Sarah Janet "Jan" Willis Gillikin
Harkers Island, NC
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Interviewers: Keia Mastrianni, Mike Moore
Transcription: Shelley Chance
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START INTERVIEW

[*Transcript begins at 00:00:01*]

00:00:01

Keia Mastrianni: Today is May 1, 2016. We are on Harkers Island recording oral histories. I'm at the home of Jan Gillikin. And we are going to start our interview. It is 2:33 in the afternoon.

00:00:17

Jan can you tell us your name and birth date?

00:00:21

Jan Gillikin: Sarah Janet Willis Gillikin, my birthday is March 27, 1939.

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KM: How old does that make you?

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JG: That makes me as of this past March, seventy-seven years-old.

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KM: And people call you—what is your nickname?

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JG: Miss Jan.

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KM: Miss Jan.

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JG: Uh-huh.

00:00:43

KM: Okay, and I think we're going to talk a little bit about food since you are a cook and a—a professional nurse by trade, but I hear—you know we've—we've talked about your food and—and maybe we could start at the beginning with you know Harkers Island food and how that got here. We talked a little bit earlier about that.

00:01:03

JG: Okay, you have to remember that most of the food on the coast is seasonal and depending on the year that you are speaking of, in the early 1900s there were boats that traveled from Harkers Island or Shackleford, wherever you had the—wherever you were living at—at that time to bring you the staples like sugar, salt, flour, coffee.

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The other foods, the pork could be raised because of the hogs. On Shackleford Banks they had sheep. There was no sheep on Harkers Island. But you could get the mutton any time you wanted to send someone over there to catch you a sheep and bring it home. And they would probably kill it out in the water and the fish or whatever would get the intestines so there was very little wasted at that time.

00:02:01

Basically the—the vegetables were grown in the family gardens and depending on the weather you would have a good crop or—or you wouldn't have a good crop. If you kept the—over on Shackleford, if you could keep the horses and cattle out of your garden you would enjoy your garden.

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My daddy said there were fruit trees over at Cape Lookout where he spent most of his summers as a youth. He was born there, too, in 1916, so he was able to entertain us quite often with stories of Cape Lookout.

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KM: And your father's name?

00:02:38

JG: My father's name was Gordon Willis. He was born June 20, 1916. The family happened to be at Cape Lookout during those summer months because they still had their camps. Most of them had to close their camps and since the school had closed at that time and they had to move over to Harkers Island where there was a school. And at the time when the people moved from Shackleford and the few that moved from the Cape, we had the largest school population of any school in Carteret County. The population for the school was over 200, so we had a very fertile mamas and daddies at that time. [*Laughs*] And my mother came from a family of twelve. In fact, my uncle, my—my—the youngest one of the family who is my uncle, I am five days older than he is.

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So we call him the—I was born March 27th of '39 [1939] and he was born April 1st of—of '29 [meant '39], so we call him our April Fool Baby. But getting—getting back to the food and so forth, food was seasonal. Whatever happened to be—in the wintertime, I think might have been the hardest, they would in the fall of the year, they would catch a lot of fish that could be split and salted in the barrels. And they were used to supplement the food and there was also lots of duck hunting in the wintertime. And of course if they were fortunate enough to have a—the—

the rutabaga, shoot wild duck and rutabaga was one of the most favorite meals that the family could enjoy.

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The—the pigs were raised. Over to the banks they—I think they let them run wild and they would root and do all of that. But here on Harkers Island they kept them in a fence and they had to be—their—their food supply had to be supplemented with the corn. And I remember my uncle Roland Willis had a grocery store and he sold corn in fifty-pound feed sacks. And I was very fortunate that the feed sacks were saved for mama and she made many, many pretty dresses for me to where to school out of the feed sacks that was from the—the corn that they fed the hogs.

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But I remember daddy and in the fall of the year with the weather had turned, cold enough that you were sure the meat would not spoil, they would build some kind of contraption and tie rope around the legs of the pig and he had been killed, of course, at that time, and then they'd split him and let the blood drain out of the meat so the meat would be more palatable or tastier or whatever.

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And at that time sometimes you shared with the families that were less fortunate and it was sort of a—the way of life here was a family affair because we didn't have a bridge and if people courted—what I mean by courting, dating, they—the island—we called it from the center of the island going towards the west we said—we'd go—those were people that lived to the westar'd. And then from that center of the island going eastward we'd say we're going to the eastar'd—when we leave home our mama would want to know where you're going now? And

we'd say we're going to the eastar'd to play with so and so or we're going to the westar'd to play with so and so.

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But of course the newcomers here now don't—don't know that. That was—that was the way our parents knew how to get a hold of us if they wanted us. [*Laughs*]

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The pig was delicious. My grandmother knew how to smoke. They would have smokehouses and they would smoke—and the bacon just was so good and of course none of—I told you none of it was wasted. They would use the fat from where they would fry the bacon. They had a jar or a can or whatever and if you wanted to season your vegetables that was the type of seasoning or if you wanted to fry out some of the other fat pork that was used all the time. In fact, some people even used the fat pork today. They just like the taste of it. I have never been one to use that. I was working and I would always—took the easy way out of seasoning my foods. [*Laughs*]

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Another interesting thing, my grandmother raised chickens and we always had fresh eggs that we didn't have a lot of beef though, not that I remember. We had more pork chops and bologna and hotdogs and we weren't introduced to the foods like lasagna and spaghetti and pizza until after the bridge came in the '40s [1940s] and that was the time of the Second World War and there was men stationed over at the coast guard atation at Cape Lookout. They started dating island girls and we became exposed to some of those Italian foods and started liking them quite well.

