

Wild Caught  
John Edens Oral History  
Date of Interview: Unknown  
Location: Sneads Ferry, North Carolina  
Length of Interview: 57:31  
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Like we said, I'll be going out with you guys. Then this will kind of tie in with what we see in the film. I've been doing the documentary for a while about the town and it's also a real fishing town. Talk about your background. Did you grow up around here or –

John Edens: Oh, yes. I was born and raised right here on this river. Sure was. Been doing it ever since I could walk, I guess [laughter].

MB: Well, now talk about your family a little bit. In other words, your father and –

JE: Well, all of his people were farmers and fishermen. So, it's just in the blood [laughter]. But his daddy before him, he farmed and fished. I guess what they couldn't make farming, they made fishing. He just left the farm and he went to all fishing. I guess that's where I got it from.

MB: What was this town like when you grew up?

JE: Well, [laughter] it was a lot different than is now. There weren't very many people here. Matter of fact, they didn't get electricity in here until, I don't know, I guess 1950 [laughter]. They had no water, just well water. No lights. It was pretty primitive.

MB: A real, little, isolated handle.

JE: Yes. It was just hardly any people. What people were here were mostly fishermen or farmers. That was pretty much it.

MB: How long has your family been around here?

JE: Well, Betty could tell you better than I could [laughter]. She's gone back through that family tree thing and she's traced it all the way back to I guess well, my great-great-grandfather. I got a picture of him in there. He was in the Civil War. So, it's been a while since, I don't know, eighteen hundred, I guess. Somewhere around there.

MB: Wow, Civil War, that's a long time ago. You were around here then.

JE: Yes.

MB: Sneads Ferry. That's interesting because I've interviewed a lot of people and there are a number of people that their families go way back.

JE: Yes. Well, back in the seventeen hundreds, the Midgetts, they came from up around the Kitty Hawk and from there back this way. I guess they got off the boat there. I don't know that to be true. But they migrated here around eighteen hundred.

MB: You mean like Johnny Wayne's family?

JE: Yes.

MB: Of course, these families you see Midgett, Carr. They're almost –

JE: Yes. Most of the old settlers in Sneads Ferry we're kin to, sure, in one way or another. Like my wife's family, she's from Florida. She was born in Key West, raised in Marathon. She had fourteen brothers and sisters [laughter]. So, I got a lot of family.

MB: Fourteen brothers and sisters.

JE: Fourteen.

MB: Don't mess with them or you have fourteen on you.

JE: It was a pile of them.

MB: She grew up in a fishing family?

JE: Yes. Her father crawfished over around Grand Cayman and about. Sure did. He was a good man.

MB: Well, so growing up here it was smaller.

JE: Yes. Pretty small. I don't even remember. There were only a couple little stores here when I was a kid. Right across the road is one of them. That used to be Mr. Levy's old store, Levy Midgett. I think there's one more down Piru. It was called Lucas's store. That was a good while ago though.

MB: So, when did all this growth start to happen around here?

JE: You know what, I believe it started when this shrimp festival started. I really do. I remember the very first one. That big house right down there, that's where the very first one used to be, or was. I was just a kid probably 9, 10 years old. I remember because I won \$10 and a crate of Pepsi's. I called it the greasy pig [laughter].

MB: [laughter] So, I think they've had thirty shrimp festivals.

JE: Thirty shrimp festivals. It wasn't yesterday.

MB: Well, so since we're talking about how the town has changed, do you like that?

JE: Well, there is nothing you can do about it except live on, because that's progress. A lot of people move from up north here. I got a lot of friends. You know some of them like Tom Burgess. He's from New York, Long Island, somewhere there. But a lot of people came down here and liked it so good they just bought a house and stayed [laughter].

MB: Well, in comparison, the prices of real estate are a good deal here compared to what you pay in Long Island.

JE: You aren't kidding.

MB: Or anywhere else for that matter.

JE: Things are a lot cheaper [laughter].

MB: Yes, for a while there. I guess I hate to see it grow.

JE: I hate to see it grow. I'm a small-town guy. I don't even like to go to Jacksonville much less any big city. I've been to Cincinnati before and I didn't like it [laughter]. Too congested.

MB: So, let's get back to you grew up here. Your father was a fisherman?

JE: Yes, my father, my brother. My older brother, he fished for a living. I guess all my uncles did.

MB: So, when did you first start fishing as a kid?

JE: I don't know. I think the first time I remember going I was probably 7, 8 years old in the summertime fishing with my dad when I didn't have no school. I guess that's the first time I remember going. Yes, about 7, 8 years old. That hooked me [laughter]. Been doing it ever since.

