

Wild Caught
William Everett Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
Location: Sneads Ferry, North Carolina
Length of Interview: 18:11
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: Take a look at –

Matthew Barr: Okay, sir, can I have your name?

William Everett: William Everett. William E. Everett.

MB: All right, Mr. Everett. I appreciate you just taking a few minutes to talk with me. Basically, this documentary is going to be on UNC television, PBS System in North Carolina.

WE: Yes.

MB: It's going to be a one-hour documentary called Sneads Ferry, A Portrait of a Fishing Town. So, we'll look at fishing and its importance to this town. Now you were telling me before, just a few minutes ago, that you've lived here for much of your life at Sneads Ferry.

WE: Correct.

MB: Well, talk about how you chose to live here and what it's been like.

WE: Well, I didn't make the choice. I was born here. My folks have been here, that's right after Civil War. So, continuous resident. So, when after I finished my stint in Air Force, I said I'll return home. That's how I have been here.

MB: So, it was a nice place to grow up?

WE: Not particularly. I really didn't mean to return, but I left. It was the improvements that had occurred between the time I left, that is during my absence and about the time I was ready to get out of Air Force made me want to return home. I have a chance to look [inaudible]. I don't know, an awful lot of places I'd rather be than be here. So, I chose to come back.

MB: So, what are some of the things that you like about being here?

WE: I think it's still the quietness, the slow pace of life that appeals to me. I've retired twice. I'm too old to be worried about the high pressure that [inaudible] this is what I'm trying to attract. Then I enjoy certainly being around the water. Don't like to fish. I love to eat seafood, but I was born on it. I learned to swim right out there. It was just my childhood. So, I have some fond memories as well as some that weren't so. [inaudible]

MB: Now the seafood that you get at a place like this is fresh as fresh can be.

WE: Right.

MB: I mean, talk about that a little bit. I mean, a lot of people, they eat seafood in a restaurant, they order shrimp. Shrimp may have been frozen and this is really good seafood.

WE: Well, I can say this, what actually happened, I grew up at a time when fish [inaudible]. I

prefer (sparts?) They're called bottom fish. This is tough times. If you come to the river in the morning and fisherman return, they give you all the bottom fish and you can share it all. So, I learned to love them when I was a child. It's just the best way to eat seafood. I think people who appreciate it would get it in restaurants, it's far removed from the seafood, simply don't know what real good fresh seafood's all about. But I know and I appreciate it. I guess that explains why I enjoy it, sir, I really do. I'll tell you something else, this may not be interesting. I found that after I left home what I missed most, it's good [inaudible]. I've been in places where I couldn't [inaudible] at all. When I thought about returning, that's one of the first things I did.

MB: So yeah, I mean I think getting fresh food is getting hard to do these days. Not just seafood, but a lot of food. [inaudible] Food's got to [inaudible].

WE: Well, it is routine for me to eat fresh seafood. If it was any other way, I don't know. I just come here, this is one of my favorite fish houses. There's more than one here. This is where I'll ordinarily come to. [inaudible]

MB: Well, that's great. So, it sounds like there were a lot of improvements over some of the early days in Sneads Ferry [inaudible].

WE: Yes, we did two things. My father fished and farmed. This is the way we made our living at the time and practically everybody had a little [inaudible]. He did it manually. He was into it. It was simply a part of our life. So, I've never been a fisherman no more than I've gone out with my older brothers or my father. I'm not attached to the notion of working in the river, but I might have [inaudible] So, I can eat my favorite dish, which is seafood.

MB: So, your father fished and farm?

WE: Yes, he did.

MB: Yeah, that's an interesting combination. I've interviewed a number of people who they did that.

WE: Well, that was fairly common in these parts at that time. See, what you got to remember is I'm about seventy-two, something going along with that. I think I can remember fairly clear. I began to remember things about [19]32. I was born in [19]28. So, I grew up with that combination of things. That's why I (sustained?). This was long before the marine base [inaudible] huge track of land. This is part of marine base also [inaudible].

MB: So, what was it like in the depression here?

