

WILLIAM BALDWIN
Poet, Retired Shrimper, McClellanville, SC

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Location: Mr. Baldwin's home, McClellanville, SC
Interviewer: Sara Wood
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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00:00:01

Sara Wood: Okay, so it's September 13, 2014. This is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm here in McClellanville, South Carolina with Mr. Billy Baldwin. And Mr. Baldwin, I'm wondering if you would—wouldn't mind saying hello and introducing yourself for the tape, telling me who you are and where we are right now.

00:00:21

William Baldwin: All right. I'm—I'm William Baldwin but everybody calls me Billy. And I'm sixty-nine years old coming up on seventy and I was born here in McClellanville, South Carolina and then actually grew up in different places along the coast and—and came back here after college. And I've been here since '64 [1964]. And I fished and—fished and wrote and built houses and mostly fished in my young—in my younger days, so—. I'm here talking to Sara.

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Sara Wood: And for the record Mr. Baldwin will you tell me your birth date?

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William Baldwin: October 27, 1944.

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Sara Wood: So you said growing up you moved around on the coast. Why did you move around?

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William Baldwin: My father was a—a Fish and Wildlife Service Biologist and he was the only Wildlife Biologist in the entire thirteen southeastern states. So after—after—he had—in the late ‘40s [1940s] he had to travel a lot but we went up to Savannah and Bluffton. Bluffton was another fishing community at the time and then I ended up going to high school in Summerville which is just above Charleston. But I always—my family was here and my grandmother was here. She—my grandmother lived right at the fuel dock where they fuel the shrimp boats and I could always get a job fueling shrimp boats. I was in heaven, yeah. I’d run away from home and—and stay here you know. Still am here.

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Sara Wood: And can you tell me your parents’ names?

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William Baldwin: It was William P. Baldwin Jr. and Agnes L. Baldwin.

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Sara Wood: And what was your grandmother’s name?

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William Baldwin: That was—she was Lucille. She was a Morrison so we’re all—one of—there were two families in the town, McClellan(s) and Morrison(s) and we call him Ole Grandpa. I think he had seventeen children and none of them went anywhere so we’re—we’re all Morrison(s) or McClellan(s). *[Laughs]*

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Sara Wood: And your grandfather's name?

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William Baldwin: Uh well Rut Leland was my grandfather here. He was a—he was a boat captain and I just sort of a merchant, ran a freight boat back and forth to Charleston. And my other was William P. Baldwin. He was from Wilmington, Delaware. That's them.

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Sara Wood: So you have a lot of history in your family of connection to the water Mr. Baldwin?

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William Baldwin: No, not really. I'm thinking about it—not at all, not—not as far as—my mother was the leading state expert on Marsh—Marshland Titles going back to 1680 and my father spent a lot of his life bogging around in the salt marsh. In that sense—yes [*Laughs*], not—not fishing though.

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Sara Wood: And can you tell me a little more about the dock where your grandmother, did she own the spot there where boats would come in and fuel up or how did that work?

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William Baldwin: I think it had probably been my grandfather's probably his loading you know the freight boat dock. I'm just guessing there but my uncle was running it as a fuel dock when I was a boy and you know I can remember laying—laying in bed, every morning you'd hear the shrimp fleet was a collection of old World War II surplus landing crafts and all sorts of Navy things and—and all the—after World War II all the young men came back. They had all been in the Navy and they converted these boats to shrimping that we never had shrimping in McClellanville. Well we had the—the Portuguese came in the mid-'30s but just for a couple of seasons. And the problem was there wasn't any way to get—you couldn't ship the shrimp away. There wasn't—you know the road wasn't paved or anything. So after World War II they had a paved road and ice and things that they hadn't had before and they took this fleet of—of just mismatched things and none of them had mufflers. I can remember as a boy laying in bed and hearing these boats go out. They went out every day you know and just the noise of the racket. They were all gasoline engines. They would blow up at the dock fairly regularly.

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I remember my father used to tell a story of—of Ben Lewis. He had an old shrimp boat and it was always blowing up. And my father was walking me—I woke up early and he was walking me along the dock and Ben Lewis blew up and my father kept racing back and forth with fire extinguishers to—to try to help Ben Lewis. And I was afraid of being abandoned and I kept trying to run onto the burning boat. And a couple years after that Ben Lewis blew himself up. That was the end of [*Laughs*]*—the end of that.*

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But I—you know I don't know what would really help you but I've heard stories about these—these early boats they had no winches. Everything was done by hand. Pulled one big net, they'd all pull flat nets. There wasn't anything but a flat net. You know later on we were all this—you had two seams, four seams, this/that, but a flat net was just a big flat thing that dredged along. And it was filled—the Cape waters were filled with anchors and hundreds and hundreds of these giant sailing ship anchors because it was the first big shoal coming up the east coast. And people would get in trouble you know and they'd be in a storm. And they would put the anchors over and they'd have to cut them loose or they'd drag the anchor and wreck. It's supposed to be shipwrecks all over the place out there. But they told me that they brought in hundreds of anchors in those early days which since everything thing was manila lined it was a big deal you know to wrench something like that onto a boat and bring it in.

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Every—you know and that—that kind of shrimping lasted up through the '50s [1950s]. I was running the—I was running the fuel dock. I must have been twelve, thirteen, fourteen. I remember there was a black—a young black man there Earl running it and we always paid him \$14 a week. And he got a job in New York City putting together aluminum blinds for \$90 a week and he left and my uncle hired me and gave me the \$14. I was in heaven. *[Laughs]* You know just—for somebody that was like that, and then at night I would go down and work at the shrimp packing dock and I—everything was hand-done, ice boxes, wooden boxes. The shrimp were scooped by hand. Dick Gathers would just stand there all night scooping shrimp. Didn't have a—didn't have a forklift to load the trucks and Moose would stand there and load—he would stand there and just jerk fifty, 120-pound boxes up chest-level and stick them on the back of a truck.

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And when I'm saying that—that's how it was when was twelve. Well that's exactly how it was when I was twenty-one. I was running that shrimp dock. My cousin was in the Vietnam War and he was gone so for a year I ran the dock. And it really hadn't changed. Two light bulbs on the whole stretch of the dock. I'd be the only white person there. Everybody was talking Gullah. It was just like a foreign country. And you know I loved it. *[Laughs]*

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I would wake up three mornings a week, I would drive the shrimp to load—my uncle would put forty-pound boxes of shrimp on the back of a—of a pickup truck and the back-end would just be shrimp and I'd drive it to Myrtle Beach three mornings a week. I remember the other three mornings, there was Roy Singleton, this black man was my—my brother-in-law's striker. This was when I was twenty-one. And when you got to Myrtle Beach you—you turned left and you unloaded at Myrtle Beach Seafood but to the right was the amusement park. And I remember Roy would drive by and they had—they had a roller coaster. And he'd tell me, he said you know we got integration now. They can't keep me off of that roller coaster. And so one day he just pulled the truck over and rode the roller coaster.