MB: Well, let's talk about, so what is it about it that gets in the blow? What is it?

JE: I don't know. I guess it's the freedom. You haven't got no freedom in a shop in town or some confined quarters somewhere or anything for that matter. You get to go out there and it's just that big, open space and there's nothing to bother you. I like not being bothered [laughter].

MB: [laughter] You did a lot of stuff, you guys, today. You what, built that whole canopy frame?

JE: Yes. We finally got it done today. It's always work doing the boat. Always. We had to go through all the [inaudible] and grease them up and switches here and there. Now, I got to go down there and make rigs when we're done here. Make me up some fishing rigs.

MB: Fishing rigs, you mean the actual – what is that?

JE: Take that monoline and make you a piece of a leader about that long and put a hook on the end of it. That's pretty much the basic.

MB: How big a hook is it?

JE: Well, the grouper hooks are pretty big because they got big mouths. But we also use the small ones for beeliners and stuff, smaller mouth fish. But we got all different sizes, I guess.

But we only use, like I say, just grouper hooks and what I call pinky hooks.

MB: Pinky hooks?

JE: Yes.

MB: Well, how do you know where to go for grouper or for – how do you know where you're going? Talk about that? How do you do all this stuff?

JE: Well, it's a big ocean [laughter]. I go off as far as I want to go up to the northeast and then I'll work just in and out trying to find where they're biting at because they don't bite all over at one time. They'll bite in certain spots, one day in certain spots than another. It's hard to keep up with [laughter]. You got to a place, you mark fish, you stop on them. Some places are ledges. Some places are just little rolls about that high where it just rolls up, anywhere you mark fish at. But like I say, they don't bite every day. You have to go to each little spot finding where they're biting at and then work that little area.

MB: Well, how do you know where the spots are to begin with?

JE: [laughter] Well, there's a lot of boats out there. Everybody talks to everybody and they'll all fan out and wherever they're biting at, you can call a guy and say, "Hey, they're biting out there." Then you go to that area. Pretty much like that. They all work together. It's pretty neat.

MB: So, even though you're competing with each other.

JE: Yes, you're competing. But like I say though, it works a lot better when they work together like that. Everybody shares information [laughter], places, and hot bites.

MB: So, you have the radio to keep in contact with?

JE: Yes, all the time.

MB: That's not that big a boat, is it, for being way out there 50 miles out.

JE: That *Barbara Sue* I worked on for Junior Grant, it wasn't a 30 foot. I worked with that out there for the last 5 years until I got on Mike's boat and I fished, I don't know, 70 miles at times.

MB: How about storms out there?

JE: Well, they were no fun [laughter] especially this time of year, kind of the severe weather and tornadoes and stuff like that. Water spouts out there are pretty common. But you stay away from them except at night when you can't see the. That's what got that boat year before last. He was laying the anchor and there'd come a severe thunderstorm. It pushed on out the sea and water spouts got him. Sunk her right there laying to the anchor. Luckily, he had an EPIRB and the helicopter picked him up.

MB: The emergency position indicating radio beacon.

JE: That's what it is.

MB: So, those suckers go off or you fire them off and –

JE: Well, what I do is grab a hold of it and just hold it [laughter]. I wouldn't let it get away from me. If they can hone in on that beacon and you got a hold of it, they got to find you.

MB: But it tells them where you are.

JE: Yes. They can go right to it. I tell you, a lot of guys didn't like them, but they do help [laughter].

MB: Well, speaking of all that, have you been in any close scrapes yourself all these years of fishing?

JE: Well, a few times [laughter].

MB: Can you talk about them?

JE: Well, one night, Hammer – you met him – he went with me and my other brother-in-law. He worked with me fishing. He was on that *Barbara Sue*. We were anchored there one night trying to sleep a little bit. It wasn't rough. It was pretty actually. Off there where we fish at is the shipping lane. You work right in the shipping lane. I could only sleep for 30 minutes at a time because I didn't like it [laughter]. I just happened to wake up one time and I looked around and looked behind us and there he was. He had both his range lights lined right up on us and you could have hit him with a rock. A steaming Full Boar it looked me like. It was all I could do to get her started up and added away. That was a close call.

MB: Well, what was it?

JE: A ship [laughter].

MB: How far away was it?

JE: You could have hit it with a rock. I don't know. It was probably a little farther than that house there.

MB: You mean the bow was aimed at you?

