

Wild Caught  
John Wayne Midgett Oral History  
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Interviewer: HB – Harvey Bradshaw  
Transcriber: NCC

John Wayne Midgett: The Taylors went there and fenced off that property they had right beside his car lot were. He couldn't use it anymore. They say not, but I think it was because of that. I really do. Because they've been there, what, twenty years selling cars, and they let them use it. But the fellow that Gary is, he went over there and said, "Sam, you can borrow my tractor if you want to. It's got all the gear on the back of it." Because Sam was over there digging holes with a post hole digger. Gary said, "Well, you can use my –"

Harvey Bradshaw: He is healthy. He was down there on an auction one day sitting on a chair. He had gone down to get some cement mix.

JWM: Oh, yes. He's healthy sharp.

Matthew Barr: We should have been filming all this stuff before. But, Johnny, how did you pull off – now remember, none of this is going to be for public distribution – but in terms of what you did, how did you manage to change people? It was four-to-one against you at one point. Then it was unanimous for you.

JWM: Well, I just explained to the county commissioners what was going on and talked to some different people with a lot of good help. It just turned out my way. I don't know what made them change their mind. I don't know. I think they might have done a little research into the case. At one time, I think they just heard one side of the story. They were hearing one thing.

MB: That's what Hubert was saying, was that guy who came last night to the – what was that guy's name? That commissioner? He showed up last night at the celebration.

HB: Jack Sharp or Paul Buchanan?

JWM: Paul.

MB: Paul Buchanan.

HB: I mean Jack Wright.

JWM: Yes, Jack Wright.

MB: Paul Buchanan was voting against you for a while.

JWM: Well, he was voting against my proposal where fishermen could use their property in any community. But when we went for the rezoning, for some reason, which I don't know why, but he voted for my rezoning. So, maybe he felt justified. We presented a good case. There were a lot of community business properties in the neighborhood. We put on a good presentation for the county commissioners. They were justifiable in what they did, I feel like. Because a lot of other cases had been done that way in the area. We proved it, and they thought so too with community business properties is what we did. We presented that. There were twenty-two other community business properties in the neighborhood, and we presented that. My neighbors didn't have a problem with it. They both stood up for me. There were a lot of different people that

stood up for me. We proved that there were businesses being run in the neighborhood besides mine. The county commissioners, I guess they listened to this and took it all into account and figured that it was the right thing to do.

MB: But looking back on the last two years, were there ever times when – you had no choice but to fight. But that said, it must have been tough for you.

JWM: Oh, it was tough. Sometimes I thought I was going to be all right. Then sometimes it seemed like I weren't. County commissioner said they were going to help me, and then they tried. The Planning Department, well, they wouldn't help me. It was just a roller coaster deal, up and down, up and down, until we finally got through it. It was a mess for a while. It really was.

MB: So, how did you keep your sense of faith?

JWM: [laughter] I don't know. To tell you the truth, it was too hard. But I just felt like I'd be all right. For some reason I just felt like he was going – a lot of good people helping me. A lot of good people, they kept telling me that it was going to be all right. I don't know. It just did.

MB: Well, yes. All the things that went on, there's a lot of unfairness. Even the way you were just talking about how some people would cut a meeting and not allow for discussion in a meeting.

JWM: Oh, yes. I went to several of those. They didn't want to discuss it at all and didn't want to talk about it. There were a lot of things that didn't seem right. But I don't know the law, how meetings were supposed to be run, but seemed like I was done wrong several different times at these meetings. We were supposed to have public comments, and they didn't want to let me have a public comment. It was just not right.

MB: Now Charlie is a preacher or a minister.

JWM: Yes, Charlie Hughes, he's a minister here now, but he's an ex-judge. He worked for Governor Hunt at one time, and there was another governor. Which one was he that he worked for?

HB: Holshouser? I'm not sure.

JWM: Garner? What was the one – I can't remember. He worked for a couple of the governors I know. But he's really intelligent. He helped me with my case.

MB: It seems like all these people kind of came together.

JWM: Oh, yes. A lot of people came to help me, but I didn't know how to ask them. That's when you really find out who friends are, when people come to help you. You don't even have to ask them. I wouldn't have ever got as far as I did, and I would have never made it through this situation if it hadn't been for people coming and helping with it. There's no way I could ever repay the people that helped me through this case. There's just no way. A lot of good people

went out of their way, spent a lot of time and a lot of research, and just bent over backwards to help me with this case. I'm indebted to them forever for that reason.

MB: Well, how about other fishermen, do they –

JWM: Yes, a lot of fishermen, they came and helped me and tried to support me the best they could. I had a lot of support from the fishing community. I wish I would have had a lot more because I was trying to fight for everybody's right to fish. Some fishermen were against me.

MB: Why would the fisherman have been against you?

JWM: I don't know. I really don't know. I've wondered about that myself, but I knew not to approach them about it. Because if they were against me, I wasn't going to get to the real reason. No way. I don't understand what it was, if they were mad at me or bitter at me. Because I just don't understand why they were against me. But I wish they would have come to me in the beginning and said, "Look, we're against you for this reason." Maybe we could have straightened it out at that point. But I was fighting for their right whether they liked me or not. I was trying to fight for the whole community's right to be able to fish and live here. But I can't explain why they were against me. But 95 percent of the fishermen were for me. They all were in support of it, and they understand what the situation we're in now. I've got lucky enough to have a piece of property on the water, but a lot of them are not that lucky. They're going to wake up one day, and it isn't going to be there. With this property value getting high and people buying up the property, there just is not going to be anywhere to tie their boats up or anything anymore. There I was trying to fight for their right to fish and be able to dock boats, and they were against me. I've yet to figure it out. Why would anybody be against me for something that they do? But that's human nature.

MB: That's a hard one to figure out.

JWM: It is. It really is.

MB: Well, I remember when you were head of the New River Fishermen's Association. Fishermen are pretty independent in terms of trying to organize them and stuff.

JWM: A lot of fishermen are loners. They like to fish alone. They like to be alone. That's the reason they fish for a living. A lot of fishermen don't like crowds of people. They're family-oriented people. But they're really competitive people. You're dealing with a natural resource. A lot of times when you find a school of fish or you find clams or whatever, you don't tell your buddy about it a lot of times. Because you want to try to get as much of it as you can to better yourself and your family. But that leads out into the community a lot. It makes you a loner-type people. That's why it's hard to get people to meetings in the fishing community. It's hard to get the fishing community to stand together for each other. I can't explain it like it needs to be explained, but that's the way they are. My father was like that really bad. He was a loner type person. He didn't have very few friends, and he liked to work by himself. He just stayed to himself. But it kind of hurts you when you're trying to fight the battles that we're trying to fight now. We need to be united, not pulling against each other, whether we like each other or not.

You're always going to have that in a community, and people don't like one another. But we all need to pull together and fight this thing that we're dealing with now.

MB: So, when you went into this two years ago, did this whole process change the way you look at politics and all that stuff?

JWM: Well, I didn't know –

MB: You've been through a whole write-up. You've been through a whole journey.