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And he—within a few months he and my brother-in-law disappeared at sea. So I always thought Roy got to ride the roller coaster. *[Laughs]* I remember real young the—there was a fleet of they call them yellow riggers. And they would come through from Southport. We mentioned Wilmington [North Carolina] and they'd come through from Southport [North Carolina]. And I can't—I can't believe I can't remember the name of the man who had them. They were like oh,

twenty, twenty-five of these boats. And fifty foot double-rigged. Well yeah they might have been single rig then I guess when they first came through. And they were painted—all the rigging was painted orange with this surplus paint. And so just as a joke people would call them the yellow riggers. And I remember one—you were talking about somebody named Happy and I remember there was a—a black man named Happy who would—he was deaf and dumb and I remember him juggling Pepsi bottles down there on the dock at night, you know like six Pepsi bottles going like that [*Gestures*] and the boats if—if the owner of the fleet figured the boat wasn't capable of reaching—they had to go to St. Augustine next and I remember they didn't have any kind of electronics—anything, they would put the best Sailor out in front and the rest would be behind him in a line. And if you fell out of line some of them would end up in Key West. They were trying to reach St. Augustine.

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But if he figured that the boat wasn't good enough, seaworthy enough to reach St. Augustine which is 400—300 miles or whatever—he would sell it cheap in McClellanville and the local men would buy those boats and they would nurse another twenty and thirty years out of them. [*Laughs*] Just—just patch them up and keep them—you know and just work off your—Johnny Yates, the Howard—there were three or four more. I'd like to say I could show you one now but I don't think any are left. They finally gave up the ghost.

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So let's see—

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Sara Wood: Well if you'd like I actually have a question for you if it's all right with you. I'm wondering when you were small and you started working on the—you know fueling up on the dock when you saw people come in, when you saw these boats come in was there something about—do you think that—that had an impact on your decision later to go out and—and shrimp and fish?

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William Baldwin: You know I suppose it did. But partly if you lived here and you didn't want to commute somewhere you know you could work for the forest service or something. You didn't have a choice. You know you had to work on—you had to work on the water. And I crabbed and I oystered. And when I got into shrimping I—I really didn't enjoy it, I just did it. I drank a lot and I would—I never drank on the boat but I always drank at night and I didn't enjoy it. But you're probably right, probably did—the impression all that made certainly is why I still live here. You know if you have—have a childhood like that it's pretty—pretty nice.

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I'll give you a recipe. When I was young shrimpers a lot of them were young men and they would come in at night and they would—it was a warehouse up in Georgetown and they'd jump in their Impalas and race up there and all spend the night in the warehouse and come back and get on the boat and go again. And I was working, I guess I was twenty-eight, twenty-nine years old and I had a boat called the *Sherri Ann* which was a nice boat. I didn't keep it up but in the late fall most of the local boats that could we go down to St. Augustine and Key West. But that only left a few of us here shrimping which was good. And but there were five or six North

Carolina boats that came here because they could drive home to South Port in one night. You know and they liked that and so they were here. And I remember coming in one afternoon and they were talking on the radio and they were exchanging fudge recipes. And I just thought well what happened to everybody racing off to the whorehouse? *[Laughs]* But I don't have the fudge recipe for you, I'm sorry.

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So let's see. What else? Do you want to stay on the—the dock or just go onto something else?

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Sara Wood: No, let's stay on the dock for a second. I'm wondering Mr. Baldwin, you said—I have actually two questions for you just going back and I just want to make sure I understand. So you said shrimping wasn't big until the Portuguese came here.

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William Baldwin: Yeah, there was no shrimping until the Portuguese. That was '35 [1935] and '36 [1936] and they came and it was very you know ethnic. The boats, they said all the boats were painted blue and they had eyes, big eyes painted on the bows. And the Portuguese were—normally you'd think of the Portuguese as being poor but they had more money than the local people. And they would stay in people's houses, rent—people would rent them rooms. And I remember Jay Schuler saying that the—the Portuguese boarder gave him you know gave him a bee-bee gun for Christmas. It was just outrageous wealth. *[Laughs]* So then you had a ten year period where you know where there was—you can't say nobody was shrimping off of here

because little North Carolina boats would come through. I remember—I did a 700-page book about my father, wrote it in long-hand about his work on Cape Romaine and I went up to Washington, DC and I spent a week reading the—the office memos of the Fish and Wildlife Service and somebody—one of the early fisher—one of the early—not biologists—caretakers describes in 1940 a North Carolina boat pulling—towing along the Sandy Point Shore and he—he—he cuts the engine down to the point where the boat just is static, you know it’s not moving. He climbed over the side, walked ashore, cut the—cut the heart out of a palmetto fawn and it’s a salad, walked back to the—waded back to the boat and got on the boat and revved it up and kept going. He was going to eat it—part of a—.

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There was an old—I was going to talk about him later but there was an old tugboat captain here that kind of adopted me, Joe [Cumby] and I was doing exactly like you’re doing now. I—I was doing an oral history and—and I said, “Captain Joe?” I had these questions about Cape Romaine and I said, “Captain Joe, now tell me what you,”—when he was a boy? He grew up—he grew up literally on the—on the marsh and I said, “What did y’all eat?” And he said, “Well, we—we’d eat this and that,” and he said, “We—we’d eat a loggerhead turtle.” I said, “You mean the eggs?” He said, “No, no, we’d eat the turtle.” I said, “That’s supposed to be pretty nasty.” And he looked at me with this expression and he—he said, “Billy. If you’re hungry enough you’ll eat anything. You’ll eat dead things on the side of the road.” That was a revelation. [*Laughs*]

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I could—I’ll come back to Joe later if you have time.

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Sara Wood: Do you—do you—when you were growing up did you—were—were people eating a lot of shrimp around here? I mean was it—or I mean I’m curious because there’s the industry.

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William Baldwin: Uh you know I didn’t even really think about it. You know we did eat a lot of shrimp but it—but not—I don’t know that we ate it in proportion to what was there. Shrimp and grits and a slice of tomato my grandmother fed me that all the time, but I can—her favorite meal to feed me was two slices of ham, red rice and green peas out of a can. You know that was supper over and over.

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Crabs, they would boil crabs and my family just had a—a real drinking problem and—and all my aunts and uncles and—and my parents too, they’d get together for a crab boil in my granny’s kitchen and—and everybody would be tight and they’d always—they’d pour the crabs into the boiling water and one or two of them would always get out on the floor and they’d chase him around. And over and over again one would get behind the refrigerator and it would just stink. It would be there forever that smell of rotten crab you know. So yes, we ate crabs.