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Collards was always, always, always a favorite of ours. Sweet potatoes because we could get those from a community right across the bridge called Otway and they would raise the best sweet potatoes that anybody could ever eat. So, that had become—has become a staple.

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And remember when you're—when you're cooking for a big family whatever you're stewing in the pot for like my—my mother came from a family of twelve, well you had to have a lot of food to feed twelve people. So they would like what we call stew the pot a whole lot. That would be start off with your potatoes and onions and then if you had a meat put that in there and if you know—if you had some carrots put that in there. By the end of it, it was whatever you chose to call it at that time [*laughs*]. But anyway we were all so hungry we ate it and thought it was good.

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KM: Uh-hm, now I just want to go back just a little bit. You were telling me a story about how they used to make the fireplaces out on Shackleford.

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JG: Oh yeah, that—

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KM: I'd love to hear that story.

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JG: That was—Mrs. Guthrie, what was her first name? Maybe—maybe I'll remember it after a while but I was interviewing her for another article I was doing about ten years ago and she brought this up and I had never heard it before.

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She said that they made fireplaces out of the shells and I couldn't really understand what she meant until she was telling me they grind—or break the shells apart and get them as fine as they can and then mix lime with them and make it into like a cement. And then they take the larger shells and put the lime in a—glue them together with the lime and somehow come up with a fireplace. So I thought that was a very ingenious way of taking what you have and doing the best you could with it.

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Now some of the—I'll mention this right now since we're talking about Shackleford, lots of those houses over there were made with the lumber that would wash up on the beaches after the storms. There was a lot of shipwrecks and so forth around the—the hook of the Cape and they would go—the old-timey word for it was wracking—w-r-a-c-k-i-n-g—wracking the beach after a high tide. And that was like a scavenger hunt to see what had been washed up. And there was lots of wood that the people were able to force to—I'll say it like that—forced to use to help repair their—their modest homes and—and get by. They had to get by the best way they could. It was not an easy life. In the early 1800s of there they were—whaling was the large industry and that was oh such a hard life.

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KM: Okay and talk to me about you growing up, what you grew up eating and you said your mom was the best cook or—.

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JG: Mama—mama was the cook I knew. [*Laughs*] So I realized as I—after I grew up some of the things that we wished that she had—had chosen not to do, she loved salt and would

relish the foods that we ate and she thought if it was really, really brown it was really, really good. But as I've noticed as I'm aging that you know if you cook a piece of round steak, the longer you cook it the harder it gets. [*Laughs*]

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So you know little things like that—that she chose to do that I—I don't do that and she—she would use lard and mix her—always yeast rolls. We had breakfast and supper we would always have the yeast rolls and she used the lard to make the yeast rolls. Let me get back to a little something that I thought was so interesting when I found it out.

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My grandmama Sara was known for her good cooking also and they said that she could make the lightest best cakes. Well anybody that's used lard knows that lard will have a heavier consistency when mixed with flour. So I—when I asked what kind of shortening she would use, they said she would boil the chicken fat and skim off that fat to use in all of her cakes. And that's why she had such light, nice cakes.

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KM: Nice, very neat and you said your mom didn't let you in the kitchen too much.

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JG: Mama thought the kitchen was a place for the adult women. She didn't think men had a place in the kitchen and she didn't think children did, only to set the table and wash the dishes. So I practically learned by observing and once in a while I'd sneak in there but as far as—as my taste and so forth they have cultivated over the years. And noticing and reading recipes and having my own particular taste and my style of doing things has evolved and I like my cooking. I reckon that's the reason I'm the size I am. And my husband liked my cooking and

he was—he was not a big man but I had to—he had heart problems almost half of our married life, so I was forced into not using particular—particular types of food that were like the naughty cholesterol foods. I was conscious of that and had to cut down on the amount of salt. I was used to a lot of salt from my mother's cooking.

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So I had to cut down on that and—

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KM: Uh-hm and tell me about like you said you would read recipes. What—what books were you reading when you were kind of learning to cook or experimenting in the kitchen?

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JG: Well I took Home Ec[onomics] in high school and I think that was a very positive thing in my—for me because I learned that I could play around with recipes and change just a few of the ingredients and make them to taste to me better than the original recipes, not that the original recipes were not appropriate and measured out, but if I didn't like a particular ingredient I would try to substitute and if it turned out good, okay, if it didn't I knew better next time. [*Laughs*]

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KM: And you know the reason I found you because you're part of a kind of a very famous Harkers Island cookbook. Can you talk to me about the cookbook? What is its name and how came about—about?

