

Wild Caught  
Kern Everett Oral History  
Date of Interview: Unknown  
Location: Sneads Ferry, North Carolina  
Length of Interview: 52:00  
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: All right. Appreciate you doing this, Mr. Everett. Can you tell me a bit about – just to give us a little sense of your background, talk about growing up here in Sneads Ferry?

Kern Everett: Yes, I grew up here. My daddy was from Sneads Ferry. He moved off during the war and worked in Baltimore. But we came back here in [19]51. So, I've been back since [19]51. A great place to grow up. Real small place. Commercial fishing and farming were big in that period of time. Like I said before, there were a whole lot more commercial fishermen and more boats then than there are now. At that period of time in the [19]50s, there were also a lot of party boats. People would come down – most of them were farmers or worked in factories or whatever, maybe up towards Greensboro or Danville, Virginia. They'd come down and rent a boat, go out in the ocean and fish all day, and come back in. Very few people had speed boats or their own fishing boats back in the [19]50s. My dad, his brother, and a lot of their friends had fishing boats. On a given Saturday in the summer, in the mid-[19]50s, he probably had twenty-five boats, chartered, going out offshore here. As opposed to the Morehead City area or Wilmington, Southport kind of catered to the more wealthier type of people, where there were more expensive and bigger boats and whatever – game fish. The boats down here kind of catered to the working class man. He came down and spent \$10 or whatever it was, and shared with his buddies and rent a boat and stay all day in the ocean. Shrimping got to be a big deal here back before the [19]40s. Shrimp was just a nuisance. Nobody saved them. They were considered junk seafood. It wasn't up until the early [19]50s anybody started selling shrimp to make any money out of it. So, the [19]50s saw the beginning of the shrimping industry in Sneads Ferry, mainly in the river. Then the late [19]50s, early [19]60s, they started shrimping some in the ocean. One thing that makes this area unique in the seafood business is that we're back in Onslow Bay. We've got Wilmington to the south of us and Morehead City to the north of us, and we're back in a bay here. But the good thing we've got here, we've got formations of rocks that are unbelievable here, and fish like rock formations. So, if you're going to go catch bottom fish or you're going to shrimp, some of the best shrimping and best fishing, it's back in Onslow Bay because of the rock formations right off shore here. Once you pass Wilmington going on towards South Carolina, and once you pass Morehead going on towards Cape Hatteras, you could drag a shrimp trawl for maybe twenty hours and never have to turn around. No rocks to bother you. Here, you may go fifteen minutes. If you don't jag and turn in and out, you'll hit the rocks. But those rocks were a blessing in disguise because they created lots of fish here and lots of good seafood. The industry really took off because of that. Then the [19]60s – middle [19]60s or late [19]60s, people began to buy speeding boats and fishing boats of their own. By the late [19]60s, fishing party boats, as they had been in the [19]50s, were kind of on the way out. We had a few here – eight or ten probably. I think probably now, we've got like four or five in the whole community. But we used to have twenty-five or thirty. But if you come down here on a weekend now, everybody's got their own boat. Everybody go fishing on their own boat. The seafood industry in general, if you go back before the [19]40s or in that area, ice was the big problem. You had to catch what you were going to catch, get clear of it quick. So, salt was important. But the only way you could do it with certain kinds of seafood was to salt it down in barrels and stuff. So, that was big in the late 1800s, early 1900s. Mulletts and different kinds of spots and whatever were caught in some quantities and put in big barrels and salted down. But there wasn't enough volume there. You couldn't have had as much volume because salt was not that plentiful, you know. Barrels cost money too. So, until there was really ice here, it didn't really take off. Of course, that was the case anywhere, not just in Sneads Ferry.

MB: Wow. I mean, so shrimp was not considered –

KE: It was considered junk seafood back before the [19]40s. I mean, I don't know that anybody even cared about it. They just rolled them out of the nets and let it go. Nobody wanted them. Daddy grew up right here on this bay here, and shrimp was considered nothing back in those days. Of course, they didn't have the equipment and the nets to catch them. Fish were more important then. But up in the late [19]40s, early [19]50s, shrimp then caught on. Then of course, that's probably the biggest industry in our area now. Of all the industries that was here before, shrimp probably has more money coming in from it than any other industry. It's not a big fishing village anymore. What there is, is like crabs and flounders or small scale and not really need a large scale to make good money at it. But on a good week, a boat may catch \$15,000 of shrimp during the main part of the season. They would never do that with crabs or anything else. So, shrimp is the big thing now. But the boats don't always stay here. They're big boats now, and the bigger boats have to migrate. They go to South Carolina. They go to Pamlico Sound, and they go to Florida. They hit each area when the best shrimping is in that area. In the old days, everybody basically stayed here. They didn't go anywhere else.

MB: Now, can you talk a little bit about your family?