[Laughs]

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I—thinking back, oysters, we didn't—you know I just don't think. We didn't really have oyster roasts, but you just ate them all the time. My uncle when he was a boy we were sort of raised—I just followed him around like a little dog really and—and when he was a boy they had the Santee Gun Club which was all these lawyers from Philadelphia and New York came to hunt duck and they had a big place about five miles north of here. And [Inaudible's] job was to supply them with oysters. And they kept the oysters in—in croaker sacks right there in the front yard and there weren't—there weren't even septic tanks. The toilets just emptied right in the creek. And they—they kept them—I'm not saying they just were trying to poison the lawyers from Philadelphia 'cause they ate themselves that way but it's amazing that—that the whole town didn't die from God knows—well actually the whole—. If you go over to the local cemetery up until World War II actually the majority is infant death. That was probably malaria I think killing them, so—.

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Sara Wood: And what—what was your uncle's full name?

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William Baldwin: He was Rutledge Baker Leland and the second but everybody called him Weaver.

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Sara Wood: Do you know why they called him that?

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William Baldwin: He was the wee whine in the family and so that's why he was Weaver.

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Sara Wood: And he ran the dock that you talked to me about?

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William Baldwin: Yeah, yeah he did a lot of everything. He—he had—he just—his wife taught school and he did what he felt like. He was—he ended up a millionaire. He just—he ran the seafood company and ran the dock and had—had a fleet of shrimp boats. He just—he was just a wonderful person. He had a few flaws but he was wonderful.

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Sara Wood: And what was the name of this company—?

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William Baldwin: Well you had the Esso distributorship. I supposed he inherited that from his father and Carolina Seafood. And he had the [Bellatrix] and the [Aldebaran] with Chan Stroman, the Miss Kim, [Bellatrix II], Sea Pal. There were three or four more. And I would work for him, I ran the Kim for him. I remember after Hugo the whole fleet, everybody—you've seen pictures, the whole fleet washed up and I had been running the Kim a few years before that. So that was a Hatteras trawler, fifty-five foot and oh it was a piece of junk. I mean no—he never kept anything up and so all—all—even the outboards, I had the only outboard that survived the storm 'cause I

had just at the very last minute, it was on a trailer in the back yard and I tied the trailer off. And otherwise, every outboard in the town was lost. And I was taking the insurance adjuster around and we—we pulled up to the Kim and we were walking up the bank toward it and I—and I was getting ready to say well if nothing else at least that old death trap is out of the water. And he said, you wouldn't believe what I had to pay your uncle for that. *[Laughs]* So I didn't say anything. *[Laughs]*

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Sara Wood: Well Mr. Baldwin, I wanted to ask you one other thing and then I wanted to ask you, you said you—you started—you went out after college. But before I ask you about that you said earlier—there's something you said that you know if you lived around here you didn't have a choice but to work around shrimping or around the dock somehow. And I'm wondering if you could explain why.

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William Baldwin: Well I think when my father came here in '38 [1938] he made a joke. He said that the people just sold groceries to each other. And the other thing he said was they didn't even know there was a Depression, that they had always been poor. You know they had nothing since the Civil War. And there were thirty-nine stores on Main Street. And there were probably seven grocery stores, you know and three barber shops. And people thought, they got so excited when they paved Highway 17 which was in '38 [1938] and '39 [1939]. They would—they would write these booster articles about McClellanville is going to boom. Well it didn't boom. Every—everybody just got in their cars and drove away to shop and the whole—it happened all over America, the whole village just shrank, you know shut down. And I'm thinking if you—there

were a couple of jobs left on Main Street and you could commute to Charleston or Georgetown and the Forest Service was here and they moved the Fish and Wildlife Service after '55 [1955]. There just really wasn't anything else to do.

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Sara Wood: And one other question that came up 'cause you were talking about all the—all the folks who'd come in from the boats who are predominantly black and speaking in Gullah. Was that—were African Americans mostly the ones who were shrimping at the time when you were growing up or did you see white shrimpers? I'm just curious as to—.

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William Baldwin: You know I would—that—that fleet of yellow riggers I think they were mostly—they weren't all black. There was a famous shrimper named Dooney Watts that kind of left—led things and he was—he's a character in a—in a—I don't know you, you said you were in Wilmington. Robert Roark wrote a book called *The Old Man and the Boy*. And Dooney Watts is in that as a character. They were black I think except for Dooney probably and one or two more but locally, you know I can't really—. A lot of veterans at first in the '40s [1940s], maybe a third—a third black captains, about like that, all—most of the strikers were black but not always.

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Sara Wood: And what does a striker do?

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William Baldwin: Well people always used to ask what's the name and it's—I think a striker was an assistant on a steam—steam boat, the old song John Henry, remember he's hammering and he's got a striker holding the spike or something. A real—in the old—old days, a striker got there early and he made the coffee and he laid out the nets and everything was ready to go when the captain stepped onto the boat. But by the time I came along the striker, you had to go into his mama's house or his grandmama's house and drag him out of bed and get him on the boat and curse him. That was a different age. *[Laughs]*

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Sara Wood: Mr. Baldwin how did you end up on a boat? I mean how—you said you went to but can you kind of talk about how that all happened for you?

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William Baldwin: I—I wanted to be a writer and I was in college to be a writer and I wrote my Master's Thesis on the Dadas and the Surrealist. And that was in '68 [1968] or '67 [1967] and you can imagine what that prepared you for. Any—I mean I'm saying there weren't any jobs in McClellanville well for a Dada Surrealist Scholar there weren't any jobs in the State of South Carolina. And my uncle—so there I was with my diploma and my uncle Weaver he—he said well, you—I'll give you—I don't remember what he paid me—\$4 an hour, \$6—maybe—\$3.50, so there was an old tugboat captain, Captain Joe Cumby and Joe was about sixty-two or sixty-three and he had been on the water. He was the one I—I just told you about if you're hungry enough you'll eat anything. And—and we were—had gotten this—this dead-rise oyster boat from the Chesapeake and he had a homemade railway in his front yard. And he said, “Well you can be Joe's carpenter helper.” And—and the only—he said, “Now Joe has got a violent temper.

If you see him—if you see him start to lose his temper just run. Just run as fast as you can.” And two or three of the old-timers around the dock, the waterfront, they came down and whispered that to me. They said, “If—if Joe starts to lose his temper just run.”

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So my first week with Captain Joe he got out of the car and he kind of grunted at me and—and he—what did he do? He had—he had a caulking iron and an ax and a caulking hammer and a saw, handsaw and he started at that bow of that dead rise boat and caulking and if a plank was bad he—he would ax—he would take the ax and shape—. You know sometimes a dead rise is almost like a propeller. And Joe would shape that thing with the ax and he just caulked and—and what did we do? After you caulked it we painted it with yellow and orange paint. I would do that. And then he puttied on top of that. And he re-nailed the whole thing with these big old spike things and on Friday we got down to the propeller. And he took the ax and knocked the propeller off and the propeller was this old rotten brass thing. It was probably about maybe forty inches. I don’t know. I mean he drug it up on the bank and he scribed it, the whole edges of the prop were rotten and he scribed it and he took the same ax that he had used to shape the boat, he sharpened it and he chopped a new perimeter on the propeller with the ax [*Laughs*] and took the file he had been using to sharpen the ax and he put an edge on the propeller and we put it back on. And that was the bottom work. And he went on—we became really good friends after you know I knew him another ten years. So that’s how I ended up on the water. I think after that I ran the seafood company for a year. And then I started running crab pots during my lunch hour and I was making \$70 a week running the seafood company and I could make \$90 a week in one hour with the crab pots.