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JG: Um, we have always at our United Methodist Church here on Harkers Island had a United Methodist Group, United Methodist Women's Group and we had a bizarre one year and

made quite a bit of money for a little church like ours and we just didn't want the money to go adrift without having something to—to show that would—of lasting significance.

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So we—Karen was a—one of my youngest when I was an MYF leader and then she was grown and had taught school in Havelock and—

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JG: This was Karen Amspacher, yeah, Karen Willis—Harkers Island, Karen Willis Amspacher and I knew—she had a new baby but anyway she had been teaching school up there and somebody said Jan, Karen knows all there is to know about putting on a bizarre and stuff like that. So she helped us with the bizarre and it was amazing. And then afterwards we said Karen we've got—we thought $7,200 was—I mean we were in big, big, big—the big works then [*laughs*], so we told—we said Karen what could we possibly do to let this money grow for us, you know like investing?

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And she had—she thought and thought and then she came to one of our meetings in January. The bizarre was that October and we hadn't spent the money. We had been very careful. [*Laughs*] But we—we loved to give money away for needy causes and women and children are our hearts as United Methodist Women so she thought about it and she met with us and she said, "I think we ought to do a cookbook and in that cookbook let's put some of the Harkers Island history that is vanishing." I mean you know you can only tell oral histories so long and then it's just lost.

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So we thought about it and thought about it and I just turned up my nose. I said, "Ewww another cookbook Karen?" She said, "But this one will be different Jan." I said, "You sure about that?" [*Laughs*] And she talked us into it and we worked real hard. We worked a year getting the book together and she just spent so much time with that book. And it's like one of her babies, it really is. And it has been such a blessing to our United Methodist women and we were able to get recipes from most of the ladies in the church and if anybody maybe had a recipe they really didn't—whether they were from our church or not and they wanted it put in there we didn't mind at all. And we—we got those stories. We got more stories than we could use really but she had a way of dividing the cookbook into eight different sections, telling different things about our history and a little bit about the Cape and it—it made it an interesting book not only for the women and the recipes—now we used the simple recipes, nothing that you'd have to go get all these funny spices. We're—we're simple cooks and that is the way we chose to—that's the type of recipes we chose to use.

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Now I've had—we've been selling the books in 2017 will be thirty years.

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KM: Wow.

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JG: We started in '87 [1987] and I believe that's right. But anyway, the history in the books amazingly has made it very attractive for men because there's stories about the fishing and so forth. And I had one man that came—came to me, we were selling books at the seafood festival I think one year and we were talking generally to the public and telling what our book

was like. He says, “Ma'am, I got one of them and I keep it in the bathroom all the time.” [*Laughs*] So I said, “Well praise the Lord, get another one and give it to somebody.” [*Laughs*]

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KM: That’s wonderful. And do you remember what some of the recipes were that you contributed to the book?

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JG: Yes. I can't think of the name of it, wait a minute. Uh, uh, uh, chew bread.

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KM: Hmm, what is chew bread?

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JG: Chew bread is so easy. It’s like a one, two, three. Flour, brown sugar, eggs, coconut, nuts, butter, margarine, and of course the recipe has you know the amounts that you use, but you—it all mixes up in one pan in a bowl and then you just spread it out and in a greased pan and—and you do not overbake it because it’s supposed to be chewy.

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Now if for some reason you do overbake it do not throw it away because it makes the best biscotti. Is that the right way to pronounce it?

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KM: Biscotti?

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JG: Biscotti, if it’s too dry you just get your milk or your coffee and you sop that buddy, it brings it right back to life. [*Laughs*] But I always tell the children that that’s when they should

get their mother. And I've got a recipe for my husband's favorite pound cake. Let's see, there's others but you know what I can't remember right now. I'd have to look through the book.

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KM: Well that's all right. I saw a recipe for the fig preserves. That was—

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JG: Oh yeah, I—I do—I do preserves and I put several of those recipes, the sweet spiced pickles and the preserves and I do a strawberry preserve. You take a—you put the strawberry Jell-O in with the strawberry figs and it tastes almost like strawberries.

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KM: And—and figs grow well all over the island?

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JG: Oh yes, this is—they are a—almost I would say almost drought resistant but you do—if it's a dry summer you do have to water them some. But as far as the bugs and so forth, you don't have to worry about any kind of bugs getting on your trees. You have to worry about the gulls eating all the ripe figs in the top of the trees and you have to be early—you have to be early picking your figs or the—the other little birds love them, too as well as human beings. *[Laughs*]

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KM: And you've got—how many fig trees do you have in your backyard?

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JG: I have in my own personal backyard I have five and then my backdoor neighbor has two that I forced her to plant—to let me plant in her yard, too. [*Laughs*] So we do have an abundance of figs.

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KM: That's nice and what else is there an abundance of on Harkers Island?

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JG: Are you talking about now?

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KM: Uh-hm.

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JG: Tourists. [*Laughs*] We have an abundance of tourists. I can't say that there's any particular food that Harkers Islanders are known for. We like to have our own little garden, maybe a—plant onions. Onions is something when we stew our hard crabs in the spring and summer that we like the green onion tops in our crabs. So some—some people—these things are now so easy to buy at the grocery store.