KE: Okay. Yes. The Everett family, I've traced it all the way back and we were probably the first or one of the first handful of people that came here in 1730. Most of the people that came to this area came from Tyrrell County, Pasquotank County, northern part of Edenton – Edenton, North Carolina – by way of Virginia and Maryland. So, 1730 to 1746, I had a great-great granddaddy way on back – Nathaniel Everett. They got 4,200 acres of land when he and about six other people moved into the area in the [19]30s and [19]40s. They were the first settlers of this area. The land where we're here now used to belong to him. It was sold several times. Daddy bought it back again. His name was Nathaniel Everett. He died in 1755. I got the will he left in detail – everything he left in his will. I got his daddy and his daddy and his daddy all the way back to the 1600s. All their names. Basically, a lot of facts about them from there on up here. But he died 1755. He was basically a farmer. He farmed by way of Tyrrell County. A big land holder. He had a tavern down at the marina where we were a while ago. He owned a thousand acres of land there. That area where we went to the marina a while ago is a very significant area for the history of this area. Because before Highway 17 was through here, the main way to south of here was to go across there on North and Morehead City that way. Everett's Creek was named after Nathaniel Everett. It's the creek up there about a half a mile from where the marina was, where we were a while ago. His son was named Arthur Everett. He continued. Arthur Everett was significant because he was a magistrate in the late 1780s. A Spanish galleon was captured off of Swansboro. They captured six Spaniards and they paid him to take the Spaniards to Wilmington. He got paid for taking these prisoners. They couldn't speak any English all the way to Wilmington where the jail was in. Before 1734, there was no Onslow County. New Hanover County encompassed all this area, including all the five or six counties surrounding New Hanover County. So, Onslow County wasn't a county until 1734. Then Arthur, he died about 1810. His son was named Jenkins Everett. He had farms and whatever. Then Thomas C. Everett, MVD Everett, John A. Everett, born in 1849, died in 1898. His son's name was Arthur Everett, born in 1871. Died in 1946. My dad born in 1915, died in

1997. Me, born in 1944, still alive [laughter]. So, I got it all the way back. But you had a pre-revolutionary period here. A lot of people that came into our area were people that were tired of bureaucracy and the England and the taxation and whatever around the major areas like Wilmington or Edenton, North Carolina, or around the Tidewater, Virginia area. They wanted to get to an area where there was free land, or basically free land, and nobody bothered them. So, the first settlers that came here had a lot of freedom. Nobody bothered them. We were too far away from Wilmington, too far away from Beaufort or the main areas where people were populated. So, we had a pre-revolutionary period. Then of course after that, you had a period there from 1800 to the Civil War. It was almost 95 percent farming, and all the land was cleared around here. It was a lot of farming going on – peanuts and that type of thing. Of course, the Civil War saw a lot of the families here lose people in the Civil War. I think probably after that, the place stayed sleepy and very small right on up to 1942. The biggest event for our area anytime in the past history has been the Marine Corps Base. Because in 1940, Jacksonville didn't have the 700 people. Then the Marine Corps Base came in there, and of course, that changed everything. One thing that made Sneads Ferry kind of unique is that we have set 44,000 acres to the north of us owned by the Marine Corps. So, there's no private ownership of land across the bridge. So, we're the last little outpost until you get on down into the Hampstead area and the Wilmington area. Because there's nothing that way until you get to Swansboro, it kind of gave us a little buffer zone and a kind of, I guess probably thirty years or forty years of reprieve, of not having the rights with each type of atmosphere or that type of thing. But the Marine Corps Base basically changed everything because it gave jobs. In other words, civil service came along. A good number of people here in the [19]50s and [19]60s worked for the civil service on the base over there. So, they had some income. They didn't have to depend on fishing or farming anymore.

MB: All right. So, the Marine (Campers?) Union changed the entire bay, 700 people in Jacksonville –

KE: In 1940. Of course, then it blossomed after that. Of course, Campers Union is a big area now. Big. But in terms of how it relates to the fishing industry is that the Marine Corps Base basically owns all the land at the high-rise bridge here in Sneads Ferry all the way to Jacksonville on both sides of the river. Well, that means there's not much development there. There's no industry there. There's nobody polluting the water there. There's no houses there basically, except for a few houses they have for the generals and colonels on the base over there. So, that probably helped preserve, in some way, the seafood industry here longer than it would have. Because if that land had been in private ownership, this place would be like Charleston, South Carolina, now, probably. Because the river's beautiful. It's one of the widest rivers in the world for its length. Twenty-three miles long and five and a half miles wide at the widest place. It's high cliffs all the way to Jacksonville. It's a beautiful river. But the Marine Corps Base owns it. So, that's a breeding ground for croakers and spots and shrimp. They raise up there. They're not bothered too much. Then they migrate down in the summer and the fall of the year. Then they're caught either down here in the lower part of the river or in the ocean.

MB: Now, here's a dumb question, but do shrimp spawn in the ocean too, or do they have to spawn in the –

KE: Certain varieties of them do. But the vast majority of them go up these small muddy creeks up the river. I go up there floundering. They're that long right now, flipping everywhere. We have a summer shrimp called the brown shrimp that we're catching now that you've seen. Then there's a green tail shrimp that we catch in September, October, November. He's only about that long now. He'll be that long later on. They're flipping now. They're growing up the river. Right now, there's no trawling allowed up the river. Sometimes, they open the river – certain parts of it in late August, but not into creeks where these shrimp raise at. So, when it rains a lot and when they get a certain size, they'll flush out of the creeks into the river and then into the ocean.

MB: When those channel netters try to get them.

KE: Channel netters – it is kind of a competition. The channel netters want to get them before the little shrimp boats get them and before the big shrimp boats get them in the ocean. The big shrimp boats hope they'll get to them in the ocean before the little people get them all. It's kind of a little game [laughter].

MB: So, I noticed that. Yes. Well, now, talk about your – was your dad involved with commercial fishing?

