

Wild Caught
Kim Midgett Oral History
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Length of Interview: 00:20:51
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Kim, now, we went through this before. Just be comfortable. I'm just curious about a few things now. Talk about what it's like growing up in a small town, Sneads Ferry. I'm trying to get a sense of this town.

Kim Midgett: It was nice. You know everybody. It was small. You weren't afraid to walk the roads.

MB: Well, you grew up here. Has the town grown a lot?

KM: Oh, yes. It's not as small. You don't know everybody now like you used to know everybody.

MB: So, that must have been pretty different to know everybody like that.

KM: Yes. I wasn't allowed when I was little. I don't walk from – just anywhere. My kids, I won't let them do it.

MB: I don't know how the people live in this town now, but –

KM: [inaudible]

MB: – it seems like –

KM: Not more than what it used to.

MB: Is that better or is that – well, how do you feel about that?

KM: Well, I guess a smaller community, you know?

MB: I mean, you really know Johnny pretty much your whole life.

KM: Yes.

MB: In other words, did you go to elementary school with him?

KM: He was a couple of years ahead of me. We knew each other.

MB: So, tell me how you got married. Talk about that a little bit. How old were you when you got married?

KM: Nineteen, twenty.

MB: So, what were you doing at that point? Were you working?

KM: Yes.

MB: Come on –

KM: I was working in a cafe.

MB: Which one?

KM: It's not here now. Well, it's now the Green Turtle Bay. It used to be the Dock House. I think it's used to be that now.

MB: So, you worked as a waitress there?

KM: No. Kitchen.

MB: Kitchen?

KM: [affirmative]

MB: Is that where you learned how to cook so well?

KM: They helped [laughter].

MB: Let's talk about your kids and describe each one and their age and a little bit what they're like and so forth. Who is your first child?

KM: Kayla, she's nine. She doesn't like messing in the river too much. Andrew, he's eight, and he loves it. He used to take buoys around when he was two and three, the crab pot buoys.

MB: Go ahead. So, he probably wants to follow in Johnny's footsteps?

KM: Yes. Zach, he's five. He don't pay no mind right now.

MB: Now, you grew up in a fishing family, right?

KM: [affirmative]

MB: So, does your family lived in the fishing business for generations?

KM: Not as long as his. My grandpa was a plumber. My dad was a fisherman.

MB: Did he die at sea?

KM: [affirmative]

MB: How do you feel? How old were you when that happened?

KM: I was five.

MB: Was that really a traumatic thing for you? I mean, obviously, it was, to go through that.

KM: [affirmative]

MB: But I guess that is part of what we were talking about with Johnny. It's a dangerous job out there. You were mentioning that you didn't really like Johnny's channel netting because you were worried about him.

KM: Yes. It was at night. It's hard to see.

MB: Even though the town has grown, do you still enjoy living here?

KM: Oh, yes.

MB: How about talking about your family? I mean, we went to that pig pickin. You've got a lot of people. Your mom is here. Do you have a number of relatives who are around here?

KM: Yes. They all weren't there. There were quite a few that didn't come.

MB: You've got a big family around here?

KM: Yes. There's more here than what was at the pig pickin.

MB: Like Johnny has mentioned, like Thanksgiving, Christmas, talk about some of what you all do for –

KM: Everybody comes here at Christmas. I cook, and we have presents and just have a good time.

MB: Well, that's good. So, you are a homemaker, right? Thank God there's still some homemakers in this country who are able to stay home. I mean, it's pretty neat and devote full time to your kids. You have a busy life. You've all kinds of things to do.

KM: Oh, yes.

MB: Take us through what will be a fairly typical day. Like today, what would you do today, I mean?

KM: Stay home, take care of my kids, and clean my house and cook dinner. That's about it.

MB: So, speaking about dinner – I know we're doing a sound test – but what's up for dinner tonight [laughter]?

KM: Shrimp, oysters, soft crabs, stone crab claws.

MB: So, do you always cook a pretty big meal for everybody?

KM: Most of the time.

