she does have a lot of local stuff. She gets her scallops here. She gets her oysters and her clams and it's local stuff. Now when you get those oysters from here, they are so different from anywhere else.

Margo Hunt: Oh yeah.

Helen Merritt: And she's noted for good seafood and she's noted – everybody – well, it's been word of mouth because we didn't have a lot of advertisement. And she's just beginning to get some advertisement. Couldn't do so much, but I'm her partner.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) Her partner.

Helen Merritt: And advertising's gotten so high. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Um.

Helen Merritt: That we had to – we couldn't do but so much. But she did get a sign on the Causeway, which she says she might give that up 'cause that's gone up so high now. But she got one over here on the Beach Road finally. All the property I have here, and I own another piece of property at the end of those little shops of Kruno's down there, I've got a piece of property there on the end of that, and I thought that's a perfect place for a sign for her. She needs to be out here – she's just far enough off the beaten path, you'd be surprised who don't know she's there.

Margo Hunt: Hum.

Helen Merritt: Drive by it.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: But you know they wouldn't – they wouldn't let me put a sign on it. I don't understand that part. We had to go to Court once over a sign because I wanted her sign out on my corner where ever body could see it going to the beach. And we had heard that - we thought that the law was anything that was on wheels you could put it anywhere, you're moving it you know. So she went and took my – we had a big – one of those big neon signs with the arrow that we weren't going to use the arrow. You're not allowed to use them I don't think. But she, by

herself, put that up on – on a cart, she had a cart. She put it up on a cart on the back of her truck and put that out there in my lot. And, of course, Kenny came along and we had to go to Court.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: ‘Cause we wouldn’t move it that weekend. We said we’d always heard that this was on wheels, you could do it. Well, anyway, we couldn’t and we paid that little fine and Court charge. Judge took it easy on her. Wadn’t too bad, but it was the principal of it. When you own all this land and you can’t do anything for your own self, I don’t think the Town treats us right on that. And I’ve complained but it don’t do any good.

Helen Merritt: I got a piece of property there that runs from that trailer park all the way down to the corner and I’m not allowed to put another sign on my property for another business.

Margo Hunt: Oh, just one for Capt. Zack’s?

Helen Merritt: Well, just where she is. But she can’t put nothing over where I am.

Margo Hunt: I see.

Helen Merritt: But I own it all.

Margo Hunt: Huh.

Helen Merritt: And I – I just didn’t understand it, but that’s the way it goes you know. You got so many rules and regulations now that we used to not have. And maybe some are good, I don’t know. Not all are good and I went – I’ve been to the Town Council many times and I’ve told ‘em, all I ask you is to treat everybody alike and then you wouldn’t have these problems. But that – I’m sorry to say, but it’s not done, it’s not done. Some things I have seen done, well, they build in marshes, you don’t hear a thing about wetlands any more.

Margo Hunt: I was going to ask you about the wetlands off Deep Hole Road. Have you seen that?

Helen Merritt: Yes.

Margo Hunt: Now who’s doing that I wonder?

Helen Merritt: I think Gene Wayne. They tell me he bought that property, I don’t know. But you don’t hear anything about wetlands any more.

Margo Hunt: Why not?

Helen Merritt: People got fined for that, they filled it in and they had to go dig it all out again. And now you don't hear any more about it. So I don't know I don't understand a lot of this stuff. But I – I wouldn't advise anybody (laughing) to go in a small business today.

Margo Hunt: You would not?

Helen Merritt: Huh-uh, huh-uh.

Margo Hunt: And why is that?

Helen Merritt: It's been so many headaches.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: I mean, we've been through with the Health Department, the Town over signs, and lines and it's just been one thing after the other. And finally I guess we are all straight now. But I still can't use anything on that corner. They come put signs on there for everything the Civic Center has. They just come put signs up there. I did give them permission in the beginning and now they don't ask, they just come do it. But they can do that because it's – they say nonprofit. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: Really?

