

Wild Caught
David Griffith Oral History
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Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr
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Matthew Barr: David, can you give us a little bit about your anthropological background, how you got interested in anthropology just to give us a little –

David Griffith: Well, I think I got interested in anthropology like most people do, I was interested in digging up stuff [laughter]. But as I got into the discipline, I thought it was a little more fun to talk to people who are still alive and could give you some more information about their lives. I found that to be a very interesting enterprise and have always found it to be an interesting thing to do. Because you're traveling all around, you get to meet new people all the time, investigate different occupations, all kinds of stuff. So, that's kind of how I got into it. I was actually in writing programs for several years before that. But then moved into anthropology because I thought anthropological research would be more interesting than teaching creative writing.

MB: I'd say that's probably a good point [laughter] to do it. Then you were saying you did your dissertation in University of Florida about Jamaican sugarcane workers?

DG: Yes.

MB: That's interesting.

DG: Jamaican sugarcane workers, they come into the United States on a visa called an H-Class Visa. It's a temporary work visa. The program actually no longer exists. But it's interesting that now in North Carolina there are Mexican workers coming into the seafood processing plants here. They pick crabs and they have the same kind of visa. So, it's exactly the same program, but it's with Mexico instead of Jamaica now. So, actually I've studied that program for Sea Grant and other people over the years because the issues are very similar to what I was doing my dissertation work on.

MB: Slave labor, basically.

DG: Yes. Right. So, Jerry didn't like the book because –

MB: It's a fine industry, I'm sure.

DG: [laughter] Well, there are some good people.

MB: So, it sounds like some of the research you've done has a lot to do with the occupational culture and the lives of working people.

DG: Yes, it is. In anthropology, I'm part of this organization called the Society for the Anthropology of Work. We do research on occupations around the world really. We publish a little journal called the *Anthropology of Work Review*. So, yes, that's what we do, occupational culture stuff. That's what I enjoy. I've done studies of farm workers, fishermen, and food workers like poultry processing and meat packing workers.

MB: Have you seen that book that got a big splash about a woman who worked at a chicken

processing plant up in Maine called – oh, I have it. It was a beautiful book. A lot still photographs. It's this little oral history done back in the early [19]80s about a woman who was at a plant that closed down in [19]82 or [19]84. It's a look that –

DG: No, I haven't seen that. Yes, I'd like to see it.

MB: It's a woman who works at Chapel Hill in the oral history program there.

DG: Oh, really?

MB: The name will come to me. Anyway, well, let's get into some of the issues we're dealing with here. This documentary is a portrait of right here right in the harbor, a real fishing town unlike places like Beaufort, which are worth the –

DG: It's a touristy town.

MB: Which is tourist. This isn't a tourist town. This is relatively poor – I would characterize – town. Not that all fishermen are poor. But could you describe, in other words, your book? Why don't you begin by telling us what you really cover in your book that just came out?

DG: Well, I cover a little bit of prehistory. I have a chapter on prehistory that talks about the Indian occupation of the coast and how they utilized and also named parts of the coast. Then I have a chapter on the early European fisheries, which were herring and whaling. They had shore-based whaling out of the Outer Banks and Beaufort area. Then I get into the contemporary issues. The contemporary issues are more about the fishing communities themselves and the different areas of the state, all the different fisheries that we have. This is one of the most complex ecosystems on the East Coast. We have a very, very productive sound estuary system here. So, I talk a lot about that and how it supports all these different fishing groups. Then I talk about the problems that are facing the industry right now, which real estate development along the coast is a main one. Of course, you've probably heard about it. There's a lot of regulations that come from the state and from the feds that bother these guys. A lot of times they can't see any rhyme or reason to them. I talk about how important the fishing communities are to the economy of the region and the kind of social diversity of the coast.

MB: So, you just kind of touched on some of the major issues. Why don't we start getting into them. Let's take coastal development right off the top.

