

**Emma Rose Guthrie
Harkers Island, NC**

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Date: April 28, 2016

Location: Mrs. Guthrie's Home, Harkers Island, NC

Interviewers: Keia Mastrianni, Mike Moore

Transcription: Shelley Chance

Length: Fifty-three minutes

Project: The Saltwater South: Harkers Island, North Carolina

START OF INTERVIEW

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

Keia Mastrianni: Okay this is April 28, 2016. We are recording the oral history on Harkers Island for the Southern Foodways Alliance. Today we are speaking with Emma Rose Guthrie and I'm going to turn it over to her. Can you introduce yourself and tell us your date of birth?

00:00:21

Emma Rose Guthrie: Yes, I am Emma Rose Guthrie. And I was born March 21, 1933 right here on the island, farther down to the other end of the island where Barber's Harbor is today.

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KM: And—and what side of the island is that?

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ERG: It's on the right hand side going down.

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KM: Is that called the easter'd side?

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ERG: That's called the easter'd.

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KM: And how is the island broken up?

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ERG: The island is broken up by the eastar'd, the middle is the mid—the center of the island we call the middle of the island, and then the other end we call the westar'd end, which is better known as Red Hill.

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And our end was known as Chinatown.

00:01:02

KM: [*Laughs*]

00:01:02

ERG: They called that—that's what they called us down there. [*Laughs*]

00:01:06

KM: Now tell me about your mother and father and how many brothers and sisters you have.

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ERG: Oh my daddy was Leslie Rose and my mama was Kristine Willis. My daddy's family came from Cape Lookout, that's where they were born and raised, Cape Lookout. My mama's family was the Willis(es) and they came from the Shackleford, right—right across from where I'm sitting now. And I had—I do have some famous people in my family because my mother's grandfather was the famous Joe Cephas Willis and he's my great-great grandfather. And I take care of his son's grave even to this day and he's buried down there in the old cemetery. So I take care of that.

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But anyway, mama and daddy got married. Daddy—mama was fifteen, daddy was eighteen. And they have fourteen children. The first little girl died at two. She got a—a—some kind of diphtheria or something that went around and—and she died at two. And there's four of the girls that's gone onto heaven. There's ten of us left now, five boys and five girls. And had most of the girls first, had seven girls before we ever had a boy and then we had Buddy. That was the oldest boy. He's named after—after daddy but we call him Buddy. And after—after Buddy we got Helen, the one sitting here with me. And she was the only one born in a hospital. And the rest of us was born home down on the shore. But I had a great mama and daddy. They—they taught us great and—and they never had any problems with us. We've always been a very, very close knit family until this day. We still have our Christmases, we have our birthdays, we—and we're always—most of us live on the island now and we all get together.

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KM: Sure.

00:02:58

ERG: My brother lives down at Bayview and he's got a harbor down there and a marina and all that so that's our gathering place mostly.

00:03:06

KM: So tell us about your—your dad was—what was his profession?

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ERG: My daddy was naturally a boat-builder. My—my—the Rose family were the famous Rose Brothers, boat-builders and where my grandmama's house was at down on the shore where I was born they—later they gave it to some of the boys to build the boat house and

Earl was mostly the one because he worked at the shipyard in Norfolk and when he come back they wanted the boat house. And so my grandmama gave them the old home place and my grandmama moved in with my—my family then, we had moved away farther up on the island you know.

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But anyway they were great boat-builders. I mean they were famous all over the world.

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KM: And did you—did you—you were a commercial fisherwoman as well?

00:03:58

ERG: I was a—after I got my—well I was with my daddy because he said every time he went down to get in the boat—we lived right on the shore and of course then you had to anchor the boat farther off the bigger boat like the one I showed you, the model I have of it. And but you had—we called it a skiff, a smaller skiff that daddy kept—kept down to the—we called it the landing. But every time he went down there [*Laughs*] I was sitting there waiting for him even when I was a little toddler. He said, “I can’t get rid of you.”

00:04:26

But I was the one that always helped him because we didn’t have the boys then. Now we got the girls come first and I was one of the oldest girls. So I always helped him, I would help him paint his boats and we had a-railways—we called it down at the landing that belonged to my uncle. And daddy would put his boat up and I would have to help him and—anyway I always helped him. And when daddy would come in from floundering, we lived down that way, the fish house was right down from—right down the shore from where—from where I’m sitting now. And I would take the boat—he would come home like in the middle of the night, sometimes

before day and he would go onto bed and I'd get up that morning and I mean just a little girl, I'd take that boat and I'd go to that fish house and I'd sell those flounders for him so he could sleep.

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KM: Wow.

00:05:13

ERG: And then I'd take the boat on that side and learned how to run a boat and all that stuff early in life.

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KM: And you loved—you loved it?

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ERG: I loved every minute and I still do. I was supposed to go today but I had this interview with you and I didn't go. I'm going tomorrow though.

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KM: So tell me, you grew up clamming and—and what—?

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ERG: We—we clammed, we oystered, we scalloped and me and my husband have flounder nets that we would set the flounder nets—. Now my daddy giggered them and he used to let me go with him when I was a little girl every night and mama would give me an old quilt because the gnats would eat us up.

00:05:51

And but he would let me go. Out of the fourteen even when the boys come along I was the one that loved the water the most and—and my brother, Manley, the one I told you got wounded in Vietnam, he—he loved the water and 'til this day me and him have just liked that.

But anyway I come from a good family and then later on I got married and grew up and got married. And some of the girls, they married—some of us married servicemen. My husband was army. Helen's was navy and I had a sister that married a marine. And I had one in the coast guard, so we had all the branches of the service at the same time. And some of them—Helen went to Spain. One of the—we had one set of twins, Pearl—Pearl, she went to Bermuda, one of the twin girls, and any—anyway we were scattered everywhere.

