

Claire and Hal Lott

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Interviewees: Claire and Hal Lott

Interviewer: Merle Goldman

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Videographer: Ennis Barbery

Interview Location: Lotts' Arts and Things, Main Street, Chincoteague Island

MERLE GOLDMAN: My name is Merle Goldman. I'm a volunteer with the Chincoteague Island Museum. Today, which is January 19, 2015, as part of the Museum's Life History Project, I will be interviewing Claire and Hal Lott. Both Hal and Claire are artists. They own and operate Lotts' Arts and Things which is a shop located on Main Street. Today's interview is being held in that showroom. I would like to start by talking to each of you about your early lives because we're interested in knowing when you were born and where you were born and what life was like for both of you in general. And the nature of your community, was it rural, was it city, was it farm? Did you have a large family unit and were your parents people who were involved in the arts or did they have some other profession or vocation that they pursued. Why don't we start with you Claire? Beginning with when and where you were born.

CLAIRE LOTT: I'm a native born Baltimorean. Born on Falls Road in Hamden. Very trendy nowadays. Not so trendy when I lived there. [laughs] I am part of a family. My parents, mother and father and one brother, Phil who passed away this year. I was born, as I say, on Falls Road.

MERLE GOLDMAN: What year?

CLAIRE LOTT: 1927, which makes me very old.

MERLE GOLDMAN: It was a good year though.

CLAIRE LOTT: Yes it was. We lived, as I remember it, in an apartment on Falls Road. And the one thing I can remember happening in those early days was my taking my clothes off and running naked down the street. [laughter]. My mother told me about that. I guess I was two. You don't know about that one. [looks at Hal] After Falls Road I had lots of relatives living in Hamden too. My grandmother, my aunts and uncles. Each of my parents was one of seven children. So they had big families in those days. After Falls Road we lived in Rolland Park, if

you know Rolland Park. St. John's Road. Right next to the railroad tracks. As a child I was terrified of the noise of the trains at night. I got over it. Went to the elementary school there. I remember my mother taking me to the library. That was very important in our lives, was reading. She was a singer in her youth. They lived in, pretty much, in poverty I would say. Grandpa died when he was quite young, before he was 50 I think.

HAL LOTT: She was also a talented artist.

CLAIRE LOTT: Yes, she is. Here comes Kipper (cat).

HAL LOTT: I have her prints upstairs are just remarkable. Little watercolors you know.

CLAIRE LOTT: That was my mother's.

HAL LOTT: Yeah, she had a magnificent sense of space, and vision, and color and everything. It was natural. I guess that's were Claire picked it up.

CLAIRE LOTT: My father was a radio announcer in Baltimore. You may remember Arthur Godfrey. [laughs] Gary Moore. They were contemporaries of my father.

MERLE GOLDMAN: What was your dad's name?

CLAIRE LOTT: Dice.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Dice?

CLAIRE LOTT: Dice, Claire Dice.

[When David MacKinnon met with the Lotts to finalize this transcript, Claire Lott added that her nickname was "Snake Eyes" in grade school as a result of her maiden name, Dice.]

MERLE GOLDMAN: That was your maiden name?

CLAIRE LOTT: Francis way my father's name. I participated in a radio drama with Gary Moore once. He was directing it gas and electric company. Do you remember the gas and electric company in Baltimore? I was part of the crowd. I was about 12 years old. [laughs] And he said, "Now people, I want you to murmur. The crowd murmurs." So when we came to that spot in the script, we all murmured. But I giggled, and you could hear the giggle. [laughs] He stopped it and says, "Claire, you're not supposed to giggle; murmur."

MERLE GOLDMAN: What does a murmur sound like?

CLAIRE LOTT: Like people talking in a crowd.

HAL LOTT: Don't forget your father was a colonel.

CLAIRE LOTT: Well yes, he was in the National Guard for many years and served in the Pacific. He turned 40 as he was a soldier. I remember I did have his letters talking about how old he felt at age 40.

HAL LOTT: And your brother Phil, don't forget.

CLAIRE LOTT: Phil was a military man from age 17. He couldn't wait to get away from home I think. Signed up for the Korean War at age 17. He lied about his age and served there and three missions in Vietnam.

MERLE GOLDMAN: So when did you become interested, or how did your interest, do you recall becoming interested in...

CLAIRE LOTT: I went to Saturday school at the Maryland Institute [then known as the Maryland Institute for the Promotion of the Mechanic Arts, now called the Maryland Institute College of Art].

MERLE GOLDMAN: How old?