DG: I would say that's the major issue. The book is based a lot on focus groups and interviews with fishermen around the state. Almost inevitably, that issue would come up as the main one they're concerned about in terms of pushing them away from the water, increasing the cost of coastal land, and mainly of things like slip space. Coastal real estate development is oriented towards more of recreational traffic, of course, and tourist and recreation stuff. So, consequently, there's a lot of increasing competition for slip space and places to store boats. People are trying to develop marinas and that makes problems with water quality. There was just a whole range of issues that came up under that coastal real estate heading, I guess, or topic. But it was one that fishermen would really get adamant about. They really would start getting

emotional. I talk about this in my book, but I was at one focus group where the fishermen's wives started getting into it about how real estate developers had come to them in one way or another, and tried to buy their land from them, land that had been their families for generations. They said that they had people who were from Florida and Texas, and would come up and try and map all the coastal real estate and find out who owned it. Then send them all letters and postcards saying, "We'll pay you top dollar for this and we want to settle right away." So, there was a lot of that kind of stuff going on. Fishermen a lot of times talk about conspiracies. They saw it as kind of a part of a great conspiracy against them. Now, whether or not they really thought it was as organized as a government conspiracy or something like that, that's another story. But they just saw it as a major way that their lifestyle was being undermined by outside forces and by people that didn't really understand their life. So, that was probably the main issue.

MB: Of course, that's a highly complex issue that affects every community with Greensboro. Every place, these are these problems.

DG: Right. The coastal landscapes, I would say also mountain landscapes, are particularly at risk for this kind of development. Because for one thing, we have such a fragile ecosystem. Often, we can't sustain population growth of that magnitude when you're talking about real estate development along the coast. But the coasts are increasing. The coastal populations are increasing much faster than the rest of the country. If you want to see what the long-term consequences of that are, you just go to Florida. You can see all the incredible problems with water supply and pollution and eutrophication and all these issues that are coming up in Florida waters and it's still going on down in Florida. We have here what they call halfbacks. Have you heard that phrase? Well, halfbacks are people who go to Florida and then they come halfway back [laughter]. Well, Florida of course, is saturated. You talk to a lot of people who say, well, we wanted to move south. So, we went down to Florida and then we didn't like it. So, we moved to North Carolina or Georgia or South Carolina. That's what we're getting now.

MB: So, the pressure and everybody wants to live by the ocean, of course. I think a town like Sneads Ferry, for whatever reason, has been a little out of the loop in terms of being discovered like a place like Beaufort, which has all those beautiful old homes and the waterfront and so forth. This is very picturesque. But partially maybe because of the base that's Camp Lejeune over there, which is good to have, I think, except for their lead deal or whatever. But at least the land is held intact. I don't know. These are complex issues. If you go along the intercoastal here, there are just so many more homes along there, big homes. This is where the crabbers are going or right in front.

DG: Yes. There are a lot of small communities like Sneads Ferry up and down the North Carolina coast. Also, even if you go like the lower Eastern shore of Virginia, you'll find some similar type communities. I think they're all eventually going to be targeted because of the fact that now places like Morehead City and Beaufort are getting saturated and they're looking for new places. You're always hearing about real estate developers coming in and trying to buy up places like this here just because they're waterfront property. I was interviewing a herring fisherman up in Chowan County, and he's got a really nice, long strip of riverfront. If you've ever seen the Chowan River, it's just beautiful. So, he's got a beautiful long stretch of riverfront

property and he gets offers all the time for that. But because he's a herring fisherman and because he wants to keep it in his family, that tradition, he hasn't sold out yet. But eventually, it might happen.

MB: Well, so you've been studying these coastal communities in your book and in your research and the Sea Grant research. Let's take a look. I would think that there are commonalities between these towns, would you say?