KE: Yes. Dad had three boats. He built boats during the war in the shipyard, but came home and went back into the fishing business. He had three shrimp boats and fishing boats. He caught every type of thing there was back in the late [19]40s, [19]50s, [19]60s. That's what I grew up doing as a young boy. He had three shrimp boats. When I was fifteen years old, he turned one of them over to me in the summer. "You hire your own crew, you take care of the motor, it's all yours." That's what I did. I tell people, having been a school principal, those opportunities are gone anymore because that gives you such a confidence that you can do that. But I wasn't the only one. My friends who had daddies who had boats, they all did the same thing. It was like a way of life.

MB: So, what was that like being a –

KE: It was great. You couldn't even drive a car, but you would drive a shrimp boat. I mean, you stayed out all night long. You drag, you took care of the nets, and that's what everybody did here. It was during the summer when you weren't in school. Of course, there wasn't much ocean shrimping going on at that period of time in the early [19]60s. It picked up more and more and more. But now, more shrimp are caught in the ocean than are caught inside the river.

MB: So, did you ever want to be a fisherman yourself as a job?

KE: Yes. I went to college and graduated from Chapel Hill, came right back home, and got on a shrimp boat. Somebody said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I didn't go to college to get a job. I went to college to get an education. I'm going to do what I want to with my life." But I've been fishing ever since. But my old high school principal talked me into coming and helping him a little bit, and I never got away from that. So, I was a principal by the time I was twenty-seven years old. It was just a different world back here then.

MB: We'll talk about that.

KE: Yes.

MB: I'm trying to get the feeling, and like I'm telling you, we're going to be doing these old stills of trying to get a feeling of what it was like.

KE: Okay. Yes, I think I can give you a little feel of that. Before the [19]60s – back in the [19]50s and before that, most all the fishermen had very, very crude materials to work with. The motors weren't that great. The boats weren't that great, and certainly, the biggest thing was the fishing nets. They all used cotton nets, and cotton nets rot fairly quickly. So, when you fished, whether you shrimped or whether you caught spots or croakers or mullets or trout, or whatever, you had to bring your nets in, lime them down with lime so they wouldn't rot, and dry them out and drag them back on the boat again. So, they didn't have very good material. But when monofilament and nylon came along in the [19]60s, that really revolutionized shrimping and fishing in general, not just here. Because you were able to use your nets a longer period of time, and you were able to catch more fish with it then. But it was nothing to go out. We've had plenty of weeks where we had a hundred boxes of shrimp and plenty of days when we had 7,500 pound of mullets, or two thousand pounds of spots we're running, that type of thing. Back in those days, in the [19]50s, you could take two sink nets. A sink net is a net that goes from the bottom up where the (cords?) aren't showing. It's used in the ocean. It stands bottom in about eight foot of water. So, you go out there and set them between the rocks, like one evening. You go back the next morning and you pull your nets in. During the [19]50s, you'd have a two-hundred-yard net, would have three thousand pounds of fish in it. I mean, every day. Now, they use two thousand yards a net. Daddy never fished for more than five hundred yards or six hundred yards. A net caught all the fish you could pick out with five or six hundred yards. But when I go now, I take 1600, 1800 yards with me. That spots, croakers, trout, sea mullets, that type of thing. But everybody did it. I mean, that was a big thing in Sneads Ferry, in this area. In terms of how you lived, you ate a lot of seafood [laughter]. As a boy growing up, we thought, we're tired of seafood. But when you think about it a minute, shrimp, fresh oysters, and clams and fish every day, it can't get any better than that [laughter]. If we saw a piece of steak, we thought that was special.

[laughter]

MB: Well, yes. I mean, it seems like it's also a very healthy way to live, you know?

KE: Yes.

MB: The air is fresh.

KE: Yes.

MB: You know?

KE: Yes, that's another comment I was going to make. Having been a Carolina graduate with

two degrees and going off to school and going back to school on many occasions. The comment I would make about fishermen in general, I think the newer ones aren't like the older ones. But I could probably name the fifteen guys here that I would consider the old fishermen – most of them are dead now – that never went to high school, most of them. But probably, in the grand scheme of things, they are probably some of the smartest men that I ever knew. I mean that sincerely because these guys could overhaul a motor in the dark [laughter]. They could build a net and do all the angles, how to build a net. They could fix a radar. They could operate, navigate at night with no equipment. Like, everybody's got modern equipment now – I mean, navigation things. Back then, they knew you had an instinct of where to go. They knew the tides. They knew the moon. They knew the wind, and they knew what was coming. Most of them now just go hit in the miss. It's not the same quality of fishermen. But the difference was they had to make do with nothing. So, their senses were more attuned to nature. They had to pay more attention to the tide and to the moon because it was their living now. Now, we rely too much on equipment instead of instinct. But some of these old guys, in terms of their intelligence, were very, very intelligent people. Not literary people, but just very intelligent people. I mean, like, to be able to survive and do as good as they did.

MB: Yes. I interviewed Dolphus Thompson. He was talking about when he grew up that there was an old guy who had been a fisherman, and he taught – he was like their teacher. He could tell which way the wind was going to go. I mean, the guy was – how to build boats, how to do everything.

KE: Yes. It amazed me because these guys who supposedly don't know any math or any geometry just decided one day, "I'm going to build a boat." They go out in the backyard and get their wood and they start building, and it ends up being a boat. It's shaped right. It's just an inborn instinct. But the weather was the big thing that these old timers had over the new people. They knew the weather upside down and they knew what was coming. They had a sense for the humidity and for the barometric pressure. When it was time to get in, they just knew that. Now, we just turn the TV on and hope to get a good answer. Back then, they didn't have to do that.

