

Narrator: Wanda Guy

Interviewers: Paul Ewell

Location: Melfa, Virginia

Project Name: Chesapeake Bay Watermen

Project Description: The purpose of this project is to work to preserve the heritage of the commercial fishing industries in the Chesapeake Bay region by collecting and archiving oral histories of the men and women who are and were a part of this valuable history.

Principal Investigator: Paul Ewell

Affiliation: Virginia Wesleyan University

Transcript Team: Fantastic Transcripts; Molly Graham

Date of Interview: September 25, 2011

Abstract: In this oral history interview conducted by Paul Ewell on September 25, 2011, Wanda Guy shares her experiences growing up in Deep Creek, Virginia, as the daughter of a waterman, George Fosque Smith. Wanda discusses her family's deep ties to the water, including her father and both grandfathers working as watermen. She recounts childhood memories of family picnics on her father's buyboat, the *Regina*, and describes the significant influence her father's work ethic and love for the water had on her life. Wanda reflects on the hard work and long hours her father dedicated to his trade, his cautious nature, and the respect he had for the dangers of working on the water. She also talks about her brother, Greg Smith, who continues the family tradition as a waterman. The interview delves into her father's various boats, particularly the *Regina*, built by her grandfather and great uncle. Throughout the interview, Wanda emphasizes the close-knit community of Deep Creek, the unique childhood experiences she had, and the contrasts she noticed between her family's lifestyle and that of other children. She also shares her pride in her father's dedication and the lessons she learned from him about hard work and integrity. The conversation extends to Wanda's broader family history, including her mother, Phyllis June Ewell Smith, her grandparents, and her first husband, Gus Lilliston, who also had connections to the seafood industry. Wanda's involvement with the Watermen's Heritage Foundation has deepened her appreciation for her family's legacy and the watermen's culture on the Eastern Shore of Virginia.

Paul Ewell: This is Paul Ewell interviewing Wanda Guy on Sunday, September the 25th, 2011, at approximately 2:30 in the afternoon. Could you please state your full name?

Wanda Guy: Wanda Smith Guy.

PE: And could you state your address?

WG: 26577 Texaco Town Road, Melfa, Virginia.

PE: Zip code?

WG: 23410.

PE: How long have you been residing at this address?

WG: Probably forty years.

PE: Are you aware that this interview is being recorded?

WG: Yes.

PE: Do I have your permission to do so?

WG: Yes.

PE: Is it true that you grew up as a waterman's daughter?

WG: I sure did.

PE: Could you tell me where you grew up and who were your waterman connections?

WG: I grew up in Deep Creek, Virginia. My dad was George Fosque Smith. He worked on the water most of his life. My grandparents worked on the water, both my father's father and my mother's father.

PE: Do you remember their names?

WG: Yes, my mother's father was Harry Ewell, and my dad's father was Spencer Smith. My Grandfather Smith had an oyster house in Deep Creek, had a crab house in [what] is now Schooner Bay, and my Grandfather Ewell worked on the water until he retired.

PE: You said Spencer Smith was your father's father. Do you recall what your grandmother's name was?

WG: Ruth Vivian Smith. She was (Kalana?), originally from Tangier [Virginia]. And my mother's mother was Bessie Pearl Dix; she was formerly a Dix.

PE: I guess my first official question is when you were a little kid growing up in Deep Creek, which for the record is a fishing village due west almost of Onancock, what do you remember about being a waterman's child that separated you, if anything, from other kids that you might have gone to school with or would have known?

WG: I remember our Sunday trips was a lot of times – we didn't go on many vacations, but during the summer, we would get on my dad's – had a big buyboat at the time, we would get lots of friends and family to gather on the boat and go out on picnics on Sunday afternoon.

PE: What was the name of the boat?

WG: *The Regina*.

PE: Do you recall the spelling of that?

WG: R-E-G-I-N-A. I also remember my grandfather had a barge where they [inaudible] picked oysters up from some of the buyboats. In the summer, my dad would pull that out in the middle of the creek for the kids to swim off of.

PE: Really?