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But we all got married and raised the boys, helped raise the boys. [*Laughs*] I said I had the smartest mother on earth. She had these girls first to help her raise her boys—youngins but my mother was as clean as a pin.

00:07:04

KM: Oh my.

00:07:05

ERG: You never went in our house that it was messed up. Beds had to be fixed every morning. Some people lived—beds—especially when you got a houseful of youngings, no, sir, those beds had to be fixed just right. Every morning like you got to throw them black-eyed peas in that pot, I guess I got that from her. She—

00:07:23

KM: Was she a good cook?

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ERG: My mother was a great cook.

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KM: Tell me about some of her—the favorite things that she cooked for you.

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ERG: Well my mother—well we always had seafood. And I—they said that one time—sometimes when things would get bad and slack on the island we never lacked for food because we just walked right down to the shore and picked up the oysters, the scallops, the clams, soft crabs. You could pick up an old rusty can and there'd be a soft crab in it. And—and of course my grandmama, she always lived with us. I slept with my grandmama 'til I got married. She was my heart.

00:08:00

But anyway we—we had all the food we wanted and my grandmom always had the garden. She made yaupon tea. My daddy—and she made soap, homemade soap, lye soap that we washed the clothes in. We're talking way back—way back now.

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KM: What was in the garden that your grandmother grew?

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ERG: Oh she had onions and potatoes and cucumbers and watermelon. She grew watermelon—they grew watermelons to the Cape believe it or not but they had gardens over there, so of course they come from there—over that way.

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Had ducks, chickens, and my daddy raised—got a newborn pig, a baby pig. I don't know what you call it but I call it a baby pig. *[Laughs]* He got one every spring and he—he raised that pig and then in the winter around Christmas time when it started getting colder—now daddy wouldn't kill the pig but he'd get his brother to do it. *[Laughs]* His brother would cut it up and dress it and then he'd share it with him you know.

00:09:04

KM: Uh-hm.

00:09:05

ERG: But I remember one time we had one and I had got attached to it. I had named it Sook and I come from school one day [*Laughs*] and run to the pen and Sook wasn't in there. And when I went in the house we called it a dresser but it was a cabinet with a hand pump. There was Sook split open with no hair [*Laughs*], no nothing, just pig skin. [*Laughs*]

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KM: And that was your pet.

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ERG: That was my pet. Of course I cried and said, "Daddy you killed Sook." He said, "Em—" my name is Emma but they always called me Em—he said, "But Em, you know you shouldn't have got attached to the pig because you know in the winter we eat the pig." [*Laughs*] I'll tell you, I might have eat some of the rest of them but I could not eat Sook, uh-um no way. And they used every part of that pig—nothing was wasted. That's what the soap come out of was that pig. My grandmama made lard and chitterlings and all this other stuff you know. But—but it was a good life.

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KM: Sure, well who taught you how to cook?

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ERG: Who taught me? [*Laughs*] I had to learn how to cook. Believe you me, when my mama had a baby she went to bed and stayed ten days. She didn't get up for ten days. And my older sister, I told you had died, and the twins, they went to work very early to the shirt factory

we had in Moorhead. Well I was next in line. Not only did I help daddy I had to help ma. We called her ma, I called her ma and my grandmama was Oma. That was our name for her.

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But anyway I learned how to cook very early in life. I was making like bread biscuits and stuff like that when I was ten, twelve years old.

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KM: Talk to me about light rolls because this is a very Harkers Island—

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ERG: I can give you a recipe if you want one. I got some in the kitchen. But yeah, we had to have our light rolls. We had light rolls for we called it breakfast and we called the evening meal supper. Now in the middle of the day we called it dinner or everybody else called it lunch or whatever you want to call it.

00:11:05

But we had our light rolls every morning and we'd come to school with us. I'd put a many one in the pan, twenty-five, thirty, forty at a time. We had twenty-five pound of flour in our house a week. I'm not talking a month—a week, we had twenty-five pound of flour.

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And—and out of the big bag the twenty-five pound bag—the twenty pound bag they had it in the pretty material cloth. By then I was sewing. I was sewing when she was born. And not—not when she was born, when Connie was born, the baby girl, and I used to make Connie little dresses out of those flour sacks. One she was a little toddler, one would make her a little dress. So I was excited, every week I got that piece of material to make Connie a dress.

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And I tell her now you better appreciate me girl. I made you dresses. But anyway it was—

00:12:01

KM: Can you talk to me about—can you talk to me about the process of—of making light rolls?

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ERG: Yes, well you put your—I got a recipe in there but I—for us we just done it—we had done it so much. You just pour your plain flour in—in your pan. We had aluminum pans that we could cook—done ours in. And you had your yeast and you had to put your yeast in a little bit of water for to kind of dissolve and swell up a little bit, salt, pepper, and that was about it. Not pepper, I said I put pepper in it? No, just salt and now in the—that made the dinner rolls. You had to make it and you had to let it sit for a while and rise and then you had to beat it to death [*Laughs*] and let it fall and then you had to let it rise again and then you made your light rolls. And it—in a few hours they were ready to eat.

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Like I used to come in when I was older, dating, and I said, “Mama, do you always have to give me the job to put the light rolls in the pan before we go to bed?” But when I would come in every night I’d—I’d fill that big pan, sometimes two, because we had to come to school with us too. I weren’t they good, though. But we’d come to school and we’d have sometimes white potatoes, fried, mama would get up and fry potatoes, Oma, and sometimes sweet potatoes, sometimes egg, whatever we had at the time to go on.

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But mine must have been good because there was a boy in my class that stole mine just about every day. *[Laughs]* So I tell you what, his name was Henry. And I said, “Henry now you—you’re starving me to death.” Now I’m a little runt. I was the runt of the family anyway. I said I’m a little runt but I still get hungry. So I told mama, “You just put an extra biscuit in there for Henry ‘cause I got to have some lunch.” *[Laughs]* I can’t stand that—we had to walk to school. You know in the middle of the island the old schoolhouse was.