JWM: Well, I didn't know anything about politics much when I went into this thing. It opened my eyes a lot about politics. When I first went into it, I didn't know anything about the process, how it worked or anything. I think that was partly the problem that dragged this thing on so long, that I didn't know how to fight it to start with. I didn't know how to do it. Probably two years, if I could have presented it like I did at the last, it may have gone through sooner. But the Planning Department was so rough to deal with that they wouldn't give me any information. Any information I got, we had to dig it out ourselves and read and find. But yes, the process will work if you know how to work the process, if you know who to talk to, and what to do. But most people don't. Then when you have a crowd like the Planning Department in Jacksonville that won't tell you who to talk to or won't help you at all, it really makes the process hard to go through. Once we learned how the process worked and how to go to meetings and how to talk to people or what meeting to go to it, it'll work. You just got to know how to get into it and know how to work it.

MB: Well, it was quite a learning process. But as we were talking about before, there were all those times, like that very first meeting, where there were a bunch of fishermen there in the hallway behind. What would have happened if you just showed up?

JWM: Well, if I would have just showed up at that first meeting, that would have been the end of it right there. If the Board of Adjustment had voted against me on my zoning issue, that would have been the end of the case. But since we showed up with a crowd of people and since I was the very first case that had ever gone before them on a zoning issue – they had never dealt with a case like mine before – they were unsure about making the decision. Because then again, we put on a pretty good show not to know what we were doing. I think the Board of Adjustment, they were fair-minded people. They really were. They listened to what we had to say, and the chairman said, "Look, with this many people here backing this man up, there's got to be a problem somewhere in the law here, somehow or another. Because this many people didn't come here to support this man and him being in the wrong totally." So, they postponed it, and two and a half years later, that's how it got that far. I owe them a lot of gratitude for that.

MB: So, it took two and a half years, this whole ordeal.

JWM: Yes.

MB: That's a long fight.

JWM: Oh, yes. Well, you can't quit. You've got to work. I didn't have any choice. Some people asked me that, said, "Why are you fighting it so bad?" Well, what choice did I have? Where am I going to go? Where am I going to tie my boat up? I may have somewhere to tie my boat up for the next year or two, but that's my family's property. Why shouldn't I be able to use it? Everybody else is using their property and doing like they want to do with it.

MB: Wasn't part of it that there was a whole real estate deal that you were kind of having to be right in the middle of?

JWM: I heard that at one time that some developers wanted to buy a property, and the homeowners wanted to sell. That was a rumor that could be possible. We never proved it that it was. I never seen no papers on it. But I think that's partly what happened. I got right in the middle of a real estate deal at the time.

MB: (Allen?), that French guy?

JWM: Yes, that guy was out of Wilmington. He was wanting to buy the property. Well, they had his sign on some of the properties over there and the neighbors. I heard one time that may be what was going on. But anyway, I can't help that. They're not getting our piece of property.

MB: Then that whole thing kind of went south with all the property.

JWM: Yes. Well, I don't know what caused that to go south, but it has. The fish house that we're going to buy, they bought half of it, and they haven't finished buying it. Other properties that we're going to buy, they haven't bought them.

MB: Well, there are so many different things to cover. But what was it like the very first time you went to see Angie Manning? How did they treat you over there?

JWM: They treated me like dirt. Sue McLaughlin was the first one I ever went to see. Me and my son, Andrew, went there to appeal the case. She sent me a paper in the mail saying I had thirty days to cease and desist what I was doing and if I wanted to appeal the case that I had the right to appeal it. So, I went to see her. She said, "Son, what are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I came to appeal this case that you all said I could appeal it." She said, "Well, I don't know why. You're guilty."

MB: [laughter]

JWM: I was like, "Well, I may be. But it says on the bottom of this paper here that I got the right to appeal it, to go talk to somebody else." She said, "Well, let me see the paper." She read it, and she said, "Well, you can go before the Board of Adjustment." She said, "But you're not going to win." She said, "You're not going to win the case because you're breaking the law." She just kept right on being real belligerent about it. I said, "Look, just go get me the papers that I can fill out to appeal this case. Can you do that?" She said, "Yes, I can do it." She went and got them and came back. She said, "Mr. Midgett, just what do you think you're going to do? How far do you think you're going to push this thing?" I said, "I don't know." I said, "I've got to

go to these people you said." She said, "Well, you're going to be found guilty there." I said, "Well, I'm going to go talk to the county commissioners about it." She said, "Let me tell you something, you haven't got the right to talk to the county commissioners about this case. I'm going to tell you something else, I'm the final authority in this office, and you are not getting it. You're guilty by law, and you will not get it." I gave her \$250 to fill out an appeal, and me and my son we left. Then the next time I had to go see Angie Manning, it was about the same way. She was really belligerent. "You're breaking the law. We can't help you. We can't fix it. You're going to have to move the buildings." Just every time I talked to them; it was that way, just, no, no, no. Everything out of their mouth was no. I tried to be just as nice. Well, I was. I never got out of the way with them or anything. Finally, I went and saw Hubert Smith. He knew a lot about the law. I went and talked to him, and he helped me with some things. We filed a thing. We came up with a text amendment trying to open it up to where I could stay on my property and fishermen could use their property. That didn't work. But we tried the process up for two years. Then it went on to the rezoning, and the county commissioners gave me that. But the Planning Department was terrible. They are terrible to deal with. Old Sizemore – I don't know what his first name is, but he was the main one over there that ran that place. You couldn't get an answer out of him. I don't know whether he was lying or not. I don't know what he was saying. Every time I'd ask him something, he would just ramble on and on and on and on. I couldn't make heads nor tails of what he was saying, but he wouldn't help me. But yes, they were dead set against me. I've yet to figure out why because they didn't know me from one person to another. But you can see with the kind of attitude that they gave me right to start with, that something was not right. To me, it wasn't right.

MB: They were treating you like –

JWM: Well, they just treated me bad as far as they told me that I had the right to appeal the case, and then when I go in there to try to appeal it, they tried to talk me out of it. Told me that they weren't going to do me any good and told me that I didn't have the right to talk to county commissioners in this county. Can you believe that? It says right on TV. You can watch them on Channel 4. They'll tell you right on there, "If you've got a problem, you can come to one of our meetings. As long as you don't get out of the way or holler and scream, that you can discuss anything you want to." Hell, I knew that. Everybody knows that. But that woman told me I didn't have the right. Now, why she was so belligerent against me, I've yet to figure it out. Never met the woman in my life. Never seen her before.

MB: But she really had it in for you.

JWM: Yes.

MB: I think for just fishermen.

JWM: I don't know about that man. I don't know about fishermen, but to –

MB: Or working people?

JWM: Man, I don't know about that. All I know is that she was that way toward me for some

reason that I've yet to figure out. I don't know why. I don't know. I just don't know why she was that belligerent. Why would she be that way toward me? She didn't know me. How was my case any different than a hundred other cases at that point? Then there's always rezonings going on in Onslow County and problems. But she went out of her way to be terrible against me. So, I don't know why. To this day, I haven't figured it out.

MB: Is she still there?

JWM: Yes, she's still there. They're all there except for Sizemore. He's moved on to Raleigh or somewhere, got a better job or something.

MB: The county manager got fired?