MB: I went out with John Norris. So, we stayed out overnight out there and he pretty –

KE: He may be one of the young guys, but he falls in the category of one of the old timers, even though he is not old. Because he came up and learned that from these people. He's one that has that instinct. Yes.

MB: We were about to go out the inlet there and some instinct told him – I was talking about this – to not go out. Wait and see – have somebody else go out. Sure enough, a steel boat went out and got stuck. It could have been a bad situation. We were in a wood boat. If we were out there taking these big walks of being dropped on that concrete like sand, it could have been a real serious situation right then and there. It turned on a dime, but he was able to turn and then we went back because that was it. I mean, it was not safe to go out at that point.

KE: That's been one of the limiting factors for us really having bigger, bigger boats here; is our inlet is so shallow. So, you can't go at it at a bigger scale that you would maybe if you were in Southport or Morehead City. But that's not all bad either. Those guys got to have a place they

can fish in all too. Another big thing that affected this was the inland waterway being cut through here in the late [19]20s – 1926, [19]27. If you look out here and see all this marsh grass – and this is one of my pet peeves. Even though I do consider myself an environmentalist and want things to be right, some of the things they say just are off the wall. They say we're losing our wetlands and losing our marsh lands. But right out here where you see probably seven hundred feet of marsh grass, maybe it was thirty feet in 1920. But when they cut the inland waterway through here from Maine to Florida, it flushed these brackish water areas, like Alligator Bay, with salt water. That's when the marsh grass really started growing. So, when you hear people say, "We're killing the marsh grass," we've not killed marsh grass here. We've got probably ten times more marsh grass than we had in 1920. Because it flushed in salt water into the areas that had basically been fresh – more fresh water seen. But the inland waterway changed a lot of things. Because it gave the big boats an opportunity, if they couldn't go out the inlet, to go north to south and in the waterway and find an inlet that was deeper at Morehead or Wilmington or whatever.

MB: So, that changed a lot.

KE: That changed a lot. It also provided a migration pattern for certain species of fish that run the ocean. They also come in the inlets and run the inland waterway sometimes. So, there are certain times of the year with shrimp and spots and mullets, especially mullets. Mullet fishing – it's not quite the time of year, but I wish you could come here September and watch mullet fishing. That's probably the most exciting type of fishing of all. The mullet school up and you see maybe a 100,000 pound in a school. You take them in a circle in the ocean or in the river – mostly in the ocean, with real deep nets like the one you saw out here. I'll show it to you when we go out. You pin them in, and then you run a piece of net and the mullets just circle inside the net. Sometimes, they circle thirty minutes and not a single one of them goes in the marsh. But then you run the piece of net in the middle where it stops at swimming around and they fill the marshes full. The net sinks and you pull in five or six thousand pounds. They jump all in the boat, hit you in the head. I've sunk two boats in the ocean with too many fish – mullet fishing.

MB: How big are the mullets?

KE: Well, we have September and October mullets about this long. Then the roe mullets are about this long. The roe mullets have the roe in them that are red, and that brings good money. Sometimes as high as \$2. 50 a pound. So, there's a lot of people after those. But the mullet will grow and grow until it roes – we call it roe out. It's a piece of roe inside his belly, which is baby mullets and hundreds and thousands of little small eggs. That's usually late in October and November when we call them, they roe out. That was always a big fishery. On the beach over here, back in the [19]40s, nobody lived on the beach. All the old timers had camps on the beach. They would go over and catch these mullet with (seams?). They'd wait for these schools to come down the beach. Had these big towers, and they'd say, "Mulletts coming." They would have like thirty, forty men with a little row boat. They'd take that net and go around the mullets and then pull them ashore. They would put them in these big kegs I was telling you about and salt them down and send them to Greensboro and Raleigh, wherever. No ice. There's a lot of money made in roe mullets and mullets in general back in the [19]30s, [19]40s, and [19]50s here.



MB: So, that'll be in September when they –

KE: September, October, and November, yes.

MB: I definitely have to come down to film that.

KE: That's the more exciting of anything you would see here.

MB: How many people will get involved with doing that?

KE: Not as many as before because there's not as many fish as there was some years back. But it goes in cycles. But usually, it's two or three in a boat. They're usually smaller boats. These aren't bigger boats. These are like twenty-four foot boats.

MB: So, do you do that?

KE: I do that, yes.

MB: Oh, good. Well, we've got to –

[laughter]

We got us a deal.

KE: Yes. Yes.

MB: That would be good. Very good. Yes. Yes. I'm going to also want to film the grouper. They go offshore. Like, John Edens, he –

KE: Yes. He goes well offshore, yes.

MB: We'll get that at some point too. We're trying to show the different things here. Well, now, so your family's been here going back a little bit too from the beginning.

KE: 1730.

MB: So, let's talk a bit about how Sneads Ferry – you studied up on some of the history of –

KE: Oh yes. Yes.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about it since we – unfortunately, Alan – this guy at UNCW doesn't want to be on camera for some reason. I don't what happened. But anyway, he wrote this book called *Brief History of Onslow County*, which I haven't read, but I'm sure is good.