JE: Yes. It's got a range light. It's got one in the front down low and it's got one in the back high up. That's how you tell if you're in front of them. They were lined right up on me and he wasn't turning off. I guess whoever it was, was asleep. It was scary. It scared me pretty bad [laughter].

MB: So, it was a huge freighter coming at you?

JE: Yes, probably, I don't know, 3- or 400 foot long I would imagine. At least that big.

MB: But it takes them a while to stop or even to turn.

JE: Oh, well, it does. It even takes them a while to turn. But evidently, they weren't turning. It was close [laughter]. It was too close for me. That's why I like that boat of Mike's. It's got that radar on it. You can put a guard alarm on it. You can set it for however close you want it. I keep it set for a mile and a half. Anybody gets around me I know it, be it other boats or tugboats. There's a lot of big seagulls and tugs pulling barges, that sort of thing.

MB: That must have been terrifying to see that big old ship coming at you.

JE: Well, it was. The moon was bright too that night. You could see it good [laughter]. But one time it was right off here in the river when I had shrimp rigging on that boat. Remember that Tropical Storm Josephine? Well, me and my wife decided we were going to go shrimping that morning [laughter]. We went and about middle of the first drag it hit just after daylight. It didn't really blow that hard. Maybe 60 mile an hour. But it rained so hard you couldn't see and some of the worst light that I've ever seen in my life. I didn't like it. You couldn't see nothing. Didn't have no radar, so all we were doing was dragging blind. She grabbed up a couple of lifejackets and said, [laughter], "Are you ready?" I said, "For what?" She said, "To go over the side." Well, I had her turned all the way into the wind and it still had her blowed down on her side. That was the bad thing, I couldn't turn. It didn't last, but like 10 minutes that hard blow. We got straightened out and hauled back and into the dock.

MB: But you never know when a storm's going to start up.

JE: No. You never know. I've been in a lot of bad thunderstorms in the river. A lot of them. All kinds of water spouts. Pamlico Sound is bad for them. I have seen four or five at a time up there just hanging out the clouds. It's no fun. I'm a fair-weather fisherman [laughter].

MB: So, your wife thought this was it?

JE: Yes. She thought we were going to have to go swimming. It had her blowed over pretty good.

MB: Oh, so the boat was –

JE: Yes, blowed over on its side. We were dragging. We had the nets over we couldn't haul back. There was no way.

MB: What was your good story? It's hard to –

JE: I'll tell you what [laughter], that river can make a believer out of you [laughter], open water like that. It doesn't seem as bad on the land. You know how wind is. You get out there and,

boy, those waves get nasty especially in the wintertime. It seems like it's worse in the winter when the water is cold for some reason. It doesn't settle down as quick as it does when it's hot.

MB: Even a 70-foot boat, which seems like a pretty good-sized boat, but still, that's not that big a boat out there.

JE: Not in the ocean. Sure isn't, especially as far off as those ships run. They look big but in the right kind of weather they can draw right up [laughter].

MB: Well, how far off are the shipping lanes?

JE: It runs from about 40 miles on off to a hundred.

MB: When you go out tomorrow, how long does it take to get out there if you're going 50 miles out?

JE: Well, making 10 knots, it'll take you 5 hours [laughter]. It's like a regular haul. We don't run really fast. About 10 knots is about all we make.

MB: What kind of engine do you have in there?

JE: V12 GM, Detroit.

MB: How many liters? Is that a truck engine or –

JE: Yes, it's twelve cylinders. It's a big engine. But it can use big fuel [laughter] if you push it on it. So, I usually keep it in economy mode about 9.5, 10 knots. Don't burn much that way. Unless we get ready to come home, then I don't mind giving her a little bit, I'm ready to get home.

MB: So, what's it like to be out there? Well, you go on all kinds of fishing. You've been a shrimper. You've done –

JE: Pretty much everything [laughter]. Like this river, that's all I used to do. I never ventured out in the ocean much. Just sinking it along the beach or maybe shrimping along the beach. But I don't know, in the last 15 years, I guess I started with way offshore. With my older brother, he had a boat. The name of it was *The Can Do*. We spent a lot of hours out there on that thing. We were out there on a break one night and it shifted a thunderstorm out of the northwest. I know it blew 70 or 80 mile an hour for about an hour. It got rough, quick [laughter]. But we couldn't boat anchor and go nowhere. All you could do was lay there and wait it out. It was blowing that night and we were off there, rugged waves right on the break. I think it's 62.5 miles straight off of here.

MB: What is the break?