WE: Well, I think, and I've said this to people frequently, I think we were fortunate because we didn't have to miss any meals. We were raised our own hogs and chicken, and we had access to the river. So, we ate regularly. You had your own vegetable garden also, that was part of the personal set up. We managed pretty good, especially when you consider back my parents reared eight children. I always admire them because they stayed there and kept us until we could keep ourselves. So, I'm just happy with Sneads Ferry, I guess. [laughter]

MB: Are any of your brothers and sisters here as well?

WE: Yes, half of the siblings are still living two brothers and two sisters. I'm one of the brothers of course, because there were four boys and four girls. Four of us are still living. But you got to think about it, we got to be getting old now when you consider, there was only one younger than I was and she was born in [19]30. So, you see all of them are quite old. I'm the youngest one living by the way.

MB: Some of your brothers, so they're still here as well?

WE: No, I've got two sisters living here and one brother's down here. [inaudible] east of here going towards Morehead and (Buffet?) area.

MB: Right, okay.

Male Speaker: Matt.

MB: Yeah.

MS: [inaudible]

MB: Okay. Well, I'm sorry to make you do this again. Why don't you restate your name?
[laughter]

WE: [laughter]

MB: It's never as good as the second time.

WE: William E. Everett.

MB: All right, Mr. Everett, talk a little bit about growing up in this town, Sneads Ferry. Some of the things you touched on, well, let's just start with what it was like growing up here in this town.

WE: Well, from the time I could remember we made our living by fishing and farming. Probably not all that good at either one, but we managed to survive fairly well because that was a constant or steady supply of food. So, we didn't suffer in that respect. Now, regarding the social issues, do you want to hear that?

MB: Yeah.

WE: There was nothing here to segregate or discriminate about because there was nothing here. Do you understand that? There were no institutions except this little schoolhouse and the church houses where anybody pointedly bothered to segregate anybody. So, I wasn't all that conscious of that as a small boy. When I reached high school age, then it snapped in because we had to go

to the county seat to get to school. In my first year I went to Washington in North Carolina because they hadn't furnished us a bus. I'm going to inject this, if you don't mind. Do you remember during the Nixon administration when they were hollering so much about busing? Well, I was teaching out here at a local school then, and I had a chance to say to some of my coworkers that busing was not the issue. I drove by Dixon, the same school I was working in, at the time for three years, driving to Jacksonville to get to high school. I think beside those things, life generally was pleasant. You learn to accept the situation that you can't alter and I knew that my mother and father were doing the very best they could. So, I was fairly satisfied to hear it. You were speaking about coming back here to live? Well, when I got on the train to go to Texas, that's where I took my basic training. I had never been on a train before, so everything was new to me. So, my mind was wide open. I observed and after training we went overseas and then at that time in the Air Force, I guess it's still pretty much that way, we kept going back overseas. I think I have a little more time overseas than I have stateside. I got chance to look at quite a bit of the world and compare it with home. By the time I was ready to retire and I had to make a decision, I'm going back home. That was in 1969. There was a bit of a social upheaval here, right on. "Well, I'm going home, come hell or high water." I'm here. I've been here ever since. I was fortunate when I got out. I used GI Bill, went back to school and surprisingly enough I didn't have a job getting employed when I got out of school. So, I worked at Swansboro the first year and a half and then couple of [inaudible]. Transferred to Dixon, which is only seven miles from here. I consider myself fortunate and I don't mean all of that was pleasant, but I survived it. I retired again when I got sixty years old. I believe that was in 1988.

MB: So, you were a schoolteacher?

WE: Yes, I was.

MB: That's great.

WE: Well, I don't know how great it was, but [laughter] I managed to survive.

MB: It's an important job.

WE: Well, I thought so. I mean I saw it as an important job. Then if you could see it from my point of view teaching in the school that I couldn't even attend made – sort of overwhelming. I thought I was fortunate in a lot of ways and what I really appreciated the social structure of things had altered to a degree that I found it acceptable to return home. So, I'm here.

MS: Well, okay. There're two questions. The first one that we missed was it says how much you came back for the seafood.