KE: Yes, you get a lot of facts out there and that's good. But I like the other side of the history that – the feel for what the ordinary person did. You know, how his life was as opposed to

events that happened or whatever. But Chapel Hill, going through wills and records and stuff, that's where I got most – in relation to family genealogy. But it also gave you a feel for what went on during the Revolutionary War period and during the period between then and the Civil War, and then during the period after that. But there wasn't a lot of families here. It was a small place. Of course, fishing wasn't a big deal here until probably [19]30s and [19]40s. Because there weren't any motors, there wasn't any equipment, and netting was not that sophisticated. So, the river was teeming with fish and shrimp that nobody caught basically. It's only been recently that we've been able to harvest that in a way that made any sense. Now, this was a big area for what they call the Woodlands Indians. That's an old Indian before the Cherokee. The Woodlands Indian went in this area twenty thousand years ago, and they found certain Sound sites here. Of course, they were big eaters of seafood, but mainly, oysters and clams. But Stump Sound back in the [19]40s and [19]50s, had the name – it still has the name as having the best oysters in the world. Just not as many of them as it used to be, but even a whole lot better than Chesapeake Bay. The other thing that I would say is that, when you go back in the 1700s, all the records in history and you start looking at that, the town, Richlands, North Carolina, used to be the county seat for the county. Onslow County is a big county. Then when the Marine Corps Base came to Jacksonville, that kind of shifted the area from Richlands to Jacksonville. So, Jacksonville is the county seat now. But in the old days, Richlands is where the big farms – where they had very, very good land up there. That's where Richlands got its name. Most of the farmers who were in this area, the land was kind of poor. But they could supplement their farming with fishing. It helped them a whole lot, especially with big families and everything. But you had a lot of big families down here. My dad had thirteen brothers and sisters altogether. But three of them died before they were five years old. That was typical. Everybody lost a couple kids, either in childbirth or some disease, polio, whatever. The school – back in those days, there was a little small school in Sneads Ferry. It wasn't until 1927 that the school was built out on 17 where it is now. That was a K through 12 school. Now, we have three schools in the area; high school, middle school, and elementary school.

MB: What about the actual ferry?

KE: Okay. The actual ferry went – you had a series of seven or eight people from basically 1735 up until the marina was – this bridge was torn down about six years ago, and the high rise put across there. Of course, they used to – if you were going north from Wilmington, you came down on your buggy cart to your horse, and you got the man to pull you across on the ferry. If you were on the other side going south, the same way. So, that had been a continuous operation from at least the mid-1700s all the way up until 1990 basically, [19]92, when they put the high-rise bridge across there. Keep in mind that one of the biggest areas – not a necessary population, but there was a place called Marines, and that had no relation to the Marine Corps. Right across the river from Everett Seafood, where you've been down there, over what we call Courthouse Bay, that used to be called Marines. Before they confiscated all their property to put the Marine Corps Base there, that was a pretty lively area over there. They had fights on Saturday nights. I mean, the people at Marines didn't want their daughters dating anybody from Sneads Ferry and vice versa. There was a lot of friction between Sneads Ferry people and Marines people.

MB: It's kind of weird you called it Marines then the Marines –

KE: Yes, it was Marines. But there was a family over there called Ollie Marine. I guess his daddy was over there too. But no relation to the Marine Corps. That was their last name, Marine.

MB: So, there used to be big fights between –

KE: Yes. Yes. I think the other observation I would make back in the [19]50s is that I can probably name about thirteen or fourteen little small country stores. That was not unique to Sneads Ferry. All the areas in North Carolina had a lot of little country stores. Now, we've got the Walmarts and the big things. But that supported little small families, and it provided things that we don't have now. We don't have near the stores in Sneads Ferry we had in 1955. Of course, they're bigger now. But there was a store in every corner back in 1955, and it was a smaller place then. They didn't do a lot of business, but it provided some income for a family. We sat down one night with some friends of ours and we tried to name all the stores we can name. It was kind of interesting – and where it was in like 1955. Actually, there were more stores here then than it is now.

MB: So, in some ways, it was more of a town back then.

KE: It kind of was. It was scattered out, but everybody knew everybody. People did 95 percent of their business down in Sneads Ferry. Now, they go to Walmart and Jacksonville, or they go to Wilmington, whatever. But then, everybody did what they were going to do right here.

MB: So, would you still consider Sneads Ferry a real fishing town?

KE: Yes. At this time, I would. I mean, that's changing some. But if you talk in terms of money or you talk in terms of number of people involved – I know there's not as many people involved in it overall as there was thirty years ago. But money-wise, I'm sure there's more real money made now because of the volume they catch than there was then. But the handwriting's on the wall on that too. Because those big shrimp boats are costly to maintain and they take a lot of maintenance. You've got to catch a lot of stuff to keep them up. You've got to be really a great fisherman to really be able to save any money because you've got to put everything back into your boat. It's always rusting. It's always wearing out. Your net's always tearing up. There's no end to the money. It has to go back into them. So, it kind of has a natural way of selecting people out. If you aren't good at it, if you aren't able to do things for yourself and have had everything, there's no way you can stay in business – in the shrimp boat business or the fishing business. I mean, you've got to be very proficient. A good mechanic, a good net maker. Otherwise, everything you take is going to pay somebody to fix something. That's the thing I think is going to make a difference. Now, you have John and a few of those like Dolphus that can do that. But the vast majority of them, all they can get is get on the boat, crank it up, go fishing. But when they need something fixed, they have to get somebody else a lot of them.

MB: As Buddy Davis, there's a real pro.

