

Wild Caught  
Dolphus Thompson Oral History  
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Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: Well, Mr. Thompson, I appreciate your doing this. Now, maybe one way to start off the whole thing, I attended the church service on Sunday, and I really got a lot from it. It's kind of amazing Mr. Norris is both a shrimp fisherman and a minister – a preacher. Talk a little bit about – maybe as a way of starting, just what I asked before, about what it was like growing up here in Sneads Ferry.

Dolphus Thompson: Well, it was nice. Basically, it was just the Sneads Ferry people. You didn't have a whole lot of the stuff coming in like you have now. You have a lot of tourists and stuff coming in. But we didn't have back then. It was when you all walked around this shore one day and seen the people the next day. Just seeing people. We started fishing when we were little. We had skiffs. We had to row. We didn't use to have motors. We had to row where we went. So, we weren't too fast to go in, but we enjoyed it. We went to school. How I got to be a straight A student, I'll never know. But I was a straight A student until I quit [laughter]. But all the boys pretty well grew up around here. That's basically about it. There was two of us. It was me and Louis. Louis Midgett got hurt here a few years ago. But basically, me and him were the ones that were doing most of the fishing and stuff going around here.

MB: So, you've been a fisherman pretty much your entire life. I mean, you've done all kinds of fishing. Can you talk about some of the different types of fishing you've done?

DT: Well, when we got big enough, we got to be teenagers and a little older, we went shrimping all over– everything. Then we went to Florida. From Florida to Alabama, Mississippi, Texas. I think we wound up in California one time, but there weren't a whole lot going on. So, we started back. But most times, Aransas Pass and Corpus Christi, Texas was about as far as we went. We stayed there through the winter months. Then we'd like to fish then duck. Sometimes, we'd migrate back. Then we'd fish around here, shrimp around here, and like that. We'd go back to the beach and set nets and caught sea mullets – what they call whiting now, and spots, croakers, and just a variety of everything. Then we got small boats and started shrimping. I started with a 23-foot dory. We started just shrimping right here, back at the beach, where then we didn't have no bottom. We'd go a couple yards offshore and several hundred yards down the shore, and you were in rocks. We finally beat the rocks down until now, you can basically go out here at New River Inlet and just about tow all the way to Topsail. Used to be just a little spot here, a little spot there, and that was it. But now, we can go about anywhere we want to. We still got a lot of bad rock, but we know where we can shrimp along the beach all the way down.

MB: Yes. I interviewed Buddy Davis, and he was saying that you guys used to pull up the rocks to kind of [inaudible].

DT: Yes, that's what we did. Well, if you look right here at Everetts, they've got a dike built out here. That's rocks that came from the ocean. We'd haul them out of where we towed at and put them somewhere else, which we didn't very well didn't many times bring in stuff. We just moved offshore and put it down because we didn't go well shore then. We just, more or less, moved the rocks, is what we were doing. We tore up a lot of nets and a lot of stuff while we were doing it, but we did it. Broke down a lot of live coral that was there growing and just got a place through it. But this is the best fishing area anywhere up and down the coast because you've got the rocks come right ashore. When you get on down here off of Emerald Isle and Morehead

City, you've got to go well ashore to find these rocks. Here, you move a half mile from the beach, and you're in rocks. This is that way right on until just where you get to Topsail. Then they disappear again. You've not got very many rocks, just a patch here and there.

MB: Now, were members of your family, like your father or grandfather, were they fishermen too?

DT: Yes. My father had done direct water fishing and run party boats. He ran party boats around here where they got all this stuff around the shore here. Now, there used to be a big dock there. The fellow had a couple of boats, and he run parties. I run parties until the Army got me. When Uncle Sam got me, he put me in a different bracket [laughter]. I went through basic then went into Korea. I was in Korea when they signed the Peace Treaty.

MB: Which service were you in?

DT: Army. Then they sent me back to Honolulu, Hawaii, and I flat refused to stay. Their skaters were bigger than we were. We were in the jungle, and it has a jungle side. They show you Hawaii, they show you all the beautiful stuff, but they don't show you the backside of it where they got the bases. I told that colonel, I said, "The skaters are bigger than we are. We can't fight everything." So, we told him we want to go to the States. So, we substituted to States. The problem was they had bought Alaska. I mean, they stayed out of it. So, that's where we wound up – Fairbanks, Alaska.

MB: Well, that's quite a shift from Hawaii to Alaska.

DT: Oh, I think so. You go from eighty, ninety temperature to fifty, sixty below. I believe it was fifty below when we got there. That's what you call a major change.

MB: Well, what are some of the things that you have enjoyed about fishing?

DT: Well, basically, everything is brand new every day. Because you're all the time finding something different than you found the day before, or you're all the time finding something that wasn't there the day before. So, it's like the Easter egg hunt. You're always finding the Easter egg here, the Easter egg there. So, you're always finding either a hangover here and tear up somewhere, you find a better place. The shrimp is a – you find the little fellow. If you draw a line here today and say, now, you can pull on this side of this line, but you can't pull on that side of the line, that shrimp would get on that side of the line. He knows where that line's at the minute that you put it there. But, yes, he's a little creature. So, he's a smart little fellow. In other words, if he knows they're dragging here, he's not going to come over here. He stays over on the side we're not dragging at. That's why the conservation and your officers have such an amazing job keeping up with everything. Because it's always better over there. There's a lot of them. They just – he's a previous fellow, and he goes there. That's why you hear them losing a boat or you losing this or that. Some of them just got to try it. It's like running a car down the road. Fifty-five is hard to stay on. They've got to run sixty-five and seventy. That's basically what it is with your fishing. You've got it better here than it is over there and stuff like that.

MB: Well, I mean, talk with some of the different people, like Buddy Davis and Mac Liverman, some of the other people I've interviewed. I mean, there is a lot to it obviously. I'm the first to admit I don't know anything [laughter].

DT: Well, it is just, you've got to know what you're doing and where you're going. You can't just run around and throw your nets down and expect them to be there where you go. There's places that's better than others. There's places at times that's better than others. Most of these fishermen know it. Buddy Davis and Mac, all the boys, you've got to – I would say elite group that does it all the time. They're pretty well up on it. They know when they can find them and when they can't find them. If they don't find them, they don't dry and waste all the time. They come on back. If you take somebody that don't know a whole lot about it, he will drag on and drag, drag, drag, and just waste his fuel. But most of these boys, John, all of them, they pretty well know. They've been there long enough. They know what it is.

MB: Yes. I mean, it seems like it's a kind of, in a way, one of the most ancient jobs in the world. The fisherman has always been –

DT: It's always been here. It's like everything else now. You've got so many rules and regulations on things. They're pretty well putting us in a corner. But we just have to live with it because it goes with the times, I guess.

MB: Well, how are they putting –

DT: Well, they're closing more bottom all the time. They're putting more rules and regulations on it all the time. In other words, they've got it where you've got to have a certain license. You can't buy a license to use a boat if you can't get that license to sail, they call it. Then you had to buy a license to crab, a license to fish or license to black fish or license to trap. Everyone had to buy a license for it. Now, they're breaking it back. Now, you can buy one license, and you can do your crabbing. They've got licenses now that say you just got your license, and they sold you all of them that said you had a dozen boats. You could only operate one boat at a time. That license only covers one boat. You could go to either boat you want to go, but it only covers that boat while you're on it.

