

**FRED DOCKERY**  
**Fisherman– Charleston, SC**

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Date: September 9, 2014  
Location: Mr. Dockery's home, Charleston, SC  
Interviewer: Sara Wood  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
Length: One hour, eight minutes  
Project: Lowcountry Maritime

**00:00:01**

**Sara Wood:** So it is Tuesday, September 9, 2014. This is Sara Wood with the Southern Foodways Alliance. I'm sitting here with Mr. Fred Dockery. We're in Charleston, South Carolina at his home in James Island. And I'm wondering Fred would you please say hello and introduce yourself for the tape.

**00:00:18**

**Fred Dockery:** Hi, I'm Fred Dockery. I guess I'm from Charleston, South Carolina now.

**00:00:24**

**Sara Wood:** And can you tell me your birth date for the record?

**00:00:25**

**Fred Dockery:** September 30, 1964.

**00:00:29**

**Sara Wood:** And can you tell me a little bit about where you're from, where you were born and your sort of trajectory, how you got down here? Well first tell me where you were born and a little bit about maybe you could talk about you told a really vibrant story about the nuns who raised you. Could you—would you mind talking a little bit about that?

**00:00:52**

**Fred Dockery:** Sure, I was born in Montpelier, France. And my mom was a student and she was a single mom. And when she finished her psychology degree the only job she was able to

get as a single mom was working in a mental hospital run by nuns. I've never heard that—oh that's yours? [*Refers to the cell phone ringing.*]

**00:01:18**

**Sara Wood:** That's mine, yeah that's my fault. Let me turn it off, sorry. I usually turn my phone off.

**00:01:23**

**Fred Dockery:** I thought that was my phone. I was like I've never heard mine do that.

**00:01:26**

**Sara Wood:** I'm so embarrassed, sorry.

**00:01:28**

**Fred Dockery:** That's all right.

**00:01:29**

**Sara Wood:** I usually always turn it off. Okay—

**00:01:36**

**Fred Dockery:** It's funny because mine was ringing.

**00:01:38**

**Sara Wood:** You're like, "That's not my phone."

**00:01:39**

**Fred Dockery:** I've never heard—but maybe my phone did something.

**00:01:42**

**Sara Wood:** So your mother was a student in France?

**00:01:44**

**Fred Dockery:** Yes and so she got a job in a mental hospital at a place called [*Inaudible*] which is near Rodez, and the hospital was run by nuns. And initially, the nuns took care of me while she worked during the day. And there was one particular nun who was the bread baker and she would carry me around in a bread basket. And the other nuns were always a little worried that she was—I guess they baked the bread in the baskets and they were worried that she was going to stick me into an oven—obviously never happened.

**00:02:25**

After about a year my mom got a mental patient, a schizophrenic who had been in the hospital for I think she said twenty years named Odette who was a shepherdess to come and stay at our apartment with me and Odette raised me the other two years that I was there. And she—she spoke a lot at—I guess it was part of her therapy and so I learned a lot of words at a young age. And she also because her family were shepherds they had always brought her food and they continued to bring her food so I grew up eating the same homemade food, homemade sausages that—that her family made for her and brought every week.

**00:03:14**

**Sara Wood:** And so did you grow up in France? I know you said you moved around a lot and I'm wondering if you could talk about a few of the places that you lived.

**00:03:22**

**Fred Dockery:** Sure, so I lived in France until I was three and a half. My mom met my—who I've always called my dad, he's my stepdad, who was in France on a Fulbright Scholarship and he was to become a French professor. Anyway she followed him back to America and married him in Iowa City, and his first teaching job was at the University of Maine-Orono. So we lived in Old Town, Maine and then we lived in Alton, Maine. In Alton we lived on a farm with thirty acres and I went to a two-room schoolhouse where the principal taught fourth through sixth and the teacher taught first through third. And the bathroom and office were in between the two rooms. And we had a lot of playground time. It was a lot of fun. And we moved to Shelby, North Carolina from there and then to Davidson, North Carolina and when my dad started teaching at Davidson [College], Davidson's Study Abroad Program was in Montpelier which was my hometown where I was born. And so I went back with the family in 1977-78 for two years and I went to French schools for those two years. And that was the last time I really lived in France.

**00:04:48**

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

**00:04:50**

**Fred Dockery:** My dad is Charles Dockery and my mom is Amelia Dockery.

**00:04:55**

**Sara Wood:** So did you—you ended up going to—to college in Maine? Is that correct?

**00:05:02**

**Fred Dockery:** I did. I really enjoyed my time in Maine as a kid. I think in hindsight probably most—I lived there from when I was five to eight and I bet everybody remembers that time pretty fondly. So I wanted to go to Maine and Bates College was on the common application. They accepted me and they gave me good financial aid. And so that's where I went. I went to Bates for four years and graduated—barely.

**00:05:28**

**Sara Wood:** And what did you study while you were there?

**00:05:30**

**Fred Dockery:** Philosophy. [*Laughs*] I started out in physics but it proved a little bit hard and so I switched to philosophy.

**00:05:37**

**Sara Wood:** So I know that you—you told a lot of stories today while we were on the boat but I'm going to ask you for the tape. Did—did you start out when you—when you left college did you think that you wanted to work on the water in any way? I'm wondering how that happened.

**00:05:52**

**Fred Dockery:** No, I had no inkling. I—the one course in college that I did well in was a creative writing course. And so I had this kind of in the back of my mind that I wanted to be a writer. I had worked at a summer camp throughout my summers at college kind of by chance. One of my soccer teammates had gotten me a job at this camp and so when I graduated I took a kind of similar job as an environmental education teacher at a place called Nature's Classroom.