KE: He's probably the – probably he's the pro that I would call the only pro left, really. He is a real pro. Always –

MB: So, what about the future? I mean, we were talking about Buddy Davis and what a consummate professional he is.

KE: If you look down twenty years down the road, I don't think there'll be much commercial fishing here. There'll be three or four guys in it, but it's just too many things against them. The big thing now that's kind of a – and I don't know how you do it in a fair way, but you got this ongoing debate. It's a three-way debate between the powers that be, the legislature – politicians. You've got the sports fishermen and you've got commercial fishermen. Of course, the commercial fishermen, number wise, can't come close to the number of sports fishermen. For the most part, the commercial fishermen, if you think about it a minute, don't really do a whole lot of fishing for the kind of fish that sport fishermen catch. As a rule, sports fishermen aren't there getting sea mullets. They aren't getting shrimp. They aren't getting spots – the kinds of money fish that commercial fishermen make. But the rules that are made and the influence they put on in the legislature makes it hard for the commercial fisherman to keep his head above water. I know it's a real dilemma because certainly, the seafood belongs to everybody in North Carolina. But it's kind of along with the way the legislature, back in [19]71, designated the twenty coastal counties with special rules and regulations that don't apply to anybody else in the state. In terms of development and what you could do with the land because it's in fragile areas, like this down here. In general, there's nothing wrong with that, except that there's a hidden agenda, I think. Because where the population of North Carolina is away from the coast, they can vote things in that they want to the detriment of somebody that's already down here. Even though we would all agree that we want to protect our seafood and our marshes and whatever, it's kind of hypocritical sometimes for them to overrule everything that the people down here are trying to do and trying to make a living at. Because it's for their pleasure. It's not for their living. It's like if we made a rule down here to say, "We're just going to affect the twenty counties around Guilford County and they won't apply to anybody else. But here are the rules you've got to go by. If you don't like it, we're sorry." So, there's a lot of friction there between the commercial fishermen who see their way of life. That's the thing that people don't understand. They think it's a money issue. That's just a small part of it. It's a way of life issue. They grew up in families, and they would go fishing every morning and enjoy it if it wasn't money into it, because that's the way they grew up. A lot of people that are away from here that make the rules and regulations see it strictly from the economic point of view and don't see it as a way of life issue.

MB: Because it is a way of life.

KE: Because it is a way of life. It's a good way of life because you have to rely on yourself – hard work. You get out there at daybreak and you're independent. There's lots of old time Americans that are thinking that we've lost. Most farmers in the Midwest had that back years ago. So, it's nothing unique to the fishermen, just that they see it going down the drain too and it kind of bothers them. But Buddy Davis is a pro. He's the best there is. He can build boats and fix motors, and he is a good fisherman. Yes. There's several more like him.

MB: Yes. I want say that head boat they just fixed up. They have beautiful rigging they can weld and rebuilding those big old Cummins diesels. I talked to him. I interviewed him, and he –

oh, I don't really have a plan. He just – and the riggings complex. I mean –

KE: Yes, very complex [laughter].

MB: – he has it all up in his head.

KE: Has it up in his head, yes. That goes back to that instinct or feeling for it that I told you about before. He's a couple years older than me. But we grew up in the river, fished together, and did things together. But he's really a pro at it. Yes.

MB: His sons are very good at it.

KE: They're very good at it. Yes.

MB: But I'm sure people like the Davises will manage to keep going. But some of the other ones are going to have a hard go there, I think.

KE: Yes. Yes.

MB: But for me, I mean, I'm just trying to show it as a way of life that is probably in some jeopardy.

KE: It's in some jeopardy. Yes, it is.

MB: What about the development aspect? I mean, let's face it. I mean, I'm staying over at North Topsail Beach. I can't deny that it's great to be able to stay at a condo running the beach. But in my wife's family or – but obviously, everybody wants to live on the coast. Not just this coast, but all across the United States.

KE: In the near run, I don't see that as a big threat. I know that kind of sounds weird. If you went as far as Miami is or something like that, yes, it very definitely is. Or Myrtle Beach. But development in general, if it's done right and the sewer's there, and that type of thing – and a lot of people don't want to hear this – I don't think it's really detrimental. It provides supplemental income to people that are here. If we don't have industry here and we don't have other things, if there's a second-hand or a third-hand thing that can help support the families of these people, that's good if you don't go too far with it. So far, I don't see that happening in the near future. I mean, it could. I'm sure down the road, we're going to have some problems in the area. But so far, it's not been to that degree yet. We're able to maintain our big open spaces and that type of thing.

MB: Well, that's good. That's good. I mean, there's no reason why the two worlds can't coexist.

KE: Of course, you've got people now that say they're pushing – the big issue there would be sewer. If you go countywide sewer and intense, if you spread out the sewer, everything goes wild. You need sewer because it makes things cleaner. But the downside of that is when you get the sewer, then you got congestion. More roads and more houses and more – up in the air.

MB: Well, you don't want to be Myrtle Beach or that place.

KE: We don't want to be Myrtle Beach. Yes. Right. But if it's done right, just like the Marine Corps Base over there, they have a nice sewer system. I think the river right now is cleaner up the river than it was thirty years ago. There's no question in my mind. I used to fish up there and we could see feces floating down the river and stagnation. You see some problems once in a while now. But as a general rule, the river is cleaner now than it was thirty years ago because we're not dumping stuff into it. There's more regulation. The city of Jacksonville was having to make sure when they pump that water into the river, it's cleaner, and of course, the base. So, in some ways, the river's cleaner now than it was. So, you don't have to have pollution if you do it right. You know what I'm saying?