DG: Yes. Well, there are. I'll tell you what's unique and interesting about North Carolina fisheries and also some Chesapeake Bay fisheries, is that unlike, say, the big roller net fisheries up in Gloucester, Massachusetts, these are usually smaller scale boats. Actually, the shrimp boats are pretty big. But a lot of the inland fisheries are smaller scale. They're crabbers and they move around from fishery to fishery through the year and even from year to year depending on the health of the resource, what they think they're going to make out of the resource. So, one of the things that fishermen do, we have a very diverse fishery. Fishermen are very flexible in terms of the different kinds of species that they want to fish. They aren't specialized fishermen like the ground fishermen up in New England. But they are a very diverse fishery. There are similar fisheries up in Maine like this. The small ports in Maine are very similar to this. There are places in Alabama and Texas that have similar fisheries too. But in general, we tend to think of commercial fisheries as being highly specialized. Like, you have a shrimping fleet like this, but these guys probably do something else during other times of the year. They might mullet fish or they might finfish or something like that. Like you said, they go out to the grouper-snapper fishery and do that. So, these guys are very flexible. That's one of the things you find about North Carolina. Because of that, they're really worried about a lot of licensing things that are coming up that seem to want to, what they say is, box them in to different fisheries. They want to create specialized fisheries out of people who aren't that highly specialized. Yes.

MB: Typical government.

DG: Yes [laughter].

MB: It is though, I have to say. I think it is too. We filmed a meeting of the Finfish Committee as a matter of fact with Dr. Copeland on Monday night. You're absolutely right, fisherman complain about development. Then they also almost invariably start complaining about regulations. Can you talk a little bit about –

DG: Yes. I see it, of course, from both angles in that I see that the coastal management here, has a real problem. They're trying to regulate a very diverse ecosystem that has problems that stem not just from fishing, but from all kinds of – there's a big forestry operation here. There are big mining operations. Water quality is a perpetual problem. Then we have things like the pfiesteria issue and harmful algae blooms and all kinds of stuff that come up. So, there's a range of issues that they're trying to deal with. In some ways, this is quite a different ecosystem that we have here because the Pamlico Sound is a kind of a wind-driven system. Consequently, the water doesn't flush out as much as other systems. So, we're up against a host of problems that other states aren't. As a result of that, I think then fisheries regulators have to balance a whole bunch of different perspectives and issues and biological issues with social issues and stuff like that.

Fishermen, of course, are very concerned about the regulations that affect them personally. If they don't like season closures in particular, if the closures are done, because they're interfering with the recreational traffic. There might be jet skiers or something out there, and they say, well, you guys can't fish from Thursday to Sunday because you're going to interfere with these jet skiers. They're saying, well, we're trying [laughter] to make a living here. So, there's all those kinds of issues that come up, and I can understand it. The Division of Marine Fisheries, for example, comes out with these almost daily proclamations that talk about what areas are open for fishing, what areas are closed for fishing, and they have a whole very multi-layered licensing structure. There's a whole lot of regulatory issues that fishermen do have to face and it's difficult. But it's not that different from, say, farming. Farmers also face a lot of environmental regulations. When you interview farmers, they talk about government regulators in the same way fishermen talk about them, you know? But I do see the regulator side of things. I see that it is a complex system and they're trying to balance a lot of different perspectives.

MB: Well, let's talk about some of the common missed – it may not be missed – but concepts whether they may be stereotypical, overfishing. Let's talk about North Carolina. Are some of the fish stocks in danger?