WG: Just the things [about] hanging around the railway. My dad also had a railway where he pulled up boats and worked on them in the summer. I remember doing that. I remember just being down to the oyster house when the ladies were shucking oysters in the wintertime and watching them shuck oysters.

PE: This was Spencer Smith's oyster house?

WG: It was Turner and Smith.

PE: Who was Turner?

WG: It was George Bull, George Turner, who was my grandmother's sister's husband, and he and my grandfather started this business together.

PE: You said “Bull.” Does that play a role here?

WG: Yeah. Years ago, the road down toward Schooner Bay behind Onancock, now it's called Bulls Landing, and that was taken from him. They called him, his name was George Bull, George Turner, but they called him George Bull. Don't know the relevance of the name, but just that was what his name was. I guess it was George Bull Turner.

PE: Now, your Grandfather Smith. Where did he live? He lived in Deep Creek?

WG: He lived in Deep Creek. Yes.

PE: Anything else that separated you that you thought was unusual? Or did you feel that you had – however you define normal – a normal childhood?

WG: Sure. I just felt like my dad worked a lot, which watermen did. But I think it was really with my dad – and I've learned that in later years, probably didn't realize that as a kid – a lot of times, he was on the water probably because he loved it. I didn't realize that as a kid, but he worked long hours. I thought it was hard work. I thought it was a hard way to make a living. I can remember him getting up real early and coming home real late and going out in bad weather. A lot of times, I just didn't want him to go. I didn't want him to work on the water in the wintertime.

PE: So you were aware of the dangers that he faced?

WG: Absolutely. I remember a time when he actually hit a submerged log out in the Chesapeake Bay. But as my dad would, how he handled things, I remember the crew running up to the pilot house and saying, "George, what do we do?" And he said, "Put on a pot of coffee so I can think." But that's the way he handled things. He was very level headed. He respected the water, and that's one of the things that I remember about him as much as anything. He was really one of the watermen that wasn't going to go out in any kind of weather. If it was too rough, he respected the water. I don't think he took a lot of chances that some of the other watermen took. As I realize back now, that was one of those things that I think he said, that my brother says now, but I think he got it from my dad, though he probably wouldn't admit it, that my dad worked smarter sometimes, not harder.

PE: Now, when you say your brother, who is your brother?

WG: My brother is Greg Smith.

PE: What's his middle name?

WG: Gregory Ewell Smith.

PE: Is he your only sibling?

WG: My only sibling.

PE: And what does he do now?

WG: He works on the water. He crab pots, but he's going to build docks too. So he doesn't crab dredge. He doesn't work in the winter on the boats like they used to, like crab dredging, but he does crab pot and peeler pot and whatnot in the spring and summer.

PE: Does he have a boat now?

WG: Yes, he does.

PE: What's the name of the boat?

WG: *Captain Fosque*.

PE: How do you spell that?

WG: That's Captain F-O-S-Q-U-E, after my dad.

PE: Who was George –

WG: Fosque Smith.

PE: Do you remember any other boats that your dad or your brother owned?

WG: Yeah, I do. My dad owned *Strawberry*, which I think got the name because it was down to the dock, and somebody went and painted a strawberry on the side of the boat. That's the only explanation I ever knew why it became *The Strawberry*. And I know, I think the Janey (sp?), but I don't really remember the names. I don't know if he had any more boats out there; they're the only three I remember. But I think probably *Regina* sticks out to me more than – I guess because it was big.

PE: Now, *The Regina*, where did he get *The Regina*?

WG: His father and George Turner, George Bull, built *The Regina* in Deep Creek years ago. From what I can gather, it was when my dad was a young man. I'm not sure how old he was.

PE: All right. We got you on hold. [Recording paused.] Ready?

WG: Yes. What was I saying?

PE: You were talking about your dad's boats and the ones you remember, and –

WG: But yes, he and my grandfather, and my great uncle –

PE: And your great uncle was?

WG: George Turner built –

PE: George Bull Turner.

WG: Turner was the one that built that boat, from my understanding. But I remember it always being around from a child. I can always remember that big boat sitting down to my grandfather's oyster house down to the dock because they had their own dock, the oyster house, and the railway all right there together. I had that advantage as a kid; I could go on that dock and go

crabbing, go swimming. Sunbathe out on the dock, when I got [to be] a teenager [inaudible] the back. It was probably different than what a lot of kids grew up around.