MB: So, in other words, getting back to the sports fishermen thing. I know [inaudible], they are in conflict with the commercial fishermen?

KE: Yes, Yes. The sports fishermen have a whole lot more numbers than the commercial fishermen. So, there's all these regulations now that you go by to get your license to fish with. They put limits on the number of fish you could have in your possession and whatever, and the amount of gear you can have and that type of thing. But they have kind of got that ironed out to some degree. Now, they've got two categories. They've been working for five years on it. It's ironed out now. The recreational fisherman's got one set of regulations of the amount of equipment he can use and what he can do, how many fish he can have of different species. Then you've got the commercial fishermen. You're grandfathered in if you've had one before and you've been doing it a long time, like I have. Even though I was a school principal, I've got a commercial fishing license. So, I kept it. So, I can use more net and whatever. That's probably going to be a good thing. Because it means that a man can't come down here from Raleigh just because he's got money and say, "I want two thousand yards a net," and go out there. Not knowing what he's doing and running his nets out everywhere and not able to clear them out. They stay and rot. They rot in the net and it makes the commercial fisherman mad and whatever. He's limited to a hundred yards a net now. Now, to catch him something to eat, that's fine, see. So, I think that has helped to some extent. But now, the seasons and how many fish you can have, it's going to impact the commercial fishermen in that regard. The fish itself, they're putting limits on him. If you got a big boat and you've got payments, you've got to fish [laughter]. The government says, "Now, you" – sometime in November, the government can say, "Now, flounder season's started with so many million pounds allocated. We've kept records. So, here it is. January the 15th, we've caught up our flounder quota in the ocean. Quit floundering." So, here's these boats out there catching flounders. There's a market for it, but you can't go anymore because the quota's caught up – some arbitrary quota. It's good to a point, but it's still arbitrary. There, he has worked all winter and all summer to get his nets ready, and right when you can make a little money, the quota's called up, come to the dock and park. It's frustrating.

MB: Well, I want to get back a little bit what you were saying about how tough it is for these guys because of the money, the engine, you know?

KE: Yes.

MB: I mean, it seems like it'd be a tough way to – is there going to be future generations of commercial fishermen?

KE: Going to be fewer of them because if -- it's like you said about Buddy Davis. If you're not able to do more than one or two things with your own hands and you have to hire it all done, you're at your history. Because the only way you're going to survive is supplement the bills with some other income somewhere else. Because you're not going to make enough to pay the bills you've got if you can't overhaul your motor and build your outriggers. Build your nets and fix your boat when it tears up and all that type of stuff, which Buddy Davis can do and John can do. If you're like that, they can do it. So, it's tough enough on them to make it. But they can make a living because they can do most of the work themselves. But if you can't do that, you're in trouble and big time. Of course, historically, banks and lending institutions frown on commercial fishermen. They kind of think they're renegades, and I understand that. But they're not as reluctant to loan money and to buy their motors with and stuff because it's such a risky business, and it is. The elements, the rules, the regulations, the laws. So, the bank has a hard time loaning \$75,000 to fix this boat up. Unless you a person like Buddy Davis that they know you can do a lot of things yourself, they would not lend the money to do it. So, somebody new or young, getting into it with not a lot of experience has not got much of a chance unless you grew up in it.

MB: Well, so, like farming, you really had to grow up in that, right?

KE: Just like farming, it's not much difference. Yes. Yes.

MB: Feels kind of like farming when you're slowly going – I worked out in California for the summer. When you're slowly going up one of those drags, you feel like [laughter] it's a tractor.

KE: Yes. But I think in correlation to what you're saying there is like, I leave this little small fishing village in 1962 to go up to Chapel Hill. Nobody goes with me. A small high school class. Nobody went to Chapel Hill from here but me. There, I'm finding there's all these guys from New York City and all over the world. But you know something? I had such an advantage over some of the guys. They couldn't change a tire. They didn't know anything – didn't know where the battery was in the car. They hadn't done anything. Their daddies were wealthy – a lot of them, and they came from the city. As I get older, I think about all the advantages I had. Even though I didn't have money, I had the knowledge and had a lot of experiences that helped me get through things that – they were really more disadvantaged than I was in many ways. They had the material advantages and they had families that backed education, that type of thing. But as far as being able to know what the world's about, I had the advantage, really. I mean, that's the way I looked at it. [laughter]

MB: Well, you were able to be in both worlds.

KE: I guess so. That's true.

MB: Whereas a lot of people have an incredible amount of experience and knowledge who can

rebuild engines. But may have dropped out of school in seventh grade. But that doesn't mean they're not highly intelligent and very capable.

KE: Yes.

MB: So, it's interesting. But, yes, book smarts – I don't know how you can read a book and know how to drag or –

KE: There's no way.

MB: – titles or do all that stuff. It's complex. It's also dangerous too.

KE: Very dangerous profession. Nighttime – you dragging at night. So, many things can happen. Weather, and equipment falling on top of your head, and have a lot of accidents. It's very dangerous.

MB: Yes. I've been hearing some of the stories about people getting their hands caught in winches and –

KE: Yes. Yes.

MB: – stuff can happen. Well, I think that should wrap it up. Is there anything else historically or anything we should touch on?