MB: I mean, talking with people like yourself and others, sometimes people start explaining about the moon and the tides. There's a lot.

DT: Yes, it's a lot to it. It's just like right now. The tide is tremendously high. For a moon to just stop – I think it's going to be dark nights right now. It's started growing. It should be normal tide. It's not. It's three or four feet above normal. So, we got something offshore that's really pushing. We've had a lot of water. But what it is, is it's that stuff here blowing offshore and turning offshore that's keeping that tide from moving on back out like it should.

MB: So, really, as a fisherman, you've had to really study nature in a way your whole life to understand –

DT: Well, me and Louis Midgett – like I said, he's the one that got hit with a block here a few

years ago. We had an old fisherman that we'd – that was a teacher. Anything we'd asked him, he had an answer. You knew he was good. One time we said, "We want to go floundering." We had small boats to go floundering. We said, "Which way is the wind going to blow from?" He'd look up and all the way around. Then he'd say, "It's coming out of Southwest or it's going to blow out of Northeast." He didn't ever miss it. So, I told Louis one night, I said, "He's got to have a reason for looking up every night." But we asked him. We said, "Let's find out why he looks up." Because we were learning, and we were trying to get everything we could under our shirt. So, I said, "Mr. Jim, why do you always look up when I ask you where's the wind going to come from?" He said, "Well, the Bible says you can't see the wind." I said, "Yes." He said, "But you look around, and wherever stars is twinkling the most, that's the wind between you and the stars." He said, "That's the way the wind's going to come from. If you look in Southwest and the stars is twinkling real bright, and they're calm all the way around, then it's coming out of Southwest." So, that's how we learned how to tell about the wind, which way the wind was going to come from at night when we were going floundering. Then he would tell us. So, he was pretty good. He was a smart gentleman to be coming up back in them days. But he taught us a lot. We'd ask him things, and he would tell us. So, that's basically where we got most of our information, was that old gentleman. They called sailboats lighters back then. He said, "We would take the lighter and then go up the river and use the little boats to set the nets." I said, "Mr. Jim, what is a lighter?" He said, "That's your sailboat. That's your boat that pulls you – small ones." I said, "Well, we need to know one more thing." I said, "We get on the sea coming in on the bar with the motors." Those things fly and go if you don't have to turn sideways, and you're about to turn over. I said, "How did you manage to slow an old sailboat down to keep her straight?" He said, "A bucket." The old buckets used to have the bales on where they wouldn't tear off. Like today, you put one on a bale and that would snatch off before you got anywhere. But he would throw that bucket over and that filled of water, and it would hold her straight. When she'd get up on the sea to run it, she'd go straight. So, the old people were smarter than we were. So, he'd tell us how they would do it and stuff like that.

MB: So, he was like the teacher to –

DT: Yes, he was our teacher because basically, anything we asked him, he would tell us. He was good. I don't think he had an education. If he had any, it was more than we knew. He'd just talk to us and tell us. I think he lived to be, it must have been around eighty-five or ninety-four when he died. But he was a smart gentleman. He thought the world of us because we were always there. We asked him this and asked him that. We were started building us a boat. We couldn't find one that we wanted so we were going to build us a boat. He would tell us, "Do this and this and this." So, that's what we did, and we built us some (dowers?), 23-foot dowers. We built two of them, and the old man was right there. All we had was a hands-on hatchet that we built that boat. With his knowledge, he'd tell us what to do and what not to do. So, we had a good teacher.

MB: That was right here in Sneads Ferry?

DT: Right here in Sneads Ferry.

MB: Boy, that's pretty amazing. So, just a hatchet and a saw.

DT: Yes. We had a hatchet and an old hand saw. The hatchet wasn't too sharp, and the hand saw wasn't sharp back in the days. But that's what we built her with. We'd go by the lumber, and we'd saw it with the old saw. If it had to have something chopped down, we'd chop it down. We'd cut the head stem where we started nailing on the – put the sides on. We'd chop back with the little hatchet. So, we did pretty – if we'd had a skill saw, we could have built some good boats. [laughter] He could have built some good boats because he was our teacher. He'd say, "You need to do this and this." We never questioned him because he was always right because we didn't know nothing anyway. We were just youngsters coming up. We had all the – to get up and go, and he had the head knowledge. So, that's pretty well the way we came up. A lot of people would say, "I learned this, I learned that." Well, some things, you do pick up yourself. Like, I picked up making nets. We'd go down into Moorhead to get a net built, and I watched a fellow. He cut nets. Say one man, that was the main nets. He cut nets just as hard as he could cut. We'd sew them together. We had systems to sew them together. I told my buddy one day, I said, "I think I can fix that net." I said, "I watch that rascal. I think I can do it." He said, "No, you can't do that." I said, "Okay. We will find out." So, I bought a purse seine boat. I used to catch the porgies in the ocean. I used to catch them in solid big boats full of them all the time, make fertilizers and stuff out of fish meal and all that. I'd go there and buy it. That purse seine boat, it was just like shrimp then, small mash. I'd buy it by the truckload most times. You'd get a truckload of it for \$40, \$50. So, I came back one day. I throw it out there. I went out and whacked around and made me a net. It worked. So, that's how I got into it. So, I've been making nets and messing with ever since.

MB: So, tell me, how long have you been doing the net business then?

DT: I was probably twenty. So, forty-six years. Where you sew your net together, they've got a taper on each one. They're cutting it at a different taper, and they go together. That's what gives you your funnel shape. Okay. They are hard outfits to tear through them and go there and fix them. There's very few who can do it and get it right. I guess I happened to be one of them that just more or less picked it up. I go to it and sew right through the thing and go right on. A lot of them just – if you make one mistake there, your net can go out of shape. The little boy says like pipe. If you bend it wrong, it is wrong. That's the way, if you make a mistake there, it's wrong. So, that's where I picked it up.

MB: But you taught yourself the nets?

DT: Yes. I kept a close eye on them. The lady that owned this house, her and her – I don't even know if some [inaudible], her and her mother, we came right here and got them to help us make nets. We'd sew them. They'd cut and sew. That little lady, she had just a certain pattern. She made a four-seine net. That's what she made. If you got anything besides the four-seine, you'd have to go somewhere else. We'd come around and sat out in the yard and watched her cut it. We'd help her sew it. Then I picked that one on from there, on two seine nets and stuff. Just went to different things.