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KM: Do you call them anything in particular, the green onion tops? Are they called—?

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JG: People used to call scallions but I've always called them green onion tops. Scallions might be another form of onion. I just buy the onion tops.

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KM: Sure and let's talk about the lunch you cooked for us today.

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JG: Okay.

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KM: I think we started off with clam chowder.

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JG: Okay, I'll tell you the reason that I served it as I did. I didn't serve all I could at one time because I wanted us to flavor what the individual taste was and clams have been around since—since the existence of the oceans I guess, bivalve clams and oysters and conchs and all of that nature. So I—I figured that the clam chowder would be something that since it was an older thing that—that people has been able to get a hold of all the time they've lived on Harkers Island and Shackleford. So I started off with clam chowder.

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My particular clam chowder did not have any pork on it. I didn't fry out fat meat or any of that stuff. I never have. With my husband having heart problems I never chose to do the fat pork. But I used chicken base paste and I used the regular whatever liquid vegetable oil you choose. And I did my potatoes, I cube them. I don't like large potato pieces in my clam chowder. And I cheated. I used the can clams. You can use the other. Now I'll tell you about the fresh clams. They taste real good but I'll tell you when you're cooking them they do not smell good. They stink. They really stink up your house. But the flavor is—is very tasty. But this—I call it my cheating clam chowder the one I did today. And apparently my guest has enjoyed it.

[*Laughs*]

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KM: I did very much. And you used to go clamming with your husband?

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JG: We did. My husband was a school principal and he had summers off and I was a school nurse so I had summers off and we had a boat. So this was our type of vacationing. Our backdoor neighbors were—were excellent clammers and they said, "Come on now, we're going

to be at a certain place clamming," and we said, "Okay. So we'd dress up like old farmers, no sun got on us. We'd wear shoes and socks and long pants and long shirts and have makeup on our noses so we couldn't get burned. We looked just like a clammer.

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But we—we had fun, we had lots of fun doing that in the summertime. It destroyed both of my knees and both of my husband's knees. We had artificial knees for a while until he died and now I've got them, too.

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KM: Well I guess you've done your fair share of clamming then.

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JG: We have, we have and enjoyed it. It was—it has been lucrative for some of our younger boys that—that wanted to go and do that for a living. It's a hard living but if—if they didn't want to go to school and get an education they did what they could to make a living out of the water.

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KM: I have a quick question now. Do you recall the days when the fish houses were up and lively?

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JG: Uh-hm, I do. My grandfather Stacy Davis had a fish house close to—I talk about the westar'd and eastar'd, well his was close to the east-end of Harkers Island. And the—the boats would—he had a called the Leona and one that was called the Old Sow and they'd go out and in the fall of the year they would—there were so—the fish were so plentiful, these were the spots, and the roe mullet and they were so plentiful that they would get the nets so full of fish they'd

have to stick the—the posts—it was called a sticking if you said did you—did they catch very many? They'd say, "Yeah, they've got them stuck down." That meant they had to draw the net together and go inside the net themselves and bail the fish out into the boats and then go to the fish house and unload the boats and then go back to the nets and load them again. I mean it was lots and lots of fish.

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My daddy worked for him a while too. Daddy always was mad if the fish came in on Saturday night because we had a theater and my daddy liked the movies. And that was our recreational night. And when they'd come and call him, "Gordon the boats are coming in, you've got to come on and go to the fish house," he did not like that at all but he went.

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KM: Uh-hm and do you—do you remember being around the fish houses? I mean it's just so many along the water there.

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JG: Uh-hm, yeah.

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KM: It seemed like a lively kind of central place for you know people gathering even though they were working. It was a good place for community or—?

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JG: It was. It was an excellent place for a lot of fish tales to be told by the men that might be mending nets that had been damaged when they were fishing. They would have to mend—mend the nets. That was a special way of closing up the holes and yarns would be told

and they became known as fish house liars. And they would tell all the tales and sometimes as they would tell them they would get bigger and bigger and bigger.

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Oh my daddy—let me tell you about this, this is a true story. Daddy was by his self this particular day over at Cape Lookout. Les and Sally Moore had their camp over there at that time. And they were looking in their binoculars and dad had fish in the net and they looked and a whale was following the nets. And daddy saw the whale coming and he inside of the boat there's a pull post. I mean when you've got a lot of fish you wrap the line around that and that—that's how you pulled the fish together instead of you personally having to do it.

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So daddy saw the—the whale coming towards his boat and he grabbed ahold of the pull post and the whale died just before he hit—this is the story that Les and Sally Moore has told us and it was in the newspaper. And the whale went down by the side of daddy's boat and almost turned him over. And he—he had a story—a true story to tell mama when he got home that night.

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KM: [*Laughs*]

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JG: And the next thing we knew Les and Sally had published it in the newspaper.

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KM: Wow, do you remember—do you know about what year that was?

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JG: I want to say that was sometime—now I'm guessing, I'd say around the '60s [1960s].

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KM: In the 60s?