PE: Were there a lot of kids in Deep Creek back then?

WG: Yeah. There was a fair number of kids because we all used to get down to the dock and go swimming, and we played Lost Track, Dead Mule in the summertime.

PE: What was that again?

WG: Lost Track, Dead Mule.

PE: What is that?

WG: It's kind of a hide-and-go-seek game. You play after dark; somebody would – it's like Marco Polo, they play in the pools now. But it was just on land, and somebody would hide, and they'd say, "Lost track," and you had to say, "Dead mule," so they could try to figure out why your voice was. We used to play that into summer until all hours of the night, and we played ball. It was lots of kids, and there were always kids coming and going swimming and playing on the docks and whatnot.

PE: I have to ask, and you don't have to answer this honestly, but what is your birth date?

WG: June 19, 1949. I'm sixty-two and proud of it.

PE: So this time frame you're talking about would be the '50s and '60s.

WG: Yes.

PE: Primarily?

WG: Yeah, we moved to Deep Creek. I actually lived at (inaudible) until I was six. We moved next door to my grandmother and grandfather in Deep Creek when I turned six. That's where I lived until I got married and moved away.

PE: When you got married, who did you marry?

WG: The first time I was married, I married Gus Lilliston. We were married for thirteen years. We had a son, Scott Lilliston, and that was a good thing.

PE: Now, when you say Gus, was that his nickname or was that his real name?

WG: Gordon Eugene was his name, and his dad was a waterman also.

PE: Now, who was his dad?

WG: His dad's name was – Paul, I don't know. I can't remember. His mother was Edith, and his father was – I can't remember what his father's name was.

PE: Were they from Deep Creek as well?

WG: And he had seven siblings.

PE: Do you remember any of their names?

WG: Yeah. Most people probably would remember Buddy Lilliston; his name was Louis. He had B&L Seafood for years. Then there was the one they called Turk; his name is Albert Lilliston. He was working in the seafood business also as a truck driver and bought crabs. I'm not sure if he ever actually worked out on the water, but he was always in the seafood business. I believe another brother – I believe he did also. I believe he worked in the water business for a long time. I don't know what he did later years, but I think as a younger man –

PE: Who?

WG: Junior, the one they called Junior, and his name's Earl. Maybe that was their dad's name, Earl. I'm not absolutely sure about that, and then he had four sisters, so it was eight of them.

PE: Do you remember the sisters' names?

WG: Yes. The oldest one was Rosie. She married [inaudible] Annis from Johnson's Wharf. There was Anna or Annabelle. She married Joe Colonna from Cashville. Edna Bowen – well, she was Edna Thorton before; she was married to John Thorton from Melfa, and then she married Billy Bowen from Exmore. And then there was Diane, and Diane married Bobby Blankenship. I'm not sure exactly – Bobby was, I think, from away from here. I'm not sure where Bobby – he wasn't a native of the shore but has been here for a number of years.

PE: Now, Gus also worked in the seafood business?

WG: Yes, and Gus worked on the water too for a long time. He worked on the water, and then he drove the truck for Buddy, his brother, for B&L Seafood for a long time too.

PE: Did you ever work in any segment of the seafood industry?

WG: No.

PE: What kind of work did you do?

WG: My first job, when I got out of high school, was at a canning factory in Hallwood. I worked for a Taylor Packing Company, and that actually was my first full-time job. I ended up staying there for ten years until my son was born.

PE: You did primarily what kind of work?

WG: Payroll. I did payroll and bookkeeping. Basically, bookkeeping, but I was their payroll clerk for mostly ten years.

PE: When you look back at your life and the experiences that you've had, what is the fondest memory you have of your father?

WG: My father? Oh my goodness. I have lots of fond memories of my father. You think they're not funny at the time, but I think – I probably told the story [in] the last year so many times. Being involved with The Watermen's Museum and whatnot this past year has just brought so many things back to me that I hadn't thought about in years. I've told the story that I remember when I was in high school, one of my teachers was asking each of the students one day what their fathers did for a living. Of course, I said mine worked on the water. She said, "Well, what does he do?" [Recording paused.]

