

Mila Guthrie
Harkers Island, NC

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Date: March 17, 2016

Location: Seaside, Harkers Island, NC

KMs: Keia Matrianni, Mike Moore

Transcription: Shelley Chance

Length: Forty-five minutes

Project: The Saltwater South: Harkers Island, North Carolina

START INTERVIEW

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

Keia Mastrianni: My name is Keia Mastrianni and we are working on an Oral History Project for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Harkers Island. The date is March 17, 2016. Can you tell us your name and where you are—where you were born?

00:00:21

Mila Guthrie: I'm Mila Willis Guthrie and I was born April 13, 1960 in a little town called Sea Level, North Carolina.

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KM: And where are we sitting right now Mila?

00:00:32

MG: We are at business Seaside at Harkers Island.

00:00:37

KM: What kind of business is it?

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MG: It is a general store. It is a gift shop. It is a gas station and a restaurant.

00:00:45

KM: Good, I would like to start at the beginning and maybe tell us a little bit about your family's history, where they came from, and you know how they arrived here at Harkers Island as far back as you can remember.

00:01:00

MG: Well as far back as I can remember a lot of my family members came from Shackleford Banks. They were born and raised over there. They had a house over there. They

had—it was a community just like Harkers Island. And they had gardens over there. They had a cemetery. The cemetery is still standing over there.

00:01:21

They shrimped, fished, clammed, scalloped, oystered, and did whatever they could. And that is how they survived.

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KM: And what brought them this way?

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MG: Storms, the storms brought them over to Harkers Island.

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KM: Okay and does that go back to your great-grandparents, your great-great-grandparents?

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MG: Yeah, great-great-grandparents, uh-hm.

00:01:43

KM: And do you remember any tales you were told about life on Shackleford?

00:01:47

MG: I know they had a horse over there, one horse I think that—I think that was the only horse over there at the time. I know they did a lot of whaling. I know I've heard my grandparents tell about they would have their lanterns lit and they would go on the ocean side of Shackleford and they would be on the beach many times and they would be harpooning whales for their fat and—.

00:02:19

KM: And, what did your mom and dad do?

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MG: They [*laughs*]*—well actually, my mom—you know mean as growing up or—?*

00:02:30

KM: Yeah.

00:02:32

MG: Well I recall them—well my mother especially ‘cause their home was on the shore side on the south side of the island. And I remember her telling tales of at night they would have all their lights turned out because in the war the submarines would see them or the ships would see them from Cape Lookout. And if they saw any lights it would just lure them over to the homes and they would patrol the back sound and they wanted all their lights out come dark, so—

00:03:03

KM: Wow. And—and so, was your dad a fisherman? Did he—?

00:03:08

MG: No, my dad was in the coast guard, yeah.

00:03:13

KM: And you had told us about Mr. Rhodes who was the boat builder. That was your grandpa?

00:03:19

MG: Uh-hm, their little home was right beside the Rhodes—the original Rhodes Brothers Boat Works and it was my grandfather Earl Rhodes and his brother James Rhodes. And they started out and I think that was in 1960, which was the year I was born. And they had that

old boathouse. It looked dilapidated but it—it looked like that—that was my remembrance of it when I was—as a little child. It always looked the same. It looked like a dilapidated torn down almost house, but—I mean boathouse.

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And they built the boats there, little strips of juniper, no mats, no plans, just by the eye.

00:04:00

KM: By the eye, yeah. Yeah and what kind of—what kind of boat—?

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MG: The Flare, the Carolina Flare. That was the—that was the name.

00:04:11

KM: And did that originate here in Harkers Island?

00:04:13

MG: Uh-hm. Yeah and I have a—which I found a photo I want him to take a picture of. It was the biggest thing, it was a big article about a boat that they built that was called *The Atlas*. And at the time it made the papers of course and it was like \$250,000 and they thought that was the biggest thing. And now that would be millions, you know for something that—that back then which sounded like a lot of money to us. When you said \$250,000 but—yeah, they—they built many boats for a lot of people.

00:04:46

KM: Did you ever go around and—and watch them when they were doing that?

