

Wild Caught  
Mogie Norris Oral History  
Date of Interview: Unknown  
Location: Unknown  
Length of Interview: 00:34:49  
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Now, how do you spell Mogie?–

Mogie Norris: M-O-G-I-E, yes.

MB: How did you get that nickname? Well, there's a lot of nicknames around here.

MN: [laughter]

MB: I've been meaning to ask somebody. I heard about your brother or somebody's, not Snake Guy or somebody or other, a bunch of different – I don't know.

MN: Oh, yes. I got a brother nicknamed Tom Cat. Got a nephew named Hot Dog, just nicknames and things like that. My granddaddy nicknamed me Mogie. That's all I know. They just called me Mogie all my life.

MB: So, you're Mogie.

MN: [affirmative]

MB: So, Mogie, I asked the same question to Richard. It's kind of neat you three brothers work together. What's that like? Is it different to work with your brothers? I'm sure you worked on other boats.

MN: Well, you know how they are. You can get along with them. Because there are other people that are kind of hard case people that you can't get along with. There are some that you can and can't. I've always been able to get along good with them. I've worked with a lot of people that's been good too. Most of the shrimpers are. The full nature they were raised into it, are good guys. But some of them are pretty hardcore fellows, I don't know, whatever they want to be, bad or whatever [laughter].

MB: So, talk about how you got into the fishing business.

MN: Well, I started when I was really young. Shoot, I reckon eight, nine years old, I used to go shrimping with my dad up the river and mess – different guys I run around with when I was young, hung around with them, just messing around in the river and stuff on days I didn't go to school. On the weekends or the summer especially, doing a lot of stuff in the river when I was young, clamming, oystering, different things to make a few bucks when I was young.

MB: So, was your father a fisherman?

MN: Most of his life, yes. Most of the time he was, when he was here. When he moved here in 1957, that's when he started here. He started out what they call flounder fishing back then, flounder gigging and stuff. Then he got into shrimping and stuff like that when he got a little older. We were raised up around the water, is what it amounts to [laughter].

MB: So, raised around the water, does fishing get in the blood as a way of life too?

MN: Yes, it does. It really does. I know guys that I've seen them when they were five or six years old, you couldn't even get them on a school bus because they were raised around the water, and that's where they stayed. I've seen their moms drag them out to the school bus. But they just loved it. They would go in the river fishing and stuff in the summertime, and they would get used to it and everything. They would just love the water. Nature is what it is. It just gets into you. That's about the best I can tell you about that.

MB: I was thinking about Mike. You know Mike. He's an ex-Marine that became a shrimper. His sons run a business with him, I think. I forget his last name.

MN: Mike.

MB: He has a little boat right here that's –

MN: Yes, Mike Cowdrey.

MB: Yes.

MN: Yes, I know who you're talking about.

MB: When he got into it, he was at Camp Lejeune when he decided to do shrimping.

MN: Yes. Once you get to what we call the sand in your boots or shoes or whatever, that's just the way it is. It just takes to you. It's just the way it's always been to everybody that I know of.

MB: So, what is it you enjoy about it?

MN: Well, I enjoy all of it. I know that's peaceful to me. Something that you're your own boss, you can do about like you want to do or not like you want to do. You've got a boss, but it's just something that you just love to do. I don't know, it's just a good feeling. To me, it is. I've tried different jobs on the hill. It's too crowded [laughter].

MB: That's interesting the expression "on the hill."

MN: Yes [laughter].

MB: I hadn't heard that until I came out of Steve's interview. But on the hill, you mean land.

MN: Yes.

MB: So, what are some of the types of jobs you tried on the hill?

MN: Oh, I've spray painted campers and stuff like that. I drove a garbage truck for a while, for a couple of years. Mechanic work, I've done that for about a year, just never liked it. Just always came back to the water.

MB: Speaking about mechanics, so in other words, when you're a fisherman, you get to know something about a lot of different things, right?

MN: Yes. You know about all the engines and stuff like that you had to work with and stuff. You know about everything on the boat and stuff. You learn that as you go along. If you have a problem with your alternator or something like that, your electrical wiring, you know about where all the wires are at, and different things, plumbing, anything you want to do. It's just like working on a house, things like plumbing, electrical work, and stuff like that. It's about the same thing. You learn all of it.

MB: Because you can't call the plumber or the engineer every time you have a problem. Otherwise, you don't –

MN: No. If you're on the water or something like that, you have a problem, you better know how to fix it [laughter].