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JG: Uh-huh, I'm—I'm like I say I'm—I'm guessing at that. I—I was grown at the time and dad had a little bit of age on him. And I don't understand why he was out there by himself. Man I'll tell you what, he did not like turtles. I know they're an endangered species. But my daddy was not a friend of turtles. Turtles would ruin the fish. They'd go and snap their heads off when they were hung in the net or they'd take a big bite out of the fish and then the fish had to be thrown away.

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The—the turtles were hungry. They were going to eat, too if they saw a free meal. But daddy didn't like them.

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KM: He didn't like them. [*Laughs*] Let's go—the next dish we had I think today was fresh meat and rutabaga? Is that what we had?

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JG: Yes, we did. That would always be a winter dish here because they would raise their own hogs and right before time for killing them they would feed them corn to make sure—

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KM: Tell us what dish this is. I'm sorry to interrupt.

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JG: Fresh meat and rutabaga is a pork, type of pork meat that you stew and then you season it with the—the rutabaga which everybody knows what rutabaga is but they would wax—they learned this, they would wax the rutabaga. It would cause them to last a long, long time. So I don't know if they would wax them back then or not, but—

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KM: How do you wax them?

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JG: I—we buy them to the store already waxed so I'm sure that they just cut the greenery off of them after they've let them reach the size that's appropriate. And they probably dip them in warm wax and it coats them and preserves them. And you—when you're cleaning them you—you cut all of that off. But that we ate today was very rich and very tasty I thought.

00:31:46

KM: Uh-hm and so it—it always came around wintertime when the hogs were killed?

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JG: Yeah, the hogs would be killed after the first cold snap in November. And of course they would tie them up by their legs and gut them and—. Grandmama Sara would take the guts and get in the—one of the skiffs, the little skiffs that you'd oar out to the middle of the sound and she would clean the intestines and that's what—what she would use when they would grind up the scraps from the hog and season them and make pork sausage. But that was a nasty job. Can't you imagine how nasty that was, my lands?

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But of course in late years you could buy the sausage hmm, casings I think that's what they're called and that you didn't have to do that. But back then they had to. I mean they—they were just making everything count. They—they were not wasteful people. They made everything count.

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KM: Yeah and tell me how you prepared your fresh meat and rutabagas.

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JG: I—I used the vegetable oil and water and salt and pepper and I stewed the meat until it was tender. And then I cut the rutabaga up and I—I used some of my favorite [*Laughs*] chicken-based paste to season it. That's my secret.

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KM: You're giving everyone your secret.

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JG: That's my secret, secret, sometimes now I'll use a little bit of Accent but I did not use Accent in anything today. So and then we had collards. Now collards was a—a vegetable that everybody could raise. You could raise collards just about anywhere. Even Shackleford banks you could raise collards. Now they had the manure from the—from the horses and the cattle over there to enrich their gardens, too.

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But you could—there was a summer collard and you had to cook—cook those longer 'cause summer collards were tougher. The winter collards when the frost hit them they were more tender and people seemed to care for the winter collards better than the summer. Now I

didn't like collards when I was a child. Mama would not put any sugar in them and they were sometimes so bitter that you couldn't eat them. In fact, I didn't like fish but I had to eat them, so I took mustard and I filled my fish full of mustard. I don't do that now. I like fish and I like collards but I flavor them Jan's way [*laughs*] instead of mama's way. They're flavored Jan's way now.

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KM: And how do you do yours?

00:34:27

JG: Well after I—I have learned you clean them by the big leaf. You cut the big leaf off of the stalk. And then it's easier to wash a great big leaf on both sides and clean it and then I lay it in my cookie sheet after I've washed it real good and make sure—now the curls as it curls on the edges I 'd make sure there's no worms hidden in any of the dark places you would cut off. And I'd lay them on the cookie sheet and I'd lay layers and layers and layers of those after I've washed them. Then I'd roll them like you would a—a cigar and then I'd use a knife and just slice them in about—half inch slices and then a par boil them. Now par boiling is getting your water hot enough to put whatever you're choosing to par boil. It's like pouring boiling water over something only you leave the hot water in the pot and you put your vegetable in the pot for a short—maybe five, ten minutes depending. And then you pour that water off and let it cool and then you can put it in your Ziploc bags and freeze it. And it freezes six months or longer.

00:35:41

KM: That's awesome. Those were very good and we had them with—is this your own special pepper vinegar?

00:35:49

JG: Um, well I don't know that it's anything special about it. I just had the hot peppers and put—I use the—the white vinegar. I—I choose to use that. It seems—seems to make a better hot—hot vinegar in my opinion but that's just the opinion of the person.

00:36:08

KM: Well it was delicious on the collards.

00:36:09

JG: I thought so, too.

00:36:11

KM: Yeah. [*Laughs*] And then we had—well did we have the cornmeal dumplings in the collards as well?

00:36:18

JG: We had cornmeal dumplings in the collards. I didn't have enough moisture in—with the collards so the cornmeal dumplings were not as moist as I was hoping. They were a little dry but the reason being I didn't have enough juice in them or the collard liquor. That's what it is. Used to drink it by the cup and didn't I love it? But these collards were so tender I couldn't put a lot of water in them.