JWM: Yes. Frank Clifton, he's no longer with the county for some reason. The county commissioners had seen fit to terminate his contract or something here a while back. But that didn't have nothing to do with me. But he isn't here no more. I don't think it had nothing to do with me. I don't believe it did. But I'm a small fish in that pond. They've got a lot of dealings up there going on.

MB: I guess they do.

JWM: I never even talked about man before.

MB: Did they ever offer you a deal just for you?

JWM: Yes. Well, one time they told me just to keep it quiet. Over to the Planning Department, they said if I just keep it quiet, that they would help me out and see if they couldn't help me. But I knew better than that. They were trying to sweep it under the rug. I said, "No. If we're going to stir it up, let's let everybody smell it." So, I went and got the newspaper. I went and got Channel 12 TV newspeople. They came down. They filmed all the meetings and everything. I think it went pretty good. I got a good response out of people.

MB: How did you learn how to work with media people?

JWM: My good friend named Matt Barr told me a lot about things like that.

MB: [laughter] I wasn't asking for applause, but seriously, you did pretty good.

JWM: Well, it's the truth. You said, "Well, you ought to get the news media involved in some of it." That's what I did. I think it helped. At a certain point, it did help because I got a lot of support out of it. Because when it went in the newspaper, a lot of people came to me and said, "Well, I've seen your article on the paper. What's going on?" I think the more people that I got familiarized with what was going on, the more people showed up to the meetings to help me. Like I said, there were a lot of people that helped me that I didn't ask to help me, that came to the meetings. The thing turned into a community thing. Everybody knew about it. A lot of people wrote letters to the editor that were good. Some were good, and some were against. But there



were more people writing good things about me in the letters. The commissioners could have looked at some of that kind of things. But I just felt like they were trying to keep it quiet, so it would have been a lot easier to do me in or get rid of me a lot easier that way. I said, "No, I'm not going that way."

MB: I think showing up with a camera and everything, that put them on the spot.

JWM: It did put them on the spot.

MB: News media or when we showed up, that kind of put them on notice a little bit.

JWM: Well, certainly. People can say things, but when people are filmed and they say things, they can be held accountable for it. I've never spoken anything but the truth. People stood and lied on me in court now. Put their hand, swore to God, and stood there and told lies on me. I was the only one telling the truth the whole time. Me and my family and my supporters were telling the truth. But some of those people who were against me, I couldn't believe some of the lies that they had told. But anyway, it turned out for the best so far. There isn't no telling what's right around the corner. But it's pretty good today.

MB: You've learned enough to know that you've got to be vigilant always.

JWM: Yes. Well, it is a big relief that the county signed off on community business for me. But still, I've been through this thing so long that it's always lingering right behind me, what's coming next. What will they throw at me next to aggravate me? But maybe they won't. Maybe some of it's gone now.

MB: Must have been hard to keep focused on fishing and this battle at the same time.

JWM: Oh, this thing cost me a lot of money. It did, which it was worth it. The money is monetary. What I'm trying to say, it cost me a lot of – I think it was a thousand dollars' worth of fines that they fired me.

MB: Really?

JWM: Maybe. I never figured it up. It was like \$1,200 worth of – every time I filled out a text amendment, it cost me \$200. Every time I had to get rezoning, it was 300. The filing appeal was 300. Every time I went to county, [laughter] they were sticking their hand out. They were hitting me with a filing or hitting me and telling me I had to fill out papers. But every time I filled out a paper, it was 200 more dollars. But then I had to lose work to go to the meetings a lot of times. I was busy working, and I'd have to stop what I was doing. Then gas isn't cheap. Every time we'd go to town, me and my family, we'd always go eat. It was just a lot of expense and burden that I shouldn't have had to go through. The end result, it was worth it. But still, it was something that people should not have to go through for something that was senseless. Those people's concern about me was over nothing really. It was just over a \$595 carport shelter that everybody's got in Onslow County in their yard. Come on.

MB: Yes. Just the unfairness of how they were treating you and then your neighbors had all that, and there was no problem with them.

JWM: When the zoning officer came to see me, he said, "You need a permit for that car shelter." I said, "Well, where do I go to get one at?" He said, "It isn't you. You're not going to get one." He said, "You can't have one." I said, "Well, my neighbor's got one." He said, "Well, it doesn't make no difference. You're not getting one." I said, "Well, who gets a permit for these car shelters?" He said, "Nobody." He said, "But you've been turned in for it, and you can't have one." So, that's where that went with that. But that's what the whole thing was over. The county gave me a permit for my cooler. They couldn't take that away from me. But they were trying to make me stop my shedding operation down there, which was ridiculous. I wasn't hurting anybody. It's hid by woods. They can't see it. It was just the fact they didn't want me there for some reason.

MB: Did you ever consider suing the county over all this stuff?

JWM: Well, no. Things cross your mind, but you can't sue the county. The county's got all the resources in the world to fight you. Those things cross your mind because you feel like you've been done unfairly sometimes. But when you start thinking rationally, the county is the only one that can fix this problem for me. You can talk to lawyers, like we talked about before, and you might win, or you might not. That's too costly for me. I can't go down that road.

MB: So, when you talked to lawyers, well, one guy was honest and told you.

JWM: Oh, yes. Well, I talked to a lawyer, and he told me that it would cost me 30- or \$40,000, and he didn't know whether he could win the case or not. He said the best thing to do was not to fight it, which what that was at the time, the county commissioners had made it – this is kind of confusing. The county had given me the right, if I would build a house on my property, that I could stay there and work my business as a home business operation, which I couldn't afford to build a house. I got one house, and I couldn't afford to build a house. That's what the lawyer told me. He said, "Son, they gave you an out. Take your 30-, \$40,000 and invest it in your house instead of invested in me. I can't promise you a victory." But I couldn't afford either one. I couldn't afford to build a house, and I couldn't afford to pay him that kind of money. So, that was the option that I ran into. That's why I went for the rezoning of the property.

MB: So, you went for it and were rezoned as a commercial.

JWM: Right. But that's the only choice I had. They told me that. That's the only zoning that I could get and stay there legally.

MB: Now, remember, this is just private. But who was the mean villain dude, the one that poured the chemical in the – what was that guy's name? The young guy that has the carpet cleaning business.

Kim Midgett: Lynn.

JWM: Oh, that's Lynn Henning.

MB: So, what was his whole thing? What was his motivation behind it?

JWM: I do not know. He's been on this thing right behind me, right steady. He stood up in court and said that I was running a business down there when they hadn't proved I was running a business. Said they didn't have no dock for me yet. I forget all – he just told all kinds of mess about me. He was running a business out of the community. He owned a business called Sparkles Cleaning Service. His address is in Eastwood subdivision for his business. We've got it in the phonebook where his phone number and his address are in that neighborhood. He swore he wasn't running the business. But yet, Denny is over there dumping chemicals in the creek. We're sitting there and watching him dump them right in his driveway. Then he swears he wasn't doing that. Well, there's a hundred people in Sneads Ferry that'll swear to it that he was doing it because they all saw him. But that was his business. I don't mind other people's business. But for some reason, he's took me to heart. Now, anything he can do to aggravate me, he is. He's on me about my document now, which that's legal. I've let the lawyers look at it, and I've let the county look at it. It's legal. He's hellbent determined he wants to see it. I don't know what this boy's problem is. Everywhere he goes, he calls his enemies, or he just rubs people the wrong way. I think he's miserable. He's got to be miserable somehow or another to act the way he does all the time. Because I've never spoke a word to him. I've never said one word to the man. Don't know him or nothing else. He's been right on me from the word go.