**00:06:27**

I'm going to pause here for a second. [*Fred's daughter, Emma, comes home from school so we pause the tape.*]

**00:06:36**

So Nature's Classroom, I taught there for a year and still had writing on my mind. I was going to head out west and be a ski instructor but I was living in an old airplane hangar and one of my roommates was going to fix my truck but instead he just took my battery and so I ended up being stuck in Connecticut and actually living in my truck for a little while and then I got a job with a landscaper. And I did that up until winter and when winter rolled around I figured I didn't need a whole lot of money. I would write and that was back living in the airplane hangar. And writing proved pretty hard and I was kind of cold and a friend of mine had just had a wreck with his truck and was trying to fix his truck and said I could have his job on the boat.

**00:07:41**

So I was looking for something to do and I took a job on this boat and it was—I loved it. It was—I had always liked boats as a kid. I had always liked the idea of it and all of the sudden I was on the other side of it. I was on the boat instead of watching the boat go.

**00:07:59**

**Sara Wood:** Had you ever been on a boat before?

**00:08:01**

**Fred Dockery:** I came to America on a boat, but—on the Queen Mary [*Laughs*]—

**00:08:09**

**Sara Wood:** What do you remember about that?

**00:08:10**

**Fred Dockery:** I remember a toy car that I lost on that trip and I'm positive that I really remember it because there's no pictures of it but I can picture it. I would have been three and a half. [*Sound of dog drinking water in the background.*] That's my only real solid memory of that trip. And then we—when we went back to France we took a boat from New York to L'Avure [*Inaudible*] and I remember that trip really well. And when we would go places we would take ferry boats but I never owned a boat.

**00:08:43**

**Sara Wood:** And where in Connecticut were you before you started—?



00:08:45

**Fred Dockery:** I was in Ivoryton, Connecticut which is near Old Saybrook, Essex, near where the Connecticut River comes out.

00:08:54

**Sara Wood:** And I have one other question before we talk about the first day on the boat but how did you end up living in an airplane hangar?

00:09:01

**Fred Dockery:** So actually what ended up happening, the exact details of it were I had a dog who looks a lot like the one I have now, a black and tan hound kind of mix. And he was real popular at the local bar. And there were only two dogs allowed in that bar—were my dog and this other guy's dog, Lobo. And they would come in and sleep under the pool tables. And the guy who owned Lobo was—was a fellow named Mikey [Monie] Ma-knee who was a neat fellow but a bit of a heroin addict, fabulous welder, and he was living in the airplane hangar. And he agreed to take my truck and fix it while I went up to work at camp. So I brought my truck over and left it at the airplane hangar. And when I came back, you know, he had been on one of his not-so-good times and the guys that—they ran a business out of that hangar but they had little apartments and Mike's apartment was in the rafters above the main hangar building. They gave me his—they kicked him out and gave me his spot 'cause they felt sorry for me. And—

00:10:13

**Sara Wood:** So he took your battery?

**00:10:14**

**Fred Dockery:** He took my battery, that's the only thing he did to my truck. And you know we were still friends. He was still around. He felt bad about it, too and we would often go to his mother's house for dinner. It was the weirdest thing. **[Laughs]** And she was this nice old lady and we'd have to wash our hands to come in the—you know the dining room, Mrs. Ma-knee **[Monie]**. And I eventually got that truck running, it was a—it was a neat old truck, a 19—I think that was the 1951 Dodge with the 283 Corvette engine and the Ford rear-end in it. It was a junkyard special. It had a two-speed power glide automatic transmission. The guy who owned the junkyard had built it for his daughter and then she had grown up and I bought it for 125 bucks. So it was a fun truck, but it got hit by a Soviet dissident named Alexander Fate who was running a red light on Christmas Eve, so Fate took my truck out of the running. I thought that was—I don't think it was spelled the same way. But that's how I ended up in the hangar and I just stayed there living in the rafters and my dog would run the rafters a good I'd say thirty feet up in the air. He could run on the beams.

**00:11:36**

**Sara Wood:** And what was your dog's name?

**00:11:37**

**Fred Dockery:** Duke. I always had short names.

**00:11:42**

**Sara Wood:** Can you talk about the first boat you were on that first day that—if you remember and what you remember about it, if you have any stories about the first day on that boat?

**00:11:51**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah, the first day the boat's name was The Restless and I used to have a pretty lousy painting of it that I think we finally got rid of. It was an old Navy lifeboat that had been converted into a dragger. It was forty foot and had kind of a homemade cabin at the front. And what I recall more than the work or anything else is the steaming out and the feel of the boat riding, the air, the—it's just—it's—it's a sensation. I guess it's like riding a horse for some people or riding a motorcycle for some people. It's just—I just felt comfortable. I was happy. I liked it.

**00:12:41**

**Sara Wood:** How many other people were on the boat?

**00:12:43**

**Fred Dockery:** It's just me and Lauren. Lauren was the captain and I was the crewman.

**00:12:48**

**Sara Wood:** What did you guys fish for?

**00:12:49**

**Fred Dockery:** We would troll, bottom troll and you know we'd catch some flounder, we'd catch some sand dabs, some of what we caught was for bait, we'd catch a little bit of tow tog. It was you know a little mix of fish. It wasn't any large volume. We'd pack it in totes, which the totes hold you know maybe seventy pounds or so. In a big day we might have three or four totes of fish, something like that.

**00:13:22**

**Sara Wood:** And how long were you on The Restless for?

**00:13:24**

**Fred Dockery:** Well I worked on it for a month and then we came down one morning and it was sunk. And you know we suspected somebody had sunk it but it may have sunk on its own. And that's actually one of the most formative memories for me is when we showed up like four o'clock in the morning and all we could see was antennas to me it was over. It was all right, find something else and to—for Lauren it was oh, we just got another job to do. And we actually raised that boat and drove it home that day.