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MG: Uh-hm, yeah I remember it and like I say I was young at the time but I remember it was a big deal when they would go to launch them because they would go on the railways and

that's how they would go at the end and most of the time they'd have champagne. Of course, we knew nothing about champagne as children. And just the bottles, you know now the boat would go in the sound like we call it, but—and then they had this big party, kind of like a pig-picking down to the shore. So they were very well known.

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KM: Yeah, it sounds like it.

00:05:23

MG: Uh-hm.

00:05:23

KM: And just—they just learned how to do it. Where did they learn it from?

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MG: I guess from the—from their ancestors. I don't know really, but I guess from their ancestors.

00:05:32

KM: Sure. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about what Harkers Island looked like when you were growing up, I know it's very different from today but kind of what—what kinds of things you did as a child growing up?

00:05:47

MG: Well as a child we swam. We—we did a lot of clamming ourselves and like I had mentioned before, on the south side of the island everybody had their boats moored to a buoy from their property. And me and my cousin Regina we would always go and swim out to those boats, climb on them, and jump off and swim all day long. And then when the tide would rise it would be over my head so I had to hold onto her for her to walk me back to the shore. *[Laughs]*

But that's what we did all summer and we looked forward to that vacation at Cape Lookout and just we'd go over and you didn't see no phones, no TVs. We stayed there two weeks and really had no interaction with our little island world.

00:06:41

KM: Sure. And that was special to you?

00:06:43

MG: Oh it was so—that was so—that was the best—the best days.

00:06:49

KM: I guess I was kind of wondering what your favorite places were on the island when you were growing up. Were there gathering spaces that you remember about frequenting and—?

00:06:59

MG: Well um, really I'd have to say it was either of my grandparents' homes 'cause one was to the eastern like they call it, the east end of the island, and then the other one was to the western, which was the west end of the island. So my mom's parents lived to the eastern by the Rhodes Brothers Boat Works and my dad's parents were to the western. So they were the times that we spent on the Pizer and gathering Sunday afternoons with family and—family is a big thing on Harkers Island.

00:07:29

KM: Sure.

00:07:29

MG: You know we stick together and always help our community.

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KM: Sure.

00:07:34

MG: Stick together.

00:07:35

KM: So what would you do at your grandparents' house when you'd go over there?

What would be going on?

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MG: We'd swing, you know we'd have a swing that granddaddy would make us out of an old piece of wood, tie a rope in it, and mostly just run around and play.

00:07:51

KM: Sure. And you talked a lot about Sunday dinners and—and so I'd love for you to tell us you know what Sunday dinners were like and—.

00:08:01

MG: Well Sunday dinners, like you say 'cause always after church and they had to be cooked on Saturday because my grandmother felt like if she cooked on the Sunday it was against God's will because it was like work to her.

00:08:12

So she would cook it on Saturday night 'cause she said we can't cook it on Sunday. Wow, so much has changed now, right? But it could be from a—a pot of clam chowder, conch stew, stewed chicken and dumplings, beef—like a roast beef or whatever, sometimes we would have some baked flounder with the potatoes and onions but—fried shrimp a lot, but it was just an afternoon of relaxation and just—just being with family.

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KM: Sure, what was your favorite thing to eat?

00:08:52

MG: Oh I think fried chicken was my favorite—favorite thing that we would eat because we didn't get a lot of clam stew or conch stew, but it's one of my favorite things now though.

00:09:08

KM: Sure, sure. Conch stew is one of your favorites?

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MG: Hmm, it's really good. Now I can't smell it cooking. But after my ma cooks it I can eat it then but it takes her all day to do it. You have to cook it all day.

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KM: How do you do it?

00:09:21

MG: Well after you clean them—after you freeze the conch and then defrost it and pull the meat out and cut the hoof off and clean it then you have to beat it. You have to scrape it to get the black off and then beat it. And then cook it all day, eight hours, and then you—you dice it—

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KM: You're boiling it?

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MG: Yes, you're boiling it and then you dice them up and put potatoes and of course you've got to have dumplings in it, cornmeal dumplings.

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KM: Oh yeah.

00:09:52

MG: And that's like you would say a delicacy.

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KM: Sure.

