

JAMIE WHITE
Oysterman, Crabber – Charleston, SC

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Interviewer: Sara Wood
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00:00:00

Sara Wood: I'm just going to introduce us for the tape.

00:00:01

Jamie White: Okay.

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Sara Wood: So my name is Sara Wood and I'm with the Southern Foodways Alliance and I'm sitting here with Mr. Jamie White and we're at the dock house at Bowens Island and it's Monday, September 8, 2014 and Jamie I'm just going to have you say hello and introduce yourself for the tape. tell me your name and where we are right now.

00:00:20

Jamie White: Okay. My name is Jamie White and like you said we're at the dock house at Bowens Island Restaurant.

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Sara Wood: And can you tell me a little bit about where you grew up and what it was like there Jamie?

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Jamie White: I grew up right here on James Island on Sol Legare Road and it was real interesting because you know as us growing up kids you know a lot of people used to go have to you know play with other kids, ride bikes, but we was able to do stuff like fish, crab, get oysters,

clams, and still ride bikes and do other stuff normal kids do. But you know when we was kids we just did this for recreational stuff, the you know to have—to eat the oysters and clams and everything and I never knew that, you know, oysters would take off and be a big business like this and especially here in South Carolina. We have the best oysters because if you—do you eat oysters?

00:01:16

Sara Wood: Uh-hm.

00:01:17

Jamie White: When you go to places like Texas and get those big Gulf oysters and stuff you know notice how you got to put horseradish and cocktail sauce and all that stuff on them? Here the oysters are pretty salty because you know they—this water is nice and salty here. So they—they already have you know that salty flavor. Some people just put a little hot sauce on it and some people just eat it straight out the shell.

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Sara Wood: Can you tell me a little bit more about what Sol Legare is like for people who aren't from around here?

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Jamie White: Well Sol Legare is hmm, very interesting I can say like I said 'cause you know us growing up over here we had literally the ocean in our backyard because as you know all this runs into the Atlantic Ocean so—. To have that was a blessing and then see you know everybody

that's so interested and you know living on water now when one time before you know nobody wanted to live on the water, but now you know everybody wants to live on the water.

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Sara Wood: What are your parents' names?

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Jamie White: Um, Mary White and Robert Yelder And my father he's actually dead but my mother she's still around.

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Sara Wood: Does she still live over—?

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Jamie White: No, she lives in the West Ashley area.

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Sara Wood: Now growing up did y'all—did your mother and father go out and fish and oyster?

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Jamie White: No, no. my uncles, my mother's brothers.

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Sara Wood: What are their names?

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Jamie White: His name is George Brown and then you got Richard Brown. And both of those are oystermen, crab men you know.

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Sara Wood: And did they do it just—I mean you were talking about growing up and you oystered for yourself, but I mean did your uncles have a business or did they just bring it back for the family and neighbors?

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Jamie White: No. actually they—they worked for Backman Seafood who you're going to talk to in a little while. And they worked for them.

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Sara Wood: And what was—do you have any memories of growing up around them and watching them do what they do?

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Jamie White: Oh yeah plenty. Like my Uncle Greg [referring to George Brown], he is basically the one who introduced me to you know take this as a business-wise 'cause this is what all—his whole life, you know well he was a mechanic one time but his main income from, you know, oysters and crabs. That's where his main income came from.

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Sara Wood: And now did your mom do a lot of cooking around the house or—?

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Jamie White: No. I wouldn't say she did a lot of cooking. I always grew up with that skill like ever since I was about seven. I was the type of person, you know, I don't wait on mom to do nothing. I just go and get it for myself and now you know I'm a chef. I'm going to be a chef myself.

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Sara Wood: You are?

00:04:07

Jamie White: Oh yeah.

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Sara Wood: Can you tell me more about that?

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Jamie White: Oh yeah. Well you know I noticed everything I cook like that's why I don't go to—when people invite me to their barbecues and stuff now or their cookouts I don't go no more because every time I go everybody always wants me to do the grilling or you know prep the food and stuff, so you know. But I'm real good at cooking so, you know, I said I need to take it to another level especially with being able to come out here and get fresh seafood yourself 'cause if

you notice nowadays people are more interested in restaurants that harvest everything they sell like if you catch your own fish, shrimp, oysters, all that stuff, you know they're more interested with going to places that get their own stuff, local stuff versus you know people that's just buying it.

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Sara Wood: Would you say most of the people that you grew up with and around on Sol Legare Road—was it predominantly maritime focused like people made their living off—most of the people made their living off the water or was it sort of mixed in terms of—?

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Jamie White: No. it was just—it—it—I wouldn't even say ten percent of our community might have you know turned to this for a living 'cause you know oysters—. I guess. I can't say how they always been but now they're getting to be very popular and it's getting to be a big business thing. And it's kind of scaring us local people 'cause I know talking to the lady at the DNR [Department of Natural Resources], the federal—the feds, federal government is trying to take over you know the DNR 'cause the DNR is a state thing. So you know the federal people are trying to get it you know and the federal people get it they're going to have all the rules and regulations and stuff to where you know we ain't going to be able to probably do this forever.

00:06:02

Sara Wood: And can you say what the DNR is?

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Jamie White: That's the—the Department of Natural Resources. They're responsible for you know recording and making sure it's safe to go and get the oysters or you know where you're getting them from and you know everything that goes on out here and making sure people don't abuse it and you know them and—and DHEC [Department of Health and Environmental Control]. They're responsible for, you know, making sure everything is all right.

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Sara Wood: And so when you were growing up the oystering and crabbing out here was mostly just for—for livelihood. it wasn't really—did you see a lot of like commercial things going on back here in terms of the fishermen coming back and crabbing and oystering?