DG: I imagine so. I'm no biologist, so I don't know that much. I know the herring fishery is stressed. I know that the striped bass fishery, according to fishermen, is not stressed at all and overregulated. There are other finfish populations that may or may not be stressed. Now, the shellfish populations though, don't seem to be. Shrimp, for example, the way that you destroy a shrimp fishery is not by fishing, it's by destroying wetlands and destroying nursery areas for shrimp. Because shrimp are like bugs, they just come back every year. The whole crop will be back if you just leave one or two. So, you can fish them out from season to season, but you can't destroy the population unless you destroy the nursery areas, and that's not the fish. The fishermen are very concerned about that whole issue; the destruction of wetlands. The crab population in North Carolina seems to be very healthy. It keeps coming back and coming back. Blue crab is our biggest fishery. It seems like it's a very hard fishery to fish out. Crabs are just very prolific. But I think one of the problems with the overfishing issue is that fishermen are seen to be rapers of the resource. That is one of the worst myths facing the fishing community here in North Carolina, because these guys, they monitor the resource. If you take these guys off the water, which slowly seems to be happening, we're going to lose a huge base of knowledge about the resource and about how to protect it and about how to make sure that there isn't illegal dumping and stuff. These guys are out there on the water all the time. They pay close attention. When you interview these guys, they have an incredible depth of knowledge about the relationships between oxygen levels and fish populations and pollution and runoff and stuff like this. But they're not, by any stretch of the imagination, in here just to empty our waters of fish and then just go move away. They're in it for the long haul. They want this to be a resource that perpetuates itself. So, that's one of the reasons they're somewhat against development and municipal waste handling and stuff like this. Because they see that these are other things that probably have a larger impact on, in particular, shellfish populations. But people point to the fishermen and say they're over fishing. That's the main problem.

MB: The perception is that around the world that there are, what, seven major fishing bank areas, and that five out of seven are in danger. That we're just raping as you – we're just

emptying the seas. Then ultimately, there won't be any seafood left and all that. These are the common – when you see shots as we've done not to show that, but when you see the bycatch, for example, that can be visually troubling to people. When you dump out a net and there's all these other things besides shrimp in there, most of which die and they throw them out, they're eaten by birds and sharks who are right back there waiting for them. But nevertheless, from a PR perspective or – and I asked Dr. Copeland about bycatch, and he said, well, it's a complex issue, but there's no great evidence to show that the shrimpers are hurting those populations of little tiny sand sharks or whatever. You can't just get the shrimp to go in the net. It'd be nice if they did, but they don't.

DG: Right. Actually, they do a lot of work on net construction and net design. They've been trying to reduce that bycatch problem for some time. Of course, the turtle excluder devices now called trawler efficiency devices, but same thing [laughter]. But they keep trying to reduce that bycatch. Sea grants played a role in that, trying to develop things. They go to different states and find out how they have net designs and come back and try them out in these waters here. So, I think they've reduced that. But again, I think fishermen are blamed. I do think there are big, industrialized fleets out there that are just in it for the short term. Then there are the Japanese who are fishing like Creole down there in the South Pole, which is like fishing the very bottom of the food chain. You're starting to really mess up the whole system then [laughter]. But North Carolina fishermen, they just don't have enough time and/or capital to rape the ocean. They're just getting by. You've seen how they live. They are not filthy rich by any means.

MB: I think that's –

DG: They have a good lifestyle. They're not poor in that way, but they're certainly not making millions of dollars in this business. Some of the processors are, some of the dealers are, but not the fishermen themselves.

MB: Like the farm, there are a lot of some similarities between fishermen and a classic family farm.

DG: Yes. That's right. Of course, we have a heavy family farm population here in North Carolina because of the tobacco industry. But you look at other specialty crops like blueberries, for example, in the state and those are family-farm operations. Corporations aren't really even that interested in them because they're too specialized. That's why it would be difficult for corporations to come in here and take over the fishery because there are too many fisheries and it's almost too small scale for them to bother with. Although, the processors have taken certain steps like trying to develop fleets and stuff like that, establish kind of debt relations between fishermen and the processing house. That goes on from time to time. But it seems like it flourishes and then it phases back.

MB: Of course, the whole aquaculture area is interesting. That half the seafood eaten in this country is imported at this point. That's a pretty –

DG: Mariculture too, which is pretty similar. National Marine Fishery Service right now is looking for ways to help declining fishing communities. We were actually funded to do a study

up in New England when the groundfish crisis came, because they were cutting days at sea in half. So, essentially, they were saying you can only fish for half the time. So, we went up there. Actually, there are a lot of real industrialized kind of fleets up there. But the big thing that NIMS was pushing was aquaculture. The fishermen, when we were interviewing them and saying, what do you think of aquaculture? They said, well, that's farming, that's not fishing. So, even though it was dealing with fish, they didn't see it. They saw themselves as hunters, as going out there and pursuing this resource and not just putting it in a cage. That's like hand hunting [laughter].