MB: Well, so, you've done all kinds of things. I think one big theme of the documentary is the idea of one generation to another. I was really struck by what you told me about that guy who

was willing to, in a way, be a teacher to the –

DT: Yes. He was an old man, and nobody never paid him too much money. You know how some old people are. They just walk around. They didn't realize he was there. But we just thought of the world of him. Anything he could help us do, he was right there to do it. I told him one night – I think I must have been seventeen years old the night I told him. I said, "Something's hitting their leg." We were swimming right here in Everetts slew down where John ties their boat. I said, "Something's hitting our leg." I said, "It isn't little." I said, "What it is?" I said, "We just" – they don't ever seem to bother us. When we were swimming, we'll stop once in a while and stand up. He just could touch bottom of your head; it just would clear the water. I'd feel something bumping my leg good. I said, "Something keeps bumping our legs." He said he saw a big shark. I said, "You sure?" I said, "Why isn't he biting us?" He said, "He's not hungry. If you were bleeding real bad or something, say he might bite you." He said, "But I'll catch him." That's what he told us, he'd catch him. Percy Jenkins is right now – he's still getting around, isn't he? He'd always go to the café. Percy would always feed him because he thought the world of him. He was an old fellow. He'd feed him. He told Percy, "We'd seen the shark." Or a shark had hit us, and they were going to catch him. Him and old Master Sergeant (Karsley Kessle?) was his name I think. So, they set a big chunk of meat and a big hook at the end of the slew that night we were going fishing. I said, "Mr. Jim, are you sure that was a shark?" He said, "We'll find out in a little while." Had a – what he used to call plow lines. They were, I reckon, cotton rope. He had a big cotton rope. The next morning, we came in, he had a shark over eight, nine feet they caught that night. It was just a big old shark. I don't know what kind it was. Never asked him. He said, "There's your bumper who was bumping your legs." [laughter] I said, "How many more of those down there?" He said, "That's probably just the only one." He'd always come in that slew and play around. He said, might have been more activity in there than any other place he'd been. So, he'd just come in. So, he was pretty knowledgeable for an old fellow, but he fished all his life.

MB: Speaking about the generational thing, I mean, now, you're a granddad. But in terms of the town in general, do you think they'll – I mean, this is kind of a question I probably should save more for towards the end of the interview or whatever. But since we're talking about all this stuff, what about the future in terms of the future generations of fishermen? Are they going to learn from the old masters like you?

DT: Yes, they're learning. They're learning fast. They're learning the bigger the boat, the more the power. They go where they're at. In other words, we got a boat here now working out of Pamlico Sound, which you got probably five hundred from Georgia and South Carolina working in Pamlico Sound, and they got big boats. They got freezer boats. That's what is going into the big boat. The fellow with little boaties, it's just more or less phasing out. But these little boats now are getting (scammers?) and stuff working in these rivers. They're doing a right good job at it as far as working on the big boats. But the big boat can get out even when it gets rough where the little boat can't go. He can stay right there and keep working. The young fellow is getting on the big boats. They've got enough knowledge now, and they've got enough equipment that it's so far advanced than what we had. See, they've got computers and everything now. They can go and say, "We want to go 75 miles, over a hundred miles." They'll punch it in here and punch it in there and put her on pilot, and she goes right to it. See, we didn't have all that. We had to sit

down and markers, of course, on a chart and go. We might hit it right on the head. We might be 5 miles off and same way when we started back. We might say, "Well, we go in through New River Inlet, we might wind up in Swansboro." Or we might come into Surf City. But we come in close from what we had. But now, they've got big radars. They've got the computers. They've got it all. They've got maps. Now, you can show right on your computer. Say, I want to go to this spot. Reach there and punch it in on your outfit, put her on pilot, and she goes right through it. In other words, all the guesswork is eliminated and all sitting there and marking on a chart trying to mark your course like the old pirate stuff did. He'd had to sit down most of the time. By the end, they'd had to get out and take that sextant and shoot a star to find out where they were at. Then he'd say, "Well, now, we've got to try to get 500 miles over here, a certain spot. He might come right in on it, or he might be 500 miles off. So, he say, yes, [inaudible] the stars. Right here, lately, with all this cloudy rain stuff, he'd been kind of rough on stars, wouldn't he? [laughter] He'd be lost for sure. But that's what it's doing. The younger fisherman has got so much more to work with, so much advanced equipment to work with than we had. In other words, we're more or less obsolete when we were coming up from what they are now. They've got all the knowledge. The oldest thing to having the knowledge with is making his nets or fixing his nets. They can do a certain amount. All of them can mend a certain amount. But when tears or completely in two and tears her up, then he's got to go find somebody. They can put it right together or he'll lose a few days or unless he got three or four nets for spares. That tore up all once in a while. So, the net man is more or less the key to it all right now, until they get somebody that can fix something. They can put them – it isn't running out, and they can't. That's something hard to do, is get somebody. This little fellow is learning, that's more vast. If somebody don't pick it up, it's going to be rough on the boys that's making it. So, I had a chance to go to – well, I went, but I turned it down. Back there in, I think it was [19]58 or [19]59, went to Australia. They wanted me to make nets because they didn't have no net people. I stayed there a few days, then I just didn't – Australia wasn't my place [laughter]. So, I turned the fellow down. They offered me a bundle of money, but it wasn't North Carolina, or it wasn't the States. It was just, you were in a total different world back then. Everything was different. The people even looked different. The animals they had was different. Everything there was just all out of context from what we had here. I told him, I said, "I've got nothing wrong with your territory. I'm just out of place. I'm the one that's out of place. Not you or not what you got." I taught one of his men there how to fix nets. He could mend nets, but he couldn't cut them. I taught that fellow how to fix a net, and I left him. He said, "Worth a fortune to get that." Because the man was good. He was a good net man. He just didn't know how to cut the nets and put them together. It's a little bit difficult when you're trying to teach somebody and to him, I talk funny. To me, I was talking to a Greek. I couldn't understand half of what he said. Back then, they really had that (prude?) [00:28:14] when they would talk. I said, "What did you say?" [laughter] It would take him five minutes to explain what he was trying to say. A lot of times I'd take and just draw it on a piece of paper. I said, "I want you to do this." He could pick it up now. He could pick it up easy. But you had to get somewhere to explain to him. In other words, you were a teacher. But you had to get on his level to understand where he could understand you, and he'd pick it right up. He picked it up quick.

MB: Well, I've got a question for you –

DT: Yes. I told you we're out of time trying to get together.



[laughter]

MB: Well, it was hard with the schedules. You never know what's going to happen.

DT: The boys had me tied up so bad, I [inaudible] in the yard. Every time I seemed like I'd run in the house, Jake said, "What's the name called?" I said, "I'll get it just a second." Next thing, I look back and work on it again. I say, "Oh, boy."

MB: Well, that's more important. First thing's first, you've got to keep the business going. I think that it's like you could see it way over there, and John turned it around in time. Then the alternator went out. So, they had that battery power light there. It was good. It was pretty exciting there.

[laughter]

DT: Yes, it gets you on your toes like that.

[laughter]

MB: But, surely, I want to talk about that in terms of some of the dangers.

Female Speaker: Yes. Talk about the rough water.

DT: Yes. Tell you this right now, you take this morning, it was – yesterday morning, the roughs weren't bad. Yesterday morning, the roughs weren't bad, and I didn't go. I can't go. I've got a small boat, but she's a seaworthy little fellow. She's wide. She's light. She gets around good. I couldn't by the time the rest of them go. But when you get out, it isn't going to be hooked around while you're doing it as I used to do it. I just said, I don't want to go. I didn't go this morning. They said it was sloppy and pretty good this morning. Some of the boats did good. Well, my son, I think he has 170 pounds there, too short to – but he said it got sloppy.