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Jamie White: Well, the only people who I really known was doing it then was like Backman Seafood and Crosby Seafood. And now, you know, you got seafood places all over and I was mostly local so I didn't too much know about Mount Pleasant because you know Mount Pleasant has Shem Creek and a lot of shrimpers, crabbers, and seafood men come from that way too.

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Sara Wood: And Jamie before I forget to ask you this, I always forget to ask people. what—can you tell me your birth date for the record?

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Jamie White: September 10, 1979.

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Sara Wood: So 1979. now when you were growing up did you ever think that you would work on the water like you are today?

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Jamie White: Never knew. Never knew 'cause like I said when we—when I was growing up we did it as recreational things and we just—you know when we wanted to eat some oysters or some crabs or shrimp or whatever you know we'd just come out and get them out the water and take it back, eat it, and do what we needed to do.

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Sara Wood: And how are some of the ways that you'd eat it I mean in terms of preparing it and how—the like the traditions of some of the ways you made the crab and oyster and shrimp?

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Jamie White: Well crab it's—it's not too much you can do with crab unless you want to pick them and make a special dish but mostly you can only steam crab and nowadays you got people that's frying them, so those are the only two ways you can prepare them unless you take your time and pick the meat and make a special dish. And oysters, same thing. you can either eat it raw or you can steam it or you can take it out of the shell and fry it. Now shrimp as we all know you can do anything with those and make any time of dish. Fish, you know, with that you can

steam it, but what we used to do when we was kids we would get cinderblocks and we would get like an old rack out of somebody's oven or the top of a grill or something and sit it there and have the sticks and have everything on—have a fire under it and you just sit them there and when the shell opens then you can just take the oyster out.

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Sara Wood: Kind of roast them on the top of it?

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Jamie White: Oh yeah. that's how we ate those.

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Sara Wood: Do you still do that today?

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Jamie White: No. Uh-uh. When I—let me see if I got any pictures in here [*sound of phone chiming, Jamie is flipping through digital photographs on his mobile phone*]. yeah I have it on here. I got some pictures of some oysters I do.

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Sara Wood: And I introduced you as Wright. I'm sorry about that.

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Jamie White: Oh that's okay. [*Jamie White shows photographs of very large oysters on photographs on his phone.*]

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Sara Wood: Oh wow. So that's all oyster meat?

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Jamie White: All oyster meat and what I do when I pick oysters sometimes and I don't have nothing to do I take oysters and I put them in these quart-sized jars and I sell those for \$20 a jar.

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Sara Wood: That's a lot of oyster meat in there.

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Jamie White: Oh yeah.

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Sara Wood: Oh man. now do you just eat those raw like that or do you have a specific—?

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Jamie White: That's actually not raw. That's steamed a little bit, just—just a little bit.

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Sara Wood: Is that how you like it?

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Jamie White: Oh yeah. that's how I like mine's. I like it juicy. Some people like theirs shriveled up but I like mine's big and juicy like that.

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Sara Wood: And when you steam them is that—how do you steam them usually? How do you prepare them? Do you put them like—do you cook them outside somewhere like—/

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Jamie White: Yeah. I always cook them outside in a nice big pot with the top on it. Let me see. see it's actually some pictures of some oysters [*shows more photographs of oysters on his phone*].

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Sara Wood: Those are beautiful.

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Jamie White: Yeah. that's all we pick. That's why this restaurant is so famous because you know we pick real quality oysters. And that's a conch one day. that's the biggest conch I ever seen around here in my life.

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Sara Wood: Oh my gosh. That's crazy. Now what is that?

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Jamie White: A conch?

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Sara Wood: Yeah. like so—is it like—do you eat them?

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Jamie White: Oh yeah. You eat them.

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Sara Wood: I've never seen one before.

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Jamie White: What you have to do you have to—you have to—I put them—put them in the freezer and when he freezes his self he comes out the shell. Then when you thaw it out then you can just grab them and pull the whole thing out the shell.

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Sara Wood: And how do you prepare that? How do you cook that?

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Jamie White: I like to stew mine's because see these things are real tough. And they—so they—they real tough so you got to—I let mine's cook for about sixteen, seventeen hours you

know at a low temperature. And it's—it's weird because you know they—their favorite food is clams, like plenty times I seen—I seen them eating clam.

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Sara Wood: They're kind of ugly-looking.

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Jamie White: Oh yeah. they're ugly looking but—

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Sara Wood: They look like aliens.

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Jamie White: —they taste pretty good.

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Sara Wood: What do they taste like? Can you compare it to something?

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Jamie White: No. you can't compare it to nothing. See that's some blue crabs [*showing photographs of blue crabs on his phone*].

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Sara Wood: Oh those are beautiful. They're so pretty. So Jamie, can you talk about how—how did you decide to start working in this industry? How did that happen?

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Jamie White: Well when I—when I was a teenager you know I made some wrong choices and got involved in fast money business and got involved in selling drugs and back then I didn't know what I didn't know now is you know those things affect your life forever because nowadays with a criminal record nobody wants to hire you. And you know working somewhere like at McDonalds or Walmart or something like that we all know you know making minimum wage, it's impossible to make a living off of it. So, you know, then I got into car sales and I—that's when I told you I was living in Atlanta and you know I went from making about \$80,000 a year to making nothing because in 2008 when the economy took that big hit and gas prices was five bucks a gallon and all that stuff, nobody was buying cars. The banks stopped lending out money. So I went from making \$80,000 a year to trying to live off of \$300 a week on unemployment.

