

Wild Caught  
Sherry Thurston Oral History  
Date of Interview: Unknown  
Location: Sneads Ferry, North Carolina  
Length of Interview: 00:09:20  
Interviewer: MB – Matthew Barr  
Transcriber: NCC

Matthew Barr: To start us off, I always like to do this. Give us your name.

Sherry Thurston: Okay. Sherry Thurston.

MB: Sherry, tell us a little bit about how you came to Sneads Ferry and what the town means to you. Let me start off with that.

ST: Okay. I came to Snead Ferry in 1978, pretty much. I wanted to do some classes. I looked for location and found this church building which was built in 1939. I walked into the room and there was like three light bulbs and a pulpit, and it looked like a lot of good space. What I wanted students to do is experience painting and drying like I did. So, the local people actually came. I had to get them to bring chairs. Also, the joke was to bring a piece of wood because I bought a wood stove to heat. So, I did that for a couple years, and started painting the area and painting the boats and meeting the people.

MB: Okay. What year did you come?

ST: 1978, I started teaching in here, when I finally found the building and everything, it was right around 1980. So, this is my 20th year in business. The transition in this building has been slow but improved through the years. I've added carpet and some walls and lighting and air conditioning, which is a plus. I don't know how they tolerated in here, but it's nice with air conditioning. The local people have helped support my business. Like I said, they took my classes, and some of them are still painting. They really enjoyed the group talk and all that. I got to know a lot about the people, and I value what they did. They made a living out of the river. Lots of times I'd sell artwork to them, and part of it was to be traded off, half money and half seafood. So, I got to eat some really great seafood. Somewhere around 1992, I wanted to do a t-shirt design. I was doing a lot of t-shirts, and this is the original sketch right here, pen and ink. This is a Sneads Ferry sneaker. My sons, both of them have worn the Sneads Ferry sneaker. This depicts the area pretty much. I put it on a set of t-shirts and had leave town for a vacation and came back and found out they were selling really well. So, I just said, put some orange in the sand area and some blue in the background and everybody's loved that color range. Everything's very simple. I've had many people who are in the graphics field just saying it's one of the best drawings they've ever seen. It's being profitable. I keep selling the shirts. Some people wear them out and come back and get another one.

MB: That's great. Now, that's a very well-known piece of art right there.

ST: I have key chains, note cards. I've had tote bags and aprons with a Sneads Ferry sneaker on them.

MB: You're teaching art at the high school at this point.

ST: Yes. I'm teaching at the local high school. Some of my students actually go into the river and do the shrimping. So, they tell me about that. One of my favorite boats is the (*Kelly Lynn?*) and I found that one of my student's father owns the boat now.

MB: For you, what is the significance of living in a real fishing town? I mean, how has that affected your work as an artist? I know you're obviously drawn to a lot of themes here, boats and –

ST: I love the outdoors. If I could have a life career, it'd be standing outside, painting a boat or a sand dune and seeing a boat off into the water. Like this picture right up here with the seagulls. When I paint, I want people to feel like they're right there. I do add some abstraction into my work and work with some of the colors. My colors have changed through the years. They've gone from browns and golds to more pinks and blues at times. Now they're more into more primary colors. So, it's a big transition but I'm painting the same thing.

MB: Right. So, you like living in this town,

ST: I like living here.

MB: The people mean a lot to you, the fishermen and all.

ST: [affirmative]

MB: Do you feel like this is a way of life that we'll be able to continue do you think?

ST: I hope so. I really do. I think they have a strong desire. They pass it on down from the father to the son or daughter. They are into the fishing industry. I know some of the women are into making the nets and hanging in the nets, and that's quite an art. Then the work on the boats, you'd be amazed at what I've seen. They're great in welding and carpentry. They get out there in all kinds of weather. You would think you wouldn't ever want to go outside. They're hopping on a boat and going out there and going for fish or shrimp or something like that.

MB: Right. Well, you have that kind of collage of all [inaudible] there.

ST: Yes. Here's the collage. This is kind of a history of the area for me. This is the gallery right here, and it's changed quite a bit. It's got German lap siding on it. This is the original lap signing right here. This is me with my son, Josh, who's 19 now. So, you see that the age the time almost 20 years now. I've painted it and done different things, but kept it pretty much close to what it looked like. This is some of the local people. This lady right here, (Faye Midget?). You may have met Faye. I'm not sure. Her husband is a fisherman, and her family. Let's see, this lady right here, maybe kind of hard to see, but she's sitting in a swing with my son. Her husband was (Joe Frank Red?), and he was a fisherman. He had the *Echo*, the boat the *Echo*. Right here, I'm teaching right at the shore and doing a painting of a shrimp boat and showing them how I'm doing that in watercolor. These are a couple of presentations to high schools right here. Then this is my display there inside my gallery. Here, I was on location painting on a deck.

MB: Great. Okay. That was great. It's like camping out having eggs and bacon out there with a – delicious. It's nice looking gallery.

ST: Thank you.

MB: But I can't decide which one to buy. So, the price of that one is 25.

ST: Yes, this is 25. This is one is [inaudible]. This is another grand. I got a big one of this.

MB: How much is that?

ST: I think it's 95. I haven't got it [inaudible] yet. It's mounted, but it's not [inaudible]. It's really calming. [inaudible] [laughter]

MB: Well, no, that's beyond my price range.

ST: Okay. When you get rich off of this, right?

MB: That'll be the day.

ST: This is one of my favorite [inaudible]. This was on the [inaudible] beach where the fan base is near but they got fancy houses around it now. But these little girls were tangled. The other guy is fishing, throwing line and immediately, you're tangled.

MB: I did that once on a deep sea boat out in California. I was the least popular person on the boat. I think I was tangled up with that whole side of the boat. I like that women –

ST: Oh, this? That's at the Riverview Café. That's famous. You need to see that one without glass too. Because (Ms. Marilena?) had probably been peeling shrimp, the one in the pink for over thirty years. She said that I painted her too fat, she was going to throw me in the river. [laughter] Then she got really popular because she's in this print. So, she was interviewed. Johnny Terwilliger is the one who does the marine pies. Johnny's the one who runs the Riverview now.

MB: Oh, yes. I've interviewed him.

ST: Then (Georgia Powell?) is kind of back home. This barn here is called down the winery road, and we had vineyards all around here.

MB: It is amazing.

ST: Then that's a paved road.

MB: Okay.

[end of transcript]