KE: The only other thing, for the interview, this is just one thing I was going to show you. I got one twice as big as this on the Everett. You were talking about family history, that's my grandmama's family. You look at these last names and a lot of them are still in Sneads Ferry now, intermarried. Back in the 1700s all the way down. So, you have the Hills, the Williamses, the (Sidbears?), the Everetts, the Kings, the (Innets?), the Bishops, the Justice, the Hendersons, Grants – that's all the old names, and they're still here. Intermarried.

MB: That is amazing. That's truly unique.

KE: Yes. While we've had a lot of migration off, we still had a lot of people that stayed here. There's a lot of same names that were here in the late 1700s that are still here today. Same families.

MB: The first interview I did was of Harvey Bradshaw. I filmed with him again a little bit, but I mean he was a Grant family?

KE: Yes, Grant family.

MB: You go way back.

KE: Yes.



MB: All these are the people in your family?

KE: Yes.

MB: I mean that's pretty – sometimes, I feel like I'm in some little English village or something [laughter]. I mean, that feels more like European or something, people stay that long. That is amazing. Well, that's great. Fantastic. So, you've done a lot of research in the genealogy.

KE: Oh, yes. Yes. I've got mountains of it on the Everetts too. But see, the further back you go, the more important land was, but it was cheap. But land made you – that's where you were measured as a person. If you had land, you could grow things. But can you imagine coming to an area and getting a thousand acres and there was nothing but solid trees on it. Somebody had to clear that. I mean, didn't have bulldozers either. I mean, that's amazing [laughter]. I mean, how do you go in a place, there's nothing but solid trees, and you're going to farm it. I mean, somebody's got to work their tail off somewhere, [laughter] and they did.

MB: No power, no chainsaws.

KE: No chainsaws. No power. It's all bare hands and crude instruments to do it with. But my dad was – he died two and a half years ago. Anybody that'll tell you, he was the old school – the real old school. He died out there in the front yard, where he had thirty-six deer dogs. He was eighty-two years old. It was a hundred degrees that day, and he was digging up a stump and cutting weeds out there. He worked every day. He said, "You work every day. You work every day," and he worked every day. But he was one of those guys that could weld and do everything himself. Sneads Ferry, back in the [19]50s, another little side issue, was a pretty wild place. Four or five beer joints, a lot of fighting going on. It was kind of a wild place. The law didn't even like to come down here. They didn't want to be called to Sneads Ferry, they'd rather stay in Jacksonville because getting this mess down here. So, as a boy growing up, dad and a couple of the old guys that was tough and strong, they were the law basically. If somebody beat their wife, they'd go see them. "Look, there's no more beating this wife. We're not going to hear about this anymore." I mean, people took care of the problem here [laughter], and – give you a lot of stories about that. But that's what happened because nobody called the law back in the [19]30s and [19]40s and [19]50s. I mean, you handled it. There wasn't even a law here.

MB: So, they didn't want to [laughter] come down here, huh?

KE: They didn't want to come down here. I mean, if there was a murder or a major robbery or something, which is very rare, they'd come. But they didn't want to come to Sneads Ferry. It was [laughter] kind of a wild place, like the Wild West really

MB: Tough people.

KE: Tough people. Yes, very tough people.

MB: What about the aspect of the African American community here?

KE: Yes, that's a good point you brought up. I don't know how to say this, but I read we have a very unusual group of African Americans in Sneads Ferry. As a rule, the first year I taught school, I had four of them in my class. They were the four top students in my class. We always had a high intellectual level of Black students in Sneads Ferry. I think one reason might've been there because there was very little conflict between the Blacks and whites in Sneads Ferry ever. Of course, I'm sure that goes back to slavery times. A lot of them probably had a lot of white blood in them. There were some things going on back in the old days, just like it is now. But as a rule, a lot of the Black kids from Sneads Ferry went on to college and did well in college. I still stay in contact with all of them. They played ball for me in high school. So, comparing them with like a city like Jacksonville or Greensboro or Raleigh, we had a few that were retarded or couldn't learn. But they were so much more superior, intellectual wise and grade wise and being able to succeed in school than a lot of Black kids in Maple Hill or Jacksonville or somewhere else. So, what few were here were good students, basically, which is kind of unusual.

MB: So, isn't there big a community here?

KE: No. Probably, right now. Let's say if you go back to the late [19]60s, you probably had in Sneads Ferry proper, you might have had forty Black people. Maybe sixty at the most. Probably now, you've got 150. But most of those were related to the Marine Corps or somebody that's moved in here. You still don't have any more native Black people than you had thirty years ago.

MB: So, there're only about forty-two or three families?

KE: Well, I would say there's probably forty to sixty, not counting people that moved in here from New York or somewhere. I don't know all those people. There's not a lot of those either. But the Black community in Sneads Ferry probably couldn't be more than eighty or ninety at very most everybody.

MB: They were involved with what?

KE: A lot of their daddies worked in civil service on the base. Some of them were commercial fishermen and some of them farmed. But the Black families that I had [inaudible] with, all their fathers always had fairly good jobs. They were fairly intelligent people. They made good living. They weren't poor. Some of them were, but the rule was they did pretty well compared to their contemporaries in Jacksonville or Wilmington somewhere.

MB: All right. Well, I think we can probably shut off. I was going to ask you, I was filming out with Davis a couple weeks ago. I bumped into a former high school teacher, African American, named, I think he was named Everett.

KE: We –

[end of transcript]