PE: You were telling the story about the teacher asking you what your father did for a living.

WG: So she asked us each what our dads did for a living, and of course, I said mine was a waterman. She said, "Well, it's January. What does he do on the water this time of year?" And I said, "I don't know." Well, I made the mistake of going home that night and then sitting at the dinner table and saying, "The teacher asked me this, and I told her I didn't know." He said, "Young lady, you will know tomorrow." For the very first time, I found out what he did for a living in January. He went crab dredging, and I crab dredged on the deck of *The Regina* the next morning in Cape Charles. We were up before the crack of dawn into Cape Charles, and it was cold and it was yucky. But I knew from thenceforth, I knew to know what he did, that he went crab potting and crab scraping. He didn't go crab – I don't remember dad ever crab potting much, but maybe he did, but I know he was crab scraping in the summertime, and it's fall into spring and the summertime. I think that was his love; he liked to go crab scraping. I remember when my son was a teenager and dad had basically retired, he said he never did what he called retire, but he would take my son out crab scraping in the summer so he could make some money. But I think Dad just enjoyed being out there on the water, and he just loved it. It was a passion for him, and he just loved the water, and things about the water, and the railways and the boats, and then just working on the motors. Because he did it all, he'd just say he was the Jack of all trades and the master of none, but he could fix about anything, I think. That's the way I felt about my dad. I just always felt like he could do anything.

PE: So most of your memories, you would say, of your father, were probably pretty positive?

WG: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. My dad was – very close to my dad. I was a daddy's girl, no doubt about that. Before he died in May of 2006, even just weeks before that, I would leave his house in Deep Creek to come to Melfa, and he would call to make sure I got home okay. I was just always a daddy's girl. I just felt like he would always look out for me, and he did.

PE: We've talked about your father, and your brother and I guess your first husband, Gus. Tell me a little bit about your mother.

WG: My mom was a great lady. My mom was the one person on this earth that I butted heads with, probably more than anybody else on earth. But she was a good woman; she was a hard worker. Love my mom. Like I said, we butted heads a lot because we just, most of the time, agreed to disagree. But a lot of people would tell me that I looked just like my mom, and my dad used to say he'd never seen anybody work as hard as I did in my life to not be like my mom. I have my son now saying, "Ha, you're just like grandma." [laughter] So you think about the things that – the differences sometimes as you get older, you realize they weren't such great differences. I wish she was back here now to butt heads with.

PE: Now, what was her name?

WG: Her name was Phyllis June Ewell Smith. She was an Ewell.

PE: And where was she from?

WG: She was from Justiceville, Hunting Creek, and proud of it. She loved her heritage and her family and always loved her parents. She was a daddy's girl too. When she would tell stories, most of her stories were about her daddy, just like me. That's what I'm saying. I think you realize as you get older, you are alike because I was like her in that aspect. As close as I was to my dad, she was the very same way with her dad, and she and her mother butted heads just like she and I did. You realize, "Are you really that much different?" Sometimes you wish you had a little bit of time to make things a little bit different, but you don't, so you take them that they were – you know you loved each other. I can think back and say that I can say that the last words that ever came out of both of my parents' mouths to me, and me to them, was that we loved each other. I wouldn't take anything from that.

PE: Understood. Were you close with your grandparents on your mother's side?

WG: Oh, absolutely.

PE: They were Bessie and Harry Ewell? And where do they live?

WG: They lived in Justiceville. I couldn't wait. I couldn't wait on the weekend or in the summertime to get up there. It was just like heaven on earth to me.

PE: Well, when you say heaven on earth, what exactly do you mean? What was it about going up there that was special to you?

WG: A lot of it was them. A lot of it, when I was just really, really young, was my cousins were there.

PE: Who were your cousins?

WG: Roy, Linda.

PE: Ewell?

WG: Yes.