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But anyway that’s the way it was.

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KM: Very cool. Somebody was telling me that they could taste somebody’s light rolls and know who made them.

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ERG: Know who made them—who made them, yeah. Now I could make them. Now my Aunt Janie, she could make the best I ever ate in my life. Now Aunt Janie had a smaller family so she didn’t have to crowd them in the pan like we did. So she maybe took four or five, six in a pan but we had to put a dozen or more. You know when there are fourteen of you, you have to have two or three dozen to tell you the truth. But Aunt Janie—there’s something about hers, they had these blisters I called it *[Laughs]* on the top of them and we used to take them for dinner. We used to take them and put collards between those biscuits. You never ate nothing no better.

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You’d be down there in the scallop house opening scallops. We had a scallop house right down by us—right by the boat house. And of course we’d catch the scallops. The men would

catch them. I would catch them. Now most of the women didn't go catch them scallops like I did. I'd catch—daddy—and I helped Garland [Emma's husband]. But this was before I got married. But we'd catch the scallops and—and my Aunt Janie would say, "Girls—" when it come lunchtime she'd say—she lived right out from the scallop house—she'd say, "I got us a lot of light bread biscuits already cooked and a big pot of collards." And she'd go—she'd go to the house and while she was gone we would fill her container up with the scallops—we kept the hearts. You know we opened—we just kept the heart of the scallop. So she wouldn't be losing nothing while she went to the house and fixed us some collard biscuits, sometimes potato biscuits, sometimes collard biscuits and a—anyway.

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KM: Yum, that sounds good.

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ERG: And a couple of the big containers of homemade iced tea. Oh that was good.

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KM: What do you say your favorite thing to eat is?

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ERG: Right now? Oysters.

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KM: Oysters?

00:15:50

ERG: Oh I love oysters. I love oysters. If you could see the film of us Christmas when we went to Shackleford, my family, there were four boatloads of us that went over there on Christmas. And oystering season had opened. You can't—out of season you can't get them 'cause

they won't let you now but it was—they were in season. That was this past Christmas. Do you remember how pretty and warm it was Christmas? Well we got in those four boats [*Laughs*] and we went to Shackleford and we cooked four bushels. Oysters was right there and they were beautiful. They were—in the winter they're—oh they're so good over there.

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And right where I used to have my cabin before it got burned down—

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KM: So you—you all go to Shackleford for family gatherings?

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ERG: Yeah, I had a house over there for twenty-seven years.

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KM: You did?

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ERG: And when the park service took it over and—we—we had to get rid of it.

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KM: Right.

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ERG: But I'll tell you what. If I'd had a choice between that one or this one, I would have took that one any time.

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KM: What was so special about it?

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ERG: That was—that was a very sad day. Well me and my husband, we worked over there. I mean that—that was our livelihood too because the children were all grown, the grandchildren. So me and him, we had that little cabin over there and we would set our flounder nets. We had 500 yards of flounder net and we'd set the flounder nets and we'd go oystering and we'd go scalloping, clamming, and that was our livelihood.

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And then they—the house got burned down and—they ended that.

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KM: That was when the park services took over and they told people they had to get off the lands?

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ERG: That—that was in January of '87 [1987], yeah.

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KM: And then they burned all the existing houses?

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ERG: Uh-hm, yeah.

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KM: That's so sad.

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ERG: That was the saddest day of my life. I come—was coming from Beaufort and when I got on the north—I had heard they were going to do it you know in that January. And I—this was '87 [1987]. I believe I just said that. Anyways in '87 and I was coming from town,

Beaufort, we called it town, and when I got on North River Bridge you could see the—the banks, the Shackleford and the island when you come across that bridge. And I saw five big bonfires over there and I just pulled that car off the road. I said, “Dear God please don’t let that be my house.”

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And I come on home. I went right on down to the landing where I told you we still got the old home place right down there. When I went down there and it was right across from that—it was a burning then and I got some pictures of it burning. I think that was one of the saddest days of my life.

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KM: Sure, sure.

00:18:22

ERG: And my oldest grandson [*Laughs*] he come out with the world, and now he loved it over there and he—they had—him and Landen, my other grandson they had little four-wheelers over there and I’ll tell you. We couldn’t get Alan out of the bed for about a week. That younging it just made him heart sick ‘cause we stayed over there all summer anyway. Me and Garland you know we worked over there you know.

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But—but Garland had started getting sick by then ‘cause he was sick twenty-three years before he died.

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KM: Sure.

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ERG: You know. I told her, I was—I was a captain. I had my license just like he did. And we'd go out in the boat and I'd work just like he did.

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KM: Now with being a commercial fisherwoman were there many women working in the fishing?

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ERG: Some of the women they mostly done the scallop houses. Now I know one or two would go with their husbands. But I went with Garland more than anything else because he was sick. And I—I would—I was—he worked on trawlers for a while. When he was on them big trawlers I didn't go with him. You saw a picture of him on the trawler. But after the trawler and we kept—we always had a boat. Our—our boat with the little cabin on it but then I named it the Sow Dug

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But anyway we had a lot of fun in the Sow Dug and of course we had smaller boats for whatever you wanted to do. You had a boat for everything you had to do.

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KM: Sure.

00:19:46

ERG: But that—I don't know—I could shoot a gun just as good as he could. [*Laughs*] I shot them ducks. I'll tell you that.