MB: Well, talk about some of the rough weather you've been through. I'm sure you've been through some. I mean, what's that like?

DT: Yes, I've been through some rascals now. But I'm sure all of them have because you can – it's as quick as you get in. Everything's pretty – in the world and all at once, everything turns upside down. You've got 67-mile-an-hour winds, and you're in it. Then you just ride it out, whatever it is until it's over or you get out of it. But it's something that you don't know. I'm sure all the boys are that way. You don't panic. If you panic, you lose yourself. You just ride whatever it is out until it is over and then come on in. I've been in some pretty tight places. In pretty times and places that I really didn't want to be. I've stopped them and cut them off and just go down and lay down on the bottom of a little drift with the wind and sea. I've done that a couple times. I was running big boats. It's amazing how quick it can die out and get beautiful, slick. But so far, I've seen, you're going to come out all right. Oh, those boys had some real bad experience. I had a bad experience when I was – must have been seventeen. We worked for Mr.

Hobbs right here to the end. Buddy Davis up here, his wife's mother's – yes, that's his wife's mother's father, I worked for him. I ran that boat right back here, ran parties on it. Well, we sank nets – you run the nets all back. Well, we went to Wrightsville Beach. We were going to work out there because the fish were coming that way. He had another boy running an old boat. We went out that morning. He had set his nets the night before. I told him, "I'm not going to set mine because they said it's going to be bad." So, I didn't set mine yet. We got down there, it was bad. He was scared to death he was going to get fired. They weren't going to get his nets. He is going to lose the nets. He was going to get fired. I said, "No, the nets will be there. We'll go tomorrow and get the nets." "No, I need to go today." The crew, they just all over about to cry. I let them talk me into something other than – I said that it was against my better judgment. I said, "The boat will not stand it." That perfect storm, that sea must have been big as that tree out there when it could – the first one when we could come on the bar. It took the windshield on the front of her right out for seeing. Can be right on out to the stern of her. I shook my head, run back in there, and cranked right back up. I went to sea and made the – when I started making the turn to come back, it was just like you cut the switch off. I worked on her for – well, I pulled the distributor and everything out. I was hurting real bad when I tried to move. I said, "Boy, there must be something wrong." Then I felt it. There was a piece of the wind or right down beside my goozle in there, right down beside that jugular vein. It was just nick in that jugular vein. I said, "Well, if you leave it in here – I've got to get it out." So, I took out that piece of glass. It must have been that long when I pulled it out. When I pulled it out, every time my heart would beat, the blood would go a foot and a half. I just took my thumbs and pushed right in that hole. The young fellow on there, he panicked. I went in, and I finally got him quiet. I said, "Everything's going to be all right. Don't worry about it." I said, "It'll be all right." But I took the striper out of that Chrysler engine, carried that lady on the bunk, cleaned that thing up, and got it back and put it down there. The one that run the other boat, I said, "Hit the starter. Let me see if we got far." I was holding on to the plug. When he hit it, it had all the far in the world. It knocked me right back. It stopped the blood just like you cut off a spigot. I said, "Well, I gained something by it anyway." If I stayed down over, she was started. But I said, "Let me get up and get my hands wiped off here, and I'll start her up." But when I got up, I run parties a lot on her in that back of that hatch going crossed her, had all kinds of trolling gear on it. When I got up, one of them fell right down and caught over the ground wall and shorted itself right to the case. She wasn't hitting any lid. I said, "Well, we just had to live with this." We got over the Coast Guard. I saw him when he came out the inlet, and that's the last time I saw them until they were in 300 yards of us. I got all the boys off the boat. My father was on there, and I said, "All to get your life jacket and get ready." They all got their life jackets. I said, "All right." They said, "We aren't going unless you go." So, I took my life jacket, threw it on my arm, and I said, "All right. Let's go." When I went to the side, I said, "Now," and all of them jumped off. When they couldn't get back to her, the tide was taking her. She was backing right in on that Wrightsville Beach or Wrightsville Beach pier. I said, "That's what I got the [inaudible]." I knew she'd hit that pier. She'd tear off pieces and kill some of them. I went there back, started her on, and that thing was spinning like a top and she in gear. She pushed herself back out through that sea, and she's standing right straight up. That Coast Guard boat swung in there, and you couldn't even see him half the time because he was under water. I went to the bow to get a line to him. When I did it, she come up and went down so fast, just left me in the air. I went down the water and had all the end of the cable. The Coast Guard boat, that boy had thrown that rope, and I hit it with my foot and knocked it up and saw it. I pulled it around through and tied it. So, they couldn't

get loose from the boat, and they couldn't stop to pull me up. So, they drove me about a mile offshore, and they lost me. I took a whipping from the shore from about 2 miles off. They had it on film there. The Coast Guard did for a long time. But I towed that whip from there to the beach. But when I got in there, the gentleman said, "Can you stand up?" I said, "Yes, sir." When he turned me loose, I sat down. I started right face first, and they caught me. They said, "He's lost a lot of blood. He's weak." But all of them, they went ashore, and they took me to the hospital. The captain of the other boat, when the bridge opened down, a tug got through. When it was over, when the tug got through and closed the bridge, that cop said, "Yard?" He said, "Yes, sir." When he pulled up to the baby hospital, they weren't three hundred yards. Well, he pulled up to the baby hospital, he was dead. He died of shock. He was all right. He figured everything. Well, he'd done and got me out and got me on that boat and was about to lose that boat. It was [inaudible] we were trying to get. I think he figured that he was going to be the heavy of the whole situation, and it was just more than he could take. When I got there, I said, "Everybody all right?" They said, "Yes." Then when they got through working on me, they had sewn it inside. The baby doctor sewed me up. He says, "Son, the width of a hair and you wouldn't have made it." Because it was touching that jugular thing. He said, "It looks like you lost a lot of blood." I said, "I did until I pulled that plug on that engine, and it hit the starter." He had shocked me. He said, "That's what stopped the plug." I said, "It stopped." I mean, I touched it. But that's basically about the only scrape I ever got into. I really wasn't in no scrape, but if the motor had run, we could have come right back in without any problem. But it was one of the things. So, really, I've been in some bad weather a lot of times. But that was basically the only time I ever got wiped out. Buddy Davis went out at Carolina Beach the same morning, and they wiped him out. Him and his daddy, they went out to sea down there. That's further down the beach where the wind was coming off the beach for. They like lost her there that morning. So, it was a bad, bad sea. It was 20-foot, 25-foot sea. It was easy. You could get a little boat like that fellow back in the backyard. That's a little fellow. It seas like hell. But basically, that's about it. I've been in a lot of blows, stuff that – but all you've got to do is just wait for a little more safe, ride them out and get over. You just don't force nothing.

FS: It won't happen when you beached that boat you got now.