MB: Yes. Well, from what I've heard, there are major problems with it too. They have these shrimp farms in Ecuador where half the crop is dying because of these strange diseases and stuff.

DG: Parasites, disease, genetic problems, those are all things that affect aquaculture. But mainly, it's disease and parasites. In fact, the blue heron carries some parasite. Of course, they will nest or hang out around the catfish ponds. Actually, I think it's striped bass that they affect. They carry a parasite that makes a little worm inside the striped bass. People don't like wormy flesh [laughter] to eat.

MB: Not too appetizing. Well, I don't like it. But, well, let's talk about the pollution area a little bit. Well, let's take North Carolina, how big a problem is it?

DG: It's a big problem. The Neuse River is heavily polluted from a variety of areas. Weyerhaeuser is a heavy polluter. They put, I think, dioxin or something in the water. The main source of pollution, probably for the Neuse though, is just human municipal sewage. Then also the corporate hog farms. Well, actually, they're not really corporate. They're tied into the corporations but they're mostly family farms. But the hog farms are a major problem. They're all polluting that whole Neuse River basin. Then the other river basin is the Tar-Pamlico. That has similar problems. Again, it's a lot of municipal sewage. It flows through Greenville. Then Edgecombe County they pick up a lot of agricultural waste, again, poultry more than hog. But then they also have on the Pamlico River, the big, phosphate mine which is a major polluter. Then on the Roanoke that comes into the Albemarle. Again, that also picks up a lot of municipal sewage. But then they have another Weyerhaeuser plant right on the Roanoke in Plymouth. So, in every area that flows into the Pamlico Sound, there's a lot that's coming down with it. A fisherman once said to me, he said, "The reason there's no mullet in the Neuse – I think he said mullet – that there's no mullet in the Neuse River is because he –" He said, "That first mullet went up around Piney Point and he puked. Then he turned around and came back because they'd go into the Neuse River." The Neuse really has seen some heavy fish kills and stuff like that. So, you get a lot of that oxygen anoxia, they call it, oxygen depletion.

MB: Now, this pfiesteria phenomenon, talk about that. That was discovered, what, about four years ago?

DG: Actually, I think it was discovered in the early [19]90s. It's been associated with fish kills up the Neuse River and I think the Pungo and in some parts of the Pamlico River. There have been a bunch of smaller fish kills too. Those were really big ones but hundreds of thousands of fish. It seems to mostly affect only menhaden, although I think that he might have said some

striped bass were affected by it too. We haven't had a major pfiesteria outbreak for the last few years. For a while they were saying that it posed a threat to humans. There's gathering evidence that it really doesn't pose any more of a threat than, say, poison ivy or something like that to humans, if that even. So, I don't think harmful algae blooms are things that are indicators that something else is wrong with the environment. They're not necessarily the major cause or the primal cause of some problem. I think they're related to, in fact, anoxia, lowering of the oxygen. But again, I'm no ecologist, so I can't [laughter] –

MB: You're a cultural anthropologist?

DG: Yes.

MB: Well, as an anthropologist and having studied these coastal communities – obviously these are huge issues, every single one of them. Pollution, development, regulations, I would say those are the three main forces, along with the forces that affect any group of small business people, in my opinion. In other words, a small operator these days, like me as a documentary filmmaker, I have to fight the big guys who can bring in helicopter shots, the small bookstore owner, the small hardware store, the small farm.

DG: Yes. What is affecting the small fishermen is imports from aquaculture. If you think of shrimp, shrimp is the main thing aquacultured around the world. Those things are flowing all over the world. Now we still like our local shrimp and there's still a big market for it. But these guys feel like imports are killing them. It's not that much different from any – and then I think the people who are organizing the importing are probably big producers like Red Lobster and General Foods, those kinds of people.