MB: Did he grow up around here?

JWM: No, he's from – I don't know. Somebody said one time they moved here from Waccamaw. I think it's down around Shiloh. Isn't that work from Harvey down around Shiloh to somewhere down that way? That's Waccamaw.

HB: I'm not sure Johnny Wayne. But that's why I know his daddy. They had that marina down here. Yes.

JWM: Yes. But that's where he was from.

MB: So, they had the marina by the High-rise Bridge over to the base.

JWM: Yes.

MB: So, he must have some money then.

JWM: Well, I don't know about that. They bought the property. They bought it for a good price, I think, and turned around and sold it for a good price, so I heard. I'm happy for him. That's great. But his biggest problem came, and I think it's not so much as if it's just me that he's against, I think he's against fisherman, period. Because they were a big stink. He wanted to go down there and put a hundred boat slips on the outside of his marina. Well, right across from his marina, about 200 yards maybe, Timmy Edens owns a big oyster garden there. The state of North Carolina says if you put a certain amount of boats in an area, they don't have to test it to

see if it's polluted. They automatically pollute a certain area. Like, if you get a hundred boat slips, they pollute an acre square or 2 acres square. I don't know the exact law on it. But they don't have to test it. They just consider with the bottom paint, the zincs, and all that stuff, all these boats, it's polluted. So, what happened, he went down and was going to do this. Well, the fishermen, Timmy Edens and that bunch that owns that oyster garden and his family, protested him and stopped him from putting those docks there. He even carried it before the county commissioners, and they turned him down, said that they weren't going to let nobody build docks over people's oyster gardens. So, they turned him down. I think that that's one thing right there that he's really out against fishermen because they costed him. Some friends of mine said that he had made a statement that it cost him a lot of money for his marina. Even though he did good selling his marina, he could have sold it for a lot more if he would have had all those boat slips to where more people could have accessed his marina.

MB: So, he wanted to get revenge for not having made his money.

JWM: I can't say that for a fact, Matt. But I feel like he was because a lot of fishermen went to court against him. Now I didn't go. I would have, but I wasn't really familiar with the case at the time. I was busy working. It didn't get circulated like my case did. They kept that in their family and were fighting him a lot more. I didn't really realize what was going on until after they had done it. But I kind of feel like that he looks a fisherman bad as a whole because that cost him some money, so I've been told. Like I said, I never heard him say it because I never spoke to the man.

MB: Who were the other bad guys?

JWM: Well, Monk Walton, he filed a complaint against me.

HB: Monk did?

JWM: Yes. He was the one that filed.

HB: We just saw him at the thing today.

JWM: Yes.

HB: He was sitting one table over.

JWM: Well, my cousin Francis, she stood up against me. Will Jones, he's a fisherman, he stood up in a meeting against me and wrote articles about me in the paper.

KM: Yes, I don't think he was at the meetings.

JWM: Well, he came to several of them.

KM: No, I don't think he stood up and spoke.

JWM: Oh, yes. Well, maybe he didn't. But he was at several of the meetings.

KM: Bill Keller.

JWM: Bill Keller was against me. He stood up and said some things against me. Then there was my cousin, Francis Hollowell, she stood up against me. There was Sam and Bill Taylor, they were the developers of the property. Sam never said anything. But his brother Bill stood up and went on about how much he liked me, and he loved my family and all that, but I just didn't have any business being there. It wasn't right.

KM: Gail Ollie.

JWM: Gail Ollie, she stood up there. Her whole family fished off of their property right beside my property. The whole time her daddy was alive, they fished and done like they wanted to. Then she stood up there and said, "We never fished off our property. We didn't do that. Johnny Wayne don't need to be there." But there were a lot of people against me, Matt. At one time, the Howells, Don Howell and Kathy Howell, they were.

HB: They were at every meeting.

JWM: Yes, they were dead set against me.

MB: Well, they're both real estate agents or –

JWM: I don't know. I don't think they are. They're retired. I don't know exactly what they do besides mind other people's business all the time.

[laughter]

I'm not sure. Like I said, I didn't even know none of these people. I said it to the county commissioners, and I told them all, "If these people had such a problem with me, why didn't they come over and talk to me?" If I had a problem with my crab pots or whatever and they would have come over and said, "Mr. Midgett, can you put up a fence, or could you plant some trees or something, so we couldn't see your cooler, so we couldn't see your crab pots," I would have probably gone along with it. Because I can understand they lived there and all that. But no, they didn't. They never said a word. That's why they kind of blindsided me with this thing because there was not a problem. Nobody never said a word. The Ollies, Gail Ollie, now her and her mama were dead set against me in this thing. But yet a year earlier, they came and got me to rock their driveway for them. I went and spent \$500 buying rock to fix my driveway that leads down to their driveway because she kept getting stuck coming up that hill. She said, "Son, I wish you'd fix the road. It's in bad shape." I didn't tear the road up. It was that way when I got there. Because just as soon as I got there, they came over and went to griping by the road. So, I went and hired. The boy came in, dumped rocks, spread rocks. Oh, they came over there and thanked me for doing it. "Oh, the roads all in fine shape now." Lo and behold, I went to court, and who was standing there against me that was killing [inaudible] and just mimicking everything? The Ollies. That's the kind of people they are.

MB: Sounds like those people you have –

HB: [laughter]

MB: – that couple, whatever their names were. This is great stuff.

HB: When I was thinking. But yes. But they have seen it now.

JWM: That's right. They've seen that it can be done.

HB: Yes, they have.

JWM: It gives you that. I wanted them to get that it could be done. I worried about losing for that reason. It's not that I felt like it would make me any less of a person because I lost in this thing. I wanted to win, so I could stay there, obviously. But I wanted my children to see that you can overcome battles, and things do work out good sometimes. It did. I think that's going to help them in life a long ways. I really do. Because everybody runs into struggles in their life. If you just give up when it first hits, you don't know whether you could have done it or not. My father had a good saying to me one time. He said, "Son, when something really bad happens," he said, "Don't panic. Just stop and take a deep breath and just see what is really happening around you." He said, "Nine times out of ten, it isn't quite as bad as you think it is. You just think it's really bad at the time." I've taken that to heart, and that's what I try to teach my children. I had done face the fact that if I didn't get this thing – I had done come to terms with that, that I may not get what I wanted. But still –

KM: You weren't giving up.

JWM: – I weren't giving up on it. I was not going to give up. I didn't have any choice in that matter. But for my family's sake, my sake obviously, because I can get to work there, but for the future of my children. In any endeavor they come into, any business, whatever they get into, I think this case will help them, and the neighborhood. There were a lot of people that came to me and said, "My God, how did you get it done? How did that happen? We just knew you weren't going to win." I was like, "Well, I don't know." Maybe the good Lord stepped in and helped me somewhat with it. Not that I'm religious because I'm not. But like I said –

MB: But you can believe in some kind of spiritual thing without having to go to organized religion. But there was maybe some force for good that brought all these people together to help you.