JE: The continental shelf, I guess you'd call it. The Gulf Stream where it falls off from 190 to



300 feet and then breaks off again on down to 4-, 500 feet right on off [laughter].

MB: It goes deep.

JE: Deep quick in places. Fall about 150 feet at a time.

MB: So, that's where you find the good fishing, is on that shelf?

JE: There's a lot of good fishing there, yes, at different times. Like, this spring, the fish are just starting to move in, I don't know, from 120 feet off to the break. It's usually the best this time of year. I love to do it anyway, catch all different colored fish. They got speckled hinds and strawberry groupers. They're all different colors. Just tropical fish. They look a lot like tropical fish. Matter of fact, that's one place I like to fish, it's the place they call the Tropical Bottom. It's right there about a mile and a half before the drop off. About 140 feet of water.

MB: So, you have a depth finder that tells you how deep it is?

JE: Oh, yes. You got to have that. It's a video – or not a video. It's a color machine. It's not paper. It shows you the fish. If you're looking for a ledge, it shows the ledge.

MB: For communication what you do you have?

JE: Well, we got a VHF radio. Supposed to have a telephone or a sideband but – [laughter]. A video plotter, that helps a lot. You got all your marks down there. There are a lot of marks. That helps with the anchoring too, you know? It makes it, I don't know, 50 percent easier than just anchoring without it. Because you got current running from one side and you got the wind from another and you're trying to get on a certain spot. If you got a mark, you can put it on that plotter and scale it down. If you get on that mark and the tide shifts you one way or the other, you can tell on that plotter which way it moves and how much. The next time you come around, you anchor right on it and lay there. It helps. Makes a big difference.

MB: So, when did you know growing up that you wanted to be a fisherman? Talk about that a little bit.

JE: Well, I knew I didn't like school [laughter]. I don't know. I guess it's something I've always known. Like I say, it's just in the blood. I didn't know it at the time, but it was there, wasn't no escaping it.

MB: Did you ever try to? Did you ever work other jobs on a regular role as you say?

JE: Yes. Well right now, my brother he's a carpenter and I help him on different jobs when the weather's bad like building decks or remodeling houses or adding additions or roofing. He does pretty much all of it. But I don't like roofing. I don't mind the other stuff. I wasn't much of a carpenter until I started [laughter] working with him. Now I can cut a straight line.

MB: So, how did he learn how to do all that stuff?

JE: He knew he didn't want to fish when he come out of high school. He'd done some of it. He longlined sharks there for a while. But he didn't really care for it. He likes doing it but not for a living.

MB: How come do you think he doesn't want to be a fisherman or he –

JE: He feels more security in a land job, I guess. I guess it's more predictable [laughter] anyway.

MB: Well, let's talk about that predictability. I've been talking with everybody from Mark Lumberman, Buddy Davis, Buddy's son. There's an unpredictability. You don't know.

JE: That's for sure. You never know from one year to the next. Just like coming up now, nobody knows if it's going to be a lot of Browns ramp or if it's going to be a bad year. Nobody knows. They might think they know, but they don't know [laughter]. You never know until it's time. That's the way it is with everything. Even in the fall when all the fish run, they'll run from north to south. Like the roe mullets, you never know if there's going to be any or not until it's time. There is no way to predict that [laughter]. No way.

MB: So, that makes it pretty tough in terms of raising a family or knowing how much money you're going to have.

JE: Well, yes, I guess it does at times. Like now, it's pretty slow. It's been a long, cold, hard winter. But I can't complain. We've had a few strikes in the kingfish. We had to run 70 miles to get to them sometimes. But [laughter] we got them. Down there the Frying Pan, I don't know why, but they'll go right there and lay the whole winter right there beside Frying Pan Light Tower. Bunch of ledges off in there. It's so far off it's right on the edge of the stream. That warm water comes and goes in there and it brings them a little fish in there for them to eat in that warmer water and that's why they lay there.

MB: Has the danger aspect of your work – obviously you have to think about it, but you are working around winches and – you want to get that?

JE: I have to. It is nice to have a computer though.

MB: Yes.

JE: [laughter]

MB: Looks like you have a pretty nice one.

JE: Yes, Betty, she bought that one herself.

MB: She likes the computer?

JE: She loves it.

MB: Really?

JE: Kids, they love it. I look up a few things every now and then. But music is about all I'm interested in. So, that's all I'll look up.

MB: You play guitar?

JE: Yes, a little bit.

MB: Rock and roll or –

JE: Well, I like classic rock [laughter].

MB: Me too.