**00:14:03**

**Sara Wood:** Using a lot whole lot of barrels you said.

**00:14:05**

**Fred Dockery:** A whole lot of barrels. We tied barrels to it at low tide and as the tide came up it floated it up enough that we were able to move it around into the—the slip where the travel lift could have straps under it and then the marina lifted it up long enough for the water to drain out and for us to see a hole in the bottom of the boat and we nailed a piece of plywood over it and dried the engine out and put a rebuilt—had the started rebuilt and put it back on and cranked it up and drove it home.

**00:14:42**

**Sara Wood:** And what's Lauren's last name?

**00:14:43**

**Fred Dockery:** Gardener.

**00:14:46**

**Sara Wood:** Now what happened after that month? How did—did you find another boat? Did you fish somewhere else? Can you tell me what happened next?

**00:14:53**

**Fred Dockery:** So when we got back Lauren said he was done with it and he was going to go fish offshore on a boat he had worked on in the past. And he told me that I could just run The Restless. And so I did. I didn't really know what I was doing. And I ran it—I'm going to guess it was about six months before the engine blew. And when the engine blew right about that time some other guys had approached me about buying a boat that was in relatively decent running condition. They wanted \$15,000 for it and they didn't need any money upfront and said I could pay them little-by-little. And so I took that boat over and we left The Restless in the marina. And I ran The Alliance and I would say I probably ran that one for six months or so, it might have been longer though. I went through a couple helpers. I had one helper named Ponytail George who used to be a roadie for I think it was Lynyrd Skynyrd. **[Laughs]** No, Aerosmith, it was for Aerosmith 'cause when the band went clean he couldn't go clean. I guess the band all quit like drinking and drugs and George couldn't do it. And so they fired him. And he was just the funniest most well-traveled guy but he you know he—he had problems. He—he lived on the boat and we would leave the dock at usually around four [A.M.] and he would probably get to the boat at three and you know I'd wake him up at four to untie and he would act like he had been there all night and—but he was stumbling and barely coherent. **[Laughs]** But he'd sober up by

you know late morning and super nice guy, always fun to be around, just a little on the shaky side.

**00:16:57**

He ended up getting clean and working at a gun factory in Connecticut, so—. [*Fred's son, Evan, comes home.*] That would be Evan and Catherine. That you Evan? We're recording in here, so be quiet for a few minutes, okay? This is Sara.

**00:17:22**

**Sara Wood:** Hi, nice to meet you. So—

**00:17:39**

**Fred Dockery:** Hey hon, we're recording in here. [*Fred's wite, Catherine comes home.*] If that gets to be a nuisance we can go to Carlisle's room okay. This is Sara.

**00:17:46**

**Sara Wood:** Hi, nice to meet you.

**00:17:49**

**Fred Dockery:** Don't roll your eyes at my answers [*talking to Catherine*]. I hear you already.

**00:18:05**

**Sara Wood:** So these boats basically were around that you traveled around the East Coast. Did you predominantly stay there to fish or did you—?

**00:18:12**

**Fred Dockery:** [*Noise from the kitchen and from the dog running around the kitchen.*] Those boats were both in Connecticut and we fished in Long Island Sound. It just happened to be where I lived and where I knew to fish. It was really—I didn't know anywhere else to go plus I had a Connecticut license. And Connecticut license is only good for halfway across the sound and then the other side is New York. It's a funny story because one day in The Alliance I hit a load of sturgeon. I had never seen them before and didn't know what it was. I had a big pile, they're huge fish. And in Connecticut you can keep two a day. In New York you can keep all you wanted. And [*Laughs*] so I called—I didn't know what they were worth or anything like that and I called Herby Slaven of Slaven & Sons in—in New York and he says “Ah, just send them all to me. Just tell them you're coming through New York.” [*Laughs*] I had never caught sturgeon again after that anyway, so—. But it was—that was when it was clear that it didn't make much sense that Connecticut would have one set of laws and New York would have another set right there on the same water body.

**00:19:23**

**Sara Wood:** So I just wanted to ask you this one question before I ask you how you got down to Charleston. But after you were on The Restless was there ever a part of you that said I don't want to keep doing this or was it always this is exactly what I need to be doing right now? Or, was it more about just opportunity at the time?

**00:19:40**

**Fred Dockery:** I would say—I'd say it's probably more opportunity. I did other jobs even while I was in Connecticut. I worked for an excavator for a little while and that was fun. I got to drive a

dump truck and learn to use a backhoe. I liked the work on the water. And I wasn't really that excited about looking for something else to do. I think the biggest drawback to working on the water is that it was kind of a disappointment to my parents, I think. And I think the—you know the investment of four years of college to go do a job where most people had, you know, barely finished high school just didn't you know—it almost seemed a little wasteful but I think ultimately it was just kind of opportunity and I enjoyed it. I really—it was a neat sensation to the—to going somewhere in a boat. And there's a lot involved in making a business with a boat work.

**00:21:03**

You got to keep the boat running. You got to keep the vehicle running to get you there. You got to—you got to do sales and marketing. You got to call people. It's—it's pretty complex. I guess a lot of businesses are but I think the water one is—and it's a pretty place to be.