MB: Okay, yeah, the seafood aspect. Fresh seafood, which is not easy to come by sometimes. What about that? Because you grew up being able to eat the fresh seafood.

WE: Well, all of my life here I've had ready access to seafood. There are certain types that you get in season and they're seasons. What I do now, is something that was unheard of when I was a child. I have a freezer, so I store my favorites. So, I have it year-round. We've learned that

you can put it in Ziploc bags, put water in it after you clean the fish. So, you have fresh seafood year-round if it freezes in a block of ice, when you melt it, you throw the ice out, they're just like they were when you put them in. So, fresh seafood, it is maybe year-round. That's important. Now the other aspect of it was you were asking how we got it when I was a child. Men went out with rowboats and played the nets out off the back of the skiff. We call them skiffs, little rowboats. They fished out there and they were readily available in what was called bottom fish. See they only spit mullets at that time and salt them because they didn't have facilities for freezing. You come down here and get seafood whenever they had it, it was just there for the taking. I didn't care much about mullets anyway. So,[laughter] we always got what we wanted generally as long as it was in season. Our only problem was – and the way we solved that, it wasn't fresh anymore. But we used to split and salt our own. You could pack it from the little wooden kegs and this is how we helped sustain ourselves through the winter months when they weren't catching much.

MB: So, your father would both fish and farm?

WE: Yes.

MB: Even in the depression. Talk a little bit about the depression you had – sounds like you had enough to eat. I'm like -

WE: Had enough to eat, but not much of anything else. Mostly what you consumed, you either had to grow or make. But that was all that we knew really. We didn't have this world exposure we have on TV now. A lot of things our children see and want, we simply didn't see. So, I was relatively well contented and when I got to be a young fella and wanted to walk around a little, we walked in the dark. There were no lights at night. The only lighting we ordinarily had was old oil lamp, what we call kerosene lamp. But I learned not to be afraid of the dark at a very young age. I don't regret the experience. I think it had a positive maturing effect on young fellas and all the stories they used to tell to try to frighten children, I outgrew that right away. [laughter] You had to get around and the only way you get around was by foot. So, you just simply did that.

MB: Talk a little bit about your family. You had your parents.

WE: We had eight children. I had four sisters and three brothers. That's four boys and four girls. Then I think I said this, that I appreciate them very much because they stayed put and reared us. When I left home, both of my parents were living. So, I had lived with them practically all my life unless I was away working someplace during the summer, right out of high school. I have positive thoughts about them because I said my eldest sister was born and that's the oldest child in 1918. My youngest was born in 1930. So, he couldn't have picked the worst time through which to raise his family. After I got where I could understand what had occurred, I really thought [inaudible] for staying there. I think [inaudible] men – many men simply walked off, they couldn't face the responsibility. But he stayed and he died a relatively young man, which was after I left while I was overseas and I was blessed to come back to his funeral. But I think he died a little before his fifty-sixth birthday. I'm much older than he was.

MB: One thing about this area is this will probably be the wrap up question and I think we got it. This river here, it is a beautiful area. There's something kind of special about being by the ocean at the end of this river. A medium river in the ocean's always kind of – and I guess I find it living in Greensboro. I lived in Los Angeles for about fifteen years and I've -

WE: Been out there. You couldn't give me that.

MB: [laughter] But I mean it's really nice being in such a beautiful spot.

WE: Well, I think New River itself, if you let me say this has a special charm. Of course, I learned this after I became a man. I didn't know it. But it's more like a lake than it is a river. Of course, the very feature that makes it so attractive to me creates an environmental problem because it has a hard time flushing itself. But the tide goes in and before it can go get all the way up, the river is about to turn around and go back. So, I said it never gets completely flushed. But to me this is one of the beautiful features of it. It begins and ends in Onslow County and I think you'd be hard pressed to find a river with this volume of water that short. Yeah. So, it's sort of like our lake, really good size lake. So, it stretches from one end of the county to the other. I like that.

MB: Okay, good. I think that gets it, Andy.

MS: All right. Sorry about -

MB: Thank you, sir.

[end of transcript]