00:36:43

KM: They were tender.

00:36:44

JG: Uh-hm, very tender. And then when—when I did the chicken—have we talked about chickens?

00:36:51

KM: No.

00:36:52

JG: On this? That was the last thing I served and we had the pastry—

00:36:58

KM: Chicken and pastry.

00:36:58

JG: —chicken and pastry and chickens were so easy to grow—I mean tend to and grow and they—they offered the eggs, you could have for breakfast. You could have the eggs for supper. You could have the eggs for your cooking any of your cakes or whatever. They were just such versatile and then chickens sort of tended to themselves and they were always a favorite Sunday dinner. And I remember my granny's chicken being just as good. She'd say, "Jan go out there and feed the chickens." And I'd take that corn and go throw it and it would land in that muddy chicken pen and I'd say, "Ewww. Am I going to eat that Sunday?" [*Laughs*] But I didn't think about the mud when I was eating those—that clean pretty chicken. And sometimes the eggs grow inside the chicken before they lay them and sometimes granny would have some of those yolks that she had saved that she would be stewing inside in the gravy—just so good. And she'd have the mashed potatoes you could—and the dumplings and the pastry and all good stuff.

00:38:04

KM: And you do your dumplings, you go long and a lot of people do round dumplings with their chicken and pastry?

00:38:10

JG: Well, dumplings is different from pastry now.

00:38:12

KM: Okay.

00:38:12

JG: Okay, the pastry is what I rolled out with the two types. If I had plain flour I used a little bit of salt and a little bit of baking powder and water. And I liked to make mine in strips instead of the little hunks that people put in there. That's just my choosing. And they turned out pretty good today.

00:38:39

The—the cornmeal dumplings I use a third of flour to the amount of meal I use depending on how many people you're serving, a cup of meal to a third-cup of flour, to a sprinkle or two of salt and then the amount of water and you—to me a smaller dumpling is better than a large one.

00:39:02

KM: What do you call them?

00:39:03

JG: I—I call them my fifty-cent size cornmeal dumplings. [*Laughs*] You just take off a little wad and you just flatten out in the palm of your hand and it was very tasty. I enjoyed it in my—in the clam chowder I did today. But now I didn't like it in the collards 'cause they were too dry. But the pastry was a hit [*Laughs*] on my tongue today anyway.

00:39:26

KM: It was very good. [*Laughs*] It was very good. And let me see, and then we had the yeast rolls or do you call them light rolls or do you think they're different?

00:39:37

JG: Old-timey people called them lightning bread because most of them I don't know that they used yeast. They would use this sourdough mixture that they would feed this and keep it fermenting I guess is what you want to call it.

00:39:54

KM: Yeah, like a sourdough starter.

00:39:56

JG: Uh-huh and those—that bread is real good. It's a little bit sweeter than the yeast rolls. Now I chose to use store-bought yeast roll but I can as I was telling you I can—I can do a roll that tastes just like that—that we ate today and it's in the *Island Born and Bred Cookbook* that Karen Amspacher helped us with and by the way we've sold almost 100,000 of those books. And we have used money wisely and I think that's the reason it has been blessed that we've not used it in any—any selfish way at all for—inappropriate things. We've—we've used it for ways of helping people and so forth.

00:40:41

KM: Beautiful.

00:40:43

JG: Marlene Davis' recipe is the one that I would use if I were to go to the cookbook, *Island Born and Bred* and do that one.

00:40:51

KM: Uh-hm and tell me, there was something special about the pan that were using to cook the light rolls today.

00:40:54

JG: Oh yeah, yeah. I did want to mention that. This is just—reminds me of my grandmama Sara, my mother's mother. She had that large family I told you of twelve children and they would need a lot of lard for everything that they were doing as far as cooking. If they had to fry fish it was—it was lard. If they used making yeast rolls it was lard. And they'd get it in the five-gallon lard buckets. And the—the cover, the lids on these buckets were about the size of a large pizza pan and that's what I had today. So I put our yeast rolls on the large pizza pan so it would remind me to tell you all that the—the lids from those lard cans grandmama Sara would put two lots of rolls in the pan because she had a big family.

00:41:51

And I can remember those rising and how pretty they were. And a gang of youngins thinks anything is good. So in—in—when we go visit on Sunday evening everybody would collect at grandmom Sara and Papa's house and we youngings would go searching for what we could find. And we would always find us a yeast roll and we'd go looking to see what he had in the garden. And the onion—onion biscuits, huh—would we eat anything? [*Laughs*] We would go out and we'd have little playhouses out there in the woods where the hogs would run around. They—the hogs would chase us at times. But we would use the pine tree, the—the cones and make us a fire and we'd steal some of their sweet potatoes and we'd roast us a sweet potato. Oh did we think we were in heaven—had the most fun playing.

00:42:46

KM: Uh-hm.