CLAIRE LOTT: Around 12 or 13 maybe. At the same time I got my original interest in art when I was in elementary school. Phil and I went to a two-room schoolhouse on Greenspring Avenue, which is still there—a brick school. It was heated by a big stove. We had two outhouses in the back of the school and a pump in the front for water. Incidentally my mother was head of the PTA and she was horrified that we were all drinking from the same cup at the pump.[laughter]

MERLE GOLDMAN: Was art a part of your program?

CLAIRE LOTT: Art was a wonderful part. Miss Jones, who was eventually the supervisor of art for Baltimore County, would come to the school once or maybe twice a year. And she'd drive this little car and she'd open up the trunk and here were all the art materials. We all helped to carry them in and we had art all day long and it was wonderful. It was the same with the music. Mr. Vessey came once a year and we had music all day long. I think that heavy introduction to the world of art and music is very important at that age. I could draw. And the kids all liked me to draw things for them. The boys always wanted naked women. [laughter] But then I was in the fifth grade it think by then. In high school I had a wonderful young art teacher. Her last name, I'll never forget, was Wockenfuss, which was a candy company in Baltimore, her family, I think. But she would stay hours after school. We would have all these productions, plays and scenery to make.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Where did you go to high school?

CLAIRE LOTT: Franklin High School in Reisterstown.

MERLE GOLDMAN: By that time you'd moved to Baltimore County.

CLAIRE LOTT: Yeah, in Pikesville. We had moved to Pikesville. My mother bought the house during the war, herself, [laughs] when I think about it.

MERLE GOLDMAN: So the school that you went to when supervisor of art came, that was already, you were already living in Baltimore County at the time.

CLAIRE LOTT: Yes. That was on Greenspring Avenue, Chestnut Ridge, you may remember that. But it was very rural. My best friend had a little farm where her mother milked a cow and had chickens and that kind of thing.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Were you still going to the Maryland Institute at the time?

CLAIRE LOTT: Not at that time. It was when I was in high school I guess. I graduated with my class at age 16 from high school. We had sophomore, junior—freshman, sophomore, junior, senior instead of eight years.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Did your art teachers encourage you, mentor you, did people mentor you particularly in art?

CLAIRE LOTT: I felt very close to this young teacher. And there was a group of us. We were groupies, I guess you would say. [laughter] Most of us sang in the choir too. When we weren't practicing for singing for the projects, we were with the art teacher. In the elementary school there were two building there, so we were over there helping her. And she was wonderful.

MERLE GOLDMAN: At what point in time did you think that---did you realize that you wanted to pursue art as an adult in some professional way?

CLAIRE LOTT: My father encouraged me. My mother did not strangely because I think she was artistic too. I was practical enough to say that I could never make my way as an artist. I just didn't think it was a practical way to live. So I decided, since we had so many teachers in the family---I had two aunts and my grandmother were teachers. My father was a teacher after the war and I decided that I would be an art teacher. So that's how I got to be in the Maryland Institute. The program was full time at the Institute until three o'clock in the afternoon and then you'd get on a bus or streetcar and go to Hopkins [John Hopkins University] and take night courses for your academics. It was a long day. I'd get back to Pikesville sometimes ten or later at

night. That was a long day. But we both had the same program. Very similar. He didn't tell you about how we met.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Well, we'll get there. So you made a decision to teach art. When you finished college you started teaching.

CLAIRE LOTT: The funny thing is, well, I don't know what I was thinking, but I accepted a job at Franklin High School where I had been graduated four years before. [laughs] Phil was still in the school; my brother. I knew a lot of the kids and I'm in touch with several of them still.

They've come to the shop to see us and it's wonderful. But it was difficult to realize that these adolescent kids were not much younger than I. Some of them were four years younger. We all became contemporaries at the senior level. But down at the seventh grade level it was a period of time for them where they didn't acknowledge adults. I could walk down the halls of Franklin High School that I knew so well and all these kids would be passing me by and they would never make eye contact. [laughs] Took me a long time to get used to that. It wasn't personal. But I thought it was.

MERLE GOLDMAN: I sure it wasn't. That's an awkward age for those people that were a few years younger.

CLAIRE LOTT: I didn't have an art room. Mr. Boylan and I shared the physics lab. He was so patient with me. [laughs] I had a cart that I carried materials around and finally, the next year I had an art room.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Well, that's great, yeah. So continue with you Mr. Lott.

CLAIRE LOTT: Your turn.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Your turn. Where did you grow up? When were you born? Where did you grow up? What was your family like?