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So when that happened, good thing I didn't have a family then because, you know, I had no kids or no wife or nothing that was dependent on me to come home, so I learned them. I said, "You know what?" From now on I packed my stuff and came back to Charleston and I said, "From now on I'm not going to count on you know having a job working for somebody for my money to come in." I said, "I got to get a bunch of sources where I can have money coming in from here, here, here, here, so that way if money ain't coming in this—if this avenue wasn't doing good then some will be coming from this one. If they ain't doing good in these two then maybe one of these three will have something." And so now everything works out pretty good 'cause oysters is a good business going on right now. Crabs is a good business. I own a taxicab.

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Sara Wood: Is that yours parked out there?

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Jamie White: Uh-huh. I own that so I—you know I got all types of different stuff going on because like I say, having a criminal record which—and the bad thing about it, the stuff that I did was done when I was sixteen and seventeen, but I was charged as an adult which I wasn't even able to buy cigarettes then, but the stuff is still following me right now. So, you know, but I mean stuff happens for a reason and I don't—I don't regret nothing that happened because you know it was all a good learning lesson and taught you business-wise skills to keep stuff going on.

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Sara Wood: So when you packed up in Atlanta to move back to Charleston and around here to come back home did you know that you would—you would get back—you would get into this business or did it just sort of—? I'm curious just how you decided upon you know you talked about wanting to sort of like have—have a diverse way of earning money when you came back here, but did you have that in mind to do oystering and crabbing?

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Jamie White: No not really because then I was doing—I was selling clothes and shoes and what else was I doing? I was selling clothes and shoes—

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Sara Wood: At a store?

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Jamie White: No. I used to do it out of the trunk of my vehicle.

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Sara Wood: Oh really?

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Jamie White: Yeah. I used to go to Atlanta and buy wholesale from people and you know drive around selling them out of my car. But then I quit that to go into the oyster thing ‘cause then I saw—I said, “Well, you know, seafood, people loving it and it’s getting more popular and popular by the day,” and you know especially seeing shows like Guy Fieri and all them you know they’re traveling around the world and you know so every—everything but you know because back when I don’t know how old you are but when we was younger you know you didn’t have the resources. You had to learn stuff. Now you didn’t have the internet where you can find out what people are doing all over the world. It’s a lot of stuff you didn’t have so now that people are seeing all this stuff they’re starting to travel to all these cities and you know try these things out. And this restaurant right here [*referring to Bowens Island Restaurant*] is very popular for it because, I’ve done met somebody who came all the way here from Germany just to come here and eat oysters.

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Sara Wood: What does that mean to you? I mean you grew up right over there and then you’re meeting people who came all the way from Germany to eat your oysters?

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Jamie White: It's unbelievable especially when I know they're coming to eat mine because I'm like wow. you know you can go anywhere in the world but you choose to come here and eat these, so yeah it's getting very popular. And a lot of stuff is being done out here, like a lot of reality shows, like I was on—I got to be on one of the episodes of *Drunken History*.

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Sara Wood: Oh were you—was Goat in it, too?

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Jamie White: Yeah. me—that was me and Goat yeah.

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Sara Wood: Somebody pointed that out to me and that was awesome.

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Jamie White: Yeah. that was us.

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Sara Wood: So can you—was there somebody who said—I mean did the light bulb sort of go on after you came back or did you—were you talking to someone who said, “Yeah I’m oystering and you should get into this.” I’m just curious how you made that leap.

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Jamie White: No. Actually my uncle [Richard Brown] what he used to do is, you know, he was selling to a guy and you know I needed to make some extra cash because, you know, the clothes wasn't doing good at the second, so you know I came and started helping him sell the oysters and I was seeing, you know, okay well I can make pretty decent money doing this. So I get into it full-time.

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Sara Wood: And was that the—did you start with oystering or did you start doing both?

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Jamie White: Well actually I started doing crabs first. I got into buying crab traps and when I was doing that and then at the same time—well, not the same time—maybe a year later after doing the crabs I got into the oysters.

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Sara Wood: And what was it like when you started doing the crabs? I mean what was it—was it—did it take right off the ground or was there a learning curve or you had been—you did it when you were younger?

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Jamie White: Yeah, see by doing it when you're younger you already know how to do it, like you know the areas the crabs would be in and—. So it was pretty much you know growing up I had already knew how to do everything. Then you know the skills from you know selling clothes

and all that stuff kicked in because you know it was easy to catch them but then you still have to have a market to—in order to distribute them.

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Sara Wood: What's it like getting into that as—you know coming in on your own? Was that a hard thing to do—?

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Jamie White: Very hard. Very hard because you know a lot of people look at it and see, you know like sometimes they might see me coming with six bushels of crab and be like you know right now I sell a bushel of crabs for \$60. They look at it, you know, somebody added it up and they're like, Wow, you're making \$360 in one day!" Well you know all that isn't profit 'cause you have to buy bait which is \$33 a bushel, you have to put gas and oil in the boat, you have to have a boat, and then you have to have the crab traps and all that stuff and that's why I was saying you know all my skills from you know the drugs wasn't always bad for me 'cause it taught me the skills because when you was buying/selling drugs when I was younger, you had to have a certain amount of money to buy more and you know generate profit. So then I knew, you know, using those skills on business-wise on doing oysters and crabs. It's the same thing. You know you have to buy the boat, you have to buy the traps, you have to buy the bait and then you got to get them and then you got to sell them, so you know drugs didn't do all bad for me. They taught me some good skills too.

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Sara Wood: Now did—well did it take you a while to get like—you have to buy the traps and the boat—did all of that come in a process? I mean how long did that take you to get going?