MB: Let's see here. I'm trying to get you loosen up a little bit here. Just relax now. Do you think fishermen are a special breed? I mean, you've been surrounded by people who work [inaudible]. Is there something special about the life, you think? There's this movie out called *The Perfect Storm*. None of us have seen it yet, but you know what it's about. It's about fishermen who go out. I read the book. I haven't seen the movie yet. I mean, there's probably a lot of legends about fishermen, of sailors, of people who work out in the sea. I mean, you grew up in that world. So, do you think they're kind of a special breed?

KM: [laughter] It's normal to me.

MB: It's normal?

KM: Yes.

MB: I think it's different. Most people in big cities don't have a sense of community. I mean, when you're talking about growing up here, you didn't worry about walking out the door or anything. That's kind of nice. I mean, you've got a lot of friends and families. It's kind of a warm feeling around here. Like when you go to the supermarket, do you usually – often bumping into somebody?

KM: Yes, most of the time.

MB: Because that's what Bernice Guthrie was talking about, taking two hours to go to food line because she keeps bumping into people [laughter].

KM: Yes. [inaudible] is only about – it's taking so long when I go. [inaudible] [laughter].

MB: Then when you need stuff, you go to Jacksonville, if you need something different. Usually, once a month, your mom will take care of the kids, so you can have maybe a night to yourselves?

KM: Right.

MB: What do you guys usually do?

KM: Go eat, go shopping, go to a movie, whatever, something different.

MB: Well, is there anything else you want to add here?

Male Speaker: [laughter] You asked about her father is a fisherman and his father. Is that right?

KM: No. His father was a plumber.

MB: Isn't there a movement here to create some kind of monument to the fishermen? You talked about that.

KM: [affirmative] My uncle.

MB: What's going on with that? What are you all going to try to do?

KM: Raise money to get one up and put up.

MB: Try to make that a sense now. I can't really use that because nobody will know [laughter] – he's not laughing, he's just seeing – see, if you say that, then the only way to use that is to put the question in, or should you say something like, "Well –" the problem with my doing this, I'm going to tell you what to say. But basically, if you say, "Well, yes, we're going to try to put a monument up." Can you say something like that?

KM: My uncle in the New River Fishermen's Association is going to try to raise money to put up a monument for the commercial fishermen that lost their lives.

MB: Excellent. Very good. So, there have been over the years – like in any fishing town, people have lost their lives, right?

KM: Yes.

MB: How does the town react? I mean, that must be a difficult moment in any town –

KM: Yes.

MB: – when that happens. The word spreads that something has happened out there. Well, that'd be a good thing. Maybe we can film that as it goes on. Are you really going to do that, you think?

KM: Yes.

MB: Then I think it was going to be in the Shrimp Festival grounds, where it will be a good place. It makes sense. Do you ever go out on the boat or anything?

KM: Yes, quite a bit, especially when he goes shrimping, I go with him.

MB: What do you enjoy about that, going out?

KM: I enjoy it, all of it.

MB: When I took photographs in here before, you were doing something back there with those crabs. What was all that? Tell us about what you're doing.

KM: I was cleaning them. He built me a building in the backyard to raise soft crabs or shed them out. When they get ready to come out, I'll clean them and freeze them.

MB: Wait a minute. Now, I'm still unclear about what's the difference between a soft-shell crab and a regular crab.

KM: One is hard, one is soft [laughter].

MS: They shed shell. It's better if you told it. Explain it to him.

MB: Yes, explain it to me.

KM: You catch them. They call them peelers, the hard, you know? Then you put them in the baths. The water runs constantly. They shed their shell. Then they're soft. Then you take them out, and you clean them. You sell them or freeze them or whatever.

MB: So, you mean a soft-shell crab is worth more than a regular crab?

KM: [affirmative]

MB: But how often do they shed the shell? Just once?

KM: Those shed, say, in June or a couple of months there. Let's say for about June. Then start again in August, they'll go through another shed.

MB: The same crab?

KM: [affirmative]

MB: Oh. So, how long does the crab live then?

MS: [inaudible]

MB: I mean, one crab can live about a year and a half?

KM: About three years.

MB: Three years. So, you know –

KM: Most of them.

MB: – a lot about crabs. So, the average crab can live for three years and get Social Security at that point?

KM: Yes, unless Johnny catches it.