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And I started running the crab pots and we were getting eleven cents for the crabs and we were paying nine cents for the little rotten menhaden but there were so many crabs around that you could make and you know we were—my wife and I, we were—there weren't enough hippies around to be hippies but if it was Thursday morning and I pulled—I had forty-five pots and if I pulled twenty pots then I had enough money to last a week and I'd just turn around and go back.

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So one September day I went out and I pulled the first pot. It was in Casino Creek and it was jammed full of giant jimmy crabs. It had every crab that you could put into a crab pot. And I went to the next pot and it was the same and I went to the next—forty-five pots. I went back that afternoon, same thing, you couldn't fit another crab. And I had two \$250 weeks back-to-back. And I looked at my wife and I said let's build a house. And we did. [Laughs] We built—we built the house and lot together cost \$1,600. The house—house must have been \$1,000. I don't know which was \$1,000 and which was the lot but I built it because I had two good weeks. And the old sonofabitch, he was a Maryland truck driver running the crabs and he lowered the price of crabs to—we were paying more for the rotten menhaden bait than he was paying us for jimmy crabs. Gradually people to get away from that people just started doing basket crabs themselves to Baltimore and you know the price shot way up and eventually the crab company shut down. It was bringing crabs, trawled crabs from North Carolina. And you know I don't know if it would help you. We've got—the museum sponsored this black woman photographer, Benny Days Moore, and technically we the museum we paid her expenses and we own the photographs but I would like you to—if you ever wanted to use them get her permission and just telling her you're

doing it or whatever. I've got photographs of the crab dock with crabbers, with shrimpers, with oysterers and she's an excellent photographer if that will help you.

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Sara Wood: Does she live around here?

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William Baldwin: Her grandmom, I mean her mother lives here and she—she comes and goes. She lives in Columbia.

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Sara Wood: So I wanted to ask you a couple more questions is that okay Mr. Baldwin? Could I ask you a few more questions?

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William Baldwin: Oh I'll sit here and talk all day if you'd like.

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Sara Wood: I'm wondering, so you—did you go away to college and then come back?

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William Baldwin: Yeah. I went—I went to Clemson [University]. All the—if you leave here you're supposed to be an electrical engineer and you're supposed to go to Clemson. That was the ultimate, so I went—I actually went and studied architecture for a year and got thrown out and

you know. My father read to us when we were children. Writing has always been very important to me. Just the sound of words, and that's what I did.

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Sara Wood: How did you get thrown out?

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William Baldwin: Hmm?

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Sara Wood: How did you get thrown out?

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William Baldwin: Oh I went and stayed in the pool hall when I was supposed to be working and I wasn't much of a scholar.

00:37:01

Sara Wood: You said that you were—you wrote your Masters on Dada—

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William Baldwin: On the Influence of the Dadas and Surrealists on the novels of Nathaniel West. And Nathaniel West only sold 300 books when he published them so that shows you how obscure [*Laughs*]—.

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Sara Wood: How did you choose that? Why did you choose that?

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William Baldwin: I just—I thought he was a funny writer. I stayed drunk ‘til I was thirty. I sank—I sank at fifty-five a boat, sank it in the middle of the night trying to get—trying to get down to Rockland. We were on this bar beaten apart and I guess if I had pushed across the bar and gone down a ways I could have gotten back into the channel and maybe gotten back inside. I just hated that life and we had bourbon and beer on the boat which I never ever should do. You know you just don’t want to—and I said oh shit. Let’s drink this. And so we just drank it and the boat came part underneath us. And the dawn came and there was a helicopter overhead of us and I thought if I get on that helicopter it’ll be five or six hours before I get a drink. I think I’ll just try to swim to shore and—and getting ready to. Well you had—there were three of us, had two strikers and we had life jackets and we were getting ready to swim ashore and there was a—there was a V12 but it was a shallow—shallow draft boat. Keith Swindle’s daddy and he was right off the bow and we just jumped aboard and swam to him and I drank a couple more days and then I stopped. So I’ve been sober forty years. I went back after that and I built houses for about three years and I was going broke. And one of the black captains drowned at the dock and that was the Kim and we were putting me on the Kim with Billy Graham and—and I started off—at some point. I take that back, yeah he—he put me on the Kim because I had gone back as a striker. I had made—I was broke from building houses and my son Aaron was in the ninth grade and he was making \$300 a week as a striker in the ninth grade. And he went back to high school, I went down on the dock and got his job and stayed on that boat, the stern of that boat and Larry

McClellan was a cook. *[Laughs]* He was a great cook. He's the one you should be interviewing, so—.

00:40:20

I left the stern of that boat and took the Kim and the very first day we towed up in the Keys and it was one of my favorite places. And I had a—made a tri—you put on a little tri-net to see what's out there and I had thirty big old white shrimp that just laid there and you know that meant it was a good tri. And I reached up and cut the radio off and I turned across the bow of Keith Swindle's son. I could already tell he was saying what do you see, what do you see? And I just went click. It was this pure aggression. This is the son of the man who had saved me. In three years it was just like nothing had changed. I just cut the radio off and just cut straight across his bow and went back onto shrimp. *[Laughs]* So that's what shrimping was.

00:41:25

Sara Wood: So how long did you stay with that when you went back?

00:41:31

William Baldwin: Altogether I shrimped nine years. I had a little boat for two years and I shrimped a big boat—well a little boat for two, the big boat I had for five years and then I struck for two years and then I ran the Kim for the rest of that winter. I could—I could put my shrimp boat recipes in here. I had a—when I was talking about getting my strikers out of bed those were the white strikers. But I had black strikers that were much better. I mean some of them could have been captains easily. Baby Ray could definitely have been a captain. He was a captain when he could get a boat. And I had him on the boat for one fall and there was no food on the boat of

any kind. There wasn't even coffee. There was a bottle of ketchup. There wasn't anything to drink but water and we worked like that together for three months. And there were two—two things to eat. You're catching these little—they were winter shrimp. They were little—end of November you know you count—the shrimp have a count and these would be like seventy, eighty-count to the pound. And go out on the stern and see what's there and pick up a handful of them. As you're walking by the muffler which was an old water heater pipe flange on it, throw those shrimp on the flange of the muffler and just leave them there until they were baked. And then you could just eat them like candy. Just like you'd eat them—tails and all—I mean heads and all, you just crunched them and they were kind of sweet.