HAL LOTT: Well to begin with I'm a Welshman. I was born in Swansea, Wales in a suburb called Kingstock. That's where I lived with my dad and my mom and so on. We had a big black Labrador retriever, you know, I remember him because at one time there were some problems in the mill. In a tin mill, you know, in Wales. They were the ones that more or less introduced tin plating. There was a conflict of some kind and these two guys were taking me off down toward the water. And the dog went and got my father. I mean, yes, he went back, the dog was a smart dog. He went back up and got my father and brought my father down and encountered these men. Straightened it out. But all together in that area---let's see, I was there for how long?

CLAIRE LOTT: You came to the U.S. when you were seven.

HAL LOTT: Yeah, I was seven years of age when I came to America. Consequently everybody in my family became citizens but I did not. I was too young. So I would go, you know, I had to be— lived three years in one place before they would recognize me. I was on my own living at the YMCA and this than and the other. It was pretty difficult for me to stay three years on one place. I was working in the steel mill, you know, and this that and the other.

mb: You came when you were seven.

CLAIRE LOTT: Between the time you were seven and you went to the steel mills, that's a long period in there.

HAL LOTT: Well, I was seven when I came in the country.

CLAIRE LOTT: The year I was born.

HAL LOTT: Well, okay. Of course I had to grow up. All I can remember vaguely was going to see Claire's mother. She was still up in Baltimore. She didn't think too much of me. I was a Navy man.

CLAIRE LOTT: Talk about the time between seven and the time you went up to...

HAL LOTT: Steel mills.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Where did you go to school? What city---you grew up in Baltimore? Did you grow up in Baltimore?

CLAIRE LOTT: He grew up in Martin's Ferry, Ohio [near Wheeling, West Virginia].

HAL LOTT: Yes. We came; we had relatives in Martin's Ferry, Ohio. So they sponsored us more or less. And I grew up in Martin's Ferry of course. I went to high school there, naturally.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Were you interested in art? Did you have an interest in art when you were young?

HAL LOTT: I was always interested in art. I entered some kind of a contest, I remember, when I was younger, and I won it. I got a correspondence course in art and instruction. From my father was one participated, you know, pushed me on that, in that direction. I was self-motivated but my father also was a man getting behind me, you know, making sure I did the right things. Eventually, you know...

MERLE GOLDMAN: Were you taking art?

HAL LOTT: How did we get with your mother? How did I get into that.

CLAIRE LOTT: That's the Maryland Institute, after the war.

HAL LOTT: After the war.

MERLE GOLDMAN: In high school, when you were in high school, were did you take art in school? Did you have any formal training before you ever went to college? Did you have an formal training in art?

HAL LOTT: I went to Johns Hopkins, didn't I? [looks to Claire]

CLAIRE LOTT: You did the same thing I did. We were in the same course.

MERLE GOLDMAN: At Maryland Institute.

HAL LOTT: Un huh.

CLAIRE LOTT: Teaching art and education.

HAL LOTT: Yeah.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Okay. And you came out. When you started to teach after Maryland Institute, you started to teach after the Maryland Institute? You graduated the Maryland Institute. Did you go right into teaching or was there something in between? After you graduated from the Maryland Institute, did you start teaching at that point?

CLAIRE LOTT: Forty eight was the year that we got married. You started teaching in Milford in '49. Brand new school.

HAL LOTT: I remember that I got a suit made especially for the occasion out of Army paint they called it, you know.

CLAIRE LOTT: You're talking about the wedding.

HAL LOTT: I was living at the YMCA. We went to New York, you know, the two of us. And it rained. We got caught in a rain. And my suit shrunk. [laughter] It got too tight on me. We had a good time.

MERLE GOLDMAN: This was when you just got married?

CLAIRE LOTT: The day we were married.

HAL LOTT: We had a good time in New York. But we came back, you know, and everything. Claire's mother was on her own, there in Baltimore. Anything you want to share about...

MERLE GOLDMAN: Being in the Navy.

CLAIRE LOTT: In the Navy, you skipped the whole period there.

HAL LOTT: That's another whole deal. I want to tell you about her mother first.

CLAIRE LOTT: That's later.

HAL LOTT: Well I'll tell you right now. She wasn't too happy with me being a Navy man, you know, and a Welshman, oh my Lord, no, no, no. I go to see her. She was on her own in Baltimore. Every time I went I would take her the biggest Hershey bar I could find. You know you used to get big ones like this [gestures the size]. Eventually, I think, it took a while, she finally told my older son, "You know your dad, he's not so bad after all." [laughter] It took a lot of chocolate to turn her around.