JWM: Something did.

MB: Something.

JWM: Something really did. Like you said, at one point the commissioners, it was four-to-one or three-to-two against me and four-to-one against me. Then all of a sudden, it was five-to-zero

for me. I know we put on a good show and everything, but maybe there was something else that showed people the way to go. For everything, I'm grateful. For any way that it did happen, I'm grateful.

MB: Well, Harvey, can you talk a little bit about what you said that Monday night?

HB: Well, let's see. That Monday night before the final vote, everybody else expressed Johnny Wayne's case so very well, I thought; Bob Reichner and Carol McIntyre and both of Johnny Wayne's neighbors down there, Randy Brinkley and the lady on the other side. They had examples of this community business existing in some twenty places around Sneads Ferry residential areas without disturbing anybody. So, all I tried to do when I spoke briefly was to say that here's a hardworking man who's trying to feed his family, just like his father did and just like his grandfather did and like this community has been doing for several hundred years. That he should be allowed to do that. That was just the essence of what I said.

MB: Well put as always. Who were the main speakers that Monday night when the whole thing changed? You spoke, Johnny?

JWM: No, I didn't.

MB: You didn't speak?

JWM: No, to tell you the truth [laughter]. It was a funny thing. I was sitting there waiting to speak, and at every other meeting, I don't know how to sign up. They got a sign-up sheet when you go in. Most of the time, the petitioner doesn't have to sign his name up because they'll call the staff up from the Planning Department to give their overview. Then they'll ask the petitioner to come up and state his case. Well, that night I was sitting there, and Kim said – my wife – she said, "Did you sign up?" I was like, "No, I don't have to. Because every other time, they always called me to the front." Well, we were sitting there, and next thing I know, they called somebody else's name. I didn't even speak. Maybe it worked out for the best that I didn't speak. I don't know. But I was going to speak, and I didn't. I don't know.

KM: He didn't.

JWM: That was just odd how that went. They didn't call me to the front like they normally did.

MB: Well, I remember speaking about public speaking early on when you said that "I'm just trying to feed my family." I remember a couple years ago, you saying something to that effect. But had you done much public speaking before that?

JWM: No.

MB: Was that a little nerve-racking to speak in front of all those people? Well, you didn't seem to be nerve-racked at all. You did good.

JWM: It's not hard to speak in front of people when there's really a lot at stake, like your family.

I was speaking about things I knew about. I wasn't speaking about things I didn't know about or things I had to rehearse. I was speaking about, "All I'm trying to do is work and feed my family. I don't know why you dragged me up here. I don't know nothing about zoning." That's what I told them. They asked me and said, "Mr. Midgett, why are you here?" I'm like, "Because you dragged me here." You go, "What –"

HB: [laughter]

KM: He goes –

JWM: "I don't know what you people want."

KM: [inaudible]

JWM: But I didn't understand. But no, it's not hard to speak. It makes me nervous sometimes to speak in front of a crowd if I don't know what I'm talking about or if I feel like I'm going to be made a fool of because I'm not really – as long as I know what I'm talking about, that doesn't bother me to talk in front of people. But now if I feel like I'm talking to somebody that's a lot more educated than I am, then I can't talk to those kinds of people. They talk above my head somewhat. So, that'll make you nervous somewhat. This here didn't, because –

MB: It's not that you had to stand right next to Angie Manning and some of those people who basically were horrible to you.

JWM: Oh, yes. They were always right there. But they don't make me nervous. She doesn't make me nervous at all. Of course, she talks out of both sides of her mouth. She'll tell me one thing. Then she'd go to the commissioners and tell them something else. But that's where I really first learned that something wasn't just right there. She gave me a zoning permit for my cooler and my power pole when I first met her. She told me, as long as I didn't retail off that property, that I was not running a business. I said, "Well, what makes a business in Onslow County?" She said, "Retail sales, posted signs. You've got to have bathrooms." It was just a list that she went over with me. Then when I confronted her with it in the planning board meetings and the county commissioners' meeting, she said, "No, I never said that. I didn't say that." That's a lie.

KM: You even tried to cover up for her.

JWM: Yes, I even tried to cover up for her at the first meeting. Because she said, "Well, I didn't say that." I said, "Well, maybe I misunderstood what she was talking about." Because I didn't know she was dead set against me at the time. I just said, "Well, maybe I misunderstood," just trying to get along with her. Then she kept right on with that story. Even on my zoning permit that she wrote me, it says, "No retail sales on site." So, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that she told me that in her wording because she wrote it on my permit that she gave me for my cooler. But she denies it to this day that she ever said it. But anyway, they've been hard to deal with. But they don't make me nervous none. She doesn't make me nervous.



MB: So, you never felt intimidated that you weren't just going to go –

JWM: I didn't feel intimidated. I just felt that I didn't know what was coming next because they knew the law so well. I didn't know anything about the law. They know how to get you through the law. They come up with this zoning violation and this zoning violation. When you don't know anything about the law, it's really confusing. When they start talking about primary structures and outbuildings and you can't have a building without a primary structure. I didn't know none of this mess when this thing first happened. They were talking above my head talking this. That's when I had to go get somebody to help me with this stuff because they wouldn't help me at all. But no, they don't make me nervous as far as like that. It's just I had to get somebody that knew what they were talking about to help me fight these people.

MB: What kind of anger did you ever feel about it all?

JWM: Oh, you get mad, Matt. It's just like you're mad and you want to choke somebody. You're so mad. Because they're sitting there with all the information and all the power and you're under their mercy. They're saying that if you don't move this thing within thirty days, we're going to charge you a hundred – was it 100 or 200?

KM: \$100 a day.

JWM: It's \$100 a day fine per violation. So, there, you've got to do something in a hurry. The clock is ticking the whole time, and they're just sitting there. They've got all the authority. So, yes, you get mad over it. Then when they tell you one thing and then they change their mind or don't, it was really frustrating. It really was.

MB: It's hard to find out why they want to be so unfair.

JWM: I don't know. But we've talked about that, and I've yet to figure that out. But I've told my wife, she gets really mad over it. But the biggest thing that I need to do, and my wife needs to do with this thing, is not – and I tried to do this the whole time – not let this thing consume me to where it's all that I think about all the time. Even when I was fighting this thing, I tried to clear my mind of it as much as I could when I was working or with my children. I've got a big family, and I've got too much good to do for people. I feel like I've got a lot of good things I want to do for people, not harm people or begrudge people the rest of my life over this thing. I'm never going to forgive people or forget. I may be able to forgive people what they've done later, but I won't ever forget it. But I'm not going to sit around and just be mad over it all the time. That's the wrong way. Because that doesn't hurt them, that hurts me. I just didn't want it to consume me than it liked to have. It's all we could think about for a long time because it was us and our children trying to make a living. It's hard enough to make a living at anything you go at, and then these people are aggravating you like they tried to aggravate me. But like I said, now that I've won the case, people they'll say, "Won't you do this, or won't you do that? Or you hate this one or you hate –" I said, "Look, I don't care for them. I don't like them because of what they're trying to do to me. But I'm trying to let it go." I'm trying to just keep it out of my mind as much as I can because it'll make you sick. It really will if you just keep right on with it. I'm not that type of person. I'd rather do good for people than to sit around and think about doing bad things

to people. I don't want to be like that.