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KM: [*Laughs*]

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ERG: And then loons but the law stopped us in the—shooting the loons. We couldn't shoot them anymore. But that—but we never killed nothing that we didn't eat 'cause we ate those ducks. Now I cooked the loons. I never liked loons. I cooked the conchs like I'm going to do tomorrow. But I don't like it. But my grandson Alan I'll stew some. We call it make a stew and I'll—and I'll—

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KM: Of the conch?

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ERG: Out of the conch and—and after I get it all tenderized I'll make—he likes—we call it—we call it flitters but everybody else calls it fritters I reckon. But Harkers Island style we'll make some flitters out of them. But he loves it. He carries them to work with him. He works at Cherry Point. He carries them to work with him.

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KM: That's wonderful.

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ERG: But I got great-grandchildren, but I take care of myself since my husband—my husband has been dead five years in May and I took care of him twenty-three years. I can't say that without a—but anyway he was very, very sick and finally the cancer got him the last—the last year.

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KM: You two were married since you were fifteen?

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ERG: We were—no, I was eighteen. He was twenty. Mama was fifteen. But—but we went through this War and he came home, shell shocked. We called it shell shocked. Now they call it PSD [referring to PTSD] or something like that. But you couldn't get benefits then like you do now. When he was in the Army I got \$80 a month. He got \$120, that's what we lived off of. After Cindy came I got—I got \$120 then but he would send me some of his because he—he said he did not have it 'cause where he was at everything was free you know—bed and boarding and food and all that.

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But we made it through it but he—he come back in bad shape that boy did. Tried to get help, we didn't know nothing about—about the VA [Veterans Administration] like they do now. Now we did in later years, yeah after he—after we started taking him to the hospital and to the VA so much they started giving us \$250 a month at first and then it had gone up to when he died to \$800 a month—\$800 was his—I mean \$400 was his and \$400 was mine for taking care of him.

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But when he died then they took it all away. But that's another story.

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KM: Well talk to me, you had mentioned something before if—if you've got hands and you're from Harkers Island what does the saying go, you can—?

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ERG: You can make anything. My grandson Alan the one I'm talking about that younging can make anything that you put in his hand.

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KM: And you think that's a Harkers Island trait?

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ERG: It's a Harkers Island trait, yeah. He's one of the top ones in his shop with his hands of things he makes.

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KM: Just in the blood.

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ERG: It's in the blood. Yeah, the reason they had to move from Shackleford not only did the storms bring them over, there was no trees left because they had made their homes, their furniture, they have a Methodist church over there—their boats, everything they made they'd go cut down a tree and make it. So the land was very barren over there when they had to leave.

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I want to say 1985 they had the storm and they started coming over. And then the year I was born we was already on the island then in '33 [1933]. That real bad storm we had, some people on the island called it the September Storm, some called it the '33 Storm 'cause they didn't name them then. And that was a bad one. That was when it cut the—that's when it separated the cut—the Cape from Shackleford and cut that drain through there.

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KM: Sure. And what was the island like back then? I mean it's very different than it was now.

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ERG: When—when I was small there was no—even where I—where I'm at nobody lived here. Everybody lived on the waterfront. We didn't have a bridge. We—we'd sit on—if we went—wherever we went we did went in a boat. We always had a boat at the landing and jump in the boat and go anywhere you wanted.

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But I remember when—when we got our first bridge. I want to say 1941 when we got our first bridge and—but I remember getting on that little ferry boat we had [*Laughs*] that went—it goes across where she lives now—at Gloucester. But anyway it was right up the road here on this side of the island where the—where it went across. And I remember when I was maybe about six—five or six, somewhere along in there and I got sick, and we usually were in the boat and my uncle he was in World War II and he got one of the first cars that was on the island after we got the bridge. And he lived right beside us.

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So he was going to take me to the doctor in the car. And I remember it only took I believe—I'm almost sure it only carried maybe six or seven cars because I remember right now it wasn't very many on there and ours was the last one on the end and they just had a chain across there. And I was terrified. I remember crying and crying and crying 'cause I was so scared on that ferry boat.

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And I wouldn't come back on it. I had to—so somebody would—from the island who was on the waterfront in Beaufort and would come back—whoever's boat that was we'd come

back in the boat. Mama wouldn't carry me back on that ferry no more. But uh—but it was still the good ole days and we had a lot of fun, we entertained ourselves when we were young and—

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KM: How so?

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ERG: Well the westar'd boys would come down to the Chinatown, eastar'd, the Red Hill in Chinatown. The westar'd boys would come down and want to date the eastar'd girls. So we would put on a show for them 'cause the boat house was there. We had plenty of lumber. We had anything we wanted. And the houses in the—where I lived was like in a circle. And then it was water and the boat house. And we had a hand pump. We'd go swimming and come—rinse off under that hand pump, drink water out of it, whatever going to it, but every night we did—we'd go to the boat house which was right there and we'd build our big bonfire and we would sing and we would act and you know how young people are.

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And but we had a lot of fun. And of course our eastar'd boys would go to the westar'd—after the westar'd girls. So but I married one right in the center of the island. Now his grandmama [*beeping in background*] was—was—that was my grandson Alan that I was talking about. He's on night shift. That's the reason he's there and he's the one that carries me anywhere I want to go. When I ask him to do anything like that new screen put in that door and he put that guardrail because youngings pushes their hand on it and pushes it out. I could call him right now—this is Cherry Point or wherever he's at and I call him Aly and I say, "Aly, Nana needs this done or that done," 'cause he knows I'm very independent. It's out of my reach if I can't do it. I'll tell you that. And I say, "Aly I need this done." You know what he says? "Nana you're the

first one on my list.” He always says he has a list of the things that has to be done and if he’s coming from Cherry Point he stops and he does it. If he’s home I don’t care what he’s doing, he throws it down and he comes and does it. And he throws a fit when I cut grass.