CLAIRE LOTT: That's a good line. [laughter]

HAL LOTT: In the Navy they were training us to be radio men. Take the codes. But you had to take so many words a minute. And there were three of us at the same time. We couldn't do any more. But the three of us could type. We could type. So they sent us to ComNavU in London. Commander Naval Forces European. And we did work there on what was now called a teleprinter. It was sort of an invention at that time. You know, a secret. But the thing was that they had women in London. They shipped us with the Army Signal Corps over to---not Normandy. Normandy was under Cherbourg, further down. They shipped us over there and then we would be in liaison with the Army Corps. We had their information and sent it to London to the Commander Naval Forces European.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Was this during the war?

CLAIRE LOTT: D Day. That was about D Day.

HAL LOTT: Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. We would wound probably on the LST or something like that. A landing ship tank. But the fact that we couldn't handle the code fast enough. They used to send, as I said, taking, actually on like a typewriter. It would make a tape. We'd take the tape to the commanding officer, you know, back and forth. And that went on for a while. We were in Europe, the three of us. We followed the Army. Went all the way to Paris, LeHarve, all those places, we went there. When victory came we were in Paris at the time, the three of us. Kenny Frye and—what were the other guys names? Anyway there were three of us. I have a picture of us somewhere. Eventually we came back to London. Somehow or other it affected my hearing. It either dropped down so fast or I forget what it was, but it affected my hearing. When I was coming out they picked up on that. I was not hearing. So they, you know, offered to give me something, you know, to use, but was a great awkward thing with this that and the other, wires and everything. So I wound up buying my own hearing aid, see, like this. And that's what I've worked with every since. I came back from the Navy. And I was at home in Martin's Ferry. And

I had an uncle that was the superintendent of a tin mill in Baltimore. He told my dad. There was, you know, a recession then. My dad didn't have a job. He told dad come on over and we'd get you hired. But then it turned out they wouldn't hire him. He was too old they said. So my uncle said, "Send Hal over." So they hired me, you know, in the tin mill. And I was an inspector actually. If you're familiar with tin mills, you know, they have big carousels with bits of metal in them. Put in in tanks, then take it down and goes through the tinning machines. My job was with clip boards to get the information of what was in the tank. What they did with it then, took it down with the cranes to the tinning machines. It was my job to make sure those tags matched what was supposed to be here in this machine. That was my job. I did that for quite a while.

CLAIRE LOTT: You went to night school at the same time at the Institute.

HAL LOTT: Yeah. At night I'd go to night school at the institute. Then of course I went in the service, right? I went in the Navy. Something to do with like the Navy Seals. They were training us to be underwater people, you know. You had to be able to swim pretty good, this that and the other. I was a good swimmer and I had to jump off from all that jazz.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Was this after you started the Maryland Institute?

CLAIRE LOTT: The Navy, and then you came back. The war was over and you came to the Institute.

HAL LOTT: Yeah. I went over. I came back. And I realized I had vacation time they owed me at steel mills, and I had an opportunity to go the Art Institute part time, at night and so on. Well that's how I picked up on that. Between the two things, that's what I was doing at that time. I came out of the Navy, right?

CLAIRE LOTT: And you met me. [laughs]

HAL LOTT: Well what happened was I went to the Institute and I was interested in art education. So he met with the academic dean, Margaret Glacie I went in the office with her and there were about five or six others I think. And I saw this particular lady further down. She doesn't admit it but it's true. I saw her on that day.

CLAIRE LOTT: I saw him that day.

HAL LOTT: And I think I took her to lunch that day. But she doesn't...

CLAIRE LOTT: I worked in the cafeteria.

HAL LOTT: She don't talk about that. You were stealing them blind. [laughter] We got free meals, this that and the other. We had a lot of fun.. But eventually we, as I say, I met up Claire that first day and that was the beginning of a long time.

CLAIRE LOTT: I want to go back the same day because this was the first day that the GIs arrived at the Institute. And they came in a group. Parts of uniforms they were wearing. And the rest of us, all the girls engaged, that were enrolled already, I was a sophomore, we're watching these guys come in and I saw him. Oh my gosh, I thought, this is the one. You don't believe in love at first sight. [laughter] Sixty-six married years.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Wonderful. So you dated for three and a half years.

CLAIRE LOTT: My parents were totally against this.[laughs] I was young. At age 19 then. Hal wanted to give me a ring and he went to a pawn shop and bought a really nice jade ring which I still have. My parents were appalled, you know, this is too soon, too fast. But we hung in. And they hung in. [laughs]

HAL LOTT: But you have to remember first mother was very—about me, you know. But, her father and I were like this [holds up crossed fingers]. We would ride around with him. He scared the hell out of me. We'd drive through intersections and all that, you know. He was very daring. And he had a daring brother who was a pilot in a plane and stuff like that. They were wonderful men. But they lost their lives in a storm down south there fishing one time. Got caught up in a big storm. Didn't make it back.