00:09:55

MG: Now a lot of people eat them roasted but I don't really like them like that.

00:10:00

KM: And you were telling us a little bit about how folks with—back then and can you tell us a little bit about how that was done?

00:10:10

MG: Well I remember you know just a little bit of how my grandma would do and they would get the spots and they would leave the heads on I think, cut them, split them, salt them, and let them sit out all day and also with the fish roe, the mullet roe. They would salt that, put it out in the sun and let it dry and that preserves it and I mean they would have that all winter. That's what they would eat.

00:10:36

KM: And how did they use the mullet roe, like—?

00:10:37

MG: You fry it.

00:10:38

KM: Fry it up?

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MG: Uh-hm, yeah. It's good.

00:10:42

KM: Sounds really good. [*Laughs*]

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MG: Of course I like the little ones but yeah that was a big thing. I mean mullet roe was the—that's another one of those delicacies.

00:10:53

KM: Sure, and you know you had mentioned that Billy's was kind of a hopping place in the early—

00:11:02

MG: Yes, yes and we did have a theater too and a bowling alley.

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KM: You did?

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MG: We had—yeah, we had a bowling alley and we had—and all that was in the center of the island which is what we call downtown. So Billy's had his store, it was opened in 1960. And he always catered of course to the local people. That's what he had and that's what he depended on and that's what we depended on here, too because I mean in the wintertime that's what gets you through these times is our local people.

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KM: Sure.

00:11:32

MG: So Billy's had that and then we had the theater and then we had a bowling alley. And then years later—and we had our school and then years later is when we—we got the bank

and then we had a couple of restaurants pop up but for the main part—. Now I never remember going to the bowling alley but I did go to the theater.

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KM: How much did it cost to see a movie back then?

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MG: Oh my goodness. Was it \$1, \$2, I can't remember it being over \$2.

00:12:01

KM: Yeah, I was—I read *Salt Spot for Breakfast*. I think Sonny Williamson's book and he said back then it was like a quarter or something for the theater.

00:12:09

MG: Yeah, I think it was \$1.

00:12:11

KM: Cool. And you were telling us a little bit about hard crab stew yesterday and that used to be a very specific dish to Harkers Island. Can you tell us how that's prepared and how it's eaten?

00:12:27

MG: Yes, well you take your crabs and you—of course you got to take the back off of them and you got to clean all those little feelers out and all the—of course some of them have roe in them and my grandma would always take that roe out and put it in a bowl, so as she went, she'd collect the roe and of course after you clean them then they would like boil water and pour over all of them. I don't know why, she always would do it. She had to put boiling water over them.

00:12:56

And then she would take her cornbread dumplings and kind of put those on the edges and kind of burn them to the pan. And then fry her fat meat out and then put the crabs back in with some water and of course then your potatoes and your red—green onion on top of that and then she would take that roe and put back into the crab like stuffing it, she would put that back into those crabs and cook them and that was so good. It would probably take about two hours to cook it.

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KM: Sounds so good. And then do people eat the stew as well as the—as the crabs or just the crabs?

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MG: No, they eat the stew but it—you got to have a lot of time to eat stewed hard crabs. You can't be in a rush.

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KM: You still got to—?

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MG: Take your knife and you're picking all those little sections and of course you better have you a roll of paper towels because the gravy is going to be to your elbow.

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KM: And when you ate it would you eat it inside or outside?

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MG: Either.

00:13:51

KM: Either?

00:13:52

MG: Uh-hm, mostly inside 'cause the flies would get to you if you take that outdoors, but—

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KM: Sure, sure. And was that a special occasion thing or was that just a regular—?

00:14:02

MG: No, that was whenever you know grandma or granddaddy would set the pots and— or sometimes trawling for shrimp and catch hard crabs in the shrimp trawler. Just they'd always keep them out for grandma to cook for us.

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KM: Sure. And so you had like your family had a boat-building history but did you— you also had fishermen in your family as well?