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He wanted to sell my John Deere. I got it back down at the shop. He said, “Nana don’t you think you’re too old to be cutting grass?” I said, “Aly I love to cut my grass.” If you come Monday you’re going to see me on that at eight o’clock. I wait ‘til the neighbors get up. I don’t want to wake them up ‘cause I get up at 5:00. But I wait—I’ll wait ‘til around 8:00 to start cutting my grass.

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KM: I find that the Harkers Islanders y’all are just full of energy. I just—y’all don’t stop.

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ERG: I know. I got so much I don’t know what to do with it sometimes. And I’m eighty-three years old.

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KM: [*Laughs*]

00:27:37

ERG: I don’t know where I got it from. Now my mama said I was a wild one. [*Laughs*] She used to say, “Now Em I don’t never know where you’re at. You’re up a tree, you’re on a bicycle. You’re—you’re in the sound,”—water, we called it the sound. And but I—I was—but I was the one helping her most too.

00:27:58

KM: Well tell me—tell me what—what makes this place so special to you and—and being an islander. I mean—

00:28:04

ERG: This—this place is special. We—everybody on this island—local people and we do treat everybody good. We might call you a dingbat but you're treated good when you come on the island. And I don't love to call anybody a dingbat, I really don't. I'll say people from off the island, I really don't love to say the word dingbat. But we are a very, very close knit family and if anybody gets sick or—or anybody dies the whole island people just flock right there with them and help them anyway they can and—oh they don't have to cook for a month. *[Laughs]* We cook so much food here up on the island, they carry so much food they don't know what to do with it.

00:28:42

I know when Garland died I didn't know what—I really invited the whole island to come here and eat there was so much food. My Alan and my other grandsons, they set up tables all over the backyard.

00:28:56

KM: Hmm.

00:28:57

ERG: And when my husband died, he died in the VA but—but I told them, I said, “I—I want him to—I want to have everything at my house. And I want to do it myself, my way.” Now we had plenty of insurance. I could have buried him anyway we wanted to and—and I did bury him good you know what I mean.

00:29:12

I said but Garland was always sick. He—he didn't go to church unless the youngings was in something when they was little. And he really couldn't even get out of the bed. But we—we'd—going back to—the people just rallied around me and—and—and oh, I requested no flowers—didn't want no flowers. I didn't want none. I've got a request I don't want none. I got the most flowers and—and I'll tell you one thing. The Munden man enjoyed it so much, he enjoyed me if you want to call enjoying being dead at the time, but the year after Garland died, I got the sweetest card from him. He had got married. He told me he was going to get married and—and move away. He moved up to Raleigh somewhere up by I believe he said he came to Raleigh.

00:29:58

But anyway, that year later I got a card from him and I thought—whenever anybody died, a year later, you got a card from them until I found out that they didn't. But he had wrote me the nicest card and told me, he said, “Miss Emma I want to tell you something.” He said, “You was one of the nicest women I've ever met in my life when your husband died.” He said, “And you just took charge. I barely had to do anything. You—I let you do it your way and you done it your way.” He said, “But you are a very unique person.”

00:30:32

KM: Where does this fortitude come from? I feel like there's just—I mean life is life and you've endured struggles and tribulations? But somehow you just—

00:30:42

ERG: I have—I have always been an energetic high-spirited person. I—the preacher told me the other day he said, “Sometimes I know your heart is breaking but when you walk in that

door you have that smile on your face. You always—you never let anybody know you're hurting inside," you know and I've had things. Like I said, I took care of Garland twenty-three years. I helped take care of my sisters when they were dying. Always took care of mama and daddy but they were—thank God they only lived three days, each one of them before they died, they just went right on 'til they died.

00:31:15

KM: And how important is your faith to you?

00:31:18

ERG: My faith oh my faith is my life. I've—I've been to church all my life. I went to the Methodist church. We didn't have this Baptist church then. I went to the Methodist church mostly with my grandmama and I wrote about it and it's in the Methodist church book because when they done the book they wanted me to write something about it—how I grew up when I was small in the church.

00:31:41

And—and—and I named it the—the Half a Dozen Roses.

00:31:46

KM: What did you write about?

00:31:47

ERG: 'Cause my grandmama—then you didn't have cars and things to go to church—and the closest church was the Methodist church. The Methodist church is the oldest church on the island. And part of that come from Shackleford. They took it apart and put it there. And—and believe you me, I still love that Methodist church. That's still in my heart—although the Baptist church and I love our little Baptist church.

00:32:08

But my grandmama would get up on Sunday morning and we didn't have the youngest—now it was the old—older children. There was the twins, my sister Fannie, me, and I was the youngest that went. I was—I believe I was six, five or six then. And she'd stop to her other son's house and got my cousin Leda from one and Ruth—not Ruth—Florence from another one and she—and we was called Half a Dozen Roses anyway.

00:32:40

She—we'd—we'd walk up that road to go to Sunday school. Now she came—she carried us to church. But one day she said—she said we—I got a special treat for you today, all of you. And I—of course I was always full of curiosity. I couldn't hardly—I would hop and skip and run down the road and rest of them—walking right by but I was all over the highway. But probably the shell road then, but anyway we got up there to the church and after we got up there the surprise was that we were going to—they don't baptize you in the Methodist church unless you want to be. If you want to be—but they—we were going to be sprinkled that day, all of us.

00:33:21

And I was terrified. I didn't know what—what it was. And she said, “Now Emma there ain't nothing to be afraid of. We're—we're just going to put some—sprinkle some water, the pastor will.” His name was Pastor Johnson. But anyway we—we went in there and I was—I was clinging on my grandmama by then. We went—all went up front and he did the twins. The twins were the oldest and then he—he did Leda and Florence, and Fannie—and we were all just two, three, four years apart you know. But I was the youngest.

00:33:51

But I done it. [*Laughs*] I got baptized—I got sprinkled in that church but I—I loved that church and of course I wrote about it—that was what I wrote about when I went up there as a child and like that.