MB: I remember something you said years ago when I interviewed you. You said, "I want everybody to do good. I want all fishermen and everybody to do good. I want everybody to be able to be happy in life."

JWM: Well, that's right. If you are in a fishing business – it's just like I told you before, if you are the only one doing good, everybody's eyes are on you. You want everybody making money, everybody doing good. Because if you're the only one that's doing good, you're going to be in trouble before long. Because there's going to be something that happens that's not right. Because you're running enviousy and jealousy and all kinds of things that happens. So, my philosophy of that, I want everybody to do good and be good and half of their families and do with their families. I feel like that's just the way to be. So, this thing with my wife, Kim, she gets so mad over it. She boils over it all the time, over what this crowd has done. Any mother with her children is going to be that way. Some of my friends have spoken to these people, and they would say to them like, "You're trying to take the man's family. You're hurting the man's family." They were like, "No, we're not. This has nothing to do with his family." Now this is what some of the opposition would say. They said, "Well, what do you mean it's nothing to do with this family? He's got five children he's trying to take care of." Well, that has got nothing to do with this case. Well, how does it not have anything to do with his case? If I can't use my property, I can't feed my children. But they all saw me carry my children to the meetings with me, and I did that on purpose. But they never brought none of their children with them. They never brought none of their children with them to see how rotten they were for doing what they were doing to me. But I carried my children with me, so they could see just how people are. Like you said about MacKenzie, when I started Kayla and MacKenzie to the meeting, she was three years old. She's been to every meeting with me. What was it, the birthday or the Christmas? What was it?

KM: Christmas.

JWM: Right before Christmas, county commissioners turned me down on that three-to-two vote. MacKenzie came home and what did she –

KM: We asked her what she wanted for Christmas.

JWM: Yes. We asked MacKenzie what she wanted for Christmas, and she said, "I want Santa Claus to –"

KM: "Bring me a permit."

JWM: Yes. "Give my daddy a permit, so he can stay on his property." So, she realizes what's going on somewhat. It's just like some other people stood up in those meetings, Harvey, and you heard them. They said, "This is not about Johnny Wayne." You heard them say that.

HB: I heard them say that.

MB: I heard that too, yes.

JWM: But they're telling a lie, Harvey, and you know they're lying. Because like you said, who does it directly affect besides me? Nobody. So, when you stand up and say that it isn't about fishing and it isn't about Johnny Wayne, well, what is it about then? Can you explain to me what it's about? I'm not hurting the property values. Because my neighbor just had his property redone and his place is three times worth of what it was in 1980 or 1990. That's what he said. So, his just went up three times in value. Other than that, my other neighbor, the lady lives there, she wanted me there, and her property is worth a half a million dollars. So, I don't see how I hurt anybody's property value or any of that. It was just some selfish, irritable people with nothing to do. They need to get out and get a job is what they need to take up some of their time.

MB: [laughter] It's pretty amazing.

JWM: Well, it is something I wish I hadn't had to go through; I'll tell you that.

MB: I'm sure. Just to go back, you were talking about how for your kids, this is an important lesson here.

JWM: Well, it is a lesson.

MB: But there was no guarantee it would work out.

JWM: No. That was a scary thing. You have to face the fact that you may not win, and we had. Me and my wife, we had sat down, and I had gone and looked at other properties that I thought that I could get changed to where I could use for fishing. We had looked down a lot of other avenues to try to be able to be legal.

KM: Well, they're all zoned.

JWM: That's right. But we were looking down other avenues because I had to face the possibility that I was going to lose. You've got to be realistic in that thing that you may not win.

MB: You got to have a plan B here.

JWM: That's right. Because I can't quit working. I've got to keep going for my family. Kim works, and I work. It's taken everything we can both get or make right now to survive. I think that's going to get a little worse all the time with the way the economy is going. I think some of those people that were against me, if the economy keeps going the way that it's going now, a year or two maybe, they're going to forget about me totally. They're going to forget I ever existed because they're going to have a lot bigger problems than what I was. I'm going to tell you that.

MB: Well, you're a survivor, both of you guys. Both of you are extremely hard workers. They couldn't have picked the worst – from their perspective, from a public relation's, you're a model citizen. You don't drink. You don't smoke. I'm saying that they picked the worst person from

their point of view because you're a great guy. Everybody loves you. You're a community leader. It backfired on them big time. I think they try to work out some of the stereotypes some people have about fishermen. Some will have a can of Bud in their hand. You know what some people think about fishermen.

JWM: Oh, yes. That's right.

MB: They don't work regular hours.

KM: They're dumb.

MB: All those stereotypes. I think part of this was a class issue between wealthy, upper middle-class people who need to get a job and hardworking-working people. I think it bugged them that you're such a hard worker.

JWM: That's right. Well, they made the statement that it was fine. They liked fishing as long as it was on the other side of the creek. But they didn't want it on the residential side of the creek. They made that statement at the county meeting. So, it seemed like to me that part of it was a real estate deal, and then part of it was a thing that they just felt like I was not as good as they were. That they were just a little bit better than I was because I didn't have a million-dollar house built over there or whatever.

KM: They weren't expecting a fight either.

JWM: No, they didn't.

KM: They didn't think that we'd fight like we did.

JWM: I'm not bragging about fighting. I just think that they thought this problem was going to go away a lot quicker than it did. I think they thought the county would come down and tell me to leave, and I would leave. But when you don't have no choice, you had to fight. Then it got dragged out and dragged out and dragged out. Then it turned into a who's-going-to-win deal. I was fighting just to stay there, and they were doing everything in their power to beat me. If they would have just left me alone, then I would have quit. But no, they just kept riding on, throwing everything at me. So, I didn't want to go through this fight. I didn't want all this mess.

MB: Well, a lot of people would have quit even.

JWM: Well, I'm not saying I would have quit. I'm just saying if they would have just, "So, fine." I would have been happy if they would have just said, "Well, just forget it and let it go. Don't worry about him." Who in the world wants to try to fight for about three years just to work? Hell, you can't get some people to go to work at all.

MB: [laughter]

JWM: Here I am having to fight to go to work. It is kind of a ridiculous thing to have to do.

You know what I'm getting at?

MB: Yes, I know. Oh, Kim, what was it like for you with your kids though? Were you worried about what they were feeling?

KM: Yes.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about that?

JWM: Yes, go ahead, Kim.

MB: Yes, Molly. Were you worried? Did other kids ever make comments at school or anything about all this because it was in the –

KM: To my kids, yes. They come home to – people –

MB: What would they say?

KM: Well, the teachers wouldn't mention it to them, and friends would talk about it with them.

JWM: "Oh, we made the paper again." They used to get the newspaper at school, and they would come running and give it to the kids, "Oh, your daddy's picture is on the paper again." They'd just read it in class. They talked about it a lot.

MB: But were the other kids fairly supportive in school for you guys? I would imagine so. Well, that was a tough period for the family, though. It must have been hard to concentrate just on a regular life when this thing's hanging over you.