00:42:47

JG: The boat ways—do you know what I'm talking about? The boat ways, they were on the shore and they'd pull the nets up on these boat ways for the nets to dry out. And sometimes they—if they were made out of cotton they'd have to dip them in tar so they would last the season. Well slipping the boat—the nets up on these wooden ways would sandpaper them. Well we used those all the time for our—what is it—play on that was our swing sets and we just—we would—we had an ideal children's life playing along the shore, papa's shore down to the eastar'd.

00:43:31

KM: Sure, sure. And what did we have for dessert today?

00:43:36

JG: Well Harkers Island and Down East in general have been known for their Eagle Brand Milk pies or their lemon condensed milk pies. And I figured that would depict our area more than any maybe other dessert that I could fix today. So this is made—I like the Ritz cracker crust and then I use for one pie, I use a can and a half of the canned Eagle Brand Milk and then a third cup of lemon juice and four eggs. Use the yolk in the pie and the white you—you beat that for the merengue to do on the pie.

00:44:14

And there you see it.

00:44:18

KM: And it—it's traditionally—it's just usually called Lemon Milk Pie?

00:44:23

JG: Uh-huh.

00:44:24

KM: And what's the—what—how would you describe the flavor of it?

00:44:28

JG: If you like sweet condensed milk it has a lemon flavor to the Eagle Brand Milk. And whoever invented it I'm glad they did 'cause I sure do like it. [*Laughs*]

00:44:42

KM: Sure, you know and your merengue is beautiful.

00:44:45

JG: Well thank you. I thought so.

00:44:48

KM: Oh and we also fried some shrimp today didn't we?

00:44:50

JG: We did. Those were shrimp that my dear deceased husband purchased last year and I chose to cook them after we were eating our other foods today because shrimp can get tough when they start getting cold and you want to warm them over. So I mixed a little Autry Seafood Breader and flour and did not use hardly any salt in them at all because the—the Seafood Breader has salt and I fried them in just a little oil just enough to have—and I sort of—I call it steam frying because I'll put a lid on it. And I—I don't put a lot in the pan at one time. I prefer to separate them and have them you know as a medium high as they brown on one side and I've got the lid on them and I'll take the lid off and—and then turn them over. And I won't put the lid on anymore.

00:45:42

KM: Sure.

00:45:42

JG: And about three minutes, three to four minutes that's all shrimp need to cook. I used to cook them so long you could throw them through the house. You know I've learned over the years.

00:45:52

KM: Sure. And you know you're still doing some cooking. I guess you participate in organizing stuff at church for church meals?

00:46:01

JG: We—we have been doing this for about thirty years on Wednesday nights having a fellowship supper and we have from five or six teams and each team has a different group of women and as I was sharing with you before, if—if the Lord has given you a talent and you have volunteered to use your talent use it to the very best of your ability to—to brag on the Lord and what He's doing. So when—when my group cook everybody loves to come and eat my food and that—that's my motto. Do the very best I can and we are not doing it for money. We are doing it for the fellowship. If we happen to make some money we put it in the Women's Treasury and give it away to somebody in need. So how much more could you be you know doing what would be pleasing in the Lord's sight.

00:46:52

So He's the reason it's been successful, not us. I mean we're—we're trying to do our part, too you know so—. He—the good Lord and us work real good together. [*Laughs*]

00:47:05

KM: And you get joy out of cooking for others?

00:47:07

JG: I do but I'm aging out. I've started developing back problems and I have to—to pace myself now. Used to I didn't have to.

00:47:22

KM: Do you feel like it's important to pass on some of these traditional cooking ways to the younger generation?

00:47:31

JG: Frankly my dear they don't give a damn. And that's the truth of it.

00:47:37

KM: Uh-hm.

00:47:38

JG: They'd just rather—it's like one of my friends her daughter says, "Jan, when I die somebody is going to say what did you—what foods was it your mama cooked that you liked so good? And they're going to say 'wait a minute, let me think of what restaurant now that was we'd order our foods from.'"

00:47:56

KM: Yeah.

00:47:57

JG: They—they—the restaurants have—have made it too easy for everybody for them—. Now once in a while you'll find one that really cares and wants to but basically it's easier for them to go to the restaurant.

00:48:11

KM: Sure, but it must—I mean I think it's real special that y'all did the cookbook because I think that's a way of preserving those recipes.

00:48:19

JG: It is, it is and of course the history in there has made the book. It wasn't the delightful, wonderful, out of the ordinary recipes because they were not. Now twenty, thirty years from now they will be maybe more outstanding than they are now but now they're just average ordinary recipes.

00:48:40

KM: There's a lot of history of the island in there.

00:48:43

JG: Oh that truly makes the book, yes.

00:48:45

KM: Sure, sure. And you know I guess the other—I just have one more question and that is you know anything that you wanted to say that you weren't able to say or—or what you want people to know about the people of Harkers Island and—?

00:48:58

JG: I will. I will address that.

00:49:00

KM: Sure.

00:49:01

JG: As a child growing up we didn't have a bridge here until '41 [1941]. Well our unique accent was the Elizabethan accent that you hear from me, not quite as bad as—or good as

some of the others have. But the people from we say off—that means beyond the—the boundaries of Harkers Island—

00:49:30

KM: From off.