Helen Merritt: They're making money at the Civic Center aren't they?

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: So these are things I, you know, I'll never understand. But anyway . . .

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: I think we've got it conquered that she has got some advertisement on this Beach Road.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: I don't need it. I told her, I said, "I don't need the advertisement." I could take mine down and just, you know, I don't have any, all I have is up on my building now. But . . .

Margo Hunt: Now your son is quite famous as well. Talk a little bit about him.

Helen Merritt: Well, he's, yeah, he is if it's sports, yes.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: Anything else he's not interested in talking to you. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: He's – his Father carried him to ballgames, New York Yankees fans they have been all my – our lives. And every time he could get to New York or Baltimore, wherever they were playing, he and his Father went. And . . .

Margo Hunt: And you never went?

Helen Merritt: No, huh-uh.

Margo Hunt: You weren't interested?

Helen Merritt: I had been one time I think. No, I never – I wadn't that much in to it. I am on the t.v. and I watch – oh, I love to watch World Series. And, of course, I have to root for Yankees, that's all I've ever known. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: And – but he – he remembers all this. The places his Father took him and the things they did together which was good for a father and a son.

Margo Hunt: Wonderful, yeah.

Helen Merritt: Yeah. So I was a homebody really. I kept the home fires burning. And I'm so glad that he had that time with his father.

Margo Hunt: Um, sure, wonderful. Now he's a very good writer, your son.

Helen Merritt: Well, that was his – his major in college, the journalist. And I thought well, I don't know what he'll ever do with it. Well then he went teachin' school. He taught sixth grade, which was a bad grade to put a new one in – young fellow in you know.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: And he couldn't take it. He stayed a couple years, but he said the children then were gettin' out a hand and he said he just felt like he wanted to pop 'em upside the head you know and he knew he couldn't. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: So he said it's time for me to get out of this, that he couldn't do that. So they called him to the radio station, or the news, and he started there and he's been there now I guess, I guess he's been there twelve or fourteen years.

Margo Hunt: This is the *Eastern Shore News*?

Helen Merritt: Uh-huh.

Margo Hunt: Um.

Helen Merritt: Uh-huh, and then he has the *Beacon* and whatever, sports is his thing. He travels all over to ballgames. I mean he really covers these teams. Where they – wherever they go he goes.

Margo Hunt: That's terrific!

Helen Merritt: And he goes, well, he likes – he had – his first two years of college was from the University of Virginia. Because at that time we had the branch, where the Navy Base is.

Margo Hunt: I didn't know that.

Helen Merritt: You didn't know that? He got two years there at the University of Virginia which was great. And then when they merged they went into Community College. He gave – that disbanded and then he went over to Norfolk and finished his other two years. But – so he's partial to the University of Virginia naturally. And he goes to a lot of their games. And his son now that he has is into – he's not into like he is but he's – he pushes him in it I think.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: He would love for him to be into everything that's sports he did because he was in school. He was a great runner; he broke a record, track record, when we used to have these field meets down at Keller Fair. And he broke track record of running some of those relays. And – it was funny because when he was in high school and Tommy Phillips was the principal, and he was a good friend of ours too, and he's fussin' with Greg over something one day and he said, "Your Father was such a good man." "He was such a good sport, even broke a record," you know. And Greg, he looked at him and said, "I think the only record my Father broke is the kind you play on the . . . (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But he was a good sport so Greg fell right into it.

Margo Hunt: Explain again about UVA here at Wallops.

Helen Merritt: They had a branch over here at UVA and even had housing over there. You see those little houses that's still there when you go back in there. I don't know – they were about to fall down at one time, I've not seen 'em lately.

Margo Hunt: I thought those were Navy houses, no?

Helen Merritt: Well, they were built for Navy but they – then they acquired – somehow they let them have ‘em for housing.

Margo Hunt: Now what years would that have been for roughly?