PE: And Preston, but we called him (Tutor?). But he was the youngest one, so really, he didn't get out to play with us as much as the three of us were kind of together. Linda and I, mostly, Roy was just mean to us. He was a boy, but we didn't expect any different. We played in the woods. My grandfather had cows, and he had chickens and ducks, and they had a garden, and they killed hogs.

We made butter when we were kids. My grandmother didn't even have a butter churn. We sat out there, and she told us stories under the willow tree as we had the fixings for the butter and Mason jars and banged it on pillows in our laps and turned, and she'd say, "Turn and bang, turn and bang," and we would do that, and she would tell stories. That is one of my best memories. I remember they had a big willow tree right by the kitchen door. She would fix me pillows up in the willow tree. I would sit there some days, and she'd bring me lemonade to the bottom of the tree. I would sit in that tree if the cousins weren't around and read Nancy Drew books all day long. I can remember my cousin and I having a playhouse in the coalbin. That fall, when the coalman came to dump the coal, my grandfather wouldn't let him tear our playhouse down. He made him dump the coal in the yard because he wouldn't tear up our playhouse. That's the kind of grandparents they were. They were just loving and giving. I can remember my grandfather taking us to Parksley every Saturday night, and he'd give us a dollar. He would sit at his brother's restaurant, Frontier Restaurant there, in Parksley, John Ewell's brother. And Miller Blackson (sp?) was the canine cop at the time, who was our great uncle. And Pa would give us a dollar, and Uncle Millard would give us a dollar, and it was inevitable we would buy artificial fingernails. We bought every pair of artificial fingernails that the Parksley ten-cent store ever had. We just looked forward to that on Saturday night, and he spent his time. He would sit there all night until we were ready to go home. But they were special times. When I lost my grandfather, he was the very first one in my – well, he wasn't actually the first one to pass away of my grandparents, but I was so close to him. My dad's parents, father had passed away, but it was a different relationship with him. But my grandfather, Ewell, was – I could say I was probably as close to him as I was later to my dad, that really close relationship just like my dad was. I can remember when he passed away, I was nineteen, and it just broke my heart. It was the hardest thing I ever did in my life to part with him.

PE: Just to make sure I've got it right here, you said you would go to town on Saturday night, to Parksley, and you would go to the five and –

WG: It was a five and dime. It wasn't Jackson's; it was a five and dime down further because there was a drugstore down to the end of town, there was a ten-cent store in the middle of town. I can't really remember whether Jackson's was even there. It may have been, but I just remember the ten-cent – it was like a five and dime in the middle of town. I can remember going in there because I can remember Linda and I, little thieves that we were, snatched some bubblegum one night.

PE: Oh really?

WG: Yes, at the ten-cent store. WE got outside, and then our conscience bothered both of us, and we got to figure out how we were going to put it back.

PE: And?

WG: We did.

PE: Oh, you did?

WG: Yeah, we put it back. But we had to be just as sneaky putting it back as we were getting it, but we did. I don't think either; really, it was so strange because I can't remember completely whether the one knew – we both did it at the same time, but I don't know whether we had it planned, or we were both being conniving at the same time. But we both realized what we'd done, and we got out, and that wasn't the thing to do.

PE: Do you recall who owned that store or anything about it?

WG: I don't. No, I don't remember who owned it, but I just know it was a five-and-dime right in the middle of town.

PE: You said your grandfather, Harry Ewell had a brother, John Ewell, who owned a restaurant?

WG: Yes.

PE: And where was that restaurant located?

WG: In Parksley.

PE: Do you recall whereabouts in Parksley?

WG: Yeah, it's right there where – I think it's What's Your Fancy. It's in that area where the – I'm not sure exactly because it was where Annie's restaurant – and down that way was a movie hall; it was a movie theater there at the time. I was a little kid because that's the first place I ever went to the movies. But the Frontier Restaurant was there. I think the movie had closed when the Frontier Restaurant was there because that was later.

PE: When you say the Frontier Restaurant, whose was that?

WG: That was John Ewell's.

PE: Oh, that's what it was called?

WG: Yes.

PE: The Frontier?

WG: The Frontier, yes. It was like a bar on one side and a restaurant on the other.

PE: Do you know if he started that restaurant or if he bought –

WG: He did. No, he started it.