MB: Otherwise, you're in deep shit [laughter].

MN: Yes [laughter].

MB: Didn't you talk about when you got lost at sea?

MG: [affirmative]

MB: Talk about that story. That's a great story. Let's hear what happened with that one.

MN: Well, that was a bad one to me, just frightening. I was about nineteen years old when it happened. I got a brother that's a year younger than I am. Me and him left out one day or morning, about daylight, and we went out fishing. We went, I reckon, about 10 miles offshore. We started back that evening and had engine trouble. We didn't have no way to fix it. We didn't have the tools with us. Our radio wasn't put out or nothing. Then the next thing we knew, it came up a bad storm that night. It was in the wintertime, about in November. I could see the sea buoy. I was close to the sea buoy, probably about a mile from it. I could see the land really good and everything. Right there to the sea buoy, you're right close to the inland. About dark, it started breezing up. But I threw my anchor over. They had boats come by that were coming in, but they didn't notice me. They thought I was okay. I reckon about 10:00 p.m., my anchor broke loose. It was blowing about 35, 40 knots in. When it broke loose, then it started pushing us offshore while I lost my anchor. I didn't have nothing but what were called blackfish pot fish traps on the boat. That's the only thing I could anchor with. But it was blowing so hard, it would blow me offshore before the traps could settle along the bottom to get a hold of a rock or something. It was about, I would say probably 12:00 a.m. or 1:00 a.m., before I realized that I had to get more traps overboard and more rope. Because it kept tearing my traps loose from that little rope that I had on them. So, I finally put a bunch of them together. Then I had eight or ten of them with a line on it, 150-foot rope on it, had them all tied together, and it just kept blowing us offshore farther and farther. We threw everything in them and had some cable on a winch on

the back deck. Well, we were blown so far offshore then that we were scared to even – we tied ropes to each other. I tied a rope to my brother. So, if one of us fell overboard, we pulled the other one in, or we would be together if anything was to happen to either one of us. I don't know what time the traps got into the rocks. It was late the next morning, about daylight, before the boat ever stopped. But it blew me about 40 miles offshore that night. It was bad. It was gale force winds and a little, old, 35-foot boat. Well, that evening, it was about 3:00 a.m., the Coast Guard found us. We were blown 40 miles offshore is where they found us, about 40 miles offshore. It was a bad experience. Young like that, it'd make you respect the ocean. It'd teach you something, not to go out without good equipment and stuff like that. Through the years I've learned that, something where you can call somebody or something. They had a lot of people looking for us. It was a good experience for me [laughter].

MB: But it didn't stop you from going –

MN: No. It just seemed like it made me want to go more, in a way, but respecting it. It was frightening too, seas washing up across the boat mast. When I saw the Coast Guard boat that evening when they finally got to us, the boat was about 110-foot long when they got to us. They couldn't run the two engines to us. It was blowing so hard. I could see the whole bottom of it come out when they were coming to us. It was beating them so bad. When they got to us, they said, "You all got to get on here." I said, "I know. I am [laughter]." It was pretty bad. It was frightening.

MB: Was that about the scariest thing that's happened to you out there?

MN: Yes. I've been washed overboard before, but I was to the beach when that happened. But so far as being scared, that was the scariest thing I've ever been in, in a storm. It was a bad storm. In the wintertime, you get the bad, bad. It was a nor'easter. When they blow up, it blows hard, the cold air in the winter. It was just a bad thing.

MB: So, you got washed overboard?

MN: Oh, I'm talking about in a little boat back at the beach riding and fishing and stuff, looking for fish. I got thrown overboard one time like that. But that was no experience compared to getting blown offshore there, didn't know if we were going to be found or not. You could see jets flying way up there and stuff, but you didn't know. I knew they were looking for us. I knew that. You always look for the people. Somebody is always looking for you.

MB: Because people had alerted them.

MN: But they didn't know if we were alive or if the boat had sunk or anything. They didn't know. But the way they found us, they took and started running the variations about the way the wind had blown us, where the wind had blown us offshore.

MB: So, they tried to figure out where the wind and the current would take you.

MN: Right, where the wind and current had taken us, yes.

MB: Because they can't search every piece of it.

MN: No, they can't search every piece of it.

MB: Well, we talked about this when I was on the boat. Let's see. Do you have any kids? Any children?