00:49:30

JG: —and beyond the boundaries of down east, meaning depending on who you talk to whether it's East Carteret or down to east whatever, but—each community has a unique accent. The accent that we have has nothing to do with the amount of education or how much sense we've got.

00:49:49

Now the—the children way back when did not have the opportunity to go to school. They had to work during the summer months and winter months, too and help support the families or the families would have perished. So they had more common sense than people give them credit for because they didn't have the correct English or because they spoke with an accent had nothing to do with how smart they were.

00:50:21

And we showed that when we consolidated the schools and went to East Carteret because some of the city—city people—I don't know if they intended it to sound as we heard it but it sounded as if they were making fun of Harkers Island people because of our accent. Well, we had as much common sense and if we had gone to school we'd have as much sense as they did. And that was proved when the valedictorian and the salutatorian of East Carteret High School were more associated with the down east schools than they were with the city schools. And I'm not mentioning any schools by name, but I'll say this. Harkers Island included my son that's now

a dentist—had educated people that graduated from East Carteret and went off to be principals of their schools now, teachers in their schools, nurses, several doctors, you know. Dr. Croswell is one of the doctors. My son is a dentist. And I could on naming them. So the way you speak and your accent should not be—have any class to it as far as the education between your ears.

00:51:43

KM: Right, people should not make any presumptions about—

00:51:46

JG: Well—

00:51:47

KM: —because of the way you speak.

00:51:47

JG: —and the way I answer it, they'll say, "Ha-ha, I know where you're from, Harkers Island." I say, "And you want my accent but you can't have it because you have to be born on Harkers Island to have my accent. Sorry about that." [*Laughs*]

00:52:02

KM: And are you proud of your accent?

00:52:05

JG: I don't think about it. I really don't. It's—it's who I am and my son has not lost his accent and he's in Atlanta, Georgia. Karen Amspacher is meeting people from the White House all over the world and she certainly hasn't changed her accent.

00:52:21

Now I don't think you should belabor the accent, now what I mean by belabor is if I go ahead and I talk like this [*gestures*] you know and I pretend that I got this accent well that's not my accent. I'm just making fun of people I shouldn't be making fun of.

00:52:39

KM: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

00:52:40

JG: But it's because we were not exposed but now after the bridge came and we became exposed to it and we're gradually losing the accent.

00:52:51

KM: Sure, yeah and the—yeah I mean it was a very isolated community.

00:52:55

JG: Uh-hm, we were very isolated.

00:52:56

KM: Uh-hm and a lot of those names that you see on the streets are all people who came from Shackleford and kind of settled here afterwards.

00:53:04

JG: That's true.

00:53:05

KM: But yeah, the—the bridge changed a lot as well as the park service is that correct?

00:53:08

JG: Yeah, I won't address the park service. I'll—I'll let someone else do that you know. We had a home at Cape Lookout and we lost our home.

00:53:24

KM: Sure, uh-hm. Well I think—I think our—we did good on this interview and I think you've told me a lot of great, wonderful stories about food and foodways here and I think you're an incredible cook.

00:53:35

JG: Oh well you're very kind.

00:53:38

KM: And I just—I appreciate it and next time we'll have to have some hard crab stew maybe.

00:53:42

JG: I can do them the best. My—my son, the dentist, every time he comes home I try to have stewed hard crabs. And one day we were eating and he had eaten about ten and we were all messed up just sucking and having fun. And he looked at me and he said, "Mama?" I said, "What is it?" He was all messed up. [*Laughs*] He said, "Please don't ever change the way you stew hard crabs." [*Laughs*]

00:54:07

KM: How do you prepare yours?

00:54:08

JG: Well I tell you, I am very ticklish about—I clean them and I have a special brush that I scrub the backs and I cut their legs off a certain distance from the body and I have the belly cleaned out you know and I just—I have some of the water on the stove and I par boil mine. I put the crabs in that water and let them come to a boil and then pour all of that off. The reason for

that is when I'm sopping that gravy with my light rolls I want that gravy to be as clean as it can be.

00:54:42

So the way I do it is—is you know you could take it up and drink it if you wanted to. And we always have yeast rolls to sop the gravy. I try to have the green onion tops and Vidalia onions both and then the—the potatoes. And you need to put all of that in your pot at one time because your potatoes are going to cook all to pieces if you cook it very long. I'll put in those potatoes and by the time we get to ready to eat I will say where have the potatoes gone? And they have just evaporated. And the—the gravy is real thick with them you know 'cause they're—. And most people around here don't do this but I do this.

00:55:20

Crabs have a white gravy. But I like a little bit of a tan gravy, so I use Kitchen Bouquet and when I'm mixing—if I'm going to thicken my gravy with anything with flour or whatever or sometimes I'll just grate a potato and use that, I'll put a tad of just Kitchen Bouquet to turn it a light golden brown, not enough to change the taste of the crab but gives it that light golden brown look.

00:55:48

KM: Well that sounds delicious.

00:55:49

JG: Don't it sound the best.

00:55:50

KM: It does. Well thank you so much for your time today. And we will end this interview. It is 3:29 and thank you.

00:56:30

END INTERVIEW