00:43:31

So we had that. And then the other thing Baby Ray would do, he would take a—he'd take saltwater out of the deck hose and he'd heat it and get it boiling on the stove and he'd throw some shrimp on there with the heads on and he'd bring them to a boil and he'd sit them aside for a few minutes. And then he would pour off that saltwater with the juice of the shrimp heads and all in it and he'd pour that off and then I think he'd throw away half of that and he'd take the ketchup and pour it in that and stir it around. And then he'd pour that back in the pot with the shrimp and stir it all around. And then we would just eat out of the pot and the—the sauce was whatever stuck to your fingers as you were peeling the shrimp. And then that would get on the shrimp and then you would eat it.

00:44:31

And my last Baby Ray cooking story was there wasn't anything to drink on the boat of anything and one day I found a Pepsi Cola in the tool locker and I hid it from Baby Ray and drank it. *[Laughs]*

00:44:48

Sara Wood: Did anyone ever find out?

00:44:50

William Baldwin: Well you're going to tell people. They'll know now. *[Laughs]* So that was a—I can back up a little bit. Oystering I got so broke I got—well my wife and I had a dime. My parents were rich I mean by any standard they were rich. My father sold plantations. And I could have called over there to Summerville, sixty miles and said I'm broke, but I had a dime. And Captain Joe got me a job as a carpenter for the tugboat line down at Charleston Harbor and I went down there for the day and they didn't—you know they were all laid back and they said man we'll get you some wood and we'll find something to do. And I bought a Coke with the dime and one of the old captains bought me a pack of *[inaudible]*, so at the end of the day I came home. And I said I can't—so the only thing left to do there was a black oyster crew towing from McClellanville down to *[Inaudible]*. And that's how they—they had tow boats. The—they had—they were using batteaus back then, wooden batteaus, sixteen to twenty-foot long and I built oyster batteaus for a winter. And they had little five-horse Johnson motors. It was a big—I think there was one 9.9 Johnson and they would put ten to twenty boats behind the tow boat and they

would tow to [Inaudible] and then you'd get out and each person would go where they thought oysters were and pick them and then you would tow home. It was about a two and a half hour tow.

00:46:42

And I remember the—everybody brought little tin pots of chicken bog or ham bog, you know pilau and they would heat those on the—on the manifold of the engine. That was cooking. And they had one little gas plate they'd make coffee on, a little gas burner. And I've got one nice picture by Vinny Days Moore of a man cleaning a pot off the—and I'll show you that if you want it. But I stayed on that boat for two months and that was an education. And I won the Lillian Smith Award in '93 [1993] for—that's for writing about race relations in the South. And I was in Atlanta and I spoke to those men because they found their way into the book one way or another but almost all of them died. And they just died from—they drowned, be in car wrecks, I mean it was one called Flat Top that he was working on a Ford Fairlane and the—and the fan motor, the blade of the fan broke off and cut his throat. It was—it's just the lives they lived were just so hard you know.

00:48:13

I think maybe three of them are alive after twenty years.

00:48:20

Sara Wood: Mr. Baldwin I have a question about that. It seems like there is a common thread of having a really you know it's—it's not an easy life to work out on a boat and it's sort of a

common thread that people have. And do you have any idea or theories as to why people who lead pretty hard lives they're tied into the—this industry somehow?

00:48:49

William Baldwin: Into the fishing industry?

00:48:51

Sara Wood: Yeah.

00:48:53

William Baldwin: Well I think it is the most dangerous, something—I can't remember what's more dangerous, being a jockey or something. But the fishing occupation is probably the second most dangerous in the country. And I think they always said that the Alaskan numbers, the Bering Strait kind of skewed things but it was dangerous enough around here. I can show you. There's—we have a memorial to the fishermen down at the dock. And it's—in the black community there really wasn't anything else to do than to fish. You know a few of them were farming but I—I swear. I think there must have been fifty to sixty black men oystering. With three different docks you could work from—for and they would divide up between that. And they'd make—when I was running the dock in '68 [1968] they may make \$500 a week. They could pick 100 bushels a day. They—they were men now, they were serious and they could—they do that for three—four months of the year and then get on shrimp boats. Shrimp season, you

could catch a few shrimp maybe in—winter shrimp, roe shrimp in May but shrimping was really June 1st through November. And there were other things. You could—people would put on nets and go conking and they'd go for scallops, rock shrimp, they would rock shrimp. Those things never lasted and they were just kind of fads.

00:50:58

Sara Wood: Do you remember the names of the different docks around here?

00:51:01

William Baldwin: Yeah, there were—right out at the waterway was Dalton Thomas' dock and Dalton was sort of scientific. He was probably the most organized and then we had my Uncle Weaver, that was Carolina Seafood. And at one time Carolina Seafood, they shucked—they had black women shucking oysters there. It—the Crab Company actually started there and moved down to Dalton's dock. And then Tom Duke had the furthest end dock and he—he had three shrimp, four shrimp boats but he was—oystering was his big thing. There were the old Shoke(s) family, black—black family they had a—they had oyster leases but that was kind of passing out—fading out and that was it.

00:52:20

If you go back to the '40s [1940s] there were probably eight or nine little—little docks you know that kind of cropped up. It wasn't any boat-building tradition to speak of. There were a couple of small boats that got built here. South Carolina really doesn't have a—especially north of Charleston there isn't any tradition of boat-building. There was Legares there in [Inaudible] and they built—they built nice rowboats and things. But I take that—the Shoke(s) family was

a—a lot of family and back after the Civil War they—they built some substantial boats you know, fifty, sixty-feet maybe. And that—that was it.

00:53:17

I learned to—my uncle wanted me to build some oyster batteaus. And the big normally—they were big pointed bow things that—and I'd seen them built you know and knew kind of how they were built but there was a boy over in—in Georgetown building batteaus that were like—they were shaped almost like Boston Whalers and they were sled-like and they were eighteen-feet long and he got a job—he got a scholarship to the GM Design School in Detroit and so I just took one of his batteaus and I can't remember whether it was old and I knocked it apart or what but [*Laughs*] I just copied it and I probably built twenty batteaus. I could build one in a few days. And you just wouldn't believe the—the sides were yellow pine and all the ribs were five-quarter oak. It was green, it was—the oak dried and you couldn't bend it. but if it was green—and when it was time to—when it was time to build a batteuas, my uncle would just call over to the Dawson Lumber Company and the next day they would dump the lumber. The cypress—everything was cypress on the—on the you know the bottom of the thing and it was—it was not a knot in the cypress—five-quarter, knot-free and it was \$100 a-thousand.

00:54:56

I wish I could just get it back and build with it now. It just was galvanized nail and roofing tar, cotton, just beat them together. That was my career as a boat-builder, so when I went and starting publishing novels, somehow somebody in New York City converted that to William Baldwin was a shrimp boat builder and that's how it went for years. [*Laughs*] I didn't say anything.

00:55:36

Sara Wood: Well I'm wondering Mr. Baldwin, you—I wanted to back up for a second because you said—you mentioned when your son was in ninth grade when he went back to high school or when he was in high school you took his job. And I'm wondering you know you—I know you said you were building houses around that time and things were tight. But I'm wondering if there were other reasons besides economic reasons for going back. Is there something you missed about it that you wanted to go back and—?