DT: Oh, I might with one of them that I got now. I come down and give a boy a [inaudible] or give a boy the line. I said, "Hold the line." Well, he didn't hold it. He pulled it. I was talking to my son, "Stay back there." I looked right up. When I looked down, mine was coming straight into the side of the boat. That meant the other was straight under the boat. I reached for the gear shift. When I reached for it, she'd done cut the engine off, and we went on the beach. I mean, dried out there. That little lady come running down there, that North Topsail – I mean South Topsail. That little lady come down and said, "Don't worry about it. The Coast Guard, they're on the way." I said, "You sure?" She said, "Honey, that Coast Guard is on the way." She said, "There's been three hundred [laughter] people calling that Coast Guard." They said, "We want our boat off this beach now." They said, "That's where we get our strength from." It wasn't twenty minutes, that Coast Guard was there with a line on me. Pulled me off. I said, "You want to check the boat?" He said, "No, sir." He said, "We've had three hundred people that called that station down there." He said, "One of them was Jesse Helms." [laughter] Said these people were hollering. They wanted that boat off. But the son turned me on him. But he said, "Do you need a pump?" I said, "Does any water coming out that little hole down there on the side of her?" He

said, "No." I said, "Well, I don't need a pump." He said, "That's a tough little boat." I said, "She's not a leaking. He said, "Then most of them would've been sinking." He said, "That's a good little boat. We don't need to board you. I said, "Well, I better" – I say that's one of the little things that you get into without realizing what's going on. The boys should have just held the line. So, we were pulling the bags to the boat. They had a lot of wool back then. We were pulling the bags to the boat. I just stopped, and I said, "Don't pull it. Just hold her right there until I get back." He went right on pulling it. So, what it did, it swung right sideways. It made the other nets from the other outrigger come right up under her, and the other one was off the side.

MB: Well, that's great. That's an unbelievable story. That's more than enough for most people for a lifetime.

DT: Yes. They –

MB: I could say, "That's enough of that. Let's go on with some other group today [laughter]."

DT: But at the same time now, the Coast Guard, they wanted to salvage that boat. They wanted that boat. They said that they had to pump that 36-foot Coast Guard boat. Said they had to pump her six times going around the shore while the 85-footer was towing them. They said they never have to get back there and touch that boat there. Said when they got her to around [inaudible] down there and went into – what do they call that? Coast Guard station, Oak Island, said when they got in there, she didn't have two bushels of water in it. They had to pump out the Coast Guard boat out again. So, the boys wondered. They said that was one more live little boat. They would've tucked her if they hadn't left me. But when they came down, they came down with a bunch of papers, 2 inches thick. Said the boys wanted to salvage the boat. I said, "Well, my impression was that you were all supposed to save the people and not the boat." That big officer said, "What do you mean?" I said, "You left me two miles offshore. You got it on the film. Helicopter filmed it while I was being beat ashore." I said, "You towed the boat off and left me." He just said, "Let me check into this, and I'll get back with you." The next day, he was back here signing release and getting me to sign release and everything else, so we wouldn't sue the Coast Guard. Because they had made a bad booboo when they left me floating around off our 2 miles to shore.

MB: Why did they do that?

DT: They couldn't turn that boat loose. They had it tied to the stern of them. The sea was breaking on that little boat where they were on so bad they couldn't get better to unfasten that line. I tied her to them, but they couldn't get – [laughter] they had it tied to them and couldn't get it off. I had it tied to their line, and they couldn't get that loose from that. So, they couldn't turn around. If they turned around, then the other boat would've probably run into them and sunk them both. So, they more or less had to carry the boat.

MB: An amazing thing – I mean like, what you're talking about right here and then what happened the other night, things can change just –

DT: Yes, in a minute. Me and my wife were riding – when was it when we went to the beach?

Jackie Thompson: Sunday.

DT: Sunday. It blew 40, 50 miles an hour right there at the draw bridge. That little rain score went by. It blew 40, 50 miles an hour there for twenty, thirty minutes, and then it was gone. Fell right out. But it don't seem to be nothing when you're on the hill. But if you're off there in the ocean and a wind comes up on your leg, it is going to shake you up a little bit. If you got any nerves or anything else, you wonder how long it's going to blow like this. Because it would stay like that for a couple hours. Nothing would stand it. It'd beat anything to pieces there. But it just – the little flurries, like it'll go over in a matter of three to five minutes or something like that. Then it's gone.

MB: So, a wood boat, it can start pulling the planking off.

DT: I believe it'd pull your nerves off before it pulls the boards off of that [laughter]. The wood boats are – that's why I say you don't force nothing. If you get in a bad situation, ride with it because you can't fight something. Go and hit into it because the wind and sea, like it, you're not going to do it. But if you just turn her loose and let her go, she'll ride it. You'll see them sitting right there and just, they go up with the sea and back down. It don't bother them. But if you're trying to force her into it, then you're going the wrong way.

MB: That's amazing knowledge and experience that you have in terms of –

DT: Well, that's what that old man told us that time. He said, "Don't ever fight something." He said, "I see you can't fight. Water's heavy. You can't fight it." He said, "If it gets so bad you can't go against it, then just turn right loose and let it ride. She'll lay right there and just up with the sea and down until it blows over. Then you go where you want to go."

MB: So, the sea almost has this too way too powerful nature.

DT: That's right. That's why they lose a lot of ships – lose them on that count. They push their stuff into like going into storms. They'll push herself into it. The sea's so big, which is up on one and gets off of – she's caught on the other one, the [inaudible] clears that one. Then all that middle of her in the air there, something is going to break. If it don't break, it's going to bend. The might of steel or whatever, you can't take them just so much.

MB: Yes. I read a book about sea disaster. They talked about something big ship off of Canada that got on a really bad storm, and the whole 300-foot bow section just snapped off. Then they were all clustered on the stern, and the bow came right at them out of nowhere all by itself. That was really unbelievable.

DT: It comes right back at them. It showed the North Atlantic where they're putting the oil derricks and stuff at 300 feet out of the water. They're 600 feet underneath the water. It showed ships trying to get to them there at 150 miles an hour wind. The sea is 40 to 50 feet, 75 feet. Those are the ones I saw, it was really doing any good, making any time. One looked like she

was probably 100-foot. You'd see her, and then you wouldn't see her. But when you see her, she'd come out and looked like half of her had come out. But when she went down, she was in the throttle of that seine and come up and ended or through the next one where she wasn't bending or trying to break her, and she was still good. I saw it showed a couple sink air and, well, big like 300-foot ships. They'd go over one down, back up, and down. First thing you know, you see them roll. Then they were gone. They'd already done tuck off enough water then to start turning them, and they'd go down.

MB: I have a lot of respect for Mother Nature.

DT: That's right. You can't fight. You can't fight Mother Nature. A lot of people do. A lot of people try to fight it. That's what gets a lot of people in a lot of trouble.

MB: Speaking about the younger generation and all the higher-powered computers, I wonder if they do respect nature.