CLAIRE LOTT: That was way after the war you see.

HAL LOTT: I used to go fishing with him in the boat. The lightning would be striking and I'd say, " Francis we'll never get out of here." He'd say, "Oh, we'll get a bite." He was that kind of an individual, you know. It all worked out very well.

MERLE GOLDMAN: And you started to teach at Milford.

HAL LOTT: Yes. That was...

CLAIRE LOTT: 1948, '49.

HAL LOTT: I went to Hopkins at night.

CLAIRE LOTT: Yes you did too.

HAL LOTT: That's were I got my art education. Then I started teaching at Milford. That was to me a wonderful experience. I had a lot of fun with the kids, you know. I had a bike that I used to ride up and down the hall in, you know.

CLAIRE LOTT: They got away with murder.

HAL LOTT: One time, we were always playing games on the second floor of the school. My teaching mate across the hall was interviewing some individuals from some place. And I wanted them and stood with them, you know. And the principal came in the door and I'm here with these guys supposedly from South American or someplace. I had to pretend that I was one of them. We did the damndest things. [laughter]. This friend that I worked with was the wrestling coach. I remember he could catch one of these guys with problems with him, you know. He would put his head down and bang them right against the wall, you know, and things like that. Another of my friends, Stanley Benson, we mentioned his name frequently. They had clicks, you know, because different schools were brought together. And there were four girls that were giving everybody a fit. One day I came and, "Oh I want to meet after school with me." They didn't show up. So I went in the office. The principal comes, "Your class is up there." I said, "I'm not a going up there, I'm going out there to see the superintendent." These girls do not come in to my, you know, that is going to be it. Well, it didn't take long. He got them, you know, I didn't have to go to see the superintendent. I course they knew I would Anyways, we straightened all that out.

MERLE GOLDMAN: At some point in time---so all of your teaching in the classroom was at Milford?

HAL LOTT: How long?

CLAIRE LOTT: All of the teaching was at Milford.

HAL LOTT: How long?

MERLE GOLDMAN: No, no. All of the teaching that you did was at Milford High School.

CLAIRE LOTT: He taught at the Institute. You taught night school at the Institute a couple of those years.

MERLE GOLDMAN: What courses did you teach. Do you remember what courses they were, painting, drawing? Do you remember?

CLAIRE LOTT: Do you remember night school courses? I don't remember.

HAL LOTT: In the night school I would teach fundamentals of art. That was a particular curriculum I had. Problems in design. Stuff like that. Basically those two courses.

MERLE GOLDMAN: I know that at some point in time in your career you were promoted to head of the art program for the State of Maryland for public education. Do you recall what year or around what time that was?

CLAIRE LOTT: That was a whole period there where he worked on his doctorate in Columbia in New York.

MERLE GOLDMAN: So, when you were at Columbia you were not teaching in Baltimore?

CLAIRE LOTT: He was in the classroom at Milford and he was awarded this fellowship.

HAL LOTT: I won a fellowship, yeah. You had to write an essay or something, you know, to apply for it. My essay was about the Welshman that was supposed to be the famous pirate, Blackbeard. He was a Welshman. So I wrote that with that idea behind it. I got the award. I won a fellowship to Columbia. I'd go back in forth to Columbia, you know.

CLAIRE LOTT: We lived there the first year, the whole family. We had a stipend. It was a wonderful year.

HAL LOTT: Then Claire came home.

CLAIRE LOTT: The two boys and I.

HAL LOTT: But then I would go down. Art education.

MERLE GOLDMAN: So your PhD is in art education?

CLAIRE LOTT: Yes, then he went back and forth from Owings Mills to New York.

HAL LOTT: Yeah, I would go back and forth, but they said—well my excuse was I want to see my wife.

CLAIRE LOTT: Because the income tax people came. How come all this transportation on the bus? That was funny.

HAL LOTT: I remember there was another superintendent.

CLAIRE LOTT: Kersey, Kersey? Music?

HAL LOTT: No, no, no. The one that defended me for using the money. I forget the name.

Anyways. They tried to say I couldn't have used the money, you know, to travel back home to see my wife.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Oh, your stipend. They didn't like you using it for...

HAL LOTT: They didn't like that. But the thing was, I forget who it was who defended me who said, "You can." So that was taken care of. Eventually I came back of course.

MERLE GOLDMAN: And you had your PhD in Art Education. And then you became at some point the head of art education for the entire state of Maryland which is, you know...

HAL LOTT: They were looking for somebody I think. I forget what happened. I had a friend, Mary Wauwist. She was a good friend of mine. She was a supervisor in one of the counties.

CLAIRE LOTT: Montgomery.