MN: Oh, yes. I have a set of twins. Yes.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about your family and your kids at all?

MN: Yes, we get along fine, me and my kids. I don't want none of them fishing because I don't want them doing that.

MB: Well, how come? That's interesting.

MN: Well, because of the livelihood nowadays, it's a hard job. It really is. There's a future in it, I would think, if you're capable of getting your own stuff when you're young. But it takes so many years for experience to do it. It's a lot of experimental work stuff. You have to be experienced to do it. I always wanted my kids to stay out of it. I don't have to worry about them being on the water. I'd rather for them to get a good education. That's what I always wanted. That's what they've done, always doing something like that. The more education they got, the better off they are, is the way I look at it. Something I always believed in.

MB: What about the future of this industry and all that? What do you think is going to happen in terms of the rules and regulations and all that stuff? Are they really regulating it a lot?

MN: Yes, they're regulating it a lot. It's getting to where, to my opinion, I say ten years from now, you would have to have what they call a captain's license. You have to go through the government to get all that stuff. There's a lot of book learning in it and stuff like that, years of experience being on the water, knowing what buoys are and channels and everything. It's a lot of work to it. I think they're going to go through to that. I've run shrimp boats before. I've run a lot of boats and stuff. They didn't have to have no captain's license or anything. It's getting more all the time to where they're getting pretty hard on us about stuff like that. But a lot of the regulations they've got are uncalled for, I believe. They put a lot on us that say we've done things, that we've destroyed a lot of things. But we don't destroy nothing. We try to put everything back in the ocean. If we know we can't eat it, it goes back. Because we know next year that it's going to be big enough for us to eat something. We don't try to destroy anything. We don't believe in it. Because we know if we destroy it, it isn't going to be there for the next season. Something I don't believe in. If you can't eat it, don't kill it. That's just the way it is.

MB: What do you think the public thinks of fishermen?

MN: I don't think they like us too much because they say we do a lot of wrong things to stuff. But we don't. They don't understand us. Like I said, we don't destroy something that we can

make a living at. If anything, we're going to help it. To my opinion, we always have. I've seen a lot of people that like to destroy things. They come in and make a few dollars at it, then go on and go somewhere else. That's the problem with a lot of things. Some of the public is fine with it.

MB: How about these sports fishermen?

MN: Oh, no, they don't like us. They don't like us at all. They don't want us doing nothing. They think we destroy everything, like I said. They're wrong. Somebody's got to catch it. Seafood, somebody's going to have to do it. They aren't.

MB: They're not going to do it.

MN: No, they're not going to do it.

MB: They can barely [laughter] –

MN: [laughter]

MB: We were out there refueling, and those goofballs banging – more knuckleheads. I don't know anything about boating, but these guys didn't seem to be knowing what they were doing too well, the way they were trying to maneuver to the dock.

MN: I don't kick the sports fishermen because I like to go in freshwater sport fishing too. But I don't go up there and kill nothing that I'm not going to eat. If I catch it, I'm going to eat it. If I can't eat it, I'll put it back when it's alive or try to. Because I know it's going to always be there, [laughter] to my opinion. Anybody can destroy anything if they want to. It's like, I don't know, turtles. They kick us around bad on that. But that was the wrong deal too.

MB: How many turtles do you actually come across? There are not that many turtles out there, are there?

MN: Well, I've done a lot of shrimping. I've seen more turtles – to my opinion, I've caught more turtles on hooks, hook and line fishing. So, it's the same thing as sport fishing. Because a turtle will bite a hook. I've caught more turtles on hooks than I ever have in shrimp trawls or anything. That's the truth. I'm not exaggerating on that neither. I have seen more turtles. But they don't have no place to go to lay their eggs or anything.

MB: That's the real problem, buildings and condos.

MN: Yes. People say, well, we're destroying them. But nature is like anything. They aren't going to crawl up under somebody's porch and lay their eggs. That's the way it is. There's no beaches anymore. That's just the way it is, in my opinion. They took all the nature from the beaches. Then they blame it on us. Evidently, they say the turtle can't get to the beach because of trawlers. Like I said, I've seen more fish when I was out there. I grouper fished a lot. We'd go way offshore, and I'd see hundreds of turtles, hundreds of them. I've seen how it is. I know a

hundred turtles a day, easy, floating on top of the water, swimming around and stuff, in a day. So, I've seen that many right off here. Where they go to, I don't know. They've got to have a place to lay their eggs or something. I don't know. But they blame it on us for killing them and everything. But like over there in Mexico and those other places, they kill them and sell them. They ship them into the United States and people eat them. It's a delicacy. But if we do it over here, we're bad business [laughter].