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Jamie White: Um, I'd say probably about—first starting out it took about a good year and a half process because at first I didn't have a boat so I started off, I had about six traps that my cousin gave me that, you know, 'cause he buys new traps every year. So he had some old traps and he gave me about six of them. And I started off with that and me and my uncle [Richard Brown] was going out together in his boat. And then you know we bought more traps and bought more traps and then we ended up with forty traps and after that, you know, I started saving up 'cause then I had to get my own boat where I can do everything on my own, so—. It was about a year and a half process to get—get everything rolling to where I'm at now.

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Sara Wood: And what's your cousin's name?

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Jamie White: The one that gave me the traps? William Singleton.

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Sara Wood: And when which uncle, you mentioned two uncles earlier but—?

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Jamie White: Richard Brown.

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Sara Wood: Richard Brown. And how old were you when you started doing this?

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Jamie White: Which—the—to where I'm rolling this now? Let's see I'm thirty-four now and I'll be thirty-five Wednesday. So I was about thirty.

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Sara Wood: Oh wow. Happy birthday.

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Jamie White: Oh, thank you.

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Sara Wood: And so you started with the crabs and then how did the oysters come to play into it?

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Jamie White: Well I started—we started taking them to Backman Seafood and Backman one day business was slow, well for one month business was slow and they didn't have no work for us and I guess Mr. [Robert] Barber [from Bowens Island], he needed some oysters so you know he, [Thomas] Junior Backman was like you know, "Why don't y'all go over there and pick for

him?” So that’s when we started picking for him. And now this I think our fourth year—third—either three or four years. This is the third year, third year we’ve been picking for him.

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Sara Wood: And before you were doing it primarily for Backman?

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Jamie White: Uh-huh.

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Sara Wood: And do you guys—do you do shrimp as well?

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Jamie White: No, no, no just crabs and oysters. Shrimp is a rough business.

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Sara Wood: It sounds like a rough business.

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Jamie White: Oh yeah.

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Sara Wood: I mean how do you contend with the challenges of your business though with the crab and oysters like, are there some years that are better than others and you kind of have to just be on the balls of your feet about it or—?

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Jamie White: Well yeah. some—some years are better than others ‘cause some years crabs don’t catch, because see crabs—crabs is a live thing and then oysters you know they’re just sitting on the banks, so when oyster season comes you can always go out there and make you some money selling oysters. As long as people come into the restaurant to eat them we’ll make some money. But crabs, they rough because sometimes they catch and sometimes they don’t. Like usually around the Fourth of July crabs don’t catch ‘cause—I almost gave up the crab business this year. I was about a week away from quitting it and then the crabs finally came in ‘cause from—through the month of May I made decent money doing crabs but then June and July wasn’t catching none. I was just catching enough to pay for me going out every day. I wasn’t turning no profits through the whole June and July.

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But then August made up for it, so you know so—.

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Sara Wood: How do you weather that? I mean it—it seems like it’s a lot of like, it can be a good—good month or a bad month and you—you just said you were a week away from turning in the crab business altogether, and I mean how do you hold on?

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Jamie White: Well from my learning experience, what I went through when I was living in Atlanta and I told you I went from making all that money depending on that making nothing, I know now—I took—I—and I learned also from this guy. He—he was—he quit his job because

he was an accountant for fifteen years and he was like you know he was just tired of sitting in front of a computer every day. So he said he's going to spend, you know he's going to take a year off and figure out what it is he's going to do. And I was like, "You're going to take a year off? How can you afford to do that?" And he was like, "Well, I always lived way below my means, as low as I can go." And what he meant by that was I guess like let's use for instance he was making three grand a month and he balanced it off at keeping his bills at about maybe \$600—\$700 a month so that way you know he was saving money, saving money. And he was accustomed to living off that. And now he can—he took a whole year off to figure out what he was going to do and then he went into the car business because I was telling him about that and he's still doing it 'cause he loves it, 'cause you know he said he likes you know helping people find a vehicle that they're going to enjoy and you know versus sitting in front of the computer screen all day just you know looking at a screen. He said it was driving him crazy being stuck there in front of a screen all day.

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So I finally learned how to live way below my means and save money to the point to where you know if something happens I can at least live for six months without working and not having any worries.

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Sara Wood: And what does it feel like to you to carry on traditions that have been always been here, but, you know, you never imagined that you'd be, you know, doing this for a living? What—is there something about this tradition that means a lot to you since you grew up with it, just living over here like—like we're literally looking at your old neighborhood right now.

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Jamie White: Oh yeah. it feels real good and then my thing I want to make sure it keeps going, like I got a couple guys over there now that's like twenty years old and I'm going to be teaching them this year how to do it. And I was like you know, "I ain't saying make this a career but you always need a backup plan 'cause you know out here in the world especially the way things are now you always need to know something else that you can fall back on because you know you can have a good career going and you can just wake up one day and that career can just be over with 'cause you know those things happen."

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And we can look at everybody in the world and you can see that like you got some actors like if you can remember one time Will Smith used to always be in movies and now you don't see him in no movies. We don't know if you know people got tired of using him or whatever the case may be, we don't know but you know everything don't always stay the same. So you always got to have you a backup plan on other stuff that you can do.

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Sara Wood: Do you have a backup plan right now?

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Jamie White: Oh yeah. I have hundreds of them, like I tell you. I cook. I—I got—I own a taxi-cab. You know I try to basically get into stuff that people are always going to need. Nowadays people don't like to cook. They like to buy food so that's why I want to stay around the food business because that's a business that's never going to go nowhere. The same thing with taxi, I

got into the taxi business 'cause I was like I know the city real good. And if you—and for what, the last three years now we've been the number one most what's the name—we've been the number one tourist attraction city. So you know people come here and they're going to need a taxi and then not only when they come here, they're going to want to know about you know certain attractions, restaurants, where to go, the history of here. And you know I can produce them with a lot of stuff and that's why I said I'm going to also—my next move is to get into a business that's involving you know a—a tour, like giving people tours of the city where, you know, they can see a lot of stuff where you know you don't have to go and pay no a lot of money to go and you know see certain tours.