**00:21:20**

**Sara Wood:** So how did you get—how did you end up in Charleston, South Carolina?

**00:21:23**

**Fred Dockery:** So after The Restless and The Alliance, neither of which were financial successes but they were—you know they were fun, I ended up working on an offshore boat. And my wife who was my girlfriend at the time, she and I had been in fifth and sixth grade together. In sixth grade we sat at the same desk at Davidson Elementary. And she moved up to teach environmental education at the same place where I had taught. And so we re-met and when we



decided to get married it was one of the things that we were going to—that I felt like ought to happen. What hon? [*Catherine comes in to tell Fred something.*]

**00:22:13**

**Sara Wood:** You were talking about sharing the same desk with Catherine.

**00:22:16**

**Fred Dockery:** Right, and—and so we re-met in Connecticut. And we decided to get married. And I think we both agreed that the offshore fishing and being married was not a good match. So at least not for us, so I agreed to give up offshore fishing and my roommate from college was farming scallops in Fair Haven, Massachusetts. So I called him up and he got me a job at the scallop farm and we moved up there. And so then I was in aquaculture instead of fishing, still in boats, but we'd leave and it was more like a factory job kind of but it was on the water. And I liked the job but I didn't really like the—the—the company that much. So and—and also we were talking about having kids and our relatives were all at this time still in North Carolina. So we thought we'd look to move closer to home so we'd have help with the kids. And we took a winter trip, an exploratory trip to visit aquaculture operations and out of the ones we visited I got offers from two of them, one in Harker's Island and one on James Island. And I took a job at the one on James Island which is right by Charleston. And I've been here ever since. That would have been 1991, we lived on Folly Beach. Lived in a couple of—two houses on Folly Beach and then in '95 [1995] we bought this house and have been here on James Island ever since.

**00:24:09**

**Sara Wood:** So you started with the aquaculture as soon as you guys moved down here?

**00:24:13**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah, in fact I came down and jumped right into the job. I remember it was September and it was the hottest I've ever been. I couldn't believe how hot it was here in September. I'm not a hot weather person—just I'm not. In fact if we had done our visits of prospective jobs in the summer instead of the winter I might have never done it now that I think about it. *[Laughs]* I never even thought about that—if I had known how hot it was going to be, but—. It's almost fall now, so I'm okay. *[Laughs]*

**00:24:50**

**Sara Wood:** So how did you get from doing aquaculture to working—to doing crabbing and oystering and fishing?

**00:24:57**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah, so I worked at the clam farm for six years and went through a lot of incarnations. I had—I had started out as a field captain and then I became field manager and then I moved into research and development and then inventory and it was—it became pretty corporate. The—the company even went public on the British stock exchange, London stock exchange.

**00:25:26**

And somewhere in the process it became evident that the clam farm was better at raising money than farming clams. And in its decline I got let go. And I had—I just had a kid, I was—really my first time being unemployed. And I wasn't having a lot of luck finding jobs. So I started picking oysters. It was a—something to do, and I did that for—for part of a winter and I

was still looking for a job and in fact, at one point I was also delivering the paper. That's a real raw deal here by the way. I don't know if it's gotten better but at the time you were an independent contractor. So you weren't hired by the newspaper company. You were actually buying the newspaper from them and then reselling it to the customers. But if the customer—the customer didn't pay you, they would pay the paper. But if the customer failed to pay the paper—pay the paper then you didn't get paid but you couldn't stop delivering. You had to then go get the payment yourself from the customer. It was—anyway my—my schedule that spring I went from oystering to crabbing. The guy I oystered for said, “Man you need to crab, you know oystering is over,” ‘cause it's seasonal. And I was delivering the paper and then I finally got a job at this place Moore Drums. And the job went from six to four-thirty in the afternoon, six in the morning to four-thirty in the afternoon. I wasn't allowed to quit the paper route because you had to give a calendar month's-notice to quit. And I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't but you know I just—. So I had to work another month and a half before I could actually quit that. I was still crabbing because I had built up crab customers. So for that month and a half I would get up at one [A.M.], go pick up my papers, deliver them, get done at about five, drive up to Moore Drums, work from five to—or from six to four-thirty and then come home, load the crab bait up in the boat and go crab and deliver and get done delivering at about eight, eight-thirty at night. And then I would sleep a few hours and get up and do it again and I did that—. But Moore Drums was only five days a week but the—the other stuff was seven days a week. I was pretty tired.

**00:28:21**

**Sara Wood:** And when I just wanted to go back and ask you, what was the name of the clamming operation that you worked with?

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**Fred Dockery:** It went through a couple names but it started out as Atlantic Little Neck Clam Farms. And I think it became a division of Sea Perfect.

**00:28:40**

**Sara Wood:** And does Moore Drums is it M-o-o-r-e?

**00:28:42**

**Fred Dockery:** Uh-hm, named after Jack Moore and I worked for Jackie who was the fourth Jack Moore and Jack will probably hate to hear this but he will probably never hear it anyway but there was a guy there, Melvin Scott, who had worked for three of the four Jack(s) which is really pretty impressive if you think about it. He'd worked for three generations of Jack Moore(s) and he said they had progressively gotten worse. *[Laughs]*

**00:29:16**

**Sara Wood:** Fred I'm wondering, you said that you started picking oysters, how did you get into that? Is that easy to do? Do you just start doing it? I mean for somebody coming in who hadn't done it here before what—can you kind of describe what that was like entering into it?

**00:29:32**

**Fred Dockery:** It's a pretty easy fishery to get into because there's usually a shortage of pickers, particularly around holidays. The—the—the cost to get in is pretty low. You got to go buy a license, it's about 100 bucks. You have to have a boat. I had a boat. Went and bought a

license. I found somebody who wanted to buy them. And you have to have a buyer because oystering, you can't oyster without having tags from a buyer. So not everybody does a good job of actually bringing the oysters to the person they have tags for but that's how—that's how the Department of Health chases, you know tracks where the oysters go. So I found [*phone rings*] people to crab for and I—okay.

**00:30:29**

**Sara Wood:** Do you want to—so you were talking about the process of having buyers give you tags in order to—

**00:30:38**

**Fred Dockery:** Oh right, so—so to get into oystering you have to have a buyer. But usually that's not hard to come by if you have your own boat. Even for people who don't have their own boat, at certain times a year they can usually find their way onto a crew. And then if they pick a decent oyster they can usually get continued employment. And it's—the—the pay relative to cost is pretty good. The picker keeps most of the money of—of what is made in oystering, so you could easily earn you know if you can pick a decent amount you could easily earn \$200 or \$300 a day which was good money with not a whole lot of expense.