00:34:02

But after I got married and I lived down on the waterfront, the same old house that's down there now, and Garland had to go on in the army, we wouldn't be married five months when he had to go in the Army, and there was some ladies from Davis. We called it Davis's Shore is what we called it but it's Davis. And they came on the island taking a census. Our-t-here was four churches on the island—I think eight now, but ours was fifth when we got it. But anyway they came on the island and they came down to the house. They went to everybody's house checking to see who would—would you be interested in it. And I—I was pregnant with Cindy then.

00:34:44

And I—I said—they wanted to know would—would we—if they built the little church would we think about going? And Garland's daddy, he wasn't a Christian then, now his mother was. She was a holiness Christian and she—she would go to church every Sunday. But he didn't, his daddy didn't. He—he got saved later. But anyway I said, “Well yeah, you know I'll try it. I—you know I won't make no promises but I will.”

00:35:12

So when Cindy was—Cindy was born the first day of August and on the third day they—they bought this same house [*points to Baptist church across the street*], although they've had it remodeled now, but—and they started having little Sunday schools in it and instead of me taking

that baby and walking up—way up the road to the Methodist church I would just walk from the shore and I took that little baby and we'd walk out here to this little church.

00:35:38

KM: This one?

00:35:39

ERG: Yeah, the little house. It was a house then. Immediately they started building the church. It was two or three years later before we got it finished, the church. But I said I was there before the church was and I'm still there. And I'm the oldest member of the church. But uh, anyway, I love my little Baptist church and I'm the historian over there. Whenever we get something new done I—I put it in our journal you know.

00:36:03

KM: And you love—?

00:36:05

ERG: Oh I got saved—in that house when I was nineteen years old. Cindy was—Cindy was I believe she was about maybe six months old when I got saved in that—like I say he [Garland] was in Korea on that battlefield and I was lonely. She was a sickly baby, had her back and forth to the doctor's, finally wound up—we heard of Wilmington and a Dr. Seabury's then—you didn't have these fancy hospitals. I had to take her all the way to Wilmington and had to leave her up there two weeks. But I just felt like my world was crushing down. And I'd take her though when she was well enough—I'd take her and we'd go to Sunday school.

00:36:45

And our first revival we had in that church was in February and me and my cousin, his name was Haltzy Paul but we always called him Finn Boy. Now that's one of the Harkers Island

names. Anyway he was standing beside me and we had been through that revival that whole week and that whole week I really wanted to go up there to that altar but I didn't do it. And that very—and I can't say this without tears coming in my eyes—that very last night it was on a Friday night, he was standing next to the end on the pew and I was next to him. And I told him, I said, “Finn Boy I'm getting older. I want to give my heart to Jesus.” And he's had my heart ever since.

00:37:30

And I'm singing in the choir all these years. Me and Helen, we got a rose quartet. We're still singing.

00:37:34

KM: You do?

00:37:36

ERG: Yeah, me, her, and we're all roses—me, her, and our cousin plays the guitar for us, Mike and another cousin Billy.

00:37:47

KM: Uh-hm.

00:37:47

ERG: And—and Mike's wife sings with us. She's a Rose through marriage.

00:37:53

KM: You've been doing that for a long time? [since 1971]

00:37:54

ERG: We've been doing it year a long, long time. Yeah, but we're getting older now and it's not easy but we're learning a new song for Mother's Day that we're going to sing Mother's Day.

00:38:05

KM: Beautiful.

00:38:07

ERG: And—

00:38:08

KM: Now tell me, you were—you had a life as a commercial fisherwoman and then now you also were a cook in a restaurant. Which restaurant?

00:38:16

ERG: Yeah, well Mila's up there. Seaside when you first come on the island—

00:38:20

KM: And is that the only island-owned restaurant on the island now?

00:38:24

ERG: Yeah, they're all gone. They had them—they had—they had four or five on here and they're all gone. We had one down at Shell Point right on the very end but we—really the fish houses are gone and the restaurants are gone and the—

00:38:36

KM: Were the fish houses supplying the restaurants back then?

00:38:39

ERG: Yeah, yeah with fresh seafood, yeah.

00:38:42

KM: Uh-hm and so the—the decline of the fishing industry and the regulations kind of shut those down which kind of shut the restaurants down?

00:38:49

ERG: Yeah, we got Seaside, Fish Hook, and—and the one to the other—when you come in on the island.

00:38:57

KM: So you were working at Seaside?

00:38:58

ERG: I worked at—well the red tide come and we couldn't work in the water and Garland was sick—even then I was running back and forth to Durham with him then. And the—but I carried him a many a time. Now I'd run that boat myself and he had a stroke one time and I'd take him and I'd go out there oystering and clamming. I can't say this without filling up, but anyway he had—had a major stroke. And I—I would take the boat, we had it right down. We hauled it to the landing and we'd go over to Shackleford and I would go clamming and I'd have him in that boat with a big umbrella over him and a lounge chair and his hearing wasn't very good. He—he lost it on one side when he was in the Service and he—he—but he would just lay there and sleep 'til I'd get through and get back in the boat and come on back home.

00:39:46

KM: Hmm.

00:39:47

ERG: But I—I do have a horrible story. I won't go into it now—but something happened to him one time when me and him was over there. He went adrift in the boat—

00:39:56

KM: Oh goodness.

00:39:57

ERG: I'll give you a little history of it. I—the anchor wasn't tied on—it was tied to the—the line was tied to the anchor but it wasn't tied to the boat.

00:40:08

KM: Oh gracious.

00:40:08

ERG: Threw the anchor over, I thought it was tied to the boat. Well he was asleep. He always slept and he was always sickly and asleep—under the big umbrella. And I got out and went out on the oyster rock. Well the boat was like in—we call it a slew where the deeper water was at. The tide was going out because we'd get the oysters when the tide went out. You'd just get out and walk right on the shoal and pick up the oysters you know.