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Sara Wood: Do you think you'd ever want to open your own restaurant? You talked about being—

00:27:41

Jamie White: Oh yeah. that's coming. That's coming, but you know that's probably about ten years from now 'cause in order to run a successful restaurant I mean I know I'm a good cook, a real good cook, but you still got to know how to—you know I need to learn things about you know the proper ways of storing meat, buying meat, you know keeping them safe for human consumption so that way, you know, people don't get sick 'cause the last thing you want is somebody coming to your restaurant and getting sick. So, you know, I need to learn all the basics of that 'cause you know I get people be like, “Oh, why don't you go ahead and open up your own restaurant?” I say, “It's coming but you know I want to do it the right way.” I don't want to, you know, have people coming in there and getting sick because of certain ways you got to stack

food and certain times on how to keep them certain temperatures. You know, I want to learn all that stuff, so I can do everything right because you know I want to have a restaurant where—. You know then I look at like driving a taxi, I see people who have restaurants and you know I see like—like whenever I be dropping them off at they be right there. You know, they'd be in the back smoking and stuff so it's like you know I don't like stuff like that. So you know I said whenever I get a chance to open up a restaurant I want to have like a shower there where you know you come in with whatever you're wearing but I want your uniforms to stay here because at night when everybody goes home I can wash their uniforms and make sure it's clean. You know I know they took a shower before they went to work. Nobody smokes. you know if you're a smoker I don't even want you working here because you can't smoke while you're here. Now if you did that while you're home then you know that's that, but so you know I want everything to be done the right way.

00:29:22

Sara Wood: That's really interesting. I mean it's really interesting to hear about your vision of that 'cause you do. You see a lot of cooks hanging outside the back. That's my image of a chef or a cook always chain smoking outside.

00:29:38

Jamie White: Yeah.

00:29:39

Sara Wood: Well Jamie can I ask you—do you have time for a couple more questions?

00:29:43

Jamie White: Yeah. Take all the time you want.

00:29:44

Sara Wood: I'm wondering—oh I wanted to ask you how long have you had your taxi business?

00:29:49

Jamie White: Um, how long has that been? I got into that in—I've been doing that now for—this is 2014—2010, so the end of 2009, yeah around the end of 2009. so it's been going on five years.

00:30:18

Sara Wood: So what is a typical day like for you? Do you sort of go through—do you—do you do a whole bunch of jobs in one day? I mean I'm just curious what a day is like for you.

00:30:26

Jamie White: No. Actually I took the taxi—I took my taxi business to a different level. You know I used to do it full-time at one time. But then you know having a girlfriend, and kids, you know got too time consuming. So by seeing certain things like people—I'm—I'm a people's person so people like me and I had gotten to the point where you know I don't do it—I barely do it anymore now. What I do now is I have—I got people who call me like—like I got some people who have dogs that don't want to travel with them on the plane and stuff because they don't want the dog being back there caged up and you know they don't know if it's getting twisted around.

So they travel a lot so now what I do I usually do runs where I might go to Atlanta and pick somebody up or I might go to New Orleans and pick somebody up. I do the long-distance travels now so—. But you know I always keep that because if I ever need to like say something happened like we got certain areas where we can go and pick oysters.

00:31:38

Sara Wood: Are they—now can you kind of explain sitting here where they are?

00:31:40

Jamie White: Yeah. sure. This right here Mr. Barber owns this leased area right here, a cousin—well, a long distant cousin of mine, his name is Cubby Wilder and he owns this lease over here and we use that over there. But what will happen is when we go and pick oysters you have to document where you picked them from and the time and all that stuff because if somebody gets sick the DNR wants to know where you got them from. So that's what all that documentation is for, so what they do when that person gets sick, they can go and trace where it is and they can test the water and they'll shut it down. So if something happened or if you know sometimes if it rains too much like you get a lot of rain, they'll close the whole thing, so when they close those things you have to have something to do. I can always jump in my taxi. that's why I told you I like to keep a lot of things going so where if this door closes, guess what? I can still get through that door right over there.

00:32:44

Sara Wood: That's a pretty darned good plan to have in place.

00:32:48

Jamie White: Oh yeah. it took a lot of learning and now they finally are starting to pay off, all the learning I'd been doing throughout my life, they're finally starting to pay off.

00:33:01

Sara Wood: Can you explain a little more about maybe what—okay like how you catch what you catch? So you talked a little bit about the crab traps and can you kind of talk about what the process was like, like when you go out, like you're going to go out in a little while and collect the crabs? How does it work? How do you catch them?

00:33:18

Jamie White: Well you have a—a big box trap where you put crabs like an oily—that's their favorite oily things like, chicken backs, chicken, something that's greasy, a lot of fat on that. It's a fish called menhaden. they like it 'cause it has a lot of oil in it. And you know you stick those inside the trap and you just leave them out there overnight and come back the next day and pull them up and you know the crabs will be inside there. You dump them out and put more in there and keep—keep the process going.

00:33:50

Sara Wood: And then how do you pick crabs? Can you kind of talk a little bit about—for people who aren't familiar with picking—or picking oysters, sorry. can you talk a little bit about how you do that?