00:56:05

William Baldwin: No, but when I—once I got on—I did enjoy it so if—it's as close as I ever came to enjoying—enjoying shrimping because you didn't have the responsibility and the boat was a 45-foot fiberglass boat and molded and you know to keep it clean you just sprayed the deck off and we weren't catching much shrimp. I could—the first week I made \$1,600 'cause we just happened to hit the shrimp and I—I had lost \$5,000 the year before, so to make \$1,600 in a week was—was pretty good.

00:56:52

Larry—I remember that first season I laid in the bunk and read the Bible. I could usually get the deck cleaned up in ten, fifteen minutes and I read—I just wanted to read—I hadn't ever read the Bible, so I read the Bible and it—and Larry would cook Chinese food. I remember he liked—that was good, but he could cook anything. We'd have shrimp and whatever and I was an awful—I was an awful striker and he was just really patient. I remember coming out one morning, we were coming along by—we were going out to Northeast Point because it's not a

real channel but with those little boats you could go wherever you wanted and—. And I was back on the stern and I'd let the nets down and he came back. He had the boat set on automatic pilot and he came back and he—and I did keep the boat pretty filthy. I mean you know—and he said Billy, I had a great aunt and she would scrub the floor and then she would scrub the wall and then she'd scrub the ceiling. And when she was done, she'd start again scrubbing the floor. And I said Larry, well you're taking what is obviously a psychological disorder and trying to turn it into a virtue. And he threw—he was coiling that line and he threw the line down on the deck and he said you would say that. And then he went back up on the stern and he—and he didn't bother me after that until it was—I worked for him—the strangest thing was working for him on the—on the oyster boats.

00:58:46

In the winter he had an oyster bar. I don't know what they call them—clam boats and they were—they really kept the town afloat for about ten years. They were going to re-channel the—they were taking the water that they were diverting into the Cooper River, they built this giant lake upstate in the '30s and they dumped the water from the Santee into the Charleston Harbor. And they realized it was costing them millions/billions of dollars to drag it. So they put it all back into the Santee and they knew that it was—when they put it back into the Santee it was going to kill the clams and oysters there. So they let us go in and McClellanville for at least ten years just lived off of this—we got these—everybody went out and bought these—they have a conveyor that goes down the side and most of them are around thirty-foot, big-bellied little boats and maybe gas engine running them and diesel. Another engine running the big four-inch pump and then another engine, little Brigs and Stratton running the belt, nothing with a muffler. And

it's like the worst of Henry Ford but you're on the water. And those days were sixteen-hour days and I still got callouses, calcium deposits in the palms of my hands from that repetitive picking the clams off of the conveyor and I had missed you know the first three or four years—some of them paid for their boats the first week. That's how good it was.

01:00:47

And we were coming home that first night and one of the boys were complaining 'cause we had only made \$300 a day. And you know I had—to me that was a fortune and he was used to \$600 and \$700 and \$800 a day for a crewman. And so those little boats—and I don't remember eating, I'm sure we must have stopped and ate. We probably had sandwiches. You'd leave at four in the morning and you'd be home at nine. I remember that was North River. The DDT was so bad in South Carolina that we were down—they said we were down to six eagle pairs and whatever and two of them were on North River and we saw them every day. You know so that was strange that you were in this little pocket of the world [*Laughs*] and beating along with that—that sound, that deadless bang, bang, bang.

01:01:45

My job on the boat ended up picking—picking single oysters that had gotten by everybody. And my last day working I wanted to see what I could pick just out of curiosity. Usually I picked about thirty a day. And I wanted to see—I had been on there two years and I wanted to see what I could pick. I picked sixty-seven bushels of single oysters off the end of that conveyor that one day.

01:02:11

Sara Wood: In one day?

01:02:12

William Baldwin: Uh-hm and that was the end of my career on those boats.

01:02:19

Sara Wood: That day was?

01:02:19

William Baldwin: Yeah, I just wanted to see if I could—if I really tried what—what was there.

[Laughs]

01:02:28

Sara Wood: What a way to go out though.

01:02:29

William Baldwin: Yeah.

01:02:29

Sara Wood: Sixty seven bushels.

01:02:31

William Baldwin: Big deal.

01:02:34

Sara Wood: And so why did you decide to stop?

01:02:36

William Baldwin: I can't—oh I was down on the dock and this fellow just came down and asked me if I wanted to frame up a house. I said yeah. My brother-in-law had dropped out of the—his wife wasn't happy him being in the Army and he—he was a career officer and he had dropped out. He was going back to the Army so he and I framed up that house and I just kept building after that. I built for I don't know another twenty-five years. I built like seventy-eighty houses. But I started writing, I was—when I was on that boat with Larry reading the Bible, I think I wrote a novel right after that called the Fennel Family Papers. And it was a spoof on McClellanville and it—it got better reviews than *Hard to Catch Mercy*. It was my big book. But you can buy the Fennel Family Papers now online for a penny. So I'll give you a case of them when you leave. You can't just have one. *[Laughs]* You have to take a case. *[Laughs]*

01:03:58

Sara Wood: What do you miss most about being out on the water and working on the water in some capacity—all these capacities Mr. Baldwin?

01:04:08

William Baldwin: Nothing, I—I have an outboard right there behind you that—it hadn't cranked in—it's cranked once in the last ten years. I took it out last year and it was just this—the noise and the banging you know but I kayak—I kayak at least once a week for three and four-hour—five-hour trips and two days ago we went out in the waterway and circled Jeremy Island

out there for four and a half hours of just you and silence and you're not expected to catch anything [*Laughs*] or do anything.

01:04:59

I had an interview like this years and years ago. I mean it could have been twenty-five years ago and it was a girl just like you I guess. And her theme was environmentalism and fishermen and—and she—and we started the interview out and I said—I said, “Well you got to—you got to understand that—that a fisherman is a predator. When he gets up in the morning it's with the intent to kill something.” [*Laughs*] And the interview didn't go on but another three minutes or so. [*Laughs*] That was the end. I didn't have any of the right answers. But that is what a fisherman is, he is a predator. And a kayaker is not. A kayaker is passive. So that's what I mean.

01:05:52

Sara Wood: Do you—when you go out there kayaking do you see a lot of the big ships or do you see larger boats out there or are you pretty much on your own out there?

01:06:03

William Baldwin: No. I've—especially I've made trips in the winter by myself. It takes about two hours to get to the ocean and two hours back and I've done it and not—not even seen a crabber much less a shrimp or nothing. When we were—it—it would be 100 boats there in September. You went on Sandy Point Beach you just saw boats—boats—boats. They'd come from North Carolina and we probably had forty, fifty boats packing out of here of our own and you could stand on Sandy Point you didn't see nothing but boats. You might see three hulls off in the distance now. So that's definitely changed. But you can go—two days ago we didn't—we

saw a yacht in the waterway and we saw a couple of crabbers. That's it. But we didn't see a single pelican and didn't see a single skimmer. We got on the far side of the island and we saw a bunch of [inaudible] and egrets and herons and all but it's nothing like what I remember as a boy. You just—when you went out there you were—it was just birds, birds, ducks everywhere.