PE: Do you happen to know any of the origins of Frontier?

WG: No, I don't. No, I sure don't. But he had another one that was just a bar. Before that, before he opened that with the restaurant part, it was one down – it was over, I think – what I can recall – behind where Jackson's is now. I'm not sure exactly where; I can't remember because I don't remember ever going in there. I don't think Pa ever took us in there. [laughter] Now, when it was called a restaurant, I think he took us in, but the other one, he never took us in, which of course Pa never drank, but he would go sit in there up to the bar and drink coffee. So we used to go out there every Saturday. He'd take us every Saturday night.

PE: Do you know what kind of food they'd serve there?

WG: Yeah.

PE: A variety of things?

WG: Yeah, a variety. Yes. Yeah. It was a full-fledged restaurant. I think they served everything. It wasn't just sandwiches, as far as I remember.

PE: I guess, and we'll get to the point of wrapping up this section, but I do have one more question that I'd like your opinion on. Of course, nowadays, if you watch television, we have the Discovery Channel, and on the Discovery Channel, you can watch shows like the *Deadliest Catch*, which is about the crabbers in Alaska, and *Swords on the Line*, which is about the sword fishing off the Grand Banks, and we've got stories of lobstermen off of Maine, and up in Massachusetts. They all depict commercial fishermen as sort of a wild and rough bunch. And I think that's a pretty, pretty global perspective. Not speaking of anyone in particular, but the watermen culture, when you were a kid, would you say that describes the watermen of the Eastern Shore Virginia at that time, or how would you characterize watermen back in? I guess it would be the '50s and '60s?

WG: I would say for me, that would be hard to judge because that wasn't my dad. I think it was maybe a mentality of work hard, play hard, but my dad wasn't that way. My dad was a good, steady as a rock, good husband, good father. Not that they weren't, I'm not saying that they weren't, but I know a lot of them drank and partied, and that wasn't him. I can remember at Christmas, a lot of them would go out and drink and party, and one of their wives would be calling my dad on Christmas Eve to come put their kids – you know?

PE: So would you say he was the exception to the rule, or he was the rule?

WG: I think he was – I don't want to depict them as a bunch of rough and rowdy. I don't want to depict watermen that way.

PE: But were they?

WG: But a lot of them were. They were rough, they worked hard, and they partied hard. I'm not trying to depict them as bad people or whatever, but that was just the way they were. I guess I just didn't see a lot of that because my dad wasn't that way. Yeah, I do believe he was an exception to the rule.

PE: So you would say your grandfather, Ewell, would be an exception to the rule?

WG: Right. Yeah.

PE: And how about your grandfather, Smith?

WG: Yeah. None of my family – I guess it's because none of my family were ever – I can remember my Grandfather Ewell having to drink a beer because of his kidneys, and it almost taking him all day long to drink a bottle of beer because he just didn't like it. I guess my dad was the same way. I don't remember my Grandfather Smith ever drinking. So I don't know whether it was just a family thing. I really don't know. I don't know how to explain that, because I don't think as far as – I just remember that it was a difference because I remember some of my girlfriends, I remember some of my other friends and the people that I grew up with, and lived near us, that it was different, that they were different. I don't know whether it was just because our family was maybe a little different-oriented. I don't know. I don't know how to explain that.

PE: As you got, I would say into your teenage years, and then into young adulthood, did you ever, and maybe you didn't think about any of this, or maybe you did, I don't know. But did you ever think of that culture that mainly that your brother did it, your father did it, your grandfathers did it, did you ever look at the industry as a whole, and say, I'm proud of that industry, or I'm embarrassed about that industry, or I'm neutral, I have no feeling about the industry?