MB: Well, I've heard that actually PepsiCo and Anheuser-Busch are heavily in agriculture.

DG: No, that could be.

MB: I've heard this from fishermen.

DG: That could be because PepsiCo is a highly diversified company. It's funny because the big tobacco manufacturers saw the writing on the wall years ago, and they diversified into food. So, I wouldn't be surprised if Philip Morris – because if you think about Philip Morris, they own Birds Eye and Del Monte and a whole bunch of foods that are typically seen on shelves. So, they're probably into it too. ADM is another big one and RJR Nabisco they call it now. It used to be Reynolds [laughter].

MB: Good combination. Well, what about there is some conflicts between recreational fishermen or recreational boaters, the whole –

DG: Yes. Well, I've done a lot of studies of that issue, small and larger ones. But that is something that's a little bit exaggerated by, I would say, the recreational fishing clubs in the state. Organized recreational fishermen are the main problem as far as commercial fishermen are concerned, not your run-of-the-mill day-to-day recreational fishermen. The guy who's just out

there beach fishing, surf casting, fishing off a pier and not affiliated with some club, generally those guys don't have a big problem with the commercial fishermen. The commercial fishermen don't have a big problem with them. It's the organized recreational guys like the Coastal Conservation Association, that group, who seemed bent on pushing on doing things like promoting net bans and getting all these gear regulations in place. A net ban would cripple this state like it did in Florida. A lot of fishermen were hurt by that net ban. But they're pushing issues like that, and because they're highly organized and they have a very wealthy membership base, they're able to do all kinds of stuff. So, that's where the main crux of that recreational commercial conflict lies.

MB: So, why are these guys so anti-commercial fishermen? They think that they're literally taking the fish away from their trophy?

DG: Well, I actually think it's partly related to real estate development. It's partly related to slip space. That they want more access. It's partly related to the perceived that there are problems with the fisheries resource. There was a colleague of mine down at University of Alabama who claimed – I don't know whether this is true or not – but he claimed that toxic waste disposers were backing these organizations. They wanted commercial fishermen off the water because they were the main people that reported them for disposing of toxic waste. So, there are a lot of different issues involved with it. But I think the main thing is they do perceive that there are problems with the resource. Like almost everybody else, they point straight to the commercial fishermen and say it's their problem rather than looking at – and I talk about this a lot in my book about rather than looking at their own consumption habits and how they might in fact play into the whole draining of wetlands and developing of coasts in ways that are bad for fish populations.

MB: Well, yes. The emotional issue, for example, of sea turtles when – but let's look at the condos along the North Topsail Beach. How are these sea turtles going to coexist with that? But it makes –

DG: Yes. Everybody knows that it's common knowledge that sea turtles are attracted by lights. These condo owners, of course, light up the beach every night. These sea turtles are going to come in basically.

MB: So, the development, it's interesting. I've interviewed fishermen who say that specifically Anheuser-Busch and PepsiCo are heavyweight sponsors of these bass tournaments and things that they are offering recreational fishermen.

DG: They are, yes. That's right they are.

MB: They see a conspiracy there. Then ultimately, they're also in the agriculture business and ultimately, they could take over the shrimp business, for example.

DG: That's right. That's part of that whole notion of conspiracy. My idea is that it's not really such a conspiracy as a – these people have common interests. The CCA and PepsiCo and Anheuser-Busch, they do have common interests. If they promote one another's interests,

whether it's done by getting together in some secretive meeting or something, or just doing it because it's part of business, it's not quite a conspiracy, but they're promoting their common interests. One of their common interests may be the destruction of commercial fishing. That's just sad. But another issue though that has come up again and again when you talk to recreational fishermen, is the navigation issue and getting in the way. Because some of these nets are very, very long. So, they might entangle with gear and with recreational fishing gear and stuff like that. So, you get the navigation issue as well.