01:07:35

My father did a—he did—he did census, duck census and you're talking about 25,000 green-winged teal spending the night in one little creek you know. All that's gone. It's amazing the—the deadness, the silent spring, the—pretty grim.

01:08:06

Sara Wood: How have you noticed that it—just in terms of McClellanville how the fishing industry has changed since you grew up and worked the water?

01:08:15

William Baldwin: How—how the fishing industry has changed?

01:08:18

Sara Wood: Yeah here in McClellanville over the years.

01:08:20

William Baldwin: Well if you go way back, there were—following the Civil War, probably 1880s there were oyster factories here and the black men you know going for oysters and—and all along the upper creek were giant piles of oyster shell and that was probably raw shucking. Bulls Bay oysters it was strange, everything was sent—everything that—that Tom Dukes, that place went to Utah in cans, you know. Somebody said there was a movie, a cowboy movie, Tom [Micks] or something and there was Bulls Bay oyster cans all across the back of the store.

01:09:10

They went from that. The other giant thing was terrapin and I think 1900—I went back and read all the federal seafood censuses and I think McClellanville was the number one producer of terrapin in the United States. And all out here at the end of Pinkney Street those were the terrapin pans and even up into the '20s [1920s], '30s [1930s] a black man or a white man for that matter you could make fifty cents a day on these little—working for these logging companies. They had little trains all through the woods and logging fifty cent a day and I had read that you could get fifty cent a terrapin catching them but my buddy Tim [Penniger] said, “No it was 50-cent an inch across the back of the shell.” They were—they were icing them and sending them to New York for terrapin soup.

01:10:15

And so if you could make fifty cent a day in the woods wrestling these logs or you could make it you know paddling and rowing around the—and so they just caught almost every terrapin and—and that's what killed it. They just finally wiped them out. And you know we still got a few terrapin around but nothing like we once had apparently.

01:10:43

Sara Wood: Well you said that they were sending them up to New York but was there a tradition of eating terrapin around here?

01:10:49

William Baldwin: Yeah, yeah terrapin soup was a big deal. Just the—to cook it, the Santee Gun Club was supposed to have been giving—Grover Cleveland would come down to hunt and he's supposed to have given the—the cook a—a gold watch as a reward for the—how good the terrapin soup was. And the old—you ask the old-timers now and they say that it's—they said it was a lot of work to clean the terrapin and then—and then you ask them now and they say well it's bad luck to—to clean a terrapin or to cook terrapin soup.

01:11:29

So that nobody does it that I know of.

01:11:32

Sara Wood: Do you know why it's bad luck?

01:11:34

William Baldwin: That might just be an excuse not to make it. Charlotte Jenkins, the Gullah cook, she's one of the ones that told me it's bad luck and that you don't want to make it. I guess it's somebody around town that could probably still give you a—I know there's recipes for it in all the old books, uh-hm.

01:11:57

So they went from terrapin to—terrapin, oysters and that—and shrimping was next in the ‘30s [1930s] and ‘40s [1940s].

01:12:11

Sara Wood: Is there still a lot of shrimping around here in McClellanville today? Do you know what the atmosphere looks like in terms of the industry here in McClellanville?

01:12:21

William Baldwin: Well we—we probably got more boats than most places left but I don’t—you know what? I don’t know what’s packing out here eight or nine boats with Carolina Seafood and some small ones right next door. I don’t know a tenth, a tenth of what it was. They’re young—they’re still—I think of them as being young, in their forties, shrimpers like that around.

01:12:52

Sara Wood: And Carolina Seafood is that still in your family somehow? You mentioned your uncle.

01:12:56

William Baldwin: Yeah, it’s my cousin, uh-hm. Yeah we can go down there if you like and walk around and see who is—see what they’re doing. He packs out long liners. He packs out shark—shark fishermen, these boats that work the Gulf Stream. Black fish—always were black fishing here, when the shrimping was nothing going on we would go out. And I remember when I was running Carolina Seafood the only time we were sure of a market for the black fish—

everything went to Blue Ribbon Fish Company in New York City and you know if it left here and it was the Chinese New Year. The Chinese would buy the black fish for the New Year, whatever it was and you knew you were going to get paid then.

01:13:52

A lot of times, they could send you—little black fish, they could send you a bill for freight back, the fish weren't enough to pay the freight to get them there. Medium black fish and big black fish you know you could get something. There would be all this junk fish that they had been throwing away for years. I can't remember what—and we had names for them like pig fish and sucker fish and gradually over the years they marketed all of them and they would change—they would change the name to something exotic [*Laughs*] and—and you know and clean them, and send them off. That was different.

01:14:36

Sara Wood: And how many—how many years Mr. Baldwin did you run Carolina Seafood?

01:14:41

William Baldwin: I just ran it for one year while Rut—Rut was in—in Vietnam. And he came back and he started not to run it. He started to make a career in the Air Force, but he changed his mind. He tried to turn it into a fishermen's cooperative a few years back and he couldn't—he couldn't get anybody to cooperate long enough to—. So he just keeps running it.

01:15:15

Sara Wood: So he's still running it today?

01:15:17

William Baldwin: Hmm?

01:15:17

Sara Wood: He's still running it today?

01:15:19

William Baldwin: Yeah, we—we can talk to him if you'd like. He probably—he might be down there now.

01:15:27

Sara Wood: And I just wanted to ask you because you wrote about this. Can you talk a little bit about—you know you've already mentioned a lot of people who you worked alongside over the years in this industry. But in terms of what you know what the—what the racial relations were like here between white and black in the industry. Did people mostly work alongside each other? I'm just kind of curious as to what that—

01:15:54

William Baldwin: Yeah, let me go to the bathroom. Blessing from John and the Sally May was starting out. You know she had some fame already and she came and spent the weekend with

John and his wife. And I said well she liked John. He said well you know a woman, aggressive [Laughs] so that's John. This is John's wife Nancy.

01:16:21

Sara Wood: Oh.

01:16:22

William Baldwin: And we have—we have an amateur photo club. I'm on Facebook. There's [inaudible] people that I really like. And a nurse, many days [inaudible] I edited a book for her. Yeah, lots of photographers.

01:16:56

Let's see, you ready?

01:16:58

Sara Wood: Yeah.

01:16:59

William Baldwin: Well I think back on race relations there were a lot more blacks in the seafood industry when I was younger. I mean many more. And I don't think it was exactly intentional but the blacks usually picked shucking oysters and the whites when they went out and did oysters picked single oysters. I don't know that it was any reason for that 'cause today they're only—I only know of two or three, the [Gathers] brothers and they're ancient, I mean ancient men. And they'll go out one day a week or not at all but there are three—there are three

people—white men, two white men and one white girl picking shucking—picking—well basically they're oyster-roast oysters. So a white person can pick a shucking oyster. It is humanly possible and I think that the blacks on the shrimp boats they were making a lot of money. They were making enough money to own their own boats but there was almost this—there was this feeling that—that if they owned their own boat that the dock owners would discriminate against them and you know and keep them from making money.