00:14:27

MG: Uh-hm, yeah. They would always have back then you would have to like they would call set on your spot that you wanted to—to shrimp like the specialty spots, like [inaudible] or [inaudible] Island or Kagg's Rock or anywhere through there, Middle Marsh, they—I guess they took turns. So if you wanted that set you would have to sit in your boat that whole day and night or whatever until the tide—until they got the tide of course for channel netting. And then like the next night it might be somebody else that's set there so then you move onto your other set. But you couldn't leave. If you left somebody could take it. So you had to have somebody sitting—sitting on that set, so that's how they did it.

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KM: And there was no—on quarrels ever or—?

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MG: Oh there was. They had many arguments. [*Laughs*] But I guess they—they settled them some kind of way but if you left that boat you better be prepared to lose your set for that night.

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KM: And they were—it seemed like folks had like secret spots that they went to—

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MG: Oh yeah, yeah.

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KM: —and didn't tell anybody about.

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MG: Oh yeah, they tried to—you know and they could never tell what they caught. Can't let that out, you can't tell where you—how many shrimp you caught, how many fish you caught.

00:15:57

KM: I wanted to talk a little bit about Peace Island and you know you said you and your husband kind of decided but what—what made you want to open a place like Peace Island?

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MG: Well like I said as a child, I just—you know I always had a little cash register and always loved to punch buttons, loved to just pretend like I had a supermarket or whatever, a grocery store. And after me and my husband, we got married and I guess he was looking down the road for retirement that he said you know we would like—our island could use like a little

store, a gas station, and then at that time there was only one restaurant. And of course it was after we started this that my sister-in-law said let's make a little deli. Well it—it became more of a—more than a deli.

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So I don't know, we just felt like the island could use it and it was something that he and I thought we could do together after his retirement and we've been here thirty years now. But it worked.

00:16:58

KM: Yeah, yeah. And how—I mean it's become something really special. It seems like islanders love coming here because it's an islander place.

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MG: Right, yeah we're the only locally-owned restaurant on the island now. There are several others but we're the only one that are the locals and they love to come up here and they love the mornings, they love to come in here and drink their coffee and tell tales about who—who caught something bigger or whatever and—or their deer hunting tales or—but this is where they love to come.

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KM: Uh-hm.

00:17:31

MG: And we—we accommodate them, we spoil them. You know got their coffee ready, you know it's just—it's just a close-knit community.

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KM: Sure. Now in the early days were you in the kitchen cooking too or—?

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MG: Uh-hm, yeah. I mean I still cook now. But I could be anywhere as the business has grown, I might be out front, I might be—if it's a gas problem I might be out there, if it's a septic tank problem I might be back there, if they need stock put up, I guess I'm the—the one that catches it all.

00:18:05

KM: Sure.

00:18:05

MG: But yeah, I—last week I cooked shrimp and grits, last Friday and sold out, so—.

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KM: You still got it.

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MG: I can still kind of cook. They just don't know it yet, but I can.

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KM: Well do you still cook outside of the restaurant now? Do you do meals still and—

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MG: Oh yeah, yeah. I can—I can still kind of do it. I let ma do most of it 'cause she's better than me but I'm learning—still learning.

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KM: And how did you—I mean how did you learn cooking? Did your mom or grandmom involve you in the cooking?

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MG: I think—yeah, I think I just from grandma and just like you say we were at home more then so you had three meals a day. You had breakfast. I remember grandma saying she'd get through with breakfast and what are we going to eat for—we call it dinner—lunchtime we call it dinner, what are we going to eat for dinner today? And she'd always have probably lima beans with turn cake and molasses. That's normally what a lunch would be. So we were there, we were exposed to three meals a day. And but a lot of times I was in the kitchen with her especially my Grandma Clary. I was always in the kitchen and just helping her.

00:19:16

And then of course growing up I was an only child and I spent a lot of time in the kitchen with my mother and—

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KM: Sure.

00:19:23

MG: —seeing her recipes and her fudge cake. I wish I had one of those to give you guys today.

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KM: Now is that the thin layers?

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MG: Uh-hm, uh-hm.

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KM: Sounds so good.

00:19:34

MG: Yeah.

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KM: Tell me what turn cake is.

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MG: Turn cake is flour, water, and salt and you mix it up kind of—kind of not thick, kind of loose and you fry that up and that's what—you got to have that with some molasses on it, uh-hm. And so it's like a piece of cornbread but it's—oh maybe a little bit thicker than cornbread, maybe and a different taste of course, the turn cake you eat more with beans and that type. Now we eat it with watermelon.