**00:31:30**

**Sara Wood:** And I don't need you to go—I know we have a little bit of time left, but can you sort of briefly describe the process of what it is like to—the physical process of picking oysters?

**00:31:40**

**Fred Dockery:** Oh yeah, so first of all you need to know the areas so you can find mounds that look like they have nice enough oysters on them to pick. And that's not as easy to—to learn as it sounds. But then when you do find it then you pull up to the mound and get out with your basket and some mounds have a firm bottom around them and you can actually walk around and some are boggy. I've been in some where you sink in almost to your hips.

**00:32:14**

And so you pick and as you—you take a—people use different tools, some people use a little cat's paw. I use a hammer. You pick with one hand and hammer with the other breaking off small oysters or dead shell and try to leave something about the size of your hand as the cluster. In South Carolina we pick clusters mostly. And—and you drop the cluster in the basket and when you fill your basket you—some people leave the basket there and come back to the boat when the tide is up to pick it up. Some people carry their basket back to the boat. And when you've picked as many as you're going to pick you take them someplace to wash them. I used to pick for Crosby's [in James Island] and they had the best wash station. They had this stainless platform with a pump. And they would—they would crank the pump up and you'd have this powerful hose and the stainless platform had borders on it so that the oysters wouldn't wash off.

**00:33:26**

And you would clean them up and then bag them up and put them in the cooler—about forty pounds to a bag.

**00:33:34**

**Sara Wood:** And you mentioned a cat's paw. What is a cat's paw?

**00:33:35**

**Fred Dockery:** It's like a little crowbar, a little crowbar but instead of—it's got a little—it looks like a cat's paw on the end of it.

**00:33:45**

**Sara Wood:** So who—you mentioned somebody who sort of told you that they needed help picking oysters. Who was that?

**00:33:53**

**Fred Dockery:** I'm trying to remember who told me that—that Willy would buy from me. It might have been Terry Annabelle. It might have been—it might have been Greg [Brown]. I don't know, it was a long time ago and I can't remember who pointed me towards Willy but Willy was the first person who bought oysters from me. And then I eventually got onto oystering for Joanie and Ellie at Crosby's and from then on that's primarily who I oyster for. They were the nicest ones to oyster for.

**00:34:26**

**Sara Wood:** Do you think we could—?

**00:34:28**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah, I didn't know Mr. Middleton back then.

**00:34:33**

**Catherine Dockery:** You did, you used to see him—

**00:34:36**

**Fred Dockery:** Not back then.

*[We take the interview outside to Fred's deck in the backyard because the house comes alive with people coming home from school and work. Fred's son Evan is making everybody BLTs (bacon, lettuce & tomato sandwiches).]*

**00:34:40**

**Catherine Dockery:** Did you want to sit in—you're going to sit out back?

**00:34:40**

**Fred Dockery:** We're going to go outside.

**00:34:42**

**Catherine Dockery:** Yeah, Evan decided to make something to eat—he's starving. *[Off Mic Conversation]*

**00:34:48**

**Fred Dockery:** Yes, Sara would you like a BLT?



**00:34:50**

**Sara Wood:** Oh I'm good, thank you though. That's real sweet.

**00:34:54**

**Fred Dockery:** He likes to cook.

**00:34:54**

**Sara Wood:** That's great.

**00:34:55**

**Fred Dockery:** It is great.

**00:35:28**

**Sara Wood:** If it gets too bad just holler. But and so—so you were doing the oyster picking and then did you—did you start doing the crab when oyster season was over?

**00:35:41**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah, oyster season was ending and it's seasonal. It runs from like September to April or something like that, you know maybe October to April. And so it was definitely going to end and Willy actually said, "You just need to go crab." And in fact, it seems like at that point I went crabbing with a guy named Terry Annabelle and we were going to crab together until he got his shrimp boat together and then I was going to work on his shrimp boat. But I ended up just staying crabbing and then I got the job at Moore Drums, so I never ended up working on Terry's shrimp boat.

**00:36:29**

**Sara Wood:** And now you talked a little bit about the—the process of getting into oysters but what is that like for crabbing?

**00:36:35**

**Fred Dockery:** Well certain times a year anybody can get into crabbing because there's more demand than there is supply. And all you need once again is a boat and a motor and spend a little money on crab traps. It's not a lot of expense to get in. You usually the—the—the holdups are little minor things like when you start out you don't have baskets. We use our old bait baskets as baskets. Well the brand new crabber doesn't have any. And probably doesn't know that they can buy some from the crab buyer. So and then you know starting out with—with traps initially it's pretty expensive to—to get a decent amount of traps so you buy a few and but that's—that's all it takes.

**00:37:37**

Any time in the summer just about anybody could become a crabber. When it gets tough is when fall rolls around and crabs become plentiful and then all of the sudden it's hard to sell them. That's really—that's the discouraging time for crabbers for—especially for new crabbers but really for all crabbers is when you go out there and you've been catching one or two bushels all summer and all of the sudden you catch ten and you're excited. And nobody will buy them, I mean you can't—you can't give them away.

**00:38:12**

**Sara Wood:** And then how did shrimping come into play?

**00:38:15**

**Fred Dockery:** Well I had—I had done bottom trawling up north so I knew a little bit about pulling a net. And there were other people who did small-scale shrimping and so I—I guess it wasn't immediately. It would have been a few years in, I decided I was going to give it a try and I'm kind of—I like to do things my way which is not always necessarily the best way but it's—it's just how I am. And so I went and bought a brand new tri-net which is what the big shrimp boats use to sample, and I went out in the ocean with my little boat and pulled a tri-net. I came up with an idea for how to set it and it seemed to work. And I was getting my—I must have been getting my ice from Crosby's 'cause I knew Neal Cooksey and Neal I don't know if he was laughing at me or felt sorry for me but he said, "You can't—you can't catch shrimp with a tri-net. How—how many did you get?" And I'd say, "I got thirty. You know it's getting better, I had forty the other day." And he's like, "Pounds?" I said, "No shrimp." *[Laughs]* And so he actually—his mom was still alive at the time—he says—he says, "Let me sell you a net." So we drove over to his mom's house and went around to the backyard. I still have the net. I'll never get rid of it unless I sell it to somebody else for twenty bucks 'cause that's what he charged me for it.