HAL LOTT: She recommended me. There was another gentleman, somebody, who worked with your dad, I forget his name. But the two of them put my name up. And consequently I was picked then to be the superintendent for arts education in Maryland. That included all arts, any of it, you know, music or anything.

CLAIRE LOTT: Theater.

HAL LOTT: That's pretty much where I stayed until I left.

MERLE GOLDMAN: So how long were you in that position?

HAL LOTT: How long do you think?

CLAIRE LOTT: About 18 years.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Eighteen years, wow.

CLAIRE LOTT: We were trying to figure it the other day.

HAL LOTT: How many years?

CLAIRE LOTT: Well, you put in 28 years. You had two years for your military and then of that 28 I think you taught at Milford at least ten. Maybe it was the other way around. Eighteen years at Milford in any case.

MERLE GOLDMAN: So when you all finished---when you left being the---your were telling me before something about the Eastern Shore and art. What was it? Do you want to share that how...

CLAIRE LOTT: When we ended up here?

MERLE GOLDMAN: Well no, before that you said that when you were the head of art education that one of the areas in the state that really did not have and adequate art education was the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

CLAIRE LOTT: You told the story about all you had to do was say quack. [laughs] Was that...

HAL LOTT: What did I do when I traveled around?

MERLE GOLDMAN: Not so much that but I remember that..

HAL LOTT: Art education on the Eastern Shore was not very good. The problem basically was they were hiring people that really knew nothing about art. I would observe, you know, different teachers. Obviously it was part of my job. My general feeling was if you could quack you could teach art on the Eastern Shore. [laughter] I stayed with that I guess right along until we left.

Didn't we?

CLAIRE LOTT: When you retired.

MERLE GOLDMAN: I hope that you made some changes, hopefully for the children on the Eastern Shore that they find...

HAL LOTT: I was deferred from service because I was working the steel mill, like I told you. That was a critical area. I didn't feel good about it so I volunteered for the Navy, see. I volunteered, and in the process of volunteering for the Navy I became a citizen of the United States of America.

CLAIRE LOTT: Talk about art education on the Eastern Shore.

HAL LOTT: I told you.

CLAIRE LOTT: It wasn't very good.

HAL LOTT: It wasn't good.

CLAIRE LOTT: What did you do?

HAL LOTT: I wanted to serve teachers.

MERLE GOLDMAN: How did you make it better?

HAL LOTT: Well, what I would do, I would take material every time I'd go to any particular county. I'd have a briefcase full of things I could hand out. Lesson plans, you name it, any information I thought could help them out. So consequently I every time I visited teachers I had a lot of hand outs. That was basically the way I was trying to reinforce there situation. That fact that I say 'quack' is simply a joke, you know. But on the other hand it worked. Some people just quacked.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Let me ask you this. At some time in your life you moved to Chincoteague. When did that happen?

CLAIRE LOTT: Our barber in Pikesville, Hal's barber in Pikesville, talked about the fisheries on the Eastern Shore and especially Chincoteague. And he kept saying, "You ought to go down there." So we had our young family. We had three. Two boys and a girl. We started coming down to Tom's Cove to camp. And Meagan and I, she's our youngest, would cry every time we had to leave because it was such a wonderful place. It was like nothing I'd ever seen in Baltimore. And the idea of being able to walk until you never saw another footprint was just so intriguing to me. I did do a lot of that walking. We weren't expecting to live here because we had bought property in the Garrett County [Maryland]. And that was another area that we loved. It was mountains, and stars and it was a terrific place. I won't go into it. It was too far to settle there

or here and we were freezing one spring break. We piled the kids in the car, started driving around the town just to see what the town was like. It was cold. It was rainy and we came to this intersection and there was a for sale sign on this house. Three rooms. This room, the one upstairs and the kitchen. [laughter] There was a screened porch on the back. It just spoke to me and to Hal and we said, "That's it."

MERLE GOLDMAN: Had you visited here a lot when you made that decision?

CLAIRE LOTT: I would say yeah.

MERLE GOLDMAN: You'd come down to camp a lot and fish.

CLAIRE LOTT: But also the idea of running a shop was in my head from the time---well I worked at Lycett on Charles Street. Did you know Lysett Incorporated? One of those high end shops, gift shops. And they treated me like a family. And then I met a woman at the Timonium Fair, Bertha Knudson, Norwegian. And I helped her with her booth. She was doing braided rugs. We became friends. She was considerably older than I, and she wanted to know if I would work for her and design Rya rugs which are really works of art and in wool. What do you call it, knap.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Pile?

CLAIRE LOTT: Yes, pile. I loved the way she lived. She had a farm way out in the country in Harford County near---what was the name of that water, the dam up that way.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Susquehanna?