MB: I think this covers the main issues. But let's look at the cultural issues. What I'm trying to do is show in a way, a year in the life of this little town. That these families do go way back.

DG: They do, yes.

MB: Some of them, the Midgetts, we had a huge dinner with them last night again. His great-great-great grandfather were fishermen. They were the predecessors to the Coast Guard before there was a Coast Guard. They were kind of the unofficial ones.

DG: That's right. They rescued people right and left, especially along the Outer Banks.

MB: So, here we have a way of life. Can you talk about that and what are the prospects for that way of life continuing in the future?

DG: Well, it's true. Most of the fishermen you interview in places like Harkers Island, Marshallberg, around here, Varnamtown, all these small coastal communities that remain untouched will say things like that. Like, I have thirteen generations of my family or something like that have been fishermen. Up until the 1920s, this area, a whole coast of North Carolina, was pretty isolated. So, we had this really interesting cultural history to develop in this area based on water. It really has a fascinating history as far as things like the Underground Railroad. Black watermen in the state were instrumental in helping slaves escape to the north. So, there's all kinds of dimensions to this history, and these people generally know it. If you've ever been up to Salter Path, they have all the Squatters Restaurant and places called Squatters Run and stuff like this. But that's because of this whole judgment that was against them by the Rockefeller family or something like that, way back when. So, they have a deep history and they know all about the whole events leading up to the judgment and what life was like on the Outer Banks prior to that. Then you have all these different myths and legends and stuff about the people of this area. You have the Hoi Toide language thing and it's very fascinating. So, there's all these different elements to it. But one of my main things has to do with not only does it lend a kind of charm and interesting dimension to the coast, but also cultural diversity I think is important in any area, because it offers people different economic and social alternatives when they're considering ways of life. There is still some recruitment into this fishery. There's a guy who's on the Commission whose father was a physician down in Wilmington and now he's a crabber up in Columbia. So, he was actually recruited into the fisherman. He doesn't come from this long line, but he found that this was a great occupational niche for him. That kind of thing is important in this day and age when from my perspective and even from tourist's perspective, you really don't want to convert the coast to a place where it's just a bunch of condos and hotel sixes and holiday inns and stuff like that. All the people, all they can do is be chamber maids and

busboys and bartenders and waiters and stuff like that. Those are not rich lifestyles like this.

MB: So, what do you think the future is for Sneads Ferry?

DG: Well, hopefully there's enough people in the state and in regulatory agencies and zoning boards and things like that, that they can keep development at a level at which places like Sneads Ferry can flourish. I think there will always be a fishery. There will always be fish here. We have such a productive ecosystem. The pollution problems are getting under control more and more. We're always paying more attention to those. Everybody's concerned about the fisheries. So, we'll always have fish. So, I think as long as we have fish, we'll have people to exploit that little economic niche. The problem is with the land base, what's going to happen to the landscape. But I think there are things we can do as concerned citizens to prevent overdevelopment and to prevent becoming another Myrtle Beach or another Florida.

MB: I hope what you say is true.

DG: The thing is it takes first of all, getting beyond this myth of the commercial fishermen as an environmental rapist and show environmentalists that there's a very deep value of having commercial fishermen on the water and that it's good for the environment. Then once you ally environmentalists with these lifestyle issues. Then I think you can start to move against the larger corporate types that are coming in and paying big money and stuff like that. So, I'm optimistic along those lines. Maybe I'm wrong, but Sneads Ferry has held out this long.

MB: Well, they are tough. They're very, very tough. It's a dangerous job.

DG: It sure is, yes. Very dangerous.

MB: You wonder how many of the young generation will go into it. If you were born into it, then it'd be one thing. Well, how many people are going into farming?

DG: I know recruitment into the fishery is certainly a problem.

MB: Highly unreliable year-to-year, how much money, how it's going to be out of your control. Are the crab going to be there this year, how much money do you get for them, and all that.