JE: Jimmy Buffett, Fleetwood Mac.

MB: Yes.

JE: Lynyrd Skynyrd, people like that.

MB: Good, old days.

JE: Oh, yes [laughter].

MB: [19]70s, [19]60s.

JE: Good, old days [laughter].

MB: That's my period.

JE: [laughter]

MB: I'm not too wild about the new stuff. I don't even listen to it, so it may be good stuff.

JE: No.

MB: I haven't heard it, but –

JE: Some of it's all right. But a lot of screaming and shouting and cussing [laughter].

MB: We were just talking about it this morning about how you get all these little cute girls that can wiggle around, but they can't sing or shit [laughter].

JE: [laughter] Yes.

MB: It's just like they make up these groups and package them together like casting an actor. You don't have to sing that well. I guess they can electronically make it sound good sort of by bubblegum music. Well talk about your kids. Let's see. How many? Why don't you tell us how many kids you have?

JE: Well, I got one daughter. That was her that just left. She just turned 21 and Robert, he just turned 17. He thinks he wants to fish for a living. He thinks he does, but I'm not sure [laughter]. I hate to say it, but I was trying to talk him out of it. It keeps getting harder and harder every year now. Years ago, it wasn't so bad. You got so many rules and regulations and then you got the pollutants. Like in the Neuse, that river is in bad shape. I had on the news here about the porpoises. Did you see that? They found seven washed up dead and a little baby one. I'm pretty sure that's what it's got to be because they have fish kills there all the time.

MB: What, from those hog farms up there?

JE: I don't think it's just hog farms. It's some kind of chemical is going in the water. Maybe it's nitrogen, I don't know what it is. I don't know what kind of plant they got there on the river now.

MB: We just drove over there. Isn't County of Washington on the Neuse River?

JE: Yes, I think it is.

MB: Or is it New Bern or whatever?

JE: New Bern. I believe Trent River runs through New Bern, doesn't it? The Neuse is the next one up to Washington.

MB: Right. Yes. We just interviewed this guy named B.J. Copeland yesterday. He's a zoology professor at NC State. He's a real nice guy, very on the side of fishermen. He told me that straight up that he's a scientist, but he can see the human side of all of this. But he just said, "Look, it's very simple, you got development." How do you put it? In other words, you cover stuff up, you build things, the runoff has nowhere to go. With development, you've got runoff. With runoff, you've got pollution.

JE: That's a lot of it. Instead of ground, in the cities they got pavement and nothing can –

MB: Go down.

JE: – get into that pavement. All the cars, oil on the ground, people watering their lawns with the – what do they call it?

MB: You mean pesticides and insecticides?

JE: Yes. Any of that stuff that goes in the water isn't good for it. After a while, it keeps piling

and piling, it's got to kill the bottom, I guess.

MB: With the habitat.

JE: But what are you going to do [laughter]?

MB: Yes, what can you do? So, you were trying to discourage him. You are kind of feeling a little weird about your son being a fisherman?

JE: Well, it's getting so hard. You can make a living at it, but I don't know what it's going to be down the road. They might stop it. They're talking about, well, they stopped Florida. There's a net ban in Florida. They can't use no gillnets there. I guess you've seen all the guys around here. They're back now from Florida. All those guys came down here because they can't let them fish there. They gave them a little bitty 50-yard seine or something they can try to catch fish with [laughter], but no gillnets. That's what they're trying to do here.

MB: What's a gillnet?

JE: It's just monofilament webbing in squares. It's different depths like sixty meshes deep or fifty meshes deep. You hang it to a lead line and a cork line, stretch it out. I don't know. Some of them are that deep. Some of them are deeper than the house. It's like a wall and fish will run right into it and gill into it.

MB: Then they just pull it up and –

JE: Yes, put it on the boat and pick them out as they pulling it up. It's pretty fun.

MB: So, you're worried for your son's generation?

JE: Yes.

MB: What is the future going to be for them if they go into fishing? Will they be able to –

JE: Make a living at it or not [laughter]? There are so many other things he can do that do have a future, I guess. I don't know. I guess nobody knows for certain [laughter] anything. But I believe they have a lot better chance like welding or mechanic anything. He takes to welding.

MB: Well, a lot of people said just that, that they don't want their kids going in.

JE: Yes. Well, a lot of people are sort of scared, I guess [laughter].

MB: So, could your generation be one of the last of the fishing generation?