MB: [laughter] Yes. So, was it enjoyable growing up in this little town of Sneads Ferry?

MN: Oh, yes.

MB: Was it nicer in the [19]20s? I guess it's grown quite a bit over the years.

MN: Yes, it was nice when I was younger. But the older you get, you know things are going to get bigger anyway. You get used to it. It's nice now. I enjoy it. I wouldn't go no other place to live. I like it here. I just always liked fishing here.

MB: Is it a fairly typical fishing town, Sneads Ferry? Are they like that down in Florida or wherever?

MN: Oh, they were like that in the Florida Keys when I first went down there in 1967, same way. Every place around a little fishing town, you meet the same kind of people. You meet about same really kind of people. They're good-hearted people. You get on the bad side of them, what do you expect? It's like sports fishermen. If you want take my livelihood away from me, no, I don't go along with you. That's just the way I look at it. It's like going out there and saying, "Hey, you can't cut down those trees." It's like me leaving the water and going out there protesting against something like that. I don't do that because I know that people make a living at it. There is a draw line on everything, in my opinion. Like I said, the commercial fishermen don't destroy everything. I've seen just too many turtles run over by speedboats. Right down there in the Florida Keys and the Everglades, it's a known fact that the speedboats have run over so many of those – what are they called?

MB: Oh, you mean those big, old –

MN: Manatees.

MB: Manatees, right.

MN: They're extinct, and most of them are cut up by speedboats and stuff where people have run across them.

MB: In those jet skis?

MN: Yes. Jet skis' mess. Manatees, I fed them with my hand right outside of a fishing boat. We fed them. They're good animals, in my opinion. I like them.



MB: So, getting back to the meeting in the winter, you guys will overhaul this whole boat here?

MN: Oh, yes. That's what you do, is you fix up the stuff you tore up in the summertime, redo everything, get it ready to go back just the next spring.

MB: So, it's a whole kind of cycle.

MN: It's a cycle, yes. It's a cycle. You do about the same thing every year. You always try to keep it up where it'd be comfortable living, where you can go fishing and shrimping and do what you have to do.

MB: Are you living on the boat now?

MN: Yes.

MB: What's that like?

MN: That's my home [laughter]. It is my home. I'd rather live on the boat than I had any other place. It's peaceful. Don't have nobody bothering me. This boat is just like my brother or my mom or something like that. Something happens to this boat, it is a part of my life. That's just the way it is. I know because when we saw that boat sunk down there two years ago, tears came down my cheeks.

MB: What boat was that?

MN: That shrimp boat, *Tracy Ray*.

MB: Talk about that.

MN: It was Tommy Everett's shrimp boat got aground, and they lost it down on the beach. I went down and helped them try to get it up and stuff like that. We had to take all the equipment and everything off of it. We couldn't get it off the beach. It lay there and destroyed. It just took a piece out of me when I saw it up on the beach like that. It's just like part of your life. You lose a boat, I don't care who it is, anybody's boat around here, especially anybody who does it for a living that they make – a boat is just like a child or something to me. It's your friend. You respect it because it takes care of you, and you take care of it. It's just like if you got a car that you like or anything that you like, whatever.

MB: But maybe a little bit more because the car is –

MN: Yes, it's more. Yes, it's a lot more. It's like a family. Yes, it sure is. You have these ceremonies for it. If it dies, you can bury it, and you put flowers on it, in my opinion. Sure do.

MB: I guess something that appeals to me is the idea of how ancient fishing is as a profession. It's one of the world's oldest really, in some ways. Okay, it's motorized on this boat. But pulling a net, that goes back a [laughter] longways in history.

MN: Oh, yes.

MB: So, you're carrying on the proud work of thousands of years.

MN: Oh, yes. Sure I am. Yes, and you enjoy it too. You've just got to learn how to love it. I don't know. It's just something that grows into you just like anything else, if you like your job or whatever you do on the hill.

MB: Probably have some people on the hill that are saying, "Well, I may make more money on the hill, but I don't want to do it. I want to be out here."