[laughter]

MB: Which means there won't be any need for Social Security [laughter]. So, now, he built you those. But those were full of seawater, right?

KM: [affirmative] Saltwater, yes.

MB: So, how'd you figure out how to make seawater?

KM: You get to the river and get it.

MB: Oh, well, that's a good way to do it [laughter]. So, then what was your job out there?

KM: Take care of them. Clean them. After they get soft, you gather and clean them and wrap them up and throw them in the freezer [laughter].

MB: Now, we're beginning to get some stuff here. So, do you enjoy working with the crabs out there?

KM: [affirmative] I love it.

MB: So, you can make more money off a soft-shell crab than a hard-shell crab.

KM: Right.

MB: Why is that? I mean, do they taste different or what?

KM: Yes [laughter].

MB: Try to elaborate a little bit. I mean, do you think they taste better?

KM: Yes, I like them better. You don't have to sit there and pick the meat out of a hardshell. You eat the whole thing.

MB: You're a very good cook. Do you guys often have things like the pig pickin that we went to on Sunday? Do you have a lot of gatherings?

KM: Yes. It might not be a picnic. It might be something else, hamburgers, hotdogs, or whatnot. But yes, we have quite a few cookouts.

MB: So, now, in terms of your children, do you feel comfortable about them – maybe Andrew or all three of them – getting into the fishing business?

KM: Oh, yes.

MB: Well, that's good. That's good. I hope that they'll stay relatively close around here

somewhere.

KM: Yes. I don't want them leaving me.

MB: You told me that if I didn't have children, I'd end up a lonely old bachelor. Put the fear of God into me.

KM: [laughter]

MB: That's why I have ads on all the major papers looking for a wife [laughter]. Well, I think that we've got some good stuff out of there. Any other questions, Andrew, that come to your mind?

MS: I was wondering, on the monument, is there a specific reason that you're getting in the act of building the monument?

KM: Like what?

MS: Maybe you have friends or family that –

KM: My dad, he drove it. So, his name is going to be put on there. Is that what you're asking?

MB: Yes. In other words, what's your personal motivation for – well, it's not just you.

KM: Well, it's a good thing for all the commercial fishermen that lost their lives. It's a nice thing to do for them to show that we have not forgotten them.

MS: Have there been recent things also around Sneads Ferry?

KM: Like what?

MS: Accidents or –

KM: Not that I can think of, not recently.

MS: But you've had the bad weather.

KM: Yes. We've had some bad weather.

MS: I mean, the hurricanes and [inaudible].

KM: [affirmative]

MB: So, what's it like going through the hurricanes here?

KM: I hate it. I want to leave [laughter].

MB: Didn't you guys go to a shelter? You told me about this before. There've been about four in the last three [inaudible].

KM: One of them, we did. It wasn't a very safe shelter. I'd rather been home and take my chances with a tree falling on the house.

MB: We're in the hurricane season again right now. So, next time, you guys think you'll stay here and weather it out?

KM: Oh, yes. We only left one time, and we won't leave again, not go there. Matter of fact, they've done away with that shelter.

MB: Well, you guys are probably pretty well prepared in terms of food and everything, right?

KM: Oh, yes.

MB: So, you've got a lot of skills at homes. You can. I've seen the freezer out there. You've got all kinds of peaches, all kinds of food laid up there. How did you learn how to do all that stuff?

KM: My mom.

MB: Part of the story is generationally – so, your mom taught you about how to do all that stuff. Because a lot of young women don't really know how to do all [laughter] that stuff. That's kind of like a lost thing. People in the cities don't have – well, it's not that they don't have time, but they don't choose to learn how to do all the canning. What was that like? She would show you how to do all these things?

KM: Yes. She wanted to teach me all this stuff, so I could pass it on to Kayla, and she could pass it on. Then it helps out in the winter too, when the money is tight. We've got food to eat. Whether the bills get paid or not, you've got the food [laughter].

MB: So, you've got to look at all the different aspects of getting through the year, the harder times in the winter.

KM: Yes.

MB: In the summer, you can – like you have corn out there, right?

KM: Corn, yes.

MB: Right, that you froze.

KM: [affirmative]

MB: So, that sounds good. Okay. Well, thank you. Appreciate it.

[end of transcript]