JE: I hate to say it, but I think so if it keeps on going. Because they don't want you to catch this. They don't want you to catch that. They tell you that a certain time of type of fish is caught up. There's hardly any of those kinds of fish and you can't catch them. Like with the pink porgies

now, they got a season on it when it's closed with the gag grouper. But when they open it, you can only catch 50 pounds per trip. There are so many of them out there now that you can hardly get a hook to the bottom. You have to actually pull up and leave those fish behind because they won't let nothing else bite [laughter]. It's pretty amazing. I don't know how they take stock of an ocean.

MB: I don't either. They just guess.

JE: They do it by trip tickets, is what they say. There are trip tickets they've come out with here in the last few years.

MB: I don't even know what that is. What is it?

JE: Well, in order to sell them you have to write them down how many fish, what type, where you caught them, and send it in every month. So, like St. Petersburg to the National Marine Fisheries. That's how they keep up with it. They go by annual landings. Some years aren't as good as others. I guess they think, well, that stock is depleted so we have to do something about it. So, they close it or put a limit on it. But they really don't know what's out there. It's a big ocean.

MB: It's just a guess.

JE: [laughter] Yes.

MB: They're trying to figure out –

JE: That's all they're doing is guessing [laughter].

MB: Right. Even when they have these computer models and all that. But they don't know. It's like how they know how many people are watching a TV show. They can't know everybody who's home watching TV.

JE: Just go buy surveys.

MB: Right. Dress it up with all the scientific mumbo jumbo. But that doesn't mean they actually really know. I heard some guy on the radio talking about how well, gee, that fish stocks just naturally go through cycles, something that doesn't necessarily have anything to do with fishing?

JE: No. It's just a natural thing just like shrimp, well, anything in the water like oysters, clams, all of that. Seem like the clams though, they just produce every year. Or oysters. But the hurricanes help the oysters. I don't know what it does. But after a storm, the next year it's the most oysters there's ever been. They're everywhere. It just sort of I guess spread this seed around or something. But they sure grow [laughter].

MB: So, have you done clamming and oystering and everything?

JE: Oh, I've done it all [laughter].

MB: Crabbing?

JE: Yes. I've even done a little crabbing. I've done about anything you can imagine to do with the water.

MB: So, what do you prefer? What's your most enjoyable?

JE: That would be offshore fishing and catching roe mullets. That's my two favorites.

MB: So, what is it about the offshore fishing that you really like?

JE: Getting back to that widened space thing, you're out there in a big old ocean, nobody to bother you. You just pretty much do like you want to do except a coast guard stops you once in a while, checks your safety equipment, and checks your build, make sure you aren't doing nothing wrong. But aside from that, it's wide open.

MB: So, what do you eat out there for two or three – what are you guys going to pack tomorrow to eat?

JE: Well, the usual sandwich, meat, chips, oranges, apples, bananas, and a lot of fish [laughter].

MB: Well, it's good that you truly really enjoy fish.

JE: Oh, man. I could eat them every day. Matter of fact, we do when we out there. We sure do. Either fry up a mess of them or put them on the grill. It's pretty good [laughter].

MB: You were telling me you just put the whole fish on the grill?

JE: No. You just take the skin, filet one side of him. We did leave the scales on him a couple times to burn that side down and cook them that way when we run out of tinfoil. If you haven't got a tinfoil, you can just cook them right on the scales and just eat them right off of it. It's a little plate and it's good [laughter].

MB: That's as fresh as it gets, isn't it?

JE: Yes. I like to cut them when they're still wiggling. It's the best.

MB: So, when you look at your life, you've been able to live in nature and work out there in the great outdoors and have great fresh air and water around you and the beautiful sky.

JE: Yes, I think you live longer that way [laughter]. It's pretty nice. Salt air is good for you and I like plenty of it [laughter].

MB: So, you're doing what you want to do?

JE: Yes. Doing what I was born to do [laughter]. That's the way I feel.

MB: Do you?

JE: Yes. Sure. Put on this earth to catch fish and aggravate those mullets [laughter].

MB: Hey, Barry, are we getting some nice, tight closeups?

Barry Reichenbaugh: [affirmative]

MB: Great, thank you. But I had to go back to your whole family. But if your son really decides he wants to be a fisherman, you're not going to –

JE: No, I couldn't stop him. No matter what he wants to do, you can't stop him just like nobody could stop me back then [laughter]. I was going to do what I wanted to do and that's pretty much the way he is, I guess. If he wants to do it, fine. If he doesn't, fine. But I'd rather him not. It's been a hard life, but it's been a good life. Some tough times.