DT: I think most of them do. This young fellow on that steel boat there, but he just underestimated the water that was there and got on it. Yes, something could've happened to anybody any time. But you got a drudge there. Ninety percent of the time – I'm not kicking the boys on a drudge. But ninety percent of the time, they really don't know what they're doing. He goes down and digs just hard as he can dig. He digs for three days in one place and then he'd go right over on the opposite side and throw it right back in the same place. They have to, to get it where they want it. That's what they're doing. He'll dig 7, 8 feet, and that's probably all they dig. If they were digging it 20 feet, then he wouldn't have to worry about it. But the water would stay there. But they'll dig 7, 8 feet. By the time they get it dug over here and they get over here and shift it back, they're filling this side back up and this side is deep. Then they come back over here. By the time they get over here, they get this dug out again and throw it on the shore. This side doesn't fill it back up. All they're doing is just softening it and getting it – and the buoys, they don't keep the buoys in the right place. That's what makes the buoys foul up.

MB: So, the incident that happened the other night, then they got caught kind of on a sand bar, right?

DT: Yes. Probably, that morning, they'd come in there, or the day before. It was probably 7-, 8-foot of water, and he's got a pump down at the bow. He's already got probably 20,000 gallons of water pumped in her bow or more to get that stern up, so she won't be hitting bottom. Then she hit bottom. It was probably drawing 3 feet. That big boat was probably drawing 3 feet, 3.5 feet. So, you see, he run on a shore – high shore. Like I say, probably the day before, there was plenty of water there. He was pumping it on the shore over there. But then when he got over here and went to pumping it back, right where he pumped it back at, that's where the boat was at.

MB: The barrel was missing in the buoy.

DT: Yes, the boat was missing. Yes. They'll pick him up a lot of times. When they're digging, they'll come to it and swing the bow right out over it with that hook on it and pick it right up. Set it on deck until they get through digging. Then they'll send it back. But when that boy came out

looking for that buoy and then no buoy, he's already committed himself in that little ditch to start with. When he gets there and he can't turn around, he's got to go in the ocean before he can make his turn. So, that's why he got – they say, "Well, he is a bad captain." He is not a bad captain. He is a good captain. They just moved the bottom on it, is what they did. They shifted that shore.

MB: But had that been a wooden boat, that could have been different.

DT: Oh, if it had been a wooden boat, she might have gone right there and lost her right there. Because had it got hit two or three times, it'd knock a hole in one of them. Still wasn't – whatever they say about the clock, take a lick and keep on digging [laughter].

MB: But it shows you how things can change just like that.

DT: Yes. Now, they changed it on him. See, that's about like this road we were talking about up here, where they got that dip in there three times, the stuff happened. So, something there they didn't get right to start with, or it wouldn't have been – keeps just settling.

MB: But I'm thinking that somebody that goes out day in, day out of the same inlet. But then one day, it might be a different story.

DT: Well, that boy goes every day. He said, "You can't keep Timmy" – he's there. He gets up every morning, and he goes.

JT: It changes with the tide.

DT: Like I said, if he's digging here today and throwing over here where they're going to make that shore at outside of the cans. After he gets – because the only thing he's digging with, I think, it's 24 inches wide. He's sucking that sand on each side of her. She's twenty-eight or thirty feet wide, the boat. So, he is digging two little spots, sand sifting in when he's digging, and it blows it out. But then he'll move from here, over here on this side, and dig it. But he blows it right by here where he dug this outside the ditch, and it fills it right up. But what he does, after he gets it four or five times over here, then he'll come back over here and go down this again to throw it out. But when Timmy got on it before he got a chance to throw it out, he was back on top of the shore. That's one of the things that could happen to anybody who runs the boat. It just happened while he was – lucky enough, it was a steel boat.

MB: Well, other things can happen too. [laughter] There's all kinds of things in there, the cables. With all that equipment, it was pretty gnarly.

JT: My son that lost his leg in the [inaudible].

DT: Yes. He broke it – what? A couple times?

JT: Well, his bone came out through the side. He was pulling the nets in.

MB: Well, talk a little bit about your family since we kind of got into that a little bit. But talk about how you met your wife and your kids. Give us a little bit of that aspect of your life.

DT: I better let her tell you about that. I might get it –

JT: Yes, because we all grew up, right?

DT: I might get this thing the wrong way and get a whooping.

[laughter]

I think she'd tell you more about that than –

MB: Well, talk about your kids.

FS: We have five.

DT: We got five kids. She used to work with me. It wasn't just the old the time, but when we were working up here in the river, I had a smaller boat. It was about the size of that one I guess. I had two young fellows and her, which she was better than both of the boys. Because the women could keep their mind on what they're doing and the boys are building boats or flying something way down there somewhere. They haven't got their mind on what they're doing. So, I had two boys and Jackie, my wife – turned out to be my wife. But she was pretty good, and the boys knew it. We had one that – he was (Kellard?) he'd go sleep. He had set them on the side and went to sleep out there. The other, he likely fell back, and one of them caught him. But he caught him. Every time he caught him, he's just sitting on the rail. Kellard fell right asleep and nodded back. He right went over side. She grabbed him, pulled him back on the boat. He had his mind on his job too [laughter]. But his kids were all – well, I will say all of them are fishermen. Turned out to be a very [inaudible]. He's an electrical man.

MB: So, did you give us their names and what they do?

DT: Yes. Buddy. Well, you met Buddy. Buddy, he clams. He fished a while in the – well, he liked lost Dennis, one of his brothers. They were sinking, and they were running the net back out. He caught Dennis by the feet and drove him off the boat, and he went down. He went back and crossed him with the boat [inaudible]. He went and grabbed him, pulled him, Dennis popped up, and he got him. He quit. He hasn't been sailing since then.

MB: Okay. So, he had that experience.

DT: Yes. He said that was in the position or back in the beach – fishing by the beach. So, he quit. But he had caught a pile of fish up then. Then everybody said that if he'd have lost his brother, they said, he'd never been over it. So, he decided to stay with him. So, both of him and Dennis, the one next to him – him and Dennis, they clam and channel it. David, next one, he's an electrician. He wires houses and connects houses to – all right. Then you've got Billy. He's a shrimper. He's on the [inaudible] pride right here. But he'd be glad to carry you out too. He's



carried several different ones out. Who's left?

JT: Melissa.

DT: Yes, Melissa.

JT: That's our daughter. She's married. Her husband does fish.

DT: She's sweet, but she's hands on.

JT: [laughter]

DT: Her husband, he's from Louisiana. He works at the Ford Place. So, that basically does it for the children.

MB: Now, you have grandkids, right?

DT: I mean, we got ten or twelve or eleven. There's a school of them. One just graduated. We got one more who graduates next year. Then I think it's two the year after that. Then it's the little ones.

MB: So, it's a close-knit family, it sounds like.

JT: Yes. All of us live right here in Sneads Ferry.

DT: Yes, they're pretty close by. Dennis is about there. He lives the furthest. It's about 2 miles. Go out and go back, like go into P Road, Bell Point, he lives down there.

JT: All the rest of them live right down this road here.

MB: So, you have people right here then?

DT: Yes, they're right here. Well, you got Buddy and David right here and Billy right here. Melissa right over there. So, really Dennis is the one who's a couple miles off.