00:40:35

And I had my bucket and I was a nubbing them off and I had about a half bucket when I happened to raise my head and there was not a soul over there that day but me and him. Any other time there'd have been a lot of boats. And I looked and that boat was adrift. Well I don't know how—how many feet you can call it—as far as from here to the bank and back, way, way down there where that banks at. We called that the bank on the other side of that trailer.

00:41:04

And I said, "My land there he goes," and that—when that tide starts going now that goes fast. And we have our jogging pants on. And I had got them wet and got running trying to get—they had got so wet they were about to fall off of me. But trying to catch him and then hollering but he couldn't hear me. I always kept a pocket knife. If you're a fisherman you have a pocket

knife in your pocket. I stopped [*Laughs*] long enough—I did have on a pair of tennis shoes where I didn't get my feet cut.

00:41:32

I stopped long enough to get that pocketknife out and I cut the legs off of them jogging pants 'cause it was the fifteenth of October because it was the first day of oystering. I remember that. It still does open on the fifteenth of October. I couldn't run with the wet jogging pants on. And I went—but I knew up ahead there was two little marshes that—that boat had to go through. And I was in my grandson's boat that day, Alan's and it was a nice boat. All you had to do with that one is push the button and drive it just like a car.

00:42:04

You know but anyway, I said, "Lord if you will just let that boat bump against them marshes 'til I get there,"—I was catching up with it all the time 'cause I was running fast [*Laughs*] through the mud, the rocks, the marshes and everything. But I thought—and it did it, of course it was just a little place it had to go through. But it did it, it stopped the boat 'til I got in there.

00:42:29

He was still laying there asleep—never budged. And I always called him G. And I said, "G." I reached over and shook him. "Did you know you went adrift?" He said, "No. Did I?" [*Laughs*] And I—I got in though and turned the boat around and pulled her out and got her turned around and got back in and she started right up and went right on back. And luckily I found the anchor because the line was a floating. It was still tied to the anchor so I got the anchor back.

00:42:57

And there's another story to that but I know you ain't got time to listen at it. That wasn't the end of that story.

00:43:03

KM: Oh my. But it's amazing that you knew—you—I mean you know the water and the area like the back of your hand.

00:43:08

ERG: Oh—oh I—

00:43:09

KM: To know that there was marshes there.

00:43:10

ERG: —I'll tell you what. There's been people over there at nights they couldn't find them and they'd come get me to go with them. I knew every—every little crick and turn over that way.

00:43:18

KM: Just 'cause going on the water with your dad and—?

00:43:20

ERG: All—all my life, yeah.

00:43:21

KM: Hmm, wonderful.

00:43:25

ERG: Of course there's a terrible thing happened after that—that same day.

00:43:28

KM: Okay, I'm going to—

00:43:29

ERG: My daddy used to tell us do never depend on nobody to take care of you. You take care of yourself.

00:43:37

KM: So and a lot of people on the island call you Emmer, huh?

00:43:40

ERG: Emmer. Emmer, my name is Emma but they call me Emmer. My family and my friends call me Em.

00:43:47

KM: Okay, okay.

00:43:49

ERG: Are we going now?

00:43:50

KM: We're going now. I—I don't think we said where we were sitting before and I'd like you to tell us where we're sitting?

00:43:55

ERG: We're sitting on the pizer, on Emmer's pizer.

00:44:00

KM: Beautiful. And who just got here?

00:44:03

ERG: That's my oldest sister Pearl.

00:44:06

KM: Okay.

00:44:08

ERG: She's about four years older than I am and—I love my Pearl, we look alike as you can see.

00:44:13

KM: You do.

00:44:14

ERG: We all look alike. We got that rose look.

00:44:17

Helen Rose (ERG's sister): And Pearl you came just in time—

00:44:18

KM: Yeah, so we were just talking about life on the island. So was—Pearl was cooking and taking care of you before you—?

00:44:24

ERG: No, I always took care of Pearl. [*Laughs*] Pearl didn't cook. I cooked. I told you she was one of them that went to the shirt factory.

00:44:32

KM: Oh okay.

00:44:33

ERG: She—she—her and—and the other twin they went clamming with daddy and—and then later they opened up a shirt factory to Morehead and there's a bus on the island that would come pick them up—everybody on the island that wanted to go to you know and—and

they went very young—I reckon about sixteen wouldn't you Pearl? They went real young. Anyway to the shirt factory and—and I was still with daddy on the boat and I was still with mama. But Pearl got married first. She married a boy that—in the navy—coast guard. And she was the one that went to Bermuda—I told you one of them went to Bermuda and but we always took care of mama and daddy 'til they died, all of us. That finally after all the years they were going—between fifteen and twenty years they all come back home.

00:45:22

Now I never left. I didn't have an opportunity—

00:45:25

KM: You stayed here the whole time.

00:45:26

ERG: I stayed here the whole time but I wouldn't leave no way. I mean Garland could have gone to Timbuktu which he did but I could never leave this island.

00:45:34

KM: Why not?

00:45:34

ERG: I got—I got to smell that salt air. I got to have my feet in that saltwater. *[Laughs]* I got—I got sick on Portsmouth Island one time. My gallbladder busted on Portsmouth Island now. And they had to call a—a helicopter to come pick me up to carry me to Norfolk. But I was unconscious because I told them that if I hadn't have been I'd tore that helicopter up—if I'd have come to on that thing. But anyway and I stayed there a long time. I had to have surgery and all that stuff.

00:46:04

But—but anyway.

00:46:06

KM: But you—you need to be by the water huh?

