

Wild Caught
Johnny Terwilliger Oral History
Date of Interview: July 13, 2000
Location: Sneads Ferry, North Carolina
Length of Interview: 00:08:42
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Johnny, talk a little bit about how your family's been operating this restaurant.

Johnny Terwilliger: My granddad started 1946. He [inaudible] it and then he sold to another uncle, and then I bought it and it been going ever since. I owned it, probably fourteen years now.

MB: Talk a little about Bernice. Because, you know, we interviewed Bernice.

JT: Bernice was working as a waitress, and now she's washing dishes. I have a dishwasher on a stool back there, and she was a waitress. She says she's been here the whole time.

MB: A little bit more about this. Oh, no, wait now. Oh, you pronounce her name, Berniece?

JT: Yes. Bernice, and I call her Bernice, that's what I always call her.

MB: Well, you know, I met her last shrimp festival, right? She's been very helpful, introducing these people, especially yourself, right? I interviewed Berniece and Murray, her husband a couple days ago. She's so instrumental in keeping the shrimp festival going.

JT: Oh, yes, very instrumental.

MB: So, one point that's kind of amazing to me is how long she's been working associated with the restaurant. Talk a little bit about that.

JT: Ever since it was open. It was my granddad who opened it at forty-six. She's been here ever since. Working with probably more people than I do, meeting them and stuff like that and everything.

MB: So, what was it like growing up in this town? I mean, talk a little bit about the fishing.

JT: The fishing community basically, everybody knows everybody pretty well. I've worked here all my life. I work here as a dishwasher, clean fish, work at the fish house. It's all I've ever done on anything else, really. You lost anything else, probably.

MB: Do you like living in a small town?

JT: Yes. I wouldn't trade it for nothing in the world, nowhere I'd rather live than there.

MB: Have you ever been in the big cities?

JT: No. Well, I've been in business there, but I don't want to live there. I'll take this right here any day.

MB: So, what is it about here that you like?

JT: Just tranquility, you really don't have to worry about a lot of things. I like it. Wouldn't go anywhere else.

MB: Well, but a lot of people from all over the world heard about the Riverview. Talk a little bit about this restaurant. This is kind of like a –

JT: We get people from all over. We got a signing sheet where people sign in when they come in and eat, leave a comment on how everything was. But you can look at them in there from every part of the United States, even overseas. There were people from Germany, England, everywhere.

MB: Of course, it has a great view of the river.

JT: Oh, yes. I remember watching people come and eat and watch shrimp boats coming in. Had a guy last night was sitting there and a clam boat was coming. He wouldn't know what it was. He never seen one before. It was a clam bar. So, kind of interesting for a lot of people who have never seen anything like that.

MB: So, this restaurant has become kind of like a pretty famous institution in the town.

JT: I would think so, yes. It's the oldest one here. Just like I said, it's been here since 1946. So, must be doing a little bit of something right once in a while.

MB: I guess so, yes.

Male Speaker: Now, who makes the pies?

JT: My mom. My mom makes all the pies. They're all made right here in the café. Every day, she makes them fresh made, cheesecake, all that. None of these pre-brought. I mean, even our seafood, we get local. It's not pre-brought or pre-made. It's all done right here. We have a fish room down below where we clean all our fish and everything, head our shrimp, whatever.

MB: I know it's delicious. I've had [inaudible] myself.

JT: Yes, it's all fresh.

MB: That makes the difference.

JT: That's the biggest difference, biggest one out of all.

MB: So, you've worked in all aspects of in that time there.

JT: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. I still do. I still wash the dishes. I still [inaudible]. I will say nothing's changed.

MB: Oh, really?

JT: Really.

MB: Well, even though you're the owner.

JT: When night times are busy, I'm out here washing dishes, or I'm back here cooking whatever it takes to get us through the tonight. Trying to get the people fed and get them seated and make them happen.

MB: Well, that's good. You're not afraid to jump in there and do everything you got to do.

JT: Yes, sir.

MB: There's a lot of owners –

JT: Oh, no. I'm here every day.

MB: So, when are you working, seven days a week pretty much?

JT: Six and a half. I try to take off Monday, slow day, but if it's busy and a lot of help, don't show up, I still have to come in. So, we work eighteen hours a day from 8:00 a.m. until 1:00 a.m. Now, summertime, we're so busy, so I just work straight through.

MB: I tried to come here a couple nights of July 3rd or 2nd. I can't remember when, but it was crazy out there.

JT: It gets crazy.

MB: Well, so do you have a family?

JT: Oh, yes. I have a wife and three kids.

MB: So, how old are your kids?

JT: Ten, eight and two and a half.

MB: I imagine you enjoy having them grow up in this town too.

JT: Oh, yes.

MB: Now, were your parents part of the business here?

JT: My mother, father started it, and my father was a Marine at Camp Lejeune. That's where he met her. He was stationed at Camp Lejeune, and he met my mother here. He was visitor from Pennsylvania. He met her here in this restaurant when he was stationed at Camp Lejeune.

MB: So, this restaurant has a lot of –

JT: Oh, yes, a lot.

MB: That's pretty neat.

JT: Yes, I think it is.

MB: Well, have you seen many changes in Sneads Ferry over the last ten years or so? Is it growing? Is it changing?

JT: There are more people in the area now. I mean, more traffic when it was and I think the area really grow that much. I mean, there's a lot more people around, able to beach, or something, whatever. You know, more tourists around it, maybe getting more famous for people.

MB: So, it's growing and there's more traffic.

JT: It's not out of control. It's not got where you don't like it anymore. It's still kind of pretty [inaudible].

MB: But the fishing was really the main thing in the town.

JT: Oh, yes. Main thing is fishing, clamming, and strengthen.

MB: Have you ever done that yourself?

JT: Oh, yes, all of it. Worked on the shrimp boat, clammed, all of it.

MB: We were out in a shrimp boat with Billy Davis.

JT: Oh, yes.

MB: We left at 3:00 a.m.

JT: I went to school with him.

MB: You did?

JT: Yes, him and his brother.

MB: It was beautiful out there.

JT: Oh, yes. It's nice.

MB: W went out there. We think about getting up at 2:00 or 3:00 a.m. six times a week is pretty tough.

JT: Yes.

MB: Did you do that for very long?

JT: Well, the summertime, when I was out of school [inaudible] down there. I was going to school, summer job.

MB: So, did you always know that you would work here do you think?

JT: I kind of had it at the back of my mind.

MB: Oh, that's neat. Well, anything else you might want to add, or anything? Here's Berniece over here. She usually came back to start working with you again, right?

JT: Oh, yes. She's working right now.

MB: The original handwritten menu that she wrote way back –

JT: It's still on the wall. When did you write that? [19]51?

Female Speaker: The black part was [19]49 or early [19]50s.

MB: Why don't you come over here, Berniece?

FS: I don't want. I'm not going to do that.

MB: [laughter] Okay, Berniece. All right, you're on strike. Okay, all right. Well, thanks a lot.

JT: Thank you.

MB: I appreciate that. Okay, well, if we have a problem, we'll come back.

JT: That will be fine.

MB: Thanks.

MS: Thank you for your time.

MB: Thank you. Thank you. Appreciate it.

JT: Appreciate it. Nice meeting you.

[end of transcript]