MB: That's real nice to have family around.

DT: I'm going to bite my tongue on that one.

[laughter]

JT: It is. It is.

MB: Well, I have a brother in Seattle.

JT: My brother hadn't –

MB: That's hard for us all to get together because we're all over the place.

DT: Well, have you ever been to Seattle? Have you ever been to Seattle?

MB: Oh, yes. It's a great –

DT: Did you like it?

MB: Yes, it's a beautiful city.

DT: I never cared too much. But it seemed like every time I got there, it was always raining.

MB: Well, it does tend to do that.

[laughter]

It's famous for it.

DT: Raining, raining, and raining. You look up on the mountain, there's snow.

MB: Well, I heard there was snow here last year.

DT: There was.

MB: I'd like to get a shot.

DT: It was that mountain, McKinley there, wasn't it?

MB: Yes.

DT: Yes, Mount McKinley.

FS: Or Rainier.

MB: Yes, I think McKinley is in Alaska, isn't it?

DT: Well, maybe I got my mountains tangled up there.

MB: Well, they all look the same.

FS: Yes. I mean, they're pretty and snowcapped like that.

MB: Yes.

[laughter]

DT: But when I left Alaska and came back to Seattle, we left forty below and came to forty above. I thought I'd freeze to death. It is a damp cold, and there it was a dry. I said, "I'm going freeze slam to death right here, and it is forty above." But it was just chilly.

MB: Let's get back to the story with the piece of glass because there was a – take it from where the water blew the windshield out.

DT: Yes. Well, we started at a bar. We were basically two seas from being clear of the bar, where the sea is coming to the beach. The first one looked like you couldn't hardly see the top of it from the boat. It just folded up and fell on her. It took the windshields, everything right out, and carried me in the windshields and what was left of it to the stern. I got up and ran right back in there farther right up and went on scene. When I turned her to make the turn to come back, she cut right off. She didn't drip back from the inlet. There was a little bit of a rip tide. She just rattled on off down the beach. About 2 miles down the beach when she was trying to come ashore to that pier. I knew they wouldn't never come in on that pier. So, I got the boys up, and they said, "We aren't going to let you go." I said, "Well, I'll go. Come on." Grabbed it with my jacket and run to the side and said, "Jump." Everybody jumped. I stayed on her. I got her tied to the Coast Guard. But I fell off the minute she went up so high and dropped me off the bow.

MB: But what about the glass? What happened?

DT: Oh, well, right after I first got her there, I was hurt right far bad after I got her there. Every time I'd get down to take the distributor out, it hurt real bad. So, I kept feeling in the rig, and I found it. It was a piece of glass. It was probably three-quarter of an inch all the way square. It was not a big glass, but it went enough that they got seven stitches in and seven stitches across to that. The doctor said, "Son, you came in within a hair of not being here." He said, "If you'd have moved one little iota down, you'd have been over." I said, "Doc, it would've been that bad?" He said, "Yes." He said, "Bad death where you couldn't stop it." I said, "Well, the bleeding was so bad." He said, "Yes, you lost a lot of blood." I said, "Every time my heart would beat, it would jump off air." He said, "Yes. You had nicked it. But you hadn't got enough for it to just bust loose." So, they patched me up. The baby doctor patched me up, and I never had no trouble after that. They put all the stitches in there and turned me loose.

MB: I think fishing's a very noble profession. So, I'm sure you're proud of the fact that many of your sons are fishermen.

DT: Well, yes. There's several different ways to look at it, but when you stop and say, well, people say that fishermen – a lot of people don't approve too much of fishermen. But there's a lot of good fishermen, and there's a lot that's – like everything else, everything's got something bad in it. But Jesus picked fishermen for his disciples. So, they couldn't be all bad. They're humble people. I would say to a point, now I'm satisfied. Back there in the old days, they were humble. Now, we lose our temper. Everybody loses their temper. But so far, I'm pretty, well – I'm going to my life. Once in a while, I think of things. But I just forget it because this fishing is something else. That little one, regardless of what you do to them, when they get it in their blood, they're going to do it. They'll turn down the best job in the world to go fishing. It's just

like sports. He'll spend \$100 million and head to go and catch one mackerel or one grouper. Risk his life to go 56 miles away with a speedboat to catch that mackerel or that grouper. It's a sport. It's called sport. It's not called fishing anymore. It's a sport. I don't blame them. If you can do it, then do it. There's a lot of them that does it.

MB: Does fishing get in the blood? I mean, commercial fishing.

DT: It does. It does. You can say, "Well, I'm going to quit." But you'll come back. Two or three times on this net situation, it gets to a point that you just – I guess anything's like it. You get to a point that, I've got to quit this or go crazy. I gathered up all, I'll make a net. I'll put it on paper, a pattern. So, if I decide I want to make another one, I can come back and do it just exactly like that one was. So, I gathered up all my patterns and carried them down to the net house. That's when they first started. I said, "Here, I quit. I'm not doing it no more. Don't call me, and don't tell nobody where I'm at." [laughter] What was it? About a year? About a year, I [inaudible] on mine. Your friends will come up and say, "I got a net tore up, and I need this." You'll help them. I turn down a lot of people that's not from around here because I tell them, "If I take yours then some of my buddies right here will come up and holler." Their nets are torn up, and they've got to have them right now. I then turn them down. I said, "I'd rather not do it." I said, "I'd rather just not cut me up myself to something like that." I just take it as it comes. These boys, when they tear up, when they can't get it done, I'll jump out and do it. But I could stop and build a big net house, but I'm tying myself down. I had a heart valve put in. So, I don't need to be tied down too bad. I had to leave her standing in the corner by herself before death [laughter]. But that's basically what – but you can see it in the blood. You can see any [inaudible] out. That little one that walked up there today – Wesley, it's in his blood. There's no way to get down that young in his blood. It is there. His grandfather was Portuguese. His grandfather was Portuguese. David, the son of mine, the one that's doing the electrical work, he loves it better than anything in the world. He'll take him there and show him, "I do this and that and the other." He said he's going to do it. There's no way around it. He told me, "I'll go to college and be whatever you want me to be. But I'm going fishing." [laughter] He'd rather go fishing right now than do anything in the world. You could go down there right now and say, "Wesley, let's go fishing tonight." He's ready. He'll be jumping on the boat, and he's ready to go.

MB: Here's a question, because I interviewed Ray Swaney, Sr., and some other people. Talk about, a little bit, in terms of the spirituality, do you find a sense of spirituality out there on the water?

DT: I think more than on the hill.

MB: Can you talk about that a little bit? What it feels like or –

DT: Well, it is there. You know it's there. I think there, you're where the master started with the people because he got a fisherman. If you stop and kneel down your hands and knees, he's there. You can feel his presence. In other words, you just know he's hearing you and what you're doing. Because he was really there and he's still there. I'm sure that's why John is a preacher right now. He's got a bunch of brothers, and they're not all angels, but John is totally different

from the crowd. He's been there more than I guess the rest – most of us have been on boats and stuff and big boats. First one they know there is – it's just something there that isn't on the hill.