**00:39:49**

And it had a—I swear it had a tree growing through it. We had to snap the tree off to—to get the net out. And he said, "Yeah, just put a little chain on that and put—you know put a tickler chain on it." I didn't know what a tickler chain is. It's the chain that's a little bit shorter than the

mouth of the net and so it actually drags a little bit ahead of the net. And—and I had a—a decent sized set of doors already that I think I had bought from somebody else. He says, “Give that a try.”

**00:40:22**

And it must have been—must have been around June ‘cause I was shrimping at Morris Island and I had been catching a little bit of brown shrimp. I didn’t really know the difference between brown shrimp and white shrimp. The net I—I got from Neal he charged me twenty bucks for it, it was a flat net. So it didn’t have a third line, just two lines and I—the next day that I went shrimping with it I think it was either Joanie [Cooksey] or Ellie [Berry] asked me, “How did you do?” And I said, “I don’t know.” I said, “I ran out of coolers. I ran out of ice.” I said, “I—I’ve never seen so many shrimp in my life. I don’t know if everybody is catching that much or what.” It was so exciting. That was probably the turning point for shrimping for me. It was fun, it was—yeah and there have been a lot of awful days but that day right there, that first time pulling that flat net and I swear it might have been three, four, five coolers of shrimp. It was—it was a lot more than thirty or forty shrimp. And they were pretty small. But I was excited. It was—it was cool.

**00:41:37**

**Sara Wood:** You were just talking about you know the—you know the turning point for shrimping but I’m wondering you know you’ve—you’ve since given up—you don’t really oyster anymore. Is that correct?

**00:41:48**

**Fred Dockery:** Pretty much though I haven't ruled it out. I—certainly this has not been a very good year for crabs in part because I've got all these other crabbers around me. And so I keep in the back of my mind that maybe this is the year I have to go out and—and oyster just 'cause I got nothing else I can do. But then again, Friday I hurt my back working on the—on the—the battery cable of the crab boat, so realistically I can't imagine that I'd be able to do it. But you never know.

**00:42:28**

**Sara Wood:** How do you—I'm sure you get asked this a lot but in this work how do you deal with the high—it seems like things can go so well and then something takes a turn [*Airplane flies over us audibly.*] and it's not so great for a while and I'm wondering, how do you—how do you seem to weather through that?

**00:42:48**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah, that's the hardest part. I think there's—there's this—this belief that I've seen over the years that things tend to average out. They don't totally. I definitely have better years and worse years. There's the—the further along I get in my life the less alternatives I have anyway, that helps you weather it because what—what else am I going to do? At this point you know I turn fifty at the end of this month and I'm going to go start another career? It's hard to imagine.

**00:43:28**

So by necessity I'm running low on options. And then I look at people who are more successful than I am and realize that a lot of them are not necessarily any happier than I am. And so I try not to—I try not to let failure be such a big deal. And it's relative. You know like I've had bad years but I haven't lost my house. Now if something were to happen and I lost my house there would still be—it can always be worse. **[Laughs]** You know it can always be worse. And so—and—and you know I'm relatively poor but I got five cars—five cars that run. You know that's—**[Laughs]**—there are people who don't. So—

**00:44:28**

**Sara Wood:** Your BLT is up. *[Evan attempts to deliver Fred's BLT]*

**00:44:31**

**Fred Dockery:** I'll get it later Evan. My kids are healthy. My kids seem pretty happy. I got insurance through my wife, so—. We don't—we—I think probably one of the—the big concerns is retirement but I look at the generation before me. I look at my parents and my wife's parents and there's varying degrees of how they've prepared for retirement. And it still doesn't tend to work out as planned. And you know maybe I'll regret this twenty, thirty, forty years from now but I don't want to suffer excessively now for the hope that things will be better when I'm eighty if I make it to eighty 'cause I've seen that. I've also seen people who have worked fairly lucrative jobs that they didn't really like and then they retire and it's really common that they want to come and do what I do. And (a) it says well, why not do it from the get-go, and (b) when they finally come to do it they can't because I don't think—I don't think you can fish successfully for fun. I think you actually have to have to do it because there are times where if

you didn't have to do it, you would just walk away. **[Laughs]** You know, I mean sometimes it hurts. Sometimes it's just—it's just sometimes it doesn't make any sense. And you get through it one way or another, so—.

**00:46:36**

**Sara Wood:** The other thing I wanted to ask you Fred is that around here there seems to be a lot of people who got into this work through family. There's this tradition being passed along. And you brought it yourself. And so I'm wondering, it's sort of a two-part question. What that means for you in this landscape here but also I watch how—how many relationships you have with everyone and I'm wondering if you ever consider the relationships you have with your fellow crabber—crab men and women and fishermen and people who pick oysters? I mean through this work if you've sort of woven yourself into other traditions as well or created your own tradition?

**00:47:21**

**Fred Dockery:** No, I think you're right. I think—I think they're almost like another family. There's—there's so much in common there even with you know the ones you like and the ones you don't like. It's—it's—I don't know if family is the word, it's like—but it's a group and I—I think that—that you become part of it. I really do whether—whether you came from that or not and—and certainly the relationships that—that I have built up through the fishing they're really important to me. I mean they're people that I care about. Some of them are customers, some of them are—are fellow fishermen. But they're—they're a part of my life that I look forward to all the time. And most of them and I think this is true of fishing in general, most when you're in a bind they'll help you and vice-versa.