CLAIRE LOTT: Pretty Boy, that was it. Pretty Boy dam. Near there. She never advertised. She had this little shop about this big of things from Norway. She imported the wool and she imported the little gift items. Like I say, she never advertised and she asked we to come and help her with it. I said, "But I have a baby." Meagan was pre-walking. She was really an infant. She said, "Bring her along. We'll fix up a crib here." So the first day---I gotta tell you this. The first day I came to work she met me at the kitchen door. This was in her house too. And we went in the kitchen and she said, "Claire, we're going to make cookies today." She taught me all these Norwegian cookies. I still have the little tins. I made them every year. That's how it started. It was wonderful. And I thought, "That's the way I want to live."

MERLE GOLDMAN: So you worked in her shop for a long time?

CLAIRE LOTT: A couple of years. We were good friends. Then I went back to teaching. I stayed home 16 years to raise a family. We had an older boy, Matt, and Jonathan, middle son, lives and teaches in Hawaii. He was here just ten days ago. For ten days.

MERLE GOLDMAN: What does he teach?

CLAIRE LOTT: Engineering. Well, environmental, a lot of environmental stuff. He is an engineer.

MERLE GOLDMAN: At the college level or...

CLAIRE LOTT: No, high school. And Meagan is here in Accomack County. A Head Start teacher. I've been blessed.

HAL LOTT: I was active in a teacher's association in Baltimore County. Occasionally I would go somewhere else instead of there. And that somewhere else was down here one day, you know, on a rainy day. We acquired this place. Claire and I pulled all the plaster board out of the ceiling and everything. I put all the walls in it.

MERLE GOLDMAN: What year was this that you moved here?

CLAIRE LOTT: '79

HAL LOTT: Everything that's done in here. The cabinets in there, I built all those, you know. Everything in here we built. The cases and all that.

CLAIRE LOTT: Well not quite.

MERLE GOLDMAN: When did you start working here in the---I know you did a lot of these posters that are on the wall here for the Pony Swim. In fact I own several of them. You did them silk screen, I know. You really were fabulous at silk screen. What others? So I know you did it for the Decoy Festival and you did for...

HAL LOTT: That's a painting. That's not a silk screen.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Okay. That's the only one.

HAL LOTT: Yeah. That's the only one I did. These are silk screen [identify what he is showing].

MERLE GOLDMAN: Right. So did you get involved in the art scene here in Chincoteague? Did you get involved in doing art here when you came here, in a big way?

HAL LOTT: When we first came here?

MERLE GOLDMAN: Yeah.

HAL LOTT: You mean to the house?

MERLE GOLDMAN: No, I mean, you started doing these posters for different events, for Chincoteague.

CLAIRE LOTT: I kept nagging him to do those. These are the body of work. [showing the posters]

HAL LOTT: The decoy is. Those are the posters, and that's the process right there. [showing a poster board with pictures that show how he did it]

MERLE GOLDMAN: That's the process. That's very interesting. So you did a lot of these posters.

CLAIRE LOTT: He did them all. In fact, he and Tommy Savage started the Decoy event.

HAL LOTT: All the decoys [shows a poster board with all the decoy posters]

MERLE GOLDMAN: Oh. Mr. Lott, I didn't know that you started the Decoy show.

CLAIRE LOTT: It had fallen behind for years.

eb: And so 1983 was when you did the first poster on there?

CLAIRE LOTT: 1983.

eb: '83, wow.

CLAIRE LOTT: And you did one each...

HAL LOTT: And these are all the posters.

MERLE GOLDMAN: And these are the posters here. [showing posters} Oh you did the Pony Swim as well. That's wonderful.

CLAIRE LOTT: He started with that one. [pointing to the poster]

MERLE GOLDMAN: And Claire, you also did are down here. Did you also?

CLAIRE LOTT: Well and art teacher does all kinds of art work.

MERLE GOLDMAN: You came here. What was it like here? What was the art scene like here in Chincoteague? Now we have many people who live here or have homes here part time or live here part time who are very involved in the arts and the cultural scene. And they're doing a lot to expand it and grow it and make it a big part of the life down here for Chincoteaguers and others. What was it like when you first came here in terms of the...

CLAIRE LOTT: One other shop that sold artwork, some artwork, and mostly it was carving, was the Brandt. And that's still here. I remember telling the owner that I was thinking of opening a shop here. We were friendly and Frank would always visit us, and she said, "You'll never work harder in your life." And I said, "Have you ever been in an art room in a public school?" [laughs] Well that didn't go over very big. Nancy West started pretty much the same time we did. But

Margot Hunt, you know the name? She was the shining light for the Arts Alliance, for the library, for many cultural projects on the island. And we really miss her.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Were there many artists here?