KM: Yes. It caused plenty of arguments [laughter].

JWM: Yes, you just don't know.

KM: Stress, aggravation, yes.

MB: A lot of stress.

JWM: Well, it caused me and Kim a lot of stress. A good friend of mine, Hubert Smith, he said, "It's a wonder you all are still married." Because it's hard to be married a lot. The stress of this thing would have torn a lot of people apart just arguing on this. But that isn't going to happen because when I married Kim, I married Kim forever, period. That's it. I didn't get married by a preacher; I got married by justice of peace. But when I married Kim, it's forever. I'm going to be married to Kim the rest of my life. That's just the way it is. I don't want nobody else. So, this thing here is not going to break me and Kim up. It's like Hubert told me one time. I was down and aggravated to death, and he knew it. He said, "Johnny," he said, "you should think about something." He said, "This is just an inconvenience in your life. This is not a problem." I said, "What do you mean, Hubert?" He said, "Listen to what I'm telling you." He said, "This is

nothing." He said, "What if one of your children get sick or something happens to your wife, about to die or something?" He said, "Then you've got a problem." He said, "But this here, it's all in the way you look at things." He was right. This has been a big inconvenience, and it's been a lot of headaches. But now, when something happens to one of my children or my wife, then you've got a big problem. Not to say that we didn't have a problem, but it can get a whole lot worse really quick.

MB: It depends on how you look at it, though –

JWM: That's right. Exactly.

KM: – in the context of the situation.

JWM: It was a bad situation, a bad thing to happen. But it made us stronger as a family, as a couple. So, some good did come out of it.

MB: Well, they say it either is going to make you tougher, or you're not going to do it.

KM: It opened our eyes to a lot of things that we were dumb about.

JWM: Yes, sure did.

MB: Like what?

JWM: Human nature.

MB: You mean how mean and nasty people are?

KM: Well, how politics work and stuff. We didn't know nothing about politics. Just different things.

JWM: You'll find out who are your friends and who they are and who they aren't.

KM: Yes. We've made a lot of good friends since this has happened.

JWM: Yes, we have. We really have. Like I said, people we didn't have to ask, people we never even knew.

KM: Barbara Bright and Carol McIntyre.

JWM: Yes. Martha O' Lisbey.

KM: Yes. Martha's the one that told them about it and got them involved in it.

JWM: But a lot of people came and spoke at the meetings for us. Well, Harvey, I got to know Harvey since this thing. Me and Harvey spoke years ago. I've seen him here and there. But I

consider Harvey a friend of mine now because we've been through a lot in the last couple of years. He spoke for me, and I appreciate it. So, we've met a lot of good people, I feel, like Harvey. Harvey didn't have to come and speak for me, but he felt like it was the right thing to do. I'm glad he did.

HB: I think Don Beasley did a good job on that planning board.

JWM: Don Beasley. Danny, he sure did. Don Beasley. Yes, Don Beasley was a tremendous help to me.

MB: Well, Harvey, that's a great part of the story, is how the people are coming together.

HB: It is. I think Johnny Wayne and I and Kim, we all having been born here, even though I was away a long time, we feel for this community and the kind of place it is and was. We want to keep some of that heritage and tradition for their children and other children. My family's been here three hundred years and twelve generations, and the Midgetts have been here forever too. Even Lionel Midgett, the chairman of the county commissioners, after that last meeting, I spoke to him. He said, "Eventually, the development is going to maybe overwhelm us more than we want to be overwhelmed. But we're going to keep some of it as long as we can. Johnny Wayne's case was one case where we could do right by a working man and put off the condos and the lack of waterfront for a little bit longer. We were glad to do it." So, I appreciated his position as chairman of the county commissioners and a local person to feel that way.

MB: Well, that's a good way of looking at it. Because if there is that element left of the old ways, then it doesn't die as it has. Unfortunately, there are quite a few places where it has been overwhelming, and there's nothing left of what once was the fishing life and all that. I know there are places in Maine where there's just not – or Florida probably, there's nothing left of the way it used to be with the fishermen. There are just condos and big power boats, and that's it. There are no fishermen left.

HB: Even in Brunswick County right down the road between here and South Carolina, they've lost, in essence, all their commercial fishing industry down there. The other key thing is this is a family. Johnny Wayne and Kim and this family stood together, these children going to every meeting. There are not many families who would do that and would stay together through that, and they did that. I went to every one of those meetings, and they were there every time.

MB: It's kind of a throwback to the ways we need to get back to in this country, that kind of sense of community.

HB: It certainly is.

MB: Well, I think this has been great stuff. Can you sit a little closer together?

KM: I just wandered right off [laughter].

HB: That's nice.

MB: I think we've kind of wrapped it up enough for tonight. Any other things to add about all this? It's a great story.

JWM: Well, it's been a good story. I watched shows on TV about underdogs, like the rest of us have our whole lives. I kind of felt that way, that I was fighting. The people that brought this against me didn't bother me. But when I had to fight the county, when the county stepped in with zoning laws, I kind of felt overwhelmed there because you're fighting the county government. But if anything good besides me winning – that was a good thing to happen that I got to stay there. But I'm just saying that if anybody has seen the case or kept up with the case, it does prove that you can achieve things if you try hard enough and go about it the right way. Like I said, if anybody read or saw the decision, maybe that'll help them somewhere down the road. That the right thing does happen sometimes. Because it's gotten to the point now where a lot of people say, "Well, you can't fight it. You just will go along with it, and you can't get this done, or you can't get that done." But you can if you go about it the right way and try. It doesn't always work out, but this case did. So, another case can. I feel that way, that everything doesn't have to go the wrong way all the time.

MB: I've seen it a number of times in my life in other things where back in California, we stopped this big, huge – they were going to dredge this river and screw up this area where my mom lived for years. We fought it for two years. My mom was one of the leaders, and we won. So, we were able to stop it. I never forgot that. It is possible to win. You never forget when you have a win. It feels good like nothing else. Ours went off about three years too, same thing, county commissioner meetings, all that stuff.

KM: What was that Ms. Louis said about she had the porch's view? Ms. Louis is building a house beside us. On one side of her house is her favorite side because the view is us and us working as a family. She's got a porch that goes completely around. But that's her favorite side, is the side that we're on because, she says, "You don't see that anymore. It's hard to find."

MB: That's very true. Unfortunately, a lot of families, they're families sort of, but they're all independent operators. It's just they're not really together.

JWM: Well, that's just like –

MB: Everybody is watching on their own TV or whatever.

KM: She said it reminded her of the old days where families were close. You don't have that closeness no more.

JWM: Well, it's just like when me and Kim first got married, we made a choice. Kim used to work before we got married, and she worked some when we first got married. But when our children came along, we made a choice. She was not going to work anymore. She was going to take care of these children.

KM: That isn't what you told me [laughter].



MB: [laughter]

JWM: Well, what did I tell you?

KM: You said, "When I pull up in that yard, I want to see your face in that door [laughter]."

JWM: Well, that's right.

MB: [laughter]

JWM: Well, I guess it was my choice then. I made the choice.

