

Wild Caught  
Jody Davis Oral History  
Date of Interview: Unknown  
Location: Unknown  
Length of Interview: 09:37  
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Jodi, talk a little bit about growing up in this fishing family, the Davis family because this generations have been involved in this.

Jody Davis: Yes, a lot of generations. It was great. We thought it was. We were around our family all day, every day. We got to get on the ocean and see things that most people don't get to see. It was just a different kind of lifestyle than what most people are used to. We enjoyed it.

MB: So, how old were you when you first really started to get involved with this whole thing?

JD: The first time I went strengthened in the ocean, I was 4 months so. And I went through the summer as a kid, I like to go a lot. I started full time when I graduated from high school eleven years ago. And last year, I kind of got out of the shrimp into help take care of the business, seafood business.

MB: Why don't you describe for us what a fish house is?

JD: Well, when the boats come in, we washed the shrimp, we pack them in 50-pound boxes. We retail a lot. We have a good retail business. We wholesale to retail markets. Whatever we can't sell locally, we shipped to Alabama, to the process, distributes them out to restaurants and things like that.

MB: Talk about some of the different things you do on a daily basis.

JD: Well, I usually get here at 8:00 a.m. A lot of people buy shrimp early to fish with for bait. I take several calls, people that want to buy some for the freezer, I have them ready whatever amounts they want to weigh it out in. People pick up shrimp until 6:00 p.m. when I leave. I take care of a lot of paperwork. I have to pay for the boats. I take care of paying the fuel and everything.

MB: Talk about how many days a week you work.

JD: I'm here Monday through Saturday. I usually like to take Sunday off, take my little girl to the beach, or boat riding in the river nests. That's our family day.

MB: Are you a close-knit family? Do you all live right here?

JD: We all live within 5 acres of (Wenona?). I can see both of my brother's houses from mine. We're a close-knit family. We go out together, go to movies together and go out to eat together. Our family are our best friends.

MB: That's great. It's unusual for a family to actually live within – I have a brother in Seattle. I have a brother in Boston. I'm here. My mom is in Northern California. So, we're all over the country. So, I wish I could have like what you guys have.

JD: We see each other fifteen, sixteen hours a day. We work together and we go out together and that's the way it's always been. It's probably rare to find a family this big that gets along as

good as we do together. That's the only way we learn how to be.

MB: So, both your brothers go out. It's kind of nice that you all – it kind of works out in terms of who's doing what too.

JD: We've all got different responsibilities. Their responsibility is to try to catch the shrimp, and it's mine to move them. To sell them as quickly as possible and get the best price we can. We've got different responsibilities.

MB: Take us through the kind of the year in terms of the season, what happens in the winter and so forth.

JD: In the winter is the time that we clean up and repair and paint. Do any mechanical work that we have to do because in the summer and fall we're just too busy to do that. We work through the summer and through November usually. Then December through April or May is when we take care of our mechanical work and our paint and clean up, anything we need to do like that. We just can't do it in the summertime.

MB: So, sometimes in the summer you work seven days a week, sometimes?

JD: Sometimes. So, when they're catching a lot of shrimp, they will go on Sunday. So, usually, they like to take Sunday off also. We like to take that day off. If we're catching a lot of shrimp, especially in the fall around the end of the season, they will go on Sunday sometimes. That means I have to be here too. [laughter]

MB: It's a lot of work.

JD: It can be. It's rewarding work. You get a good satisfaction out of working like this. You feel good at the end of the day.

MB: So, in terms of the satisfaction, what is it about – I mean, it's providing food for people, which is very important, obviously.

JD: We're feeding people. We give a good product at a reasonable price. That's something to be proud of, especially when it's all you know how to do. You do it as good as you can and that's what we do.

MB: So, now, do you expect and want your kids to go into this?

JD: I don't know. I've not got a very optimistic outlook on commercial fishing for the future. It has been good to us. It's given us everything we've got. But there's so many rules and regulations now that it's going to get harder and harder. There's just so much paperwork and so many laws and it's just getting hard to do. And maybe in ten or fifteen years, we might not be doing it at all. I mean, it could come to that. They've already put the fishermen in Florida and Texas out of work, the net fishermen. In this state now, they're working on trying to get inland waters ban on trawling. It seems like some groups get little by little until they get everything.

God forbid that would happen, but you never know. So, I would like my children to go to college and get a good career.

MB: Well, let's hope it continues though.

JD: We do, we hope it does. Like I said, it's been good to us, and we just hope that it continues.

MB: That was good.

JD: I hope I didn't get too –

Male Speaker: I just want to show that more on [inaudible]. You don't want to tell the story where you fell overboard? Because I'd like to hear that.

Female Speaker: Tell it, Jody.

MB: Fired up. Are you rolling?

MS: Yes. We can go –

JD: It's the summer after I graduated, 1989. Me and my father and my brother Steve were on a smaller fiberglass boat shrimping. Something broke on the winch and there was a rope that went from net to net that was across in front of us. Whenever the nets went in the water, the line came back and took me and Steve overboard. It caught us about mid-waist and flipped us right overboard. The (cullen?) table where we sort the shrimp, it fell on top of me and kind of pushed me on underwater. I had to crawl around inside until I could get out, probably twenty or thirty seconds underwater. Scary. [laughter] I didn't realize it then, I was only 18. I was invincible. But now I look at it, it could have been serious.

MB: Well, there's always danger in the –

JD: It's dangerous. Luckily, we've never had any bad accidents or serious injuries but it could happen anytime. We realize that people around here have gotten hurt. But it's part of the business, it's part of the livelihood.

MB: Boats can sink and –

JD: Things happen so quickly. When you're dealing with that much weight like we do, ropes can break. The blocks can break. It can happen so fast that you can't avoid it.

MB: I interviewed Mack Liverman. He ran a boat for – he had two boats sink on [inaudible]. He'd been through some wild stuff.

JD: You can get in trouble, it can happen. Luckily, nothing bad has happened to any of our family. We're blessed.

MB: Good.

JD: All right.

MB: All right. That was good. He did real good.

[end of transcript]