00:46:08

ERG: I got—I'll tell you what happened. We were at Portsmouth Island so I had saltwater on me 'cause they carried me right on. I didn't come to 'til four days later before I knew anything. And the first thing I asked them was, "Did you wash that saltwater off of me?" [Laughs] That nurse—I thought she would die laughing when I said—when she asked me, she said, "You—you finally got awake. Do you know where you're at and everything?" I said, "Yeah," I said, "I'm on Portsmouth Island." And she said, "No, you're not on Portsmouth Island. You're to Norfolk." So I said, "How did I get to Norfolk?" She said, "Well you got sick and they had to bring you here to the hospital."

00:46:45

And I said, "Did you wash that saltwater off of me?" [Laughs] But—I mean you can look at my skin to tell how many years I had in the sun. I wouldn't change it. I wouldn't change it this day for a million dollars. I had a good life, happy life, never was rich, never wanted to be rich and then Garland used to make very good money especially in the summer when we went channel netting and shrimping. And honey I'd slap it in that bank. I could have gone and got me a brand new car. I could have gone and bought—got new furniture. I didn't want it. I got just as good as I want.

00:47:23

KM: And you've always had everything you needed?

00:47:24

ERG: Always had everything I needed, three meals a day, always had a good little home, a good place to sleep. I'm a republican [*Laughs*], always been a Republican. Now I have voted for some democrats if I liked them and I thought they'd do a good job but Donald [Trump] is my man. And they don't like Donald but I do. You—I told them they might as well like him he's going to be our president. I—I reckon and like—are you recording what I'm saying?

00:47:53

KM: I'm recording—

00:47:55

ERG: Well some of this stuff you're going to have to take out I reckon. [*Laughs*] But—

00:48:00

Mike Moore: It will help with the Trump votes I think. [*Laughs*]

00:48:02

ERG: Yeah, yeah anyway—

00:48:04

KM: Well tell me about you know it has—the island has changed a lot and—and I mean how have you felt about the changes that have occurred?

00:48:13

ERG: Well I'll tell you. Actually when we were growing—when I was a teenager growing, me and Garland got married, we had a theater, we had stores on the island. We had a— a bowling alley. We had two places where you could go to dance. And I love to dance. And but we—we had a lot of things that the young people don't have now.

00:48:36

KM: Yeah, what—

00:48:37

ERG: We had an outdoor basketball court farther up where the old school was at and I loved to play basketball. And—we finally—one road then, yeah this was our first road. And we had roller skates. I would roller—the kind you had to do it with a key, the old-fashioned ones. We're talking way back now, '40s [1940s], '50s and I would get on those old roller skates and I'd skate from the eastar'd to the westar'd—up there to get on the basketball court so we could skate around on that.

00:49:08

KM: Nice.

00:49:08

ERG: But I—I just enjoyed life.

00:49:11

KM: And—

00:49:11

ERG: I still enjoy life.

00:49:13

KM: Yeah, even though it's different and—

00:49:15

ERG: It's very—very different, yeah. Our young people nowadays they have nothing. In fact, most of them have moved off anyway. I know I've got a lot that's moved off. And there's no jobs and you know no—they—they—I had some grandsons now would have been fishermen

but there was nothing left. It's still in their genes. They got their boats where they just go out playing in them you know. But most of them are on ferry boats. They got to be in the water.

00:49:42

KM: Sure.

00:49:43

ERG: Let's see, I got—I've got two captains on the ferry boats and I've got—well one of them is a nephew and one of them is a grandson—one of them is a nephew. And I got two oilers and both of them are getting ready to go right now to get their engineer license. And Matt he runs that ferry boat, the big one and then his odd weeks he's off he—in fact this week he's down here running west of you know the island—service.

00:50:09

KM: Yeah, so the—because of the fishing kind of decline—

00:50:14

ERG: It declined. Yeah, I—I tell you what. They—laws and regulations destroyed the fishermen. Now you just couldn't go anymore. Yeah, you could only—you couldn't make a living out of it. I'll say it that way. So now it's mostly a sports thing. Now I still go and get me something to eat. My brother went this week, the one I told you got wounded in Vietnam. He come right out there and brought me some of the prettiest sea mullets you ever seen. We had them for the day before yesterday—we ate them.

00:50:43

KM: How did you cook them?

00:50:44

ERG: Fried them.

00:50:45

KM: Fried them up?

00:50:46

ERG: Fried them up and I was going to do the conchs. Have you ever eat conchs?

00:50:49

Mike: Uh-hm.

00:50:50

ERG: You like them?

00:50:51

Mike: I do, I do.

00:50:52

ERG: Yeah, anyway the conchs is going to be tomorrow. So if you want some conchs come by and get some conchs. I got some black-eyed peas. You wait 'til I cook some biscuits. *[Laughs]* She still wants some.

00:51:00

KM: I do, I do.

00:51:02

ERG: Yeah, I'm going to give her some of them but I got to cook the biscuits first.

00:51:04

KM: Well let me ask you one more question and then we'll—we'll wrap this up and—

00:51:08

ERG: And then I'll put the biscuits in the oven.

00:51:09

KM: That sounds good.

00:51:10

ERG: Okay.

00:51:10

KM: Tell me—tell me three of the biggest lessons you’ve learned in—in your life.

00:51:15

ERG: In my life?

00:51:16

KM: Uh-hm.

00:51:17

ERG: My first one was what my daddy told me. Don’t ever depend on anybody else. You take care of yourself. My other one was that—that I wanted to be a first-class mother and grandmother ‘cause I worshiped my grandmama and I wanted to be just as good a grandmama to my grandchildren as she was to me. My third one, I don’t know, I guess it’s just life in general. I’m happy and full of life myself, so that’s my three things.

00:51:49

KM: Great, thank you. And we have to record a little bit of silence for thirty seconds.

00:52:20

END INTERVIEW