[laughter]

But what I'm trying to get at is that what Ms. Louis was talking about, my neighbor, that it's a family operation. We're always there, and we're always together. Well, I think that me and my wife instilled that in our children from the point from when they were little because there wasn't no daycare. We didn't believe in the daycare thing. So, she stayed home for the first sixteen years we were married and never worked, stayed right here with those children. To this day, you see us all the time, we're always together. We always eat together. We go to ballgames together. We're always together. If we go to the creek, most of the time, we're there together. Not to get onto a long draw of what I think about now society, but I think that that's the reason that it's made us close is just because we're close. We stay together all the time. All this divorce thing you see now and these broken homes and stuff, that would kill me. I just don't want that kind of life for my children. That would really be a bad way to be for me. I would never get over that, I don't believe.

MB: Well, I just remember years ago in the film, you said that I may not be rich, but I'm the richest man in the world. I've got my family.

JWM: That's right.

MB: Having shown that film many, many times, I can always see the audience say, "Wow, I like this guy [laughter]."

KM: When at work, women would come up to me and say, they watched the movie. That was their favorite part. That was so sweet. I was so lucky to have a husband that would say that.

JWM: Well, Matt, how a moment –

KM: That's how it came.

JWM: Matt, your movie, it makes you want to cry. I know you've heard that before. But what I'm asking you, the people that you showed it to all around the state, has it gotten the same reaction everywhere?

MB: Yes. Some are stronger in reactions than others. I showed it to commercial fishermen up in Ocean City, Maryland. They said, "Well, we already know all this." I didn't get that they – well, even when we're down in Louisiana, it's like, well, you're preaching to the choir there. But, yes, it's gotten some – Harkers Island, we showed out in this museum out there, and it was like, John Edens came out there and Betty, and it was an emotional night. People were hugging.

KM: They got it.

MB: They got it. They were loving it. Overall, it's gotten a huge, tremendous response. People really love it because it's a warm feeling. It's about good people. It makes people want to say, wait, well this is important, this stuff.

JWM: But when we were making it though, I got friends that watch it to this day, and it was like, "Man, every time I watch that movie, I just about cry." But when we were making it, did you ever think anyone – I know you didn't start with it. Because everything was really good when you first started making it. Then when you put that turn into it, that the fishing's gone south – but I still didn't think it would get the reaction that it's got.

MB: I didn't either.

JWM: You touch people with that movie a lot. I think that movie coming out at the same time that I was fighting this case, I think the movie helped my case somewhat. Because some of the senators had seen it, and some of the people with the water access had seen it. The county commissioners, some of them had seen it. I think the movie helped my case too.

MB: Well, I appreciate that. I do too. I think it also helped pass this bill that they passed, that \$20 million thing. Then they've leveraged that out to 70 million they're trying to raise for the save fishing and buy like the Mills Fish house here in town, stuff like that. So, the timing, again, was kind of God. It just all worked together in a way that was amazing. Having Basnight in there, he's the one that put that bill through.

JWM: Well, it seemed like things were out of our hands, that something made everything just come together all at one time. Because that's not my case when it went for the Board of Adjustment. There was – what's his name down there – Charlie Albertson trying to get that water access thing done. It all came into play right there. There's Basnight and him trying to do something, and the movie came out. Then I had to go to court, and it was all right there together. It just seemed like something put it all together all at one time. I think it did help, man. I really do. I think it helped with the case.

MB: Well, I appreciate that. Yes, who knew? Who thought I would sit out and do a movie about a fishing town? But then that's why it's good it took seven years or eight years to do it. Because if I finished the movie when I said I would have, it would have been before the whole main story started to happen. So, I'm really glad that it just took as long as it did. Otherwise, I would have missed all this stuff. The other only last thing would be it is hard now. You've won this victory, which is a huge victory. But of course, we all know that there are huge struggles to

be a fisherman still. It's a very tough period for fishermen.

JWM: Well, yesterday's problems aren't a problem. Tomorrow's problems are a problem. When I was younger, competition was a problem. Like I said earlier, we were loners. Kind of like you'd find fish here, or you'd find crabs there, you'd kind of want to work on it yourself and not let anybody know what you were doing. Well, that problem left, as far as I'm concerned, when they started making restrictions and regulations to stop you, making you pull turtle shooters. You can't have this size fish, and you can't have that size fish. You can't catch this fish anymore, and you put a season on the fishing. Well, that was bad. But now, that's not a problem anymore. Now, you've got fuel problems. Now, it doesn't matter what fish you can keep or what we can target, you can't afford to target it because the fuel is too bad. This energy crisis that we're going through is just about to fold up the fishing industry and probably a lot of other industries in this country, like the truckers. So, it is a revolving door all the time on problems. But I kind of got a feeling that some of the problems we thought we had at one time are not a problem like we're dealing with now. This energy crisis, there's going to be very, very few fishermen left and truckers left and loggers or whoever else. It's going to have to be people that can figure out how to streamline their business. I don't know exactly how to say it, but you're going to have to get the best for your buck, is what I'm trying to say. You're going to have to figure out how to work cheaper for less profit, and that's a bad combination. But if you're going stay in any kind of business that you use fuel in, then you're fixing to be in a big problem. I think the food crisis in this country is going to be the same way. If you haul food, it's going to cost you. If you raise it, it's costing you. But the fish in the industry, a lot of your big boats are done tied the boats to the dock. They can't afford to run the boats anymore for fuel. Imports have killed the price of shrimp. We're getting \$2 less a pound for shrimp than we did ten years ago. Fuel is \$2 more a gallon, maybe 3. The last diesel fuel I bought ten years ago, the last time I bought a diesel fuel because I used to shrimp a little bit, I think it was 55 cents a gallon. That might not have been that long ago, 7, 8 years ago. Anyway, it was 55 cents. Now, what is it? It's 4.75.

HB: 4.75.

JWM: So, that's more. That's over four times higher, right?

MB: Yes.

JWM: Over four times higher, and shrimps are, across the board, \$2 a pound cheaper than they were then. So, that's not a good theory to work on. You can't do it. I feel like a lot of good people are fixing to go. Hardworking, taxpaying people are fixing to get pushed under by greedy oil companies or whatever who's profiting off of this deal. So, I don't know if the fishing industry – I think if something doesn't change within the next year, somehow or another, that probably half of your fishing industry will be gone on the East Coast. They just cannot overcome the fuel problem. You just can't do it. Well, I just don't know what else to say about it. I just don't think we're going to overcome it.

MB: Well, that's a tough note to end on. But like you were talking about with Andrew, this is what he wants to do. It's his dream.

JWM: I don't know about you, but how can I tell my children not to do something that I love to do? I love to fish. The advantage that I've got over shrimp boats and people that's using all diesel fuel, they've come out with the new engines, like outboard engines. Mine now gets twice the fuel mileage that my old one did. So, therefore, my engine now, I can run it if gasoline's \$4 a gallon, it's just like it's \$2 a gallon. Because they have advanced these outboard engines now to where I can get a lot better fuel mileage, so I can still afford to work somewhat. But those old 6-71s and 8-71s and those 400 Cummins engines that they made 20, 30 years ago that those boys are trying to run around in those shrimp boats –

[end of transcript]