00:34:03

Jamie White: Well with the oysters that's the thing. oysters is a business like a lot of people come—come in here from all over the world just coming out here and picking up stuff and taking it. Now what they don't know is like—what they don't know is the way they're picking they're just looking at what they're going to make now. They're not looking at years to come like these banks around here that we're picking on uh, our family has been picking off of them for generations and they're still going. And the reason why is because it's a process to it. What you want to do is like our oysters come in clusters. When you pick up a cluster we have a hammer or sometimes some people have like a piece of rebar or whatever would be more comfortable using and you want to knock some of the oysters off. What you want to do is you want to knock the smaller ones off. that's where they're there to grow for next year and the years to come. So you want to knock those off and take the bigger ones and bring those back. That's why you know a lot of people like to come here and eat oysters 'cause a lot of people don't know what to pick. They're just out there picking up shells, like—.

00:35:23

This one guy—one time Mr. Barber, we didn't have enough oysters for a party we was having and he had to go to McClellanville and buy oysters. And he bought ten bushels from them and but when I went and washed them and went through it for him by the time I picked out all the shells and the trash they had in there they ended up with like almost a bushel and a half of oysters. So that mean he had eight and a half bushels of trash and shells. And you want to leave those there because oysters they spit out seeds and what the seed will do, the seed will catch onto one of those empty shells and then it will start growing from there and turn—eventually turn into

an oyster. But if these guys take all the shells, eventually it's going to be nothing left for them to grow.

00:36:14

And you know oysters are an amazing thing. I just all my life I've been eating them but I'm just learning what they do. One oyster can cycle up to a gallon of water an hour. So like a—like if you go buy a fish tank that you want to put in your home, you notice how you have to have a filter in there to keep the water clean for the fish and all that stuff? That's what oysters do for everything that lives in the oyster. it keeps the water clean 'cause they cycle, they filter the water. And I was like wow. that's—that's amazing. You know sometimes when I go pick them up you'll see them spit some water out.

00:36:58

Sara Wood: Like literally they'll spit it out?

00:37:00

Jamie White: Oh yeah. they'll spit it right on out.

00:37:03

Sara Wood: Mr. Barber was telling me earlier that the water—most of the water had always been pretty clean around here and I'm wondering if you know when you talk about this I was just—that's what brought that to mind like the quality of water is good out here, just because of the oysters. Do you think that there's connections there?

00:37:19

Jamie White: Oh yes. the—the oysters, like I told you, the oysters that’s what they do. They filter the water so like if something happens, you know some toxic stuff comes or whatever is out there and I guess—I guess the reason why it was made like that ‘cause if you think about it just like we humans have to—you know we have to—when we use the bathroom, we pee, we poop and you know we flush it down the toilet. When the fish and stuff do it out there it has to go somewhere. I mean it couldn’t stay out there ‘cause then it will eventually kill all of them off. So I guess that’s what the oysters are there for to keep everything clean.

00:37:56

Sara Wood: Like our natural like potty sort of. [*Laughs*]

00:37:59

Jamie White: Yeah. They’re the natural sewage and filter(ation) for the ocean.

00:38:06

Sara Wood: That’s really interesting. You had talked about coming over here to work for picking oysters for Bowens. Do you get crabs for the Bowens Restaurant here too?

00:38:16

Jamie White: No. He don’t serve the crab. I’ve been trying—I’ve been trying to get him to get into it but with the process of that the reason it’s hard because crabs have to be cooked live. So in order to sell them fresh you know we’re trying to figure out a process to where we can do it because we have to keep the crabs live and they don’t stay alive long. You know you might can

keep them for a day, some of them for a day or two but that's—that's the farthest you're going to get it then and it'll end up being a lot of waste if you ain't using them. So we got to figure out a process to where [*phone goes off*]*—to where we can figure out you know how to do it without losing too much.*

00:38:59

And then see. I'm a person like you got a lot of guys around here who crab. You know they come out here. They get all the crabs they can get. They take them. I'm the type of person if I don't—in order to buy crabs from me you have to let me know a day before 'cause I don't just get them and hold them because I don't want them to end up dead. I'd rather them stay out in the water so like when I go out now I only have an order for one bushel today so that's all I'm going to get. Once I get a bushel I'm not going to pull them the rest of my trip, so I'm going to you know just leave them out there until I have it sold.

00:39:31

Sara Wood: And how many traps do you have out there right now?

00:39:35

Jamie White: Um, probably about twenty-eight. I started off with forty but I'm down to about twenty-eight now. Crabs is a dirty business.

00:39:43

Sara Wood: What do you mean by that?

00:39:45

Jamie White: Well all us crabbers battle with each other. Say—let's say you got a guy named Mike who crabs and who knows where I crab at. Now let's say he got an order for five bushels today and he pulls his traps and he only gets three. Now he going to go start pulling mine to try to get the other two. And like say he know I'm catching a lot of crabs and he ain't, he might come to my area and steal some of my traps and take them somewhere else and you know so it's a dirty game. And then you got people who come out here on boats and stuff that be fishing and they use crabs as bait so they'll pull your traps and get the crabs out. Oh yeah. it's a dirty business.

00:40:26

Sara Wood: Do people get violent about this because I feel like they're—you know I used to hear about the oyster wars in Virginia but like people pulling other people's traps. Do people get in fights out here about that?

00:40:36

Jamie White: I haven't—I haven't heard of none in a while but if you get caught I'm pretty sure that's what is going to happen. Something is going to happen because you know like—like I told you. It costs a lot of money because the cheapest boat you'll going to find is you're going to have to spend at least \$3,000 on a boat. When it's all said and done by the time you buy a crab trap and put all the equipment on it, each crab trap will run you about fifty-five, sixty bucks a trap. So when you add it up you need at least \$6,000 to come out here to try to start off with. So you know nobody wants to spend that and to be sharing it with somebody else.