JT: Peace out there.

DT: Yes. You've got more peace there. I know it's just different. There's that piece beyond all understanding. Because that time I was in the Gulf, I was between Louisiana and Marathon, Key West, and it was bad. We had them coming from every direction, seized from every direction, and it was dark. All we could see was oil wells with a lot of lights from one of the derricks. It felt like it was taking her apart. She was wood though. I just stopped, cut the engine off, and I went right down inside the engine and laid down. My crew thought I had gone batty. But I think about three hours, it was gone. Because they were [inaudible] and situation beside it. We got up to these oil wells all around us at the end. One of the boys from one of the oil wells called us and says how we were doing. I told him, we've been doing fine. He said, "We thought you had done gone because we could see you just once in a long while when you're bobbing about." I said, "No. We just finally cut her off and let her go." One of the boys said, "What if we go on the hill?" I said, "Well, at least we can walk away from her." I said, "Here, you're not going to walk away if she sinks." So, they all got quiet. But it does. It gets in your blood. Once you start it, you're not going to get away from it. You could stop and do other things. I've stopped and done other things. I've stopped and tried different things, but you come back.

MB: I've been reading books about fishing and – now, are there certain things – like, I've heard that some fishermen say, "Wait a minute now. If there's an open hatch, it's bad luck," or superstitious stuff. [laughter] This gets us a little more lighter thing than – but I thought that was very powerful what you said about God and spirituality because I mean –

DT: Yes. It's something when you stop there. Because a lot of times, like I said, when I was in that water, I wasn't thinking nothing in the world. People say, "Oh, I've been scared to death. The shark's going to bite me." That was the furthest thing from my mind. I've never thought about it. I didn't worry about the boat coming back because I knew we weren't going to come back because we got rid of that other boat. Then when she was about to sink, it started with that picky boat – that Coast Guard boat. So, I wasn't looking for that boat to come back. So, I just basically try to keep my head out of the water. When I get a chance, I'd stay out of the water. Sometimes for three minutes, I feel like I'm going to bust my eyes out before I could ever get back to the top. Because it would throw me off a seat and I'd go – so, I felt like me, I went to the bottom a few times [laughter]. But evidently, I didn't. It'd just roll me under. I mean, we were wearing life jacket on. But a life jacket, unless you use that thing properly, where you got the pieces go around your legs, unless you get that thing on there like it ought to be, it can choke you to death. Because mine, I stepped in one of them, and it was slack enough that when I'd roll and tumbled on that surface, when I'd come up, I'd had to take and stash it back and get it away from my neck because it was choking me. By the time I'd get it away from my neck, I was rolling again. So, I took a pretty good little whipping coming in there. But it's a lot of things. Then you come back to your hatches. A lot of it's superstition. The old timers, if you turn a hatch upside down, that is bad luck. Which you very seldom see a hatch upside down. Now, once in a while, I'll tell him, he'll bring that check the field, he'll turn that hatch upside down. I said, "Robbie, don't turn that thing upside down. They say it's bad luck." He'll turn her back. [laughter] But it

is more or less superstition. Because if you believe that that's really bad luck, then you're not in tune with the Lord because that's just superstition. You're believing in something that's not going to happen. Now, you may leave the hatch off and fall and break your leg. But you fell, and that broke your leg. It isn't because that hatch was off. You could have slipped on a hatch and broke that leg too. So, it's just superstition. People got it. They say boiled peanuts is bad luck. Well, if that's the case, I wouldn't get to see half a dozen times because I eat boiled peanuts all the time [laughter]. So, I don't believe that peanuts is superstitious because I've been here long enough and eaten peanuts enough. No, and I still survive. But that's what it is. The old people said, "Don't turn the hatch upside down." It's superstition. Bad luck. Well, it would be bad luck if you had the hatch upside down and off and stepped in the hole. But that's of your own making. As far as being bad luck, I've never seen it be bad luck. It's just superstition. If you believe it's bad luck, it would probably come to pass. It would be bad luck.

MB: Yes. It's like somebody afraid of a car accident. They often end up having them because they tripped themselves up, so to speak.

DT: Yes.

MB: Well, I think this has been an incredible interview. Anything else you might want to add about anything?

DT: No. That's basically it. Because it's like everything else, everything's got a cycle. It's turning. Cars are getting more expensive. Women and men are getting more crazy. I'm not going to say just women. Men and women are getting more crazier in the things they do. Nothing is beyond a challenge. I would have to say one thing. Women are getting where they're coming up to the challenge more than ever before. Used to say, "I'm going to jump off this one." She'd jump over and say, "Let's go." So, you see you used to jump off by yourself. Now, they jump off with you. So, it's slow. This modern age is going around.

MB: Well, I'm sure you've seen a lot of changes in this town of Sneads Ferry over the years.

DT: Oh, lord, this place has changed. When I was eight, nine, ten years old, I could take a little stick and get in the water. Anywhere I went to on that landing and walked with my pants legs rolled up to my knees and catch forty, fifty soft crabs. Big soft crabs just laid around the shore. I'd get a nickel a piece for them. But we were little, and that was a bundle of money. Now, soft crabs are worth \$2 or \$3. They don't even pay them to mine [laughter] unless they wanted them to eat. So, things just really changed. I used to head shrimp, half a cent a pound. Four or five cents a pound is all they were worth when they sold them. Now, if you get anything less than two and a half, \$3 a pound, that isn't worth eating. So, everything's a big change.

MB: Well, I hope it doesn't change too much. It seems like it has a wonderful flavor as a small town.

DT: Oh, it is. I've been to a lot of places. Basically, right now, here at Galveston, Texas is about the only little place that's really not changing a lot. You can get good seafood. You can go to a lot of places and find one restaurant in the place, and it's got good seafood. But you've

got four, five, six right here and a small place, and people were wall to wall. It's hard to get into one of them. So, they got good seafood, and it's the people coming no matter where in the world. Getting thicker all the time.

MB: So, is there a sense of community in Sneads Ferry?

DT: Yes. It's like a big neighborhood. Everybody knows everybody, and nobody's throwing rocks at nobody. Not even your colored people. Everybody said they have a lot of trouble with colored people doing this. We don't have a bit of trouble. We've never had any trouble with them. If we go there and say, "Help us do this," they jump by and do it. The same way if they come up to us and say, "Will you help us do so and so?" We do it. There's no segregation or whatsoever around here. Everybody loves everybody. In other words, there isn't nobody saying, "I hate you because you're this or you're that." There's not. If you went out there and said, "Hey, help me do this, help me do that," they'll jump right on and help you. Very few. If somebody don't jump out and help you, it's somebody who just moved in here. But if he's here in a month or something like that, then he's one of the crowds. It's all one big place. So, that's basically what this place is around here. Everybody helps everybody, and everybody tries to stay out of everybody's way. There isn't anybody running out there and shooting each other and nothing like that. It's always, like I said, if we can help you, we help you. If we can't, we can't. Then they'll understand.

MB: Okay. Great. Okay. One more shut down for a sec.

[end of transcript]