**00:48:45**

That's—it's—it's kind of unspoken and unwritten. The time I lost my trailer up under the dock, it was Ricky Jay that I called. And you know I'm sure he had something else he was doing, but he grabbed a bunch of jacks and came down there and helped me jack it up and you know I can think of a lot of people who have helped me. I'd like to think I—I'm sure I've helped some over the time, too.

**00:49:22**

**Sara Wood:** How have things changed since you started working the water here in Charleston?

**00:49:30**

**Fred Dockery:** I'd say the two biggest changes are there's more of a non-commercial presence on the water. There's more docks. There's more houses. There's more people riding around in boats. Just not necessarily bad but it's different.

**00:49:54**

There are more places where I'm not the primary stakeholder anymore. The other thing is I think that there is at least a little bit less of everything that we've been trying to catch. It's maybe not as dire as some people make it out to be, but it's—it seems to at least be in a little bit of a decline. So with shrimping you know the—the big downfall of shrimping which benefitted me because I was small-time and sold to individuals was the price crash that the—the big shrimp boats, when the shrimp were plentiful a lot of times they wouldn't get \$1 a pound for shrimp and I was still getting \$3 a pound. And there were plenty of them because they couldn't even go. So in a situation like that you don't really look at whether the shrimp population is bigger or not, but



I think in hindsight it looks like the shrimp population has probably—there have been more small crops over the years, like—and I don't think it's all just because there's less market. I think there might actually be a little bit less shrimp.

**00:51:32**

**Sara Wood:** I just have two more questions for you. One is I know this is probably hard to sum up but what do you love so much about this work?

**00:51:43**

**Fred Dockery:** That is hard to sum up. I like—I like the excitement. I like the adrenaline of it. I like the moral lesson that it teaches. I like the fact that it's almost its own little world that when you—when you leave the dock it's almost like the old days. There's the—there's a standard and it's—it's you're in charge. How—what you do and what you don't do it's—it's really up to you. So I think it's a combination of those two. I like the—I like the people that it brings—it allows me to meet. I really—I think you can see it. I find them interesting. I think—and maybe that would happen anywhere but maybe not. You know maybe—maybe I'm really running into a more diverse or more interesting group of people because of what I do, I don't know. But I find them interesting. I find that like when we ride around on the water I know a lot of the people you know in the houses that we ride by. Over the years you know some people are friendly, some people are not, but the people who are friendly I usually take a little time to speak to them. They're taking a little time to speak to me and sometimes friendships build.

**00:53:21**

My—my friend Tom has got the place out on John’s Island. It started with his father. I used to crab, I used to—I discovered the cut-thru that runs by his property because this other guy Sniper would come up in one of the creeks that I crabbled and would never come back out. And I was like, “How is he getting out?” So one day I traced it and found it and that cut-thru took me past Tom’s docks. At the time it was Mr. Humphries. It was before Tom had taken it over. And I would crab in between the docks. I’d drop a trap in between the docks and caught nice crabs in there. And one day I’m coming through there and Mr. Humphries is waiting on the dock for me. And my interactions with homeowners on docks more often than not are not friendly. And his first comment was, “Can I ask you a favor?” It wasn’t you can’t be here, it wasn’t—. And the favor was would I mind not putting a trap in between the docks. And he said, ‘cause his grandchildren like to swim there. And I said, “As long as you don’t mind if I put a trap on the outside of either dock, you know it’s not like you’re trying to take this—‘cause it’s public resource—take it away. If you don’t mind that then I got no problem with it.”

**00:54:47**

And he said, “No, that would be fine.” And from then on whenever I would come through there he’d wave me down and a lot of times he had—that’s the only place I knew him from was from that one day. But sometimes he had huge parties going on there and he was not—it almost seemed like he wasn’t real big on the parties so he’d wave me down and I’d tie up my boat and he said, “Hop in the van and let me give you a beer.” And he would show me around his property. He had camellias that he was really proud of. That’s why I love crabbing. It’s things like—and they happen all the time. And that’s one.

**00:55:25**

That and I—and the adrenaline is pretty cool too, when things go wrong and you come out of it that's pretty exciting. I don't think that ever gets old.

**00:55:36**

**Sara Wood:** Can you think of a particular time where that's happened and you—you thought maybe I'm not going to get out of this and you did and you—that all came rushing back? I know there's probably been many times.

**00:55:49**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah, no there's one. There's one where I never thought I wasn't going to get out of it 'cause I was pretty proud of my little boat. This is when I had the little—I bought a little Sea Hawk skiff out of main, sight unseen out of *National Fishermen Magazine*. And when it showed up it had a much higher bow on it than I had imagined, but I—I grew to like the boat. And I would shrimp it. And there was this fellow Mr. Terry who would go with me every now and then. He—we'd gone flounder gigging together some and he agreed to come with me shrimping one day. And it was blowing pretty hard out of the northeast but we were going to Kiawah [Island, South Carolina] and to get there you have to go through a little stretch that I call the washing machine. I don't know if everybody else calls it that but it's really like a washing machine. The waves come every which way and a four-foot swell becomes—looks like eight-foot and sometimes you can't see over it.

**00:56:55**

And I cut on through there and then once you get past that you get into a little cove kind of that's sheltered and in a northeast wind it's just as calm as calm can be. And so we were shrimping there and it was you know it was fairly rough but not unbearable. And Mr. Terry is looking out there and he says, "All the—all the other big boats aren't moving." And we had been shrimping a little while, we were catching shrimp. It was going pretty well. And I realized that everybody else had anchored up 'cause it was too rough. And I said, "Well, we're going to have to go back through that to get home [*Laughs*] so maybe we ought to quit too." And we turned around and when we came back into the washing machine I couldn't see over it. It was—it was ugly looking but there was—I was either going to go through it or I was—there was nothing else to do, just sit there, you know. It's not like it was going to calm down any time soon. So and I felt pretty good about the boat being able to ride up and over. Mr. Terry was sitting in front of me and we came up over the first wave, and he's a big guy, and his whole body left the deck. He must have been a good foot and a half up in the air as we came up over it. And when he came crashing back down you could see he was not comfortable. And he scrambled back to the back of the boat where I had the net lying on the floor and he just laid down on his stomach on top of the net. And I continued to drive up and over that and worked on through it and got through fine. You know but there was—there were a few minutes there where you—maybe, you know, this might be it.

