

Wild Caught
Dorothy Jean Norris Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
Location: Unknown
Length of Interview: 00:13:39
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Ms. Norris, I appreciate your doing this. I guess what I wanted to get is what it's like from your point of view of being married to a fisherman. We'll start with that. What's it been like to be married to a fisherman, to John?

Dorothy Jean Norris: Well, it's been good. It's been hard times and been good times. It's like when it's good, it's good; when it's bad, it's bad. A lot of times in earlier years, he was gone a lot. So, I was mainly mother and father. But now, the kids are grown. He's home now. So, it's been good.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about your family and your kids? How many kids you have, their ages, can you give us a little sense of that?

DJN: Okay. I have three children; oldest one is 32. She's married and has four kids. My daughter is 27. She's working in [inaudible] Church children's home. She's not married. I have a son that's 23. He's married and has two children. He also works on the river.

MB: Oh, he works in the river.

DJN: He channel nets.

MB: Liston.

DJN: Liston.

MB: I filmed him a little bit.

DJN: Did you? [laughter]

MB: Yes. He has some kids. Right?

DJN: Right. He has two children, has a little boy and a little girl, ages 5 and 2.

MB: Now, tell me about where you grew up.

DJN: I grew up in Richlands, actually, which is not that far away. I've been here for 34.5 years, because I've been married that long, got married when I was 16. But I don't regret it. Fishing is a hard life for John too, and for me. Because it's unpredictable. One week, you might make good; next week you don't. Or it could be a month. But so far, we haven't lost anything. So, all in all, it's good. I can't imagine him doing anything else. Me, I waitress, and I love it. I've been doing that for, I don't know, about fifteen years or more.

MB: So, tell me about where you're a waitress now.

DJN: I work at Golden Corral in Jacksonville. I used to work at nights, usually six nights a week. This week, I got two nights off. So, I'm only five days this week. But I like it. People say, "You drive all the way to Jacksonville to work?" Yes, I do. I enjoy it. I enjoy meeting the

people. Yeah.

MB: Well, that's good. So, your kids, you all grew up, raised your kids right here in Sneads Ferry.

DJN: Right.

MB: What's it been like to live in this little fishing town? What's Sneads Ferry like?

DJN: Well, I don't know of any other place I'd rather be. I mean, you know everybody, or basically you know them. We have had a lot of new people come in that I don't know. When we finally got street names, that really confused you. Somebody said, "We're in such-and-such street is." But who are you looking at? If they give you a name, then you can tell them how to get there. Because we went for years and didn't have street names. We went for years; never knew I lived at 306 Cross Street until they sent out a notice saying that's our physical address. It's quiet here.

MB: You like the pace of a small town?

DJN: Oh, yes. Yes, I like it. I lived in Florida for about three months, which I liked that. Because everything was right there. Because you only got one way in, one way out. But I like it here. This is home.

MB: There's a special quality, which I'm trying to give a feeling of that in the film, about a small – it feels like a real fishing town. Not being an expert or anything, but it's not a tourist town here.

DJN: No. It's family, really. It's a big fishing family. That's the only way I can say it. If you're in need, they help you. Community is good about helping you if you need help, which from other people I've talked to that live in bigger towns, it's not that way. You don't even know your neighbor. So, I like it here because you do know your neighbors.

MB: Right. Yeah. That's very true. I was struck by that. I interviewed little Paul Huie, the clammer. He had a massive heart attack, and the community –

DJN: Right.

MB: They all talked about how they really helped out, time of need.

DJN: Well, they. [inaudible] There's a death in the area, people fix food, carries it to their house. I know my son-in-law passed away in Charleston, South Carolina, and I couldn't believe how that difference was there than here. Actually, nobody came over other than the immediate family. I guess because nobody knew him. But it's different here. We do go. When somebody is sick, we go. Or if somebody passes away, we try to go and comfort the family.

MB: Well, they're both fishing. That must have been tough having him away for so much, your

husband, away. You were saying you had to be both mom and dad. Has that been hard for you? I mean, I'm sure it's hard to – you'd miss him being gone a lot.

DJN: Yeah, I did. I do miss him, and I worry about him. But I've learned to depend on myself, as other people – I mean, at work, I hear them say, "So-and-so needs fixing." Well, there's a lot of stuff that I don't need a man to do. No disrespect, but because of being without him, at times, I've had to fix things. The car tears up, I have to get to the shop. Or have a water leak, I have to take care of that, other things that people depend totally on their husband. I do when he's here. I assure you, [laughter] he gets a lot of that honey-dos. But it's been good.

MB: Do you worry about him? We know that fishing is a dangerous business.

DJN: Yes, I worry about him very much. Some accidents happen so fast. I do worry about him. Now I'm glad he has his cell phone. I can keep in contact with him. So, that helps a lot.