WG: I don't think I thought about it. I thought that's what my dad did for a living. And I think probably until the last year, and it's almost like while my dad was living, I wish I could've had the appreciation that I have now for what he did. I always told him I was proud of him, and I was. I never had a time in my life that I wasn't proud of my dad and who he was. I was that kind of kid, from a very early age, I can remember, you don't mess with my daddy, and I was always that way. So I think I was always proud of who my dad was because I knew my dad was a good man, and I was proud of him. But I don't think I really had an appreciation for what he did. I knew he worked hard, and I knew he was very good at what he did. I always thought he was underappreciated because I saw him do things for people that didn't appreciate it. I saw him work on people's boats and not charge them, and people take advantage of him. I remember I used to tell him, "Dad, if you don't overcharge them, they don't think you know what you're doing." I used to tell him – he was a hard worker, and he was a good man, but my dad was not a businessman. I can remember he and my mom butting heads over the fact that he wasn't a businessman because she'd say, "Charge them." But he'd say, "No."

PE: Why do you think he said no?

WG: Because I think he saw the reality of how hard-working on the water was. He would see people, some people would have three or four kids, and they'd pull up on the railway, and he'd do work on their boats, or even if they did work on their own boats, and they'd pull their boat down, and they'd say, "I'll pay you later." And he'd see them going down the road, walking without a car with four or five kids. He wouldn't ask them for the money.

PE: So you would say he had a passion for not only the industry but for the people that were involved.

WG: For the people. Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. Because I can remember, even when he retired, my mother still had that book where people owed him money. And I'd remember even a really, really good friend of his, who he had never charged, by the way, for working on his boat or whatever, my mother decided after he – dad had pulled this fellow on the railway. My mother decided she was going to send him a bill, and he got very angry with my dad and did not speak to him for years. But when he got older, and he got sick, he asked his wife to call my dad to come up there to visit him. He wanted to apologize to him. And Dad went, and he did, and they restored – that was another thing about my dad I can remember. I don't think he ever held a grudge in his life. It didn't make any difference what you did to him, he was always ready to forgive and forget, and he set a fine example, I think, for anybody. And he did – like it had never happened, and went and visited him a number of times before he died and before Dad got sick. But like I said, far as a businessman, he just wasn't. He'd give you the shirt off his back. And sometimes, people took advantage of that. Like I said, sometimes I don't think he got the respect he deserved, and that was simply because he didn't say – the way they do now sometimes – "You owe me a thousand dollars" for a five-hundred-dollar job. Well, he did a thousand-dollar job and got paid five hundred dollars.

PE: If that.

WG: If that, and that was the difference. But I think he did it for the love of it and the love of people. He didn't do it – and I remember us talking one day. We used to do the Sunday rides when he ended up having his leg amputated, and we used to go out riding on Sunday afternoons, and we would talk. He said to me one day or asked me, was he a failure? I'm like, "Are you kidding me?" I couldn't believe that he would even think that. He would so much as think that, or that anybody would think that about him. I said, Dad, "You were such a fortunate man." He always provided for us. I don't remember ever lacking for anything. We may not have had the best of everything, but we had everything we needed. He certainly provided for us, and I was always proud of him. He was one of those people that very few times you would ever find anybody that knew him that didn't love him. Now, I'm sure there are people, but as a whole, you would not –

PE: Probably not many.

WG: You might find one or two, but you wouldn't find many that didn't love George Fosque, as most people called him, because he was, he was a good man. And all the women wanted him for their husband. They used to tell Mama all the time, "when you die," because he was a good husband; he was a good father. And I was nothing but proud of him. I told him, "Not many people can say that they got to do exactly what they love to do." That's what he did. He loved the water, he loved the people, and he loved his family, and what else can you ask for?

PE: So, in that sense, he was very successful?

WG: Absolutely.

PE: Just to wrap up, on that note, you had said a couple of times during this interview that – you said it wasn't until the past year that you – and the word you used was –appreciated what he did or what his passion was. What's that about?

WG: Being involved in the Watermen's Heritage Foundation, who my cousin, Paul Ewell, and his wife founded, and I have the privilege of being on the board of directors and working with them, has opened my eyes to a lot of things. Just things I'd never thought about. We talked about the skipjacks. Never even thought about a skipjack. I didn't even know what a skipjack was. But then, getting to the place where you realize that this heritage is back in the 1600s on this Eastern Shore and that my family was involved in that. And to look at a picture of a skipjack that was taken in 1929 at skipjack races and to realize that my grandparents dated on the deck of that skipjack in 1910. Those things that I never thought would – well, I didn't know those things because it's like I have said to Paul, I guess grandmothers talk to their grandsons about different things than they do their granddaughters because I don't – of course, I wasn't interested in boats. That wasn't something that interested me as a kid, although it did him. But that has really changed my appreciation of the culture of the boats, not even knowing what the different boats were, the importance of it in my family. I guess I just didn't think about it. It's not that I didn't appreciate my dad or love my dad; I guess I just never sat and thought about it. So it's made a big difference in the importance of it to me.