00:41:15

Sara Wood: And you—you're pulling, you say you pull maybe when you do—you pull a bushel like you'll—you'll do a bushel a day to sell. Does that go to somebody in particular at like ahead of time? Well you said you don't really take orders because you want them to be alive but I'm wondering. who do you usually sell the crabs to? Do you take it to a certain spot and people will come to you or do you—?

00:41:37

Jamie White: No people call me. I use—I'm a word of mouth type person. You know like say you buy one from me, you know and then you might be talking to a cousin or a friend of yours and they might be saying, "Man, I wonder where I can get some crabs from?" So you be like, "Oh well I know this guy named Jamie and you can call him and you know he'll bring it to you." What I usually do, people have parties. They'll call me and be like, "Hey I'm having a party this weekend. I'm going to need a bushel or two bushel or whatever." And another thing that I try to get involved with people who have these bars around here. what they usually do, they have certain nights like the guy I got to get a bushel for today, every Monday and Wednesday he gives away free crabs you know to his customers, so you know he put a little extra pepper in there so they will buy a couple extra beers, you know so—. That's who I usually—that's who I like to sell to. I usually try to sell to the public. I don't sell to the seafood market.

00:42:28

Sara Wood: Now who is the guy? Can you say his name or where—where the place is that—?

00:42:30

Jamie White: Well the place is on Grimbell Road and I know him as Juke. I don't know his real name.

00:42:36

Sara Wood: And it's just a little place he owns and he does it—he cooks it for people?

00:42:40

Jamie White: Uh-huh. he cooks them and you know people come in there to eat them.

00:42:45

Sara Wood: Is that over here in James Island?

00:42:48

Jamie White: Uh-huh. it's over there—his place is over there behind Food Lion, yeah back there.

00:42:53

Sara Wood: Okay. is it back—so it's back that way?

00:42:56

Jamie White: Uh-huh. back down Folly Road that way.

00:42:57

Sara Wood: That's cool.

00:42:59

Jamie White: Oh yeah.

00:43:01

Sara Wood: Do you—now do you still sell to Backman's? Do you do anything for Backman's anymore?

00:43:04

Jamie White: No.

00:43:06

Sara Wood: I keep saying Backman's—"Bachman's". But before you were at Bowens you were—?

00:43:13

Jamie White: Yeah. I used to sell them oysters, uh-huh.

00:43:15

Sara Wood: Now they're still over there. Do they—do they still use the same people as far as you know or—?

00:43:18

Jamie White: Yeah. My uncle—one of my uncles, Richard Brown he picks for them.

00:43:24

Sara Wood: Do they have many people picking oysters or is your Uncle Richard one of the few?

00:43:28

Jamie White: Him and his son. that's it. They have some people down there in Beaufort [South Carolina] who they usually go and buy their oysters from. So they usually use those people buying from them.

00:43:41

Sara Wood: And just—just a couple date things. When did you start picking oysters for Bowens?

00:43:47

Jamie White: About three years ago [2011].

00:43:52

Sara Wood: Three years ago. Okay. What's the hardest part of your work here?

00:43:58

Jamie White: Well I'd say the hardest part is probably washing them and bagging them.

00:44:06

Sara Wood: What's that like?

00:44:08

Jamie White: It's rough. That's why this year I say I'm going to hire somebody to wash them and bag them up for me 'cause when I pick the oysters, you got to pick the oysters, put them in a basket, walk through the mud, put them in the boat and then when you get the boat here you have to load it onto the—I have to drive the boat on the—on the trailer and pull it up here. I got to take all the oysters off the boat and dump them on this pad right here and then I got to wash them. And then I got to bag them up into bushels and then I got to put them on the back of the truck and I got to take them over to the cooler and then I got to take them off the truck and stack them up inside the cooler. And a bushel of oysters usually weighs around forty to forty-five pounds, so dealing with that—picking up and moving them around six different times in one day forty-five pounds and I usually average about anywhere between ten and fifteen bushels each time I go out, so that's like 450 pounds of oysters you're moving around about five different times.

00:45:14

Sara Wood: So it would be nice just to come and drop them off and have someone deal with that?

00:45:17

Jamie White: Yeah. that's why I say I'm going to do that. That's exactly why I'm going to do that this year, and then see, doing that I can pick more, so it'll balance out to the same thing and it would just be that somebody else will have a job 'cause you know that create a job for somebody else. And that's something you know I wanted to try to get into 'cause a lot of people be trying to say the community is bad. I mean not bad. what's the word I'm looking for? They're trying to say the economy is—

00:45:48

Sara Wood: Like it's declining or—?

00:45:49

Jamie White: When they say—you know how people are talking about the money or economy doing bad and things. I mean and by me doing my own homework at it, my opinion of that is the way we operate the economy because I mean I feel we're doing a lot of stuff wrong. And what I mean by that is a foreigner or somebody from another country can come here and work, don't get taxed, send all their money back home. I don't have a problem with that but with you not taking no taxes from him, and he's working, he can—that person can afford to work cheaper than me and you can 'cause he's not worried about health insurance, he's not worried about the taxes, so let's say me or you want to make \$15 an hour, he can come and undercut us and say \$10 an hour and still balance out to the same thing we're making.