01:18:24

That—by the mid 1980s there were some black boat owners. I think there could have been before that but they—part of it was paranoia but you know I'm not black so maybe it wasn't paranoia. But you talked about going to the Backmans. They were probably the exception for the coast. They—I mean they had a fleet down there. And I think you know that's about all I can think. I used—like I say I used those black oystermen in *Hard to Catch Mercy*. I kind of drew on them as to what kind of people they were—very proud, very proud of what they did—some of them you know, the exception I guess some weren't proud but—.

01:19:22

I remember Gene Gibbs he was one of the \$500 a week men and—and—and he showed me when you came in to unload at night you had a big bucket, a big iron bucket that was supposed to be a bushel but it was really more than a bushel. And so there were ways when you—you were shoveling the oysters up out of the bottom of the batteaus and when you—when you laid the—you laid the edge of the shovel on the edge of the iron bucket and you rolled it 'cause you were trying to create as much air as possible [*Laughs*] and even when they were

culling, they showed me how you would—you're knocking the dead shell off but you—you leave as many of these little splinters sticking up 'cause you want—you want to fill the bucket up as quick and easy as you can.

01:20:26

And so I remember that.

01:20:33

Sara Wood: Mr. Baldwin I only have—well I have a million questions for you but we've been sitting here for about an hour and a half. I'm wondering just one more thing for now. How has your experience working, shrimping, oystering, crabbing—all of it influenced your—you know you talked about wanting—having this inkling to write when you were younger and you're a writer obviously now but how has—do you think that if you hadn't had all of the time on the water do you think—I'm just curious as how that has influenced your writing. I know you've written about it but just in terms of you know that's quite an—all these experiences to have and then take to the page later.

01:21:25

William Baldwin: Well I think, real depressed even aside from being an alcoholic I was suicidal and I would—I would stop crabbing or stop oystering and ride around for an hour to look for a place to drown myself. And yet there is a kind of a—the Cape can just absorb that you know. It's so beautiful and you just—you just stay alive. It does—I don't know, whatever you throw at it you know [*Laughs*] it kind of absorbs. And if anything shrimping especially deadens that. I mean you know I didn't even go saltwater fishing for like seven or eight years after I got

off the shrimp boat. I just—I really hadn't started appreciating it until I started kayaking and that's been eight or nine years. And I go with other people sometimes but Cape Marsh I just go by myself. And you really—you're right there on the level with things and I never really—you draw on everything when you're writing but I began to do the poetry four years ago and I've got a collection I'm putting together for USC Press. I've been working on it the last couple of days and the strongest they—they think the strongest things in there are the—the village and the Cape Marsh poems. So finally you know I have gotten to—to draw on it in a really direct way.

01:23:16

If you've got the patience I'll read you two or three if you want?

01:23:20

Sara Wood: Would that be all right?

01:23:23

William Baldwin: Oh I'm so flattered, yeah. Want me to do it?

01:23:26

Sara Wood: Yes, please.

01:23:38

William Baldwin: These are—this is the letter to the publisher. I've gotten that far. This is—this is one of my buddies Sam Savage. He really liked this poem and I—. So he's—it's called *The Boat*.

01:23:57

All things worth the knowing they claim a river knows and where it's worth the going is where a river goes. Oh to be that boy, oh to bail a boat, oh to be that boy and once more be afloat.

01:24:17

That's what—that was Jeremy Creek.

01:24:24

This is sort of a 1920s poem called *Village One*.

01:24:33

She closed the window on the marsh and on the creek's hard bend. She closed it on the Africans who rode for terrapin. And on the polish shuckers, their burdened children too, she closed it on the Portuguese who went to sea in big-eyed boats painted all sky blue.

01:24:50

And on her captain husband and on her fate-boat crew and on the sun and on the moon and on the tides at sea, she pulled the drapes and waited but God refused to end the world. And what is left for her to do, a child is born and then he dies and she is there to close his eyes and when spring creeps around again to stain the porch with pollen, she takes an oak-shaft broom in hand and sweeps end-to-end.

01:25:22

Here's one that tells a true story. *Nor'easter with pasted tongue my sides are flung, among the tossing grasses, a hiss, a hum, I should have done and tide is lost to morning sun. While trawlers creek at dockside, my Uncle Weaver smiles, my Uncle Weaver speaks, is that you morning glory or do I call you evening star?*

01:25:51

And I wrote a new ending for that one. *Sea it's not the bound of sleep I fair or grim twilight or a tolling bell and I have no need for sad farewells, so do I meet my pilot at the crossing of the bar and different Sailor that I was God-forbid I get that far.*

01:26:13

Isn't that sweet? This is Captain Joe and Captain Joe had a way of when you set a course, he was—he was a seagoing tug captain back when you had a compass and a lead line. That's what you had to know where you were and you had a sexton. So—

01:26:36

The Pilot. He held up thumb and thumb, sited down these thick nail to and drew with this in words of course that take us through the bay, the break, the steeple shore of Charleston where he said dark men and women spoke a tropic speech, some softer than his own. But in these days of diesel change were few left living in the allies paved with ballast stones, check to jaw with goats, cows, grey-neck geese. Then an oil hand on palm, thick, nick-creased, he showed where once a foreign seamstress traced a violet sunset and spoke of dangers that would come and the women—woman who would love him and she did.

01:27:25

Joe—Joe was—apparently as a child Joe was always hungry and he told me when he was six he—there was a tug tied up in the—probably a steam tug tied up in Jeremy Creek and his brothers took him in there in the galley and there was nothing but food and food and food. And he—he spent his life on the boat. I’m just trying to read—I’m trying to read boat ones. Oh here’s a beauty. Here, I don’t know whether you want to edit this one out or not but when we were children you—there was an old marina dock down at the end of the creek and we fished for sharks there.

01:28:22

Here, here beside the barge crowded waterway we fished for sharks, waved at yachts, and called obscenities depending on the company being kept. What occupied the far-side was marsh, creeks, and marsh, and gulls stood on mud extending five miles to the Cape Beach and some high piled clouds. Cumulus you said and laid a fingertip to the corner of those sun-cracked lips. Cumulus, a word I’m still likely to confuse with some exotic sex act and not the luminous isolation of that moment. You can edit that out.

01:29:08

The Sting of—Hurricane. When the storm came through it left a drop leafed table open on an oak [inaudible] twelve feet above the ground. And an ocean worth of tiny catfish stranded high and dry with a glistening gray spine stuck straight up. Yanked from the pilings shrimp boats got tossed around and stacked against each other on what became the trampled on—.

01:30:33