PE: Would you say that this appreciation you now have for that culture, for the industry, or that livelihood has made you understand your dad more or appreciate him more?

WG: I think so. I really think so. That's what I'm saying. I just wish that I had had this appreciation when he was alive. I wish he could be here to be a part of this because I can almost picture his excitement. He would be right in the middle. The thing of it is, what's so crazy, my mother never really wanted him to work on the water, but she would be right in the middle of this too. They would both love this and eat it up. They would think this is the greatest thing, that it is bringing to light – and I think that's what this Watermen's Heritage Foundation is going to do and be, not just a museum which is going to help keep things alive and make people see the importance of the water for this Eastern Shore of Virginia. But the fact that it's going to just, I think, give you pride in that, that I think he was hard for my mother to have ... She did not have an appreciation for the water, other than for social things – sunbathing, picnicking, beach.
[laughter]

PE: Not crabs, necessarily, oysters.

WG: Not crabs. No, no, that was not a big thing. But I think they would both be excited about this. Like I said, I think it might even change my mother's mind about her appreciation for the culture of the watermen.

PE: I was just thinking when you were talking about Aunt June and her lack of appreciation for that part. I would bet you that she never saw a picture of the (Roux?) brothers.

WG: No, I'm sure she didn't.

PE: I can only imagine, knowing her, how exciting it would be for her to see that picture, knowing that her mom and dad dated on that boat in the 19-teens.

WG: I never thought it would affect me the way it has. Every time I see that picture, I am in awe. And if there's anybody standing around and looking at that picture, I can't help but tell them that story. If I tell it a hundred times, I can't help it. It's like I have to. So yeah, it has. I am so appreciative of being able to do this. I feel privileged to be able to do this. I can't help but believe that somehow, some way, my daddy is looking down at me and saying, "About time."

PE: I think he's pretty proud. You always wonder, and you've said it, and I know I've said it too, if only – because I think of Dad, my dad, and I always say, "If only they were alive." But in a way, they are.

WG: Oh yeah. Absolutely.

PE: And in a way, everything that's done for this foundation, it's done in their honor and for them, and I think they know that.

WG: I think so too.

PE: I know that there's not supposed to be any pride in heaven, but I think they're proud anyway.

WG: [laughter] Yeah, I agree. I agree. I know Daddy would be, and I know your daddy would be too.

PE: It's funny that even people like your cousin, Roy Allen Ewell – I know that when he sees these pictures, of course, there's a lot of things sentimental and nostalgic. It has not remotely been his thing, but you see a gleam in his eye. When he went to St. Michael's a few weeks ago, and he was up there, and he got on the *E.C. Collier*, which was Uncle Jeff Dix's boat, you could just see something in him that was just pride.

WG: Well, that's what I'm saying. I think sometimes we don't take the time to find out about our heritage. It's so much with genealogy and all that stuff anymore. But when you really start to see – it all starts to come together, and you realize what a part your forefathers had in building

this Eastern Shore. The watermen have been around forever, and you just see them fading away, and you realize it's just such a shame. It shouldn't be that way.

PE: No. But that's what the foundation is for, is to make sure we –

WG: Make sure it's preserved. And that's what I hope and pray that we can do because they deserve that. They've been around for a long time, and they still need to be around for a long, long time. That's what I hope this will help everybody see, that they need to be around for a long time, that they're not something that you can just push to the side.

PE: Well, I think that concludes this part of our interview. We're wrapping up on – it's 3:25 on 9/25/2011. This was an interview with Wanda Smith Lilliston Guy at her home on Texaco Town Road in Melfa, Virginia.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 7/22/2022