00:20:16

KM: Really?

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MG: Yeah.

00:20:18

KM: Just chop it on top or—?

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MG: Well no. We cook our turn cake or our biscuits and then we slice our watermelon and just bite a biscuit or a piece of turn cake as you're eating your watermelon. It just goes together. So but yeah, we always eat turn cake with watermelon.

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KM: Cool.

00:20:36

MG: Yeah.

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KM: And what is—

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MG: Sounds crazy don't it? [*Laughs*]

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KM: What was—what was like a typical breakfast back then like when were you eating more at home?

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MG: Bacon and grits. That's what I remember growing up, maybe pancakes but mostly bacon—bacon, eggs, and grits, toast.

00:20:56

KM: And dinner?

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MG: Now my mother would eat fish roe for breakfast. And a lot of old-timers did. They'd eat fish roe for breakfast.

00:21:05

KM: It seems like it would be nutritious though.

00:21:08

MG: But I—which I didn't acquire a taste for it 'til later on in years, but I remember they would eat it for breakfast and say there's nothing good but a lightning bread biscuit and that fish roe. That's what they ate. I know they ate that a lot.

00:21:21

Mike Moore: Do you remember the—almost when you put the roe in your mouth almost like the seediness of it, because I grew up with bass roe and eggs you know—?

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MG: Oh yeah, it's grainy.

00:21:33

MM: It's grainy.

00:21:32

MG: It's grainy yes.

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MM: Very distinctive but I love it.

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MG: Oh yeah, like I say, I—I acquired a taste for it later on but it's kind of grainy and you got to like it or—or you either love it or you don't.

00:21:44

KM: Yeah.

00:21:45

MG: There's no in between, so—.

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KM: Yeah, and I guess I was you know—I've been meeting a lot of Harkers Island folk and one of the things I noticed is y'all are incredibly hard-working and like I don't see y'all stop. We were laughing because we came by yesterday and you were working—you know here and then you talked to us and you were outside and then hours later you're out there in the yard.

00:22:14

MG: Oh yeah, I couldn't stop yesterday. I had too much to do. [*Laughs*]

00:22:16

KM: So you know I was kind of wondering what do you think defines someone from this place and what makes you so proud to be from Harkers Island.

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MG: Well you know just we're hard-working people. When you grow up and you're around the water people have always had to work for what they got. It's not handed out to you. And like you say, great-grandparents, when they went clamming or whatever, they sold those to pay a bill. And to eat of course, but if they didn't work they didn't get it handed to them. They worked. And I was raised that you worked for what you get and if you make your bed—if you make your bed hard you lay in it. In other words, you—if you do something bad or whatever you're going to suffer the punishment for it.

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KM: Sure.

00:23:10

MG: And I was just raised that way that you work hard. And I've just always grown up and like you said, island people, they worked hard for what they got. And I think it's just—like you said, it's—it's—it's just a community, a close-knit community. And we help each other and you know everybody I know that's what we did, we worked.

00:23:35

KM: And you'd help folks like if they needed anything from I mean feeding people and—?

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MG: Oh yeah, yeah. We—matter of fact, I just got through with a project through our church. It was just on my heart and mind that we helped a guy right up the road here that was like a home makeover for him and his kids. And his dad had passed away and all the churches on the island came together and it was a beautiful thing and we did his little house and yard and we had somebody from each church that contributed to it. So we're—we're loving and you know helping and loving and kind.

00:24:15

KM: Sure. And yeah, do you have some questions—?

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MG: Well I remember my husband's aunt would say that if aunt—say Aunt Francis down the road, if she was sick they would cook meals and go take to her kids. This was probably in the '40s [1940s] and '50s. You know they knew it. You know their mother is dying, we're going to cook and go take it to them. So it was—it's still like that now. If we know of anybody that needs assistance or is down on their luck or sick with—like I say with sickness, we always pitch in.

00:24:54

KM: Uh-hm.

00:24:54

MG: Got to help, got to love one another and got to help.

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KM: That's true.