Helen Merritt: Well, let’s see, Greg got out of school in – what was it ’70? It was in the 70’s, yes.

Margo Hunt: Hum.

Helen Merritt: And we were just thrilled to death that it was right here under our nose.

Margo Hunt: Yeah.

Helen Merritt: And – ‘cause he went over there and stayed in their little dorm. And that broke my heart, I didn’t want him over there ‘cause that was just the time long hair was beginning with boys, you know, and I looked and his roommate came with this long hair.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: (Laughing) And I thought oh my golly, what are we in for. And now if that’s all they did that would be fine. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: So then he transferred when that was gone, he went over to Virginia Wesleyan. And that’s where he graduated from.

Margo Hunt: Hm.

Helen Merritt: But sports has just been in his life all his – ever since he could hold a ball and that’s all he’s known. He never could play football, he was too small. He tried, he went out for the j.v.’s and he tried and we used to take – it was a friend of mine and her boy could play and mine was so small, we’d take safety pins and pin all his stuff on ‘im you know.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But he only got there to the j.v.’s. He – he wasn’t – he couldn’t play football, but he was a good baseball player. He played shortstop and right field and he was a good sport. And he just loves sports. That’s his life.

Margo Hunt: You must have gone to see him at some of those games?

Helen Merritt: Oh! I went to all the games! 'Cause then his Father couldn't go to all the games because he was workin' for the Navy see. And he couldn't always come home so me and my friend down here she had a boy in it too. My, we went to all the games, yes we did! And I said, I guess talk about distraction. We'd go down the County and play and I thought, you know, when that little boy was killed, that mother had five kids in that car.

Margo Hunt: Um.

Helen Merritt: I felt for her because I said I just know, you know, she could a had some distraction in there with five boys. Because I've had it. I've been to a game and on the way home they'd be fightin' in the back seat, or punching in the floor and I'd pull off to the side and get 'em all straightened out. She could a had – I could feel it, you know.

Margo Hunt: Um-hum.

Helen Merritt: Distraction that I had.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: When you have a bunch a kids together and coupe 'em up in a car, you know. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: You never know.

Helen Merritt: That's so – that's right. I was with all his games about. And then Paul was whenever he could. But he's the one that got him started in it.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing) You've had a terrific life haven't you?

Helen Merritt Yes! Yes! I would say.

Margo Hunt: Wonderful.

Helen Merritt: Yes.

Margo Hunt: Well, I think we've made you talk long enough.

Helen Merritt: (Laughing) Well, I guess I'm a great talker they say. I don't mind talkin'.

Margo Hunt: That's wonderful.

Helen Merritt: Don't like to get up in public or nothin' like that, but.

Margo Hunt: I've heard you at Council.

Helen Merritt: (Laughing) Well, now I get a little rowled up about some things.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: But see Paul - groups – people didn't bother Paul. He didn't care how big the crowd was, but it does me, it unnerves me, I can't – I think later, well I wanted to say so and so and I didn't say it.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh. I know.

Helen Merritt: You've either got a gift for that or you haven't. And he came from a family that did. We called them the tar family and they all talk. They were just talkers. Do you know Mabel Libscomb?

Margo Hunt: Yes.

Helen Merritt: That's his cousin.

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: She's a talker.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: I thought, well if you want to talk to anybody, you should talk to Mabel, she's great to talk to.

Margo Hunt: Uh-huh.

Helen Merritt: She's been here – her birthday is I think two days – she'll be 93 years, I believe 93 or 94. So she's a lot too, a lot more than I have.

Margo Hunt: Well, I want to thank you very much for letting us visit with you this morning.

Helen Merritt: Well I appreciate it.

Margo Hunt: I appreciate you. We appreciate you.

Helen Merritt: I just – I wish – maybe it was more - if it was more good things to talk about now but I don't know too much good right now. (Laughing)

Margo Hunt: (Laughing)

Helen Merritt: It's good to be alive. It's just good to be alive.

END OF TAPE.