00:46:45

Now where that problem comes in at, foreigners work with each other. Like I notice a lot of the Mexicans when they come here and you see them in the store, they're buying products that's made in Mexico which is smart because you know that's helping their economy out. Us, when we want something, I notice a lot of people here and Americans they look for the cheapest stuff when it shouldn't be about the cheapest stuff. You want to help out your economy so you want to buy stuff that's made here, support people who are here like usually I try to go to these mom and pop stores and buy all the stuff that I can buy because you know it's helping them make money. And try to keep the money generating through the economy so everybody can

make some money, so that's why I wanted to do stuff. And I say, "Well you know me having somebody else wash oysters that will create a job for somebody else."

00:47:45

Sara Wood: Do you see a lot of Mexican workers around here working the water?

00:47:49

Jamie White: No. I haven't seen none of them yet. They didn't get into this yet but I know they—you know it'll be soon before they come.

00:47:59

Sara Wood: What do you think the future of your industry looks like?

00:48:02

Jamie White: It's not good. That's why I want to get into the restaurant business where I can just use what I need and you know—and the reason why I say it's not good 'cause of earlier what I was telling you about the guys who—who go out there and they just pick everything they see when they're doing that and not creating the process. They're not leaving nothing there to grow. And they're not leaving no shells there, so that the oysters they're reproducing or have something. Like if an oyster spits the shell out and they don't have nothing to stick to it's not going to grow. It's just going to float and I guess eventually something will eat it or whatever will happen to it. I haven't found out what happened to an oyster when it's—when it don't have nothing to stick to. But when that happens, I mean eventually if we keep taking everything it's nothing there to grow, it's going to end up being empty. And then that's going to have a bad

impact on us because the oysters filter out the water so now if the water isn't getting filtered properly that's going to make it harmful for fish, crabs, everything else that lives out there. And we don't just use this as a source of income. a lot of people depend on this as a source of food because a lot of people eat seafood, just like with a farm you know.

00:49:29

The cows and stuff don't reproduce then we ain't going to have no meat. So the—the future is not good with the way you know they're just allowing people to take, take, take, take.

00:49:42

Sara Wood: How do you keep these traditions alive for you personally?

00:49:45

Jamie White: Me, like I told you. Showing me by the guys that's going to work up under me this year, I can get to show them how to pick and still be able to pick years to come because they'll be able to leave stuff out there to grow, shells for them to stick on. And as you can see. see all these shells right here? Those was eaten in restaurants. That's what we do with those. we take those out and dump them around so that way when the oysters re—reproduce their-selves you know they'll have something to stick to.

00:50:21

Sara Wood: And when is oyster season around here?

00:50:23

Jamie White: It'll start October 1st and it'll go up to May 15th.

00:50:26

Sara Wood: What's crab season?

00:50:28

Jamie White: Well, whenever you can catch them. You know usually January and February they usually don't catch at all too much then. It'll—it won't even—it don't even be worth it to try to catch them then.

00:50:41

Sara Wood: Well Jamie, I don't have any more questions for you but is there anything that you want to add that you think is important for people to know about your work, maybe something I didn't know to ask?

00:50:53

Jamie White: Hmm. It's back-breaking labor. [*Laughs*] That's the only thing I can say. it's back-breaking labor. It's not easy.

00:51:02

Sara Wood: How so?

00:51:03

Jamie White: Well it's not easy because you know like I tell you. all that weight you're moving around, not good for your back, you know wearing you out. Walking through the mud, and so it's not easy. That's the only thing I think I can add.

00:51:20

Sara Wood: How do you keep longevity in it when it's back-breaking work like that? Is there stuff that you do to take care of yourself in a specific way that will maybe help you stay in the game a little longer?

00:51:31

Jamie White: No. I already said—maybe about another six—seven years will probably be the most I'll try to push out this. That's what I'm hoping for. I ain't saying that's going to actually happen because you know like—like I say, I don't—with the way people are picking I don't think this is going to last long, so that's why you know like I told you I keep all my avenues open. So that way when I can't drive down one, I can go down the other.

00:52:02

Sara Wood: I think that's really smart and I mean the only other thing I wanted to ask you is you're—you're the same age as I am. I consider us pretty young still.

00:52:10

Jamie White: Yeah. we are.

00:52:11

Sara Wood: Do you—are you considered young compared to other people who you work around here? Is it mostly a lot of older folks or are you seeing younger folks coming into it? Is it a little bit of both?

00:52:21

Jamie White: Well, the people I'm seeing coming into it, I can't really say their ages because it's not really no local people that's getting into it. It's people that's moving from other cities and—

00:52:33

Sara Wood: Oh really?

00:52:34

Jamie White: Oh yeah.

00:52:35

Sara Wood: Like from where?

00:52:36

Jamie White: I don't even know where they're coming from. I ain't been asking them but people coming from other cities that's why they put a—what they do like for me to get my oyster license in order to be able to pick it's \$25. If somebody comes here from another state it's \$300 but you know that ain't stopping them because you can go out there and make that in a day. So if you're from another state it'll be worth it to pay the 300 bucks, especially if you got the market to sell them.

00:53:06

Sara Wood: Wow. So it's a lot of people coming in from out of town?

00:53:09

Jamie White: Uh-huh. Lots of them.

00:53:12

Sara Wood: What do you think about that?

00:53:15

Jamie White: Well the only thing I think is that it's killing the business because they're coming here, like I told you. they're just coming and taking, taking, taking and not going through the proper procedures of doing it the right way so, you know, you can pick next year, the year after, and keep it going.

00:53:38

Sara Wood: Well Jamie I don't have anything else to ask. Is there anything else you want to add?

00:53:42

Jamie White: No. I think that's about it.

00:53:44

Sara Wood: All right. Well thank you for your time this afternoon. I appreciate it.

00:53:46

Jamie White: Yes, ma'am anytime.

00:53:49

[End Jamie White Interview]