00:24:59

MM: Mila I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the front porch—

00:25:03

MG: Oh yeah.

00:25:04

MM: I think that's obviously really important and it's—it's not something that maybe happens as much anymore.

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MG: Oh no.

00:25:14

MM: Yesterday you were talking about the [*inaudible*]*—around here and kind of comparing it with how you grew up and what you're sort of seeing with the changes on the island. That front porch sitting do you guys still do that as a family today or is it a smaller—is it a smaller event that happens or is it done at all?*

00:25:35

MG: Well what we do now we try to make it a point that on Sundays is our day that we stop. Of course we go to church. We come back. We eat—we eat dinner, which is lunch with—my mama always cooks dinner on that day. And that afternoon we go to my sister-in-law's house which is on the shore which is where I was telling you the house was that they had the—it was all wood and they kept wood on account of the hurricanes or storms or whatever. We go down there every Sunday afternoon and we eat down there and of course now we gather on a deck 'cause the back pizer is gone now. The front pizer is there but we gather on a deck. And we just

sit there and relax and tell tales or—or whatever has happened for the week. So that's what we do now.

00:26:21

MM: So you said you were—your children, your mother, your—your brothers and sisters like what—who in the family usually—?

00:26:30

MG: It's my children and my sister-in-law and my son and his girlfriend and their little boy, we go down. So it's my husband's side of the family, we go down. But for the lunch days it's my mother that always cooks for us on Sunday lunch.

00:26:47

MM: Do you know—do you happen to know how it got its name pizer?

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MG: I don't know. That was what they always called it, the pizer.

00:26:55

KM: Yeah. [*Laughs*]

00:26:56

MG: Instead of the porch it was the pizer. Go sit on the pizer. But there's none of that now. I mean you see families just don't get a chance to get together that much anymore.

00:27:07

KM: Life moves so much faster now.

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MG: Oh it's so—yeah.

00:27:10

KM: How about with your kids, do you feel like they understand the importance of where they come from or are they—?

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MG: Yes.

00:27:16

KM: Are they fast-moving—?

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MG: Yes, I'm sure they do because we're constantly like you said just telling tales or sometimes we'll light like a lantern at night and turn the lights out and just tell tales of old-timey stories or whatever. That's something we do a lot yeah.

00:27:35

KM: I like that. Have you always done that?

00:27:37

MG: We've done that and even with my aunt, we used to light candles and she'd tell us about the headless horseman or whatever, but she would tell us tales about the War and the guns over at Cape Lookout that are now in the water. They would tell us tales about when they were small they would run through them and play hide-n-seek, so yeah we would light candles and just turn the lights out. So that was kind of fun.

00:28:04

KM: That's cool. I like that. I'm just trying to think of some other—other tales. Just I don't know, I've run through all my questions.

00:28:27

MM: How about can you talk a little bit if you can recollect and think back—back in the 1960s that Billy’s grocery store—it was yesterday you mentioned it was the supermarket but they also have a butcher and you know I have a store relative in my childhood called Baker’s Store—little grocery store were around where we lived and my mother would buy groceries and of course she would get meat wrapped—.

00:28:56

MG: That’s what we—yeah that’s what we did.

00:28:57

MM: So was Billy’s the only place like that on the island?

00:29:01

MG: Yes.

00:29:01

MM: Okay, so that was it.

00:29:04

MG: That was it.

00:29:05

MM: You went to get your groceries and otherwise you’d head to town once a day you said, right?

00:29:08

MG: Well maybe—maybe once—

00:29:10

MM: Or once a week.

00:29:10

MG: Yeah, if you were lucky you went once a week. But mostly it was every two weeks but yeah we'd go down to Billy's and he'd have his little scale there and you'd say, "I want four pork chops," and it was Billy himself that was the butcher at first. But as time went on of course he had to hire someone and of course he taught all of his kids, his three boys how to—to butcher, too, and which his son, Billy junior, is now running the business.

00:29:34

KM: Oh he is?

00:29:35

MG: Uh-hm.

00:29:36

MM: So is the business still there?

