

Wild Caught
Betty Edens Oral History
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Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Well, you've been hearing what I've been asking members of your family. Why don't we do this? So, you can just kind of basically look at me. You look at the camera to kind of see what's going on with this little –

Betty Edens: This is cool.

MB: You've been here what I've been asking your members of your family. You come from a fishing family and you were born into a fishing family right now in Florida at Key West.

BE: Yes.

MB: We talked about that in an interview we did four years ago.

BE: Yes, in 2000.

MB: I'm trying to figure out what's been going on just recently in this town?

BE: Recently.

MB: Yes.

BE: Well, okay. We've got a lot of real estate going up for sale. Mostly fish house areas because it's a waterfront area. It's our prime area. It is where we unload. That's where we sell. It's our livelihood, more or less, and it's devastating to me. So, what can I say? They're taken over, and they're taken over slowly, but deadly.

MB: Who are they you were talking about?

BE: Anybody that wants to build and pollute our waters. It will be because of building that pollutes it. We're not looking after the environment. We're not being keepers of the environment by allowing it. I can't be any more blunt than that. We have no places really left. We have one or two. I hear that there's two fish houses that for sale, and another one that's going to be a dock for just yachts and a marina. We have another marina that had come up and specifically for certain things like camping and everything, but not sailing. I think in that, we can pretty much predict the future. It won't be long. But it's flabbergasting to know that we'll have probably maybe one fish house left in the next five years. Kind of hurtful seeing my loved ones wanting to do what they want to do and the freedom to do it. That's what this nation is about. The freedom to work and to do what they want, to just live and take care of the environment. Without us, what are they going to do? We're pretty much like a guinea pig, commercial fishermen are. We go out there and we fish. We try to tell them when something's wrong and they don't listen. It's kind of hard. It's really hard anymore. I would like for my son to see better days working with his father and learning to navigate, to come in through the inlet, to fish, to just do what I did. I don't see it happening. My grandkids will never see it, not if something doesn't change. If it doesn't change, what will the public have? What will they have? They won't have the environment that I see. By no means, no means. It's changed that much in the past ten years. Since I've talked to you, it's changed. We're strong people. We'll make it.

We'll make it as long as we can. We have a future, we do.

MB: Well, I'm with you. Oh, god. What you just said, that's so powerful. You're speaking from the heart as you always do. I mean, you know knowing you that time we interviewed you on out of the fish house down there along the pier. Remember that?

BE: (Dock master?). [laughter]

MB: [inaudible] you have in those big old crates of shrimp lines or other ones. Remember little (Scooby, Mack?) and come back and Johnny with his deckhand.

BE: Oh, yes.

MB: That was a long time ago. They were [inaudible] down. It seemed like back then that's one thing that struck me back then. I'm glad I didn't finish the documentary when I should have because all this has happened since. Now, this is really the hard – it's in crisis mode right now practically. I went out to the buddy (Davis's?) fish house, it was like a morgue out there.

BE: There's a morgue at any fish house.

MB: Buddy was just ready to cry. I mean, buddy Davis is always such an optimistic guy by nature. Then he's saying there's nothing left here.

BE: Well, people have become lazy. They don't want to clean their seafood. They want it packaged. They want it already prepared and just put it in the microwave and put it on the table. That's something that you don't do with seafood. Seafood is a gourmet meal. It's not like it used to be. What I see is that cafe is not using seafood like they should. They use us in North Carolina as selling it. Other places, I mean, you're using import. So, I mean, "Come on. Tell the people the truth that you're using imports." You're taking away from U.S. citizens and using what they have done since what, for hundreds of years. What really gets me is people buy it. [laughter] They buy it, and they buy it as USA. When I was young, my grandmother told me something. It's always stuck with me. It was after the wars and everything. She come to visit. She went into a store and she picked up every glass and everything that was made, she pulled it over. She says if it's made in Japan, or if it's made somewhere else, it's not USA. I was taught this when I was like seven. Back then that was pretty awesome to learn that we were actually not supporting our country. I mean, really. [laughter] Today, when I go into the store, I still look to see where it's made. I look at the future, and I'm saying "Okay. What am I going to be in the next twenty years? Where am I going in the next ten years?" That's something to think about. I mean, just working. I mean, we give it all up. We give it up.

MB: With everything made in China, brought in from everywhere, we're importing.

BE: Oh, man. If the people really knew what was really going on, they'd be amazed. But no, we don't tell that story. We just sugarcoat it. Go in the internet and look at FDA and see where your shrimp is really coming from. I mean, is it coming from the United States when you go to buy that pretty packed stuff? No. What they put in it? What type of chemicals? How they use

it? What they feed to it before they send it to you? Oh, man. People would be amazed. I mean, really, they would. It's unreal. What I've learned is we have become where we have taken away the farmer. We're like the farmer. We know how to work the river. We know how to produce we know when to or when not to produce something. Let me put it this way. How do I say it? It's like the ocean, the inlet, it breathes. When it breathes, it feeds the river in and out, as the tides. When it does that, it produces. As it produces, it makes it living for us. We have to learn how to work it. As we learn hands on – not by books or anything else, we learn when we can shrimp, when we can fish, when we can clam, when we can oyster. With the laws and regulations that come out, it sort of tightens it, where you have to go into another field in the fisheries. As you go into a field in another fisheries, it cuts out a fishery. Let's say, we all know that it's better to eat oysters in the winter because of the bacterias and everything it cuts down. So, we have that, and we have clamming year-round. So, we have claimers all year round. But shrimping is sort of like nature. Nature does as it wills. When nature does as it wills, it will produce its young when it wants to. That's how I see it. So, it's sort of like the food chain. Say you have a small fisherman that works the waters and all. Then you have a bigger fisherman that works outside. Then you have a bigger boat that works a different thing. When you take one away from the other, actually, what you're doing is you're hurting the environment. Because as we learn from the small fishing boat, we're actually going to a different size but meant to a bigger boat and we know when to work it. Other than that, I think that the rules and regulations is actually hurting the commercial fishermen and then you have overseas, dropping our prices where we can't make no money. So, it may not make sense to most, but in my mind, that's how it works. She's laughing. [laughter] But anyway –

MB: We're kind of maintain seriousness. That's the way people are forced not to be able to jump.

BE: What are they doing? They're weeding us out. They're weeding us out bigtime, and it's fast. It's overwhelming.

MB: Between all these different things, all the same, like fuel, real estate, fish houses selling out because of the real estate. All these things are kind of happening at once. So, it's all low prices, because –

BE: It's all politics, and I'm not into politics. So, they've got me. They've got me. They have got me like a puppet. I've got to do as they do, or I don't work. The shame of it is the public don't know it, but it affects them. It affects them more than it does me. I mean, it really does.

MB: Okay. I think you've gotten to the heart of it. I really do. Especially you know, the main emotional bias. It's very powerful, Betty.

[end of transcript]