CLAIRE LOTT: It slowly had grown. After we started there were several years where the wasn't anybody else except Nancy, I think started about that time, Nancy West. Now of course lots of them.

MERLE GOLDMAN: What was your first year like here in the shop? Was it a good year in terms of...

CLAIRE LOTT: Terrific. [laughs] We were so thrilled with everything. I was so happy with the way it went. And it was very informal. People just sort of gravitated here. It wasn't what I would call making a living. That's why we waited until we retired. So then we could fall back on—thank God, Baltimore County's pensions still hold. We were the lucky ones. I always say it wasn't a living but it's a life. People that come and go are friends. It's wonderful. It was a lot like Bertha Knudson's shop.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Well, it's been very interesting talking to both of you. It's a real privilege for me because I went to school in Baltimore County and I attended Milford Mills High School. I was there from 1960 to '63 and started in September of '60 and graduated in June '63. I took—I always had an interest in art. I took art as an elective for three years. I was in Mr. Lott's class for three years, five days a week. And it was a wonderful experience. As a matter of fact I can still remember one of the things I did, I have it hanging up in my kitchen at home. It was a pen and ink. We had to do it of a scary place. Mine's of a cemetery. Now we had to blow through this little tube to make the ink spatter all over.

CLAIRE LOTT: Scary pen and ink.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Scary pen and ink.

CLAIRE LOTT: And then you had to blow through a tube to create the fog?

MERLE GOLDMAN: Yeah. I still remember that day in the classroom, in the back of the classroom where the sinks and things were, I still remember standing there with you doing that. My friend and I who both were in your class, I think about that with great fondness. Those were special years. You were a character then.

CLAIRE LOTT: He was.

MERLE GOLDMAN: I don't that you realize as much as I do now, but you were a character then and you made it wonderful. So it's a real privilege to be doing this interview today and i thank you very much.

CLAIRE LOTT: That was very nice.

[end of video but audio recording continues]

MERLE GOLDMAN: Anything else you'd like to add to this conversation that you haven't mentioned that you would like to include? Is there anything else you'd like to add that you haven't already talked about that you would like to include in the conversation?

CLAIRE LOTT: You want to add anything [says to Hal]. He'll tell you about the Navy. [laughs]

HAL LOTT: I told you about the Navy. I told you about the power of chocolate.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Yes you did.

CLAIRE LOTT: You didn't tell about how many were in your family. All those sisters.

HAL LOTT: I had four sisters. We were in Wales. My father was very high up in the tin making business. He had a very good job. The Germans at the time tried to recruit him but that's was when Hitler was there you know. And of course that didn't go through. The thing is that they--- my sisters were very impressed with the silk stockings they could get in the USA.

CLAIRE LOTT: You're too young to remember that. But they were not available.

HAL LOTT: My poor father lost out. We all came to America. All of us. The whole family. My sisters got the silk stockings. My father---I won't tell you what he loved [laughs].

CLAIRE LOTT: When I was in high school during the war, there were no stocking to be had. And we all wore dresses. Nobody wore pants yet. We would paint our legs with makeup to look like stockings.

MERLE GOLDMAN: That was your artist. [laughter]

CLAIRE LOTT: I hadn't thought about that for years 'til you mentioned silk stockings. [laughter]

MERLE GOLDMAN: Again it's been just wonderful to talk to you.

HAL LOTT: I'll tell you another instance stuck in my mind when I was going into the Navy. I heard them saying that I could swim well and I did the jump off the high thing and all that. But I had to have 20/20 vision. Basically if I had passed that I'd have been put in a submarine. That's what I was looking for. You had to be healthy. They didn't want to take anybody in the

submarines that were not first class. I didn't have 20/20 vision then. Otherwise I would have been in the submarine service.

CLAIRE LOTT: He has no vision. He's had several corneal transplants. Two corneal transplants.

HAL LOTT: Oh that. That's another deal. I had, we had to go up to Johns Hopkins to have an evaluation on whether they could do something with my eye. My left eye, all I have is peripheral vision. I know the hand is there. I can't read with it or anything. One-eyed jack. Consequently I didn't get into the submarine, like I told you, but the other aspect that I told you. These two things happen, you know.

CLAIRE LOTT: He never complains.

HAL LOTT: I came out, I told you, they were behind us. I didn't hear them.

CLAIRE LOTT: That was the test in those days.

HAL LOTT: So you never know when life's going to turn this way or turn that way.

MERLE GOLDMAN: Well thank you very much again.