MB: Well, let's talk about that. How about the town of Sneads Ferry? Is there a real sense of community here? What would you say about that?

JE: Yes, it's a pretty tight-knit community. I guess everybody knows everybody, you know? It can be bad one way and good in another. You know how small towns are [laughter], a lot of gossip. But I don't pay that to mind. I'm never on the hill long enough to listen to it [laughter]. I'm at sea most of the time, weather providing especially this time of year. We'll probably be out until, I don't know, maybe August. Fish run on off there until end of August or something. Maybe even into September this year. Who knows?

MB: Then what will you do?

JE: Probably do some shrimping with Michael and you know Jenny Adams. I shrimped last fall with him in between big mullet fishing. Had to take a couple weeks off and go with my dad and catch some big mullets [laughter].

MB: When your dad goes out, he does that at night, right?

JE: Yes, 24 hours a day when that comes in.

MB: Oh, really?

JE: We love it. So, we stay out there. We come home, sleep a couple hours, and go right back. The low tide, it'll run for 7 hours, the ebb tide. Then high water, it'll only run 5 hours. So, that's how much time you got between tides. You have to work around those tides. Well, we have run a few times [laughter] in the tide, but you tear up a lot of net if you aren't careful. You have to



get that little slack when it isn't pouring so hard.

MB: So, the town of Sneads Ferry is still a tight-knit community?

JE: Yes, pretty tight knit I'd say especially in tragedies. You know how that is, how that brings people together.

MB: Like with hot dog.

JE: Yes, Joey.

MB: Did you know those guys?

JE: Oh, yes. Grown up with them. Sure did. Matter of fact, we were down in South Carolina there to St. Helena Island, I guess you'd call it, shrimping when they got drowned. I guess it was part of the same storm there. It blew like, I don't know, it was 70, 80 mile an hour on us. It was pretty bad that Sunday. We towed out there and we didn't want to haul back in it. So, we towed back in the sound before we pulled the nets back up. It was blowing so hard. It was singing and rigging. Some hard, steady blow. It was I guess one of them cold front blows, you'd call them, from the warmth in the air. The hot and cold air, you know how it can push together and make tight isobars and really blow.

MB: As a fisherman, you have to know how to do a lot. You have to know a lot about weather. You have to know mechanics.

JE: You got to know a little bit of everything [laughter]. A lot of glass work, but I don't like that.

MB: Oh, you mean fiberglass?

JE: Yes, I don't like fiberglass, but I do it.

MB: How come? Because of the smell or what?

JE: Well, you do much grinding and it's not good for you all that fiberglass dust in your lungs. You wear a mask, but –

MB: Still.

JE: – they don't do so great.

MB: Yes. We passed by when were in Greenville or something, there was some Grady-White Boat company. You could smell the fiberglass way outside –

JE: Yes, the fumes.

MB: – the people who work there.

JE: The fumes get to you. Matter of fact, we just done some repair work this winter on that boat. Put that whole new deck in or from the engine hatch back built a couple fuel tanks right to the hole inside. It took us about 2 months [laughter], probably longer than that.

MB: Well, now Mike Junior, he's obviously committed to being a fisherman.

JE: Mike?

MB: Mike Calvary, the one you're going out with. Mr. Beavy, he's –

JE: You're talking about the little Mike?

MB: Yes, little Mike.

JE: Oh, yes, he likes it. He likes it a lot. He went to college for, I don't know, a couple years, I guess. Yes, at least that long. Talking about wanting to go back this fall. I think he wants to get some kind of degree in business or something. But he still wants to fish.

MB: Yes, he goes to Pembroke, I think. He's in Pembroke.

JE: Robeson County.

MB: Well, I think we can pretty wrap. Well, are there any other things you think we haven't – I think we've covered it pretty good.

JE: Well, as far as I know [laughter] – you can sit here and talk forever about it or I could [laughter].

MB: I just wonder where the future is for what you're saying.

JE: That's uncertain. I think it's uncertain anyway. They put a net ban on us. You won't be able to net fish no more. Then shortly they'll put some kind of other ban on where you can't catch groupers by a certain time. It's just uncertain [laughter].

MB: Kind of like what farmers face.

JE: Exactly. It depends a lot on the weather. So, just fishing depends on a lot on the weather how if it gets really cold or really hot. It takes certain measures of certain types of weather to make it good just like it does for farming.

MB: Well, let's hope it can continue.

JE: I hope so. Well, it's going to continue for me until they plant me. They can do what they want to do, but I'm a fish [laughter]. I just hope it doesn't come to locking me up for what I like

to do like in Florida and the net ban.