00:29:36

MG: Yes, it's just added on a lot. Now it's hardware, but—and one thing they never sold, they never sold beer. And they never—they were never open on Sunday to this day. So even after the dad passed away they honored that—that they never sold beer and of course that was a big church thing, too. You know never sold beer and never open on Sunday and he still doesn't.

00:29:59

MM: Do they still sell meat?

00:30:00

MG: Yes, uh-hm.

00:30:00

MM: They do?

00:30:00

MG: And his—and Roger is his name, he's our—he was here eating the buffet today and—

00:30:06

MM: Still cutting there?

00:30:06

MG: Oh yeah. Still cutting, you go in there and say, "I want a sirloin top, four pound," "Okay I'll go get it for you." And he—they also bring our meat fresh daily up here.

00:30:17

MM: Oh so they supply you guys with meat for your menu here.

00:30:19

MG: Uh-hm.

00:30:21

MM: At Seaside, okay.

00:30:23

MG: Yeah and we—we serve as much fresh and local as we can.

00:30:27

KM: Sure, and you buy from your friends and neighbors?

00:30:31

MG: And we buy from Eddie [Willis] and we buy from you know local—there's a couple local fishermen left that has the blue fish or whatever and we get our meat from Billy.

00:30:41

KM: And that clam chowder recipe is special here. Y'all are famous for that?

00:30:45

MG: Yeah, yeah.

00:30:46

KM: Whose recipe is that?

00:30:47

MG: Actually that was—well, it's kind of the same—it was kind of the same recipe from old-timers, like my grandmother and my husband's grandmother. So it was kind of the same. Now later on in years people have kind of tweaked it but the recipe in the beginning you fried your fat meat and you boiled your clams. You cleaned them—well you caught them, you opened them and then you cleaned them and then you chopped them—an all day job. And you boiled your clams and put your potatoes and onions and your dumplings and let her go for about two and a half hours.

00:31:23

KM: And it's only water that's used in that clam chowder right?

00:31:25

MG: Yes, we only use water.

00:31:28

KM: Nice.

00:31:28

MG: Salt and pepper.

00:31:31

KM: And you talked a little bit about your—everyone had gardens, do you still have a garden?

00:31:36

MG: No, I don't have a green thumb. I do not. I think—I can grow some tomatoes but I think that's about it for me. But a lot of people over here still do gardening.

00:31:49

KM: What were the—what were the—what was growing in the gardens when you were growing up?

00:31:53

MG: Potatoes, onions, collards, turnips, rutabagas, I really can't remember a lot of tomato and cucumber and that type of stuff.

00:32:08

MM: Mila do you know why rutabagas were so popular?

00:32:11

MG: I don't know why rutabagas, but—

00:32:14

KM: But they were—?

00:32:16

MG: Yeah and we've got them on the buffet today.

00:32:17

KM: You do?

00:32:18

MG: You know sweet potatoes. No, we—we—now my mama slices them but we dice them up here because it takes so long to cook them. It takes forever for them to get soft, but it was just always you had to have a rutabaga.

00:32:32

MM: So how would you cook them I mean here? You—you dice them—

00:32:33

MG: You boil them.

00:32:34

MM: —you boil them, boil and dice? So it's just fresh—fresh—pulled rutabaga as a side?

00:32:39

MG: And usually—yeah, we'll have either a pork chop with them. Usually that's what they like the best and collards, and sweet potatoes. I remember them being in the garden.

00:32:52

MM: Any turnips or strictly rutabagas?

00:32:54

MG: Some turnips yeah, some turnips, mostly collards and rutabagas though.

00:33:01

KM: Uh-hm, do you have big holidays that are—how was Christmas? Was—what was the big holiday around her for celebrating?

00:33:11

MG: Um, Christmas and Easter was—you know are always—always the thing ‘cause Easter we would always do the egg hunt and this was called the Sand Hole, ‘cause it’s real sandy and it was always—that’s where everybody went on an egg hunt ‘cause it was hilly and you could hide your eggs good in the trees and that was a big thing around here ‘cause all the churches and all the kids you see them to the Sand Hole doing their egg hunt. So that was—that was a big holiday.

00:33:43

KM: Uh-hm and what was Christmas like?