MN: Yes. I can make more money on the hill, but I'd rather do this. I really have. Because they enjoy it. If you don't enjoy it, what have you got? Seriously, if you work all your life and you sit there and you hate a job, in my opinion, I think he makes you hate everybody else. Or it makes you weird. In my opinion, you're weird [laughter]. Because you make people dislike you because you're grouchy or whatever around. If you don't like your job, you take it out on people that you shouldn't, and it's not fair. If you don't enjoy it, leave. That's something I always believed in. I enjoy this. I like everything I've ever enjoyed. I enjoyed mechanic work because I learned a lot. I learned that. When I ran the garbage truck, I met a lot of different people. But they didn't like me when I ran the garbage truck though, because I was a low person. You're supposed to be a low person because I had to pick up garbage for it. Hey, it doesn't matter. You got towed it out there. You're the ones that's putting the garbage there. Somebody's got to get it up for you. You're not going to go take it out all the way to the dumpster and put it away, put it in your car. It is nicer for somebody to be able to go there and pick it up for you. You ought to respect them. Make them feel good. That's what I always looked at. I treat everybody the same [laughter].

MB: That's the way it should be. Work is work. It's funny in our country that people don't respect people who do real work.

MN: Right. Exactly. Let me tell you something, garbage people, that is hard work. It's hard work, I know. I've been there. That's some of the hardest work. It's harder than any work I've ever done, I tell you. It's nasty work, and you've got to do it. It's got to be done. Somebody's got to pick it up because it's just people don't have no – I met a lot of nice people that respected me. But there's a lot of people that didn't just because you're riding a stinking garbage truck. You can't help it from stinking. You put it out there. We've got to take it somewhere for you [laughter]. That's the way I look at that.

MB: It wasn't about me.

MN: A lot of people don't understand that. But they –

MB: You ever been in New York City or whatever when they have a strike. Then they suddenly see the mountains of garbage. They might change their opinion about how important that is.

MN: Well, yes, that's true.

MB: Think about that, have a bunch of rats running around and eating that garbage. Well, any final comments about this whole thing about fishing? I must say I enjoyed your cooking. How did you learn how to cook?

MN: Well, I learned that through the years just from fishing, because it's what I've always done. I've always done it on the boats. Well, too, I learned it when I was young. I always watched my mom cook. She taught us how to cook ourselves too. So, we wouldn't be growing up by ourselves. But learn things. They teach you that. Make sure you take care of yourself when you get old enough. That's the way cooking is, cooking, cleaning, anything.

MB: Well, it's pretty important to have that good food especially when you get hungry out here.

MN: [laughter] Oh, yes. You've got to have somebody to cook. You get hungry, somebody to cook. Well, if you get hungry, you'll learn how to cook. Anybody will if they get hungry enough if they want to eat. That's the way I've always looked at that too. But it's nice to have somebody who can cook. The only thing is doing dishes. I don't like nobody doing my dishes because they don't do them right. That's the main thing. They won't clean up. They make a bigger mess. I don't even want them back over where I'm cooking. I don't. Because they make too much of a mess. I've seen too many people do it. They try to cook, and they – I don't like cleaning up behind nobody's mess. I hate that. I always have. I love for them just out of my kitchen [laughter].

MB: [laughter] Well, anything else you want to add that comes to mind, Mogie?

MN: No.

MB: It's been fun. I've really enjoyed talking with you.

MN: You too. I enjoyed it. Yes.

MB: You're going to be doing this all your life, right?

MN: Huh?

MB: This is it.

MN: This is it. Yes, this is my life. This is it, sure is. Don't want to do nothing else.

MB: It's really good you found something you really liked. A lot of people don't ever find –

MN: Well, I don't just only shrimp. I clam, and I oyster. I do all those things. I just don't shrimp. Like in the wintertime when we're not shrimping and we can't catch no shrimp, I go out here, and I catch oysters. I catch clams. I keep myself busy. It kills the monotony of shrimping too. Because you get burned out on anything you get going so much and so much. But I can

stay a week away from the water, and I've got to come right back. I've just got to get right back. It's just the way it is. It's just the livelihood. Just the way I enjoy it. It doesn't matter if I'm sitting out there fishing with a fishing pole, right there by myself. I enjoy that just as good as I do sitting there, working, doing anything else, shrimping or anything, just always take my time.

MB: You are a waterman.

MN: Yes, I'm a waterman, pure water. This shit is getting hot.

MB: Well, it's a wrap. See if I can get up here and turn this around.

MN: [laughter]

[end of transcript]