MB: All those condo owners just don't like it, do they?

JE: Don't like it. That's what it boils down to. They didn't like it.

MB: Well, you think they had something to do with all that?

JE: I know for a fact they had something to do with it.

MB: The condo people?

JE: Well, rich people didn't like seeing the old fishermen out in front of their doors. I've seen it a hundred times. Most people like it all right. They get along. There's those that don't like it and don't like what you stand for.

MB: You have a soundbite about the rich people in Florida. Then when you log the tape, you're basically writing down, here's what somebody said. You're trying to figure out here's what it is in this hour. Well, now, let's talk about the recreational vision. I don't want to put words in your mouth, but aren't there some conflicts between the recreational fishermen and the commercial?

JE: Yes, some of them. Like I say, there's a bad apple on every bunch [laughter]. But some of them are really working hard to put us out of business. I guess they want to go out there and just throw a hook over anywhere and catch fish anywhere. That's the only thing I can figure out. I don't know why they don't want us doing it. But a lot of them you meet around here though, they're just as nice. A lot of them support us. Sure do.

MB: But how about these condo owners in Florida you were talking about?

JE: Well, we have the same thing here. They don't like to see the shrimp boats out there daily in the morning. There may be a little bit of bycatch washing up on the beach or something. But not much of it reaches the beach because the birds and dolphins they all eat fish off the boats. So, it all averages out.

MB: Some of these condo owners out of North Topsail or whatever don't want to see boats out there?

JE: Well, some of them just made a few comments about it [laughter]. I think that's why they're trying to get some kind of – I don't know what you call it – try to fix it where they can't come so close to the beach. I think they want to set it at 3 miles or something like that. But that's just hearsay.

MB: What? That they're trying to do that?

JE: Yes, some of them. I've heard a few people tell me about some comments some of them made that they didn't like it.

MB: Well, the fishing boats are beautiful.

JE: Yes. Like I say, most of them feel that way. They like seeing boats out there working and just sitting there watching them. But some of them just don't like it. I guess they have their reasons [laughter].

MB: I'm sure they like the shrimp. They like their shrimp, but they don't want to fish. Well, to hell with them.

JE: [laughter]

MB: They just want everything their way, don't they?

JE: Well, that's what I can't figure out. They keep messing with you, taking this and that, and maybe a little piece of bottom here or something. But they like seafood. I don't know about you, but I don't want no Ecuador shrimp.

MB: Well, tasteless shrimp?

JE: I haven't eaten any of them and I'm not going to not as long as I can get them fresh out of the river.

MB: Well, see, I was talking about that with that B.J. Copeland dude yesterday. He was saying more than half the seafood in this country is imported.

JE: It is.

MB: Who knows what the hell they're doing at those shrimp farms?

JE: [laughter] Nobody knows.

MB: They're all shady.

JE: The shrimp looks good. That fish house down here, that's all they've been selling, the Ecuador shrimp, farm-raised shrimp.

MB: Which fish house?

JE: The Everetts.

MB: Oh, really?

JE: That's all they could get. After they sell what they've had in the freezer from when it's good, there's no more shrimp around, so they have to get them somewhere. I guess they do buy a lot of frozen imported shrimp just like Junior Grant. He buys a lot of them. I guess if they like them,

it's all right [laughter].

MB: See, that's what that Copeland guy was saying. He was saying that ultimately you could have huge companies running the seafood business, just like they run everything else.

JE: Yes. That wouldn't be good. Well, a lot of big companies run now certain fisheries. Sure do.

MB: But not around here though, do they?

JE: Oh, no. I'm talking about those big factory ships up north. What they call them fish tenders?

MB: Off of New England or someplace?

JE: [affirmative] What do they catch up there? Cod or something like that.

MB: Those are big operations then.

JE: Big operations just like in Alaska with the snow crabs. There's money in it though, a lot of money. There's money in certain types of fisheries. I guess there's a lot of money in shrimping. You got the boat for it. Shoot, I've had real good days in my little [laughter] 17-foot skiff like that one I told you about in [19]94. We had 1,050 pounds that day. We made \$1,500. I was happy [laughter].

MB: That's a good take for a day. I'm sure.

JE: Yes. Plus, we got a little bit of footage of it. Sure did. We just bought our camcorder.

MB: Well, I think that wraps it up, John. This has been a very good interview. I appreciate it very much.

JE: You are welcome.

MB: Barry, why don't we shut down and get the light off and turn your instruments back on.

[laughter]

[end of transcript]