**00:58:41**

And I—you know that brings back—there's tons of those. One time when I went offshore to check some traps and I thought it would get calmer as I got there and it actually got worse. But the further I went the more I had invested in going to check them, so I said—. And my wife was

crabbing with me that day and she had made me leave her on an island 'cause she gets seasick. She didn't want to be out there. And on the whole ride we both noticed the Coast Guard helicopter going back and forth between us. **[Laughs]** And I didn't really know what was going on and she didn't really know what was going on. And I got there and I pulled the eight traps that were there and it was really not worthwhile but it was—it's—it's stupid, it's dangerous. It was exciting, you know, the—the boat was fine for it. But it also could have been—it could have been too much. It's tons of those. And—and you remember all of them fondly except for the one that didn't pan out. So even the one that didn't pan out I sunk that little gray boat at the dock in what I'm pretty sure was seventy mile an hour winds and—but the motor never went under and I was able to disconnect the trailer and wench it back underneath. When I saw it was going to sink I just drove it right up the ramp as high as I could **[Laughs]** and was able to—to wench it back up onto the trailer and it had minor damage, so—. All that stuff, it's fun stuff—*after* the fact.

**01:00:23**

**Sara Wood:** I wanted to ask you about the name of the boat we went on. It's named Catherine and I presume that is after your wife.

**01:00:30**

**Fred Dockery:** Uh-hm.

**01:00:30**

**Sara Wood:** And I'm wondering—I have this question for you. Many women I think want a song written for them but when you named a boat after Catherine what was her reaction to that?

**01:00:42**

**Fred Dockery:** *[Laughs]* It's funny you would say that 'cause I play music too and I wrote a song not too long ago and that was her exact comment, was, "Never written a song for me."

*[Laughs]*

**01:00:58**

I think she liked it. It's—it's a pretty boat, she's a pretty woman. She—she let me buy it. It's—it's not been the easiest thing for her to be married to a fisherman. I mean it's kind of cool but, you know, you never know where the money is going to come from. Sometimes—sometimes the family takes vacations and I can't go. So it's not—it's not all good, it's just part of the package and she's part of it whether she likes it or not. So I think that—that was part of my thinking about that was you know she's—she's part of this in—in what makes it work.

**01:02:04**

**Sara Wood:** And I asked you this on the boat earlier today but do you see this being passed—what—your work means do you see it being passed down to any of your children? Does anyone seem to want to take the reins and keep it going? Is it too soon to ask that question?

**01:02:23**

**Fred Dockery:** No. What the work means I think is passed down to all three of them. But will any of them do it? I don't know. I really think that to fish you have to want to do nothing but that. It's—it doesn't make sense to fish. It's—there are easier ways to make money. If it's being out in a boat that you like you can—you can—you can work a job and still have plenty of time to

be out in a boat. You almost have to just really like the whole package so much that you don't mind the downside to it.

**01:03:26**

And I think also part of it for me is that I've worked other jobs and I came back into fishing in part because I liked fishing but also in part 'cause there were parts of those other jobs I really didn't like. When I had—when I did inventory control at the clam farm, the more I got promoted the less healthy I was. You know I spent more time a computer. I'd have to drink seven cups of coffee to make it through the day. It was just—I didn't want to be there.

**01:04:03**

And then when I lost my job at the clam farm, it made me realize how powerless everybody is. I mean not everybody but a lot of people could show up tomorrow and be told you're going to have to find something else to do. And—and one thing that was pretty clear to me was that as I had moved up in my position I was starting to value myself more than maybe my real market value was because you move up and you become a manager, you think—you think you're you know—you're pretty valuable and then you go try to find a job and try to sell that to somebody else and you realize—you start to wonder whether you believe it.

**01:05:00**

When you're fishing your value is there every day. And your value is there whether you make money or not because just making it back in is an achievement, just making it to the landing is an achievement sometimes. **[Laughs]** So but can that be passed on? I don't—I don't think so. And I think that's probably why you see less businesses, you—you don't see it

continuing on as much is businesses, fishing businesses that were handed down in the past there was money in it. It—it made more sense. And now the only reason you'd do it is because you like it better than something else you might do.

**01:06:01**

**Sara Wood:** Well Fred, I've taken a large chunk of your day today and so I'm wondering is there anything else that you want to add that you think is important or something that I didn't think to ask you or know to ask you that you want to add?

**01:06:21**

**Fred Dockery:** I think it's worth documenting the whole—the—the people who work on the water thing because I think—so I'm Portuguese originally and there's a big water community there. And they're pretty—I don't know if they're valuable or valued. I think they're valued and there's an understanding that the abilities that people who can squeeze out a living on the water have to have are valuable abilities. And I think it's worth recording that because unless circumstances bring an importance to water work again, you're going to lose that group of people. Those abilities will still be there and maybe they'll find a home somewhere else, but it's—it's—it's a value. I really think it is. I think all the people we talk about, they're—they're of interest because they're a value. They have—they have talents that are admirable.

**01:07:51**

**Sara Wood:** I think that's a really good place to end off right now.



**01:07:54**

**Fred Dockery:** Yeah.

**01:07:54**

**Sara Wood:** Thank you for doing this today, Fred.

**01:07:56**

**Fred Dockery:** My pleasure. And now I have to get back to work.

**01:07:59**

**[End Fred Dockery Interview]**