MB: You ever gone down to watch him come back in?

DJN: Oh, yeah. I come down here sometimes and watch him. I haven't been to the inlet much. I only go to the inlet, to the bar, and watch him go in or out. I don't like that.

MB: That's a little tricky there.

DJN: Yes. But I do come down here and watch him unload the fish and stuff. Mainly so I can – no, not mainly, but if I'm here, I can get some shrimp. I can call him on a radio or on a phone. "John, save me some shrimp." He's like, "Okay." But when he gets to the dock, he's got one thing on his mind. Let's get this fish off and get to the house and get a shower. But if I'm here, I get them.

MB: Well, I'm sure you've been out with him on the boat.

DJN: Yes, I have. It's been a long time since I went out with him. The last time I went, I messed my back up. So, now, he won't let me go [laughter]. Cost about \$30,000 to have back surgery. So, I'm not allowed on there to go [laughter].

MB: Well, it's grueling. It's hard work.

DJN: It is very hard. It's very hard work. They earn every penny that they make and then some. Because it's a hard life. I think it makes you old before your time because it is very hard work. He enjoys it. Like I say, I can't imagine doing anything else.

MB: Yeah, some of them say that gets in the blood. Do you think it does get in the blood?

DJN: Oh, yes, most definitely. I was hoping my son wouldn't, but he did. I'm wanting more for him. Because it's like a dying industry. It's different than what it was, even thirty years ago when we first started or more. But I think once you get in your blood, it's always there.

MB: Do you think it is a dying industry?

DJN: Yes, I do.

MB: Why is that?

DJN: Well, you don't have the cash that you did years ago. Well, one thing, you've got more boats, more people doing it. I shouldn't say there's not as many shrimps as it used to. But I think it has to be divided out more now because there are more people doing the fish and all.

MB: So, you didn't really want Liston to go into it. You would have preferred that he not?

DJN: I preferred that he graduated from school and got a good education and went on to college and got something that he could do forever. But he enjoys it just like his dad. His son probably will be the same way because he takes him out on the boat too. So, he probably will too.

MB: John is a preacher, or do you call it a reverend? I'm not sure exactly.

DJN: A preacher.

MB: A preacher. Talk about that. That's a pretty fantastic combination.

DJN: I think it is. It's hard sometimes. When he was first called, I made the statement that God did not call me to be a preacher's wife. I had to eat those words. Only because my mother was a preacher and I'd seen how she was hurt in times. It's like you couldn't satisfy people. I didn't want that for him. But he's got a good church. Our church family is good, and I appreciate them. I can't imagine him giving that up either. So, we tell him, he's a fisherman of men, a fishman of shrimp. So, either way, he's a fisherman.

MB: Oh, that's interesting. The fisherman of men, that's interesting. Of course, you look at the Bible and of course, the –

DJN: Exactly.

MB: – fishermen are very important.

DJN: Yes.

MB: So, this has been a way of life for you that's been a good way of life.

DJN: Yes, it's been good. Like I say, there are hard times. There are bad times. But it's just life in general, with anybody. There are hard times. But like I say, we've always made it. Sometimes I think, "How am I going to pay this light bill," or whatever, but just in time, it happens. So, I'm thankful for that.

MB: Well, it's an invigorating life, too. John, certainly he's in great shape physically. Talk a

little bit about the fact that he's able to work with his brothers, (Moji?) and Richard.

DJN: Yes. He enjoys that. It gives them time with him. They're very close because of that, I think, more closer than his other brothers. Because they are there on the boat with him. They enjoy it. He does too.

MB: More people are going to fish, obviously, Liston, and there are a number of young men besides Liston, I noticed down there at 3:00 a.m. or whatever coming in on those little boats. But is this a way of life that is changing? Will it survive, ultimately, do you think this thing? The independent businesspeople too have their own boat.

DJN: Well, all I can say is we hope and pray it will, because of the younger ones that are doing it now. Our generation, we're about ready to retire. So, hopefully, it will continue. Because, like I can say, they do have it in their blood. Most of them that do it, that's all they know. So, it's going to be hard for them to get a job if this stopped, which I really don't think it ever will stop completely. Because we depend on the seafood and stuff. It's food, just like farmers grow stuff and all. So, hopefully it will continue for the younger ones and all.

MB: Right. I think they face the same struggles that farmers do.

DJN: Exactly.

MB: The weather.

DJN: Right. The weather has a lot to do with it, have a lot of expenses for the equipment and stuff. But I think it'd be all right.

MB: Good. All right. Thank you so much.

DJN: Thank you.

MB: That was great. See? You did great.

DJN: Yeah. That's what you say.

MB: No, no, no, I mean –

DJN: I don't –

[end of transcript]