DG: Yes, the only thing –

MB: Just the engine rebuilds, it's just expensive to keep up. Lot of equipment worries.

DG: It is a difficult lifestyle. Reproducing that lifestyle is going to be maybe harder and harder. Immigrants might help, you never know [laughter].

MB: Well, they're picking all the crab out, right?

DG: Well, not just picking the crab. There are Mexicans now and Vietnamese. There are Vietnamese crabbing fleets and Mexican crabbing fleets here in the state now.

MB: I didn't know that.

DG: So, you do have some immigration.

MB: That happened down in Texas after the Vietnam War.

DG: It happened in Texas, it happened in Alabama, yes, Bayou La Batre, right. So, that maybe would help, although they wouldn't have the same kind of [laughter] heritage and attachment to the area. But I don't know, recruitment is a problem.

MB: Yes, a lot of the young people get out. They like a regular paycheck.

DG: That's right.

MB: A little steadily.

DG: You hear that all the time about the regular paycheck thing. You also hear about people going back into the fishery later in life. Myself and the director of Puerto Rican Sea Grant, we did a study of Puerto Rican fisheries. It was common for those guys to spend twenty years driving a cab in New York City and then going back and fishing for the remainder of their life. They were commercial fishermen. They were born into it, but at some point, they would migrate to the mainland and work and then they would go back. It's the same thing, it's a very small fishery down there. Very, very small.

MB: Well, that's quite a shift, New York City to –

DG: Oh, yes.

MB: Sounds pretty –

DG: These guys, you'd meet them on the beach and it was great because they would be talking Puerto Rican Spanish, of course, for a while. Then all of a sudden, I don't know, you'd slip up on a word or something, they'd slip right into English. Most of them knew English. But then you'd say, "Well, where'd you learn English?" They'd say, "Oh, I drove a cab in New York City for twenty-five years." From talking to them on the beach you'd think, gosh, here's this sleepy, little fishing village in Puerto Rico, and here this guy has all this international experience. But we did a study of life histories of fishermen, and found that that was a very common pattern.

MB: Did you ever read a book called *Men's Lives* by Peter Matthiessen?

DG: Yes.

MB: That was a pretty angry book about what happened to the Long Island fishermen. There was quite a bit about the recreational people going after Albany and the State Capitol and trying to get these laws passed. The same issues.

DG: Same issues.

MB: These huge homes going up.

DG: Yes, big at Cape.

MB: Tax rate base going up for property.

DG: Yes. That's exactly what's happening right now in the Florida Keys against the Cuban fishermen down there. They're being zoned out of existence. Tax rates and things like that are killing them.

MB: Well, is there anything else? The good thing, fishermen will survive and this town will probably survive. Now, it may get a little more touristy. Well, it's not particularly touristy now.

DG: Well, actually, you do see that there is some adaptation by the commercial fishing industry to kind of get in to tourism a little bit. So, it's another way of diversifying their lifestyle and maybe making it a little more attractive to people to come in and do a little commercial fishing, a little charter boating, captaining people, taking them out on party boats, stuff like this. I do know people who during the wintertime are commercial fishermen and during the summertime, they operate charters out of Nags Head. So, there is some overlap. So, it's not as if they're totally antagonistic to each other.

MB: Well, is there anything else you want to add that comes to mind in particular here? We've covered a lot of territory.

DG: No, I can't think of anything except for, like I said, diversity is important, I think, to the coast. The more people that realize that, I think the better off we are. Economic and social diversity.

MB: Well, economically, this is an important business too.

DG: It is. Yes, it is. I've heard several governors address the commercial fishing industry over the year. I've never heard one fully side with one side or the other or say, I'm totally against commercial fishing or I'm totally for it. I think most governors realize that there's really only now, I think, six to seven thousand families in commercial fishing. But they're seen as important in the state by politicians. So, let's hope we can keep it that way.

MB: Good. All right.

DG: All right.

[end of transcript]