00:33:47

MG: Christmases were like you said very family-oriented. I remember you would get—we would get like three important—you know very important things. You’d get a doll most of the time. You’d get I know mama would always get me some type of little ring or a little necklace and like little baby clothes, so most of the time you got three big things. And or you’d get a bike and a doll, you know so—.

00:34:22

KM: Sure, were those baby clothes handmade?

00:34:23

MG: Um, now my sister-in-law got handmade baby clothes but mine I think were always store-bought from the Five & Dime.

00:34:32

KM: Which is?

00:34:33

MG: Which was in Beaufort.

00:34:36

KM: And what is there now?

00:34:36

MG: Clauson's is there now.

00:34:38

KM: Got ya.

00:34:39

MM: Was it called Clauson's Five & Dime back then?

00:34:40

MG: No. It was called—was it—was it Roses or was it—was it Roses Five & Dime 'cause Roses was the old—or maybe it was just the Five & Dime and then there was a store across the road called Rumley's where you would get the little baby ducks, little chicks and—for Easter you looked forward to that getting that little chick from Rumley's.

00:35:09

MM: A live one?

00:35:10

MG: Uh-hm, uh-hm or a little baby—yeah a little chick.

00:35:13

MM: You'd get live—live chick—

00:35:15

MG: There would be like little yellow, little chickens.

00:35:18

KM: Really?

00:35:18

MG: And he'd put them in a little box. I can remember it just as well and he had a store where now all the—on the south side of Beaufort where all the yachts are docked now in Beaufort. That was all like—it's a big concrete store and it was called Rumley's. And we would—you'd always look forward to see if your parents would go get you a little chick.

00:35:39

KM: And then where would they put it like—?

00:35:42

MG: Little—they built a little cage, yeah just a little wire cage.

00:35:45

KM: And just put it out when you woke up or just bring it to you?

00:35:48

MG: Uh-hm, yeah. And then we'd—in the back down by my cousin's by Rhodes Brothers we'd build like—dig like a little pond and then when they got big enough we'd put them in the pond and they would just go, uh-hm.

00:36:00

KM: That's cool.

00:36:01

MG: Yeah, but you had to go to Rumley's and get a chick.

00:36:05

KM: Wow.

00:36:05

MG: Yeah.

00:36:07

MM: Every Easter?

00:36:08

MG: Every Easter you had to get a chick. If you didn't get a chick it was like wow. But most time we would get one. We'd get a chick.

00:36:15

MM: That's cool.

00:36:16

KM: That was a great lesson in caring, too for a child.

00:36:19

MG: Yeah.

00:36:20

KM: Caring for a young animal.

00:36:21

MG: Yeah.

00:36:21

KM: Letting him go and—

00:36:23

MG: Yeah.

00:36:25

KM: Did you name yours?

00:36:26

MG: I can't ever remember naming them. They probably didn't live too long.

00:36:32

KM: Yeah.

00:36:33

MG: You know once the dog got out or whatever but—

00:36:38

KM: Right, right. Well I've—I've—anything else that you're curious about [*question directed to Mike Moore*]?

00:36:44

MM: Yeah, I have one more thing. So—so here with the store, you said that this was family and you guys—the family had it—this is family land and there was apparently an opportunity here to open. Did you start with the convenience store and then add the restaurant later or did the restaurant come first or—?

00:37:03

MG: Actually we built the—the restaurant and the store—this was just one big metal building. And we had that until 2000 and then we added the gift shop in 2000. So the main part here was built in '86 [1986] and then in 2000 we added the gift shop.

00:37:23

KM: Nice.

00:37:24

MG: Because we had seen where we could—we kind of started branching out with a few souvenirs and then it got so we were selling more and more so then we added the gift shop.

00:37:34

MM: Yeah, did you—what did you do prior to opening the store as an entrepreneur and store-owner? Did you—did you have anything else prior to this?

00:37:41

MG: Hmm, I just—I substituted at our school some ‘cause my son was like in kindergarten and I was a stay-at-home mom and a lot of people were then. Didn’t have—didn’t really have a car. And when he started school I started substituting and when he was in the second grade was when we opened this. So then I left there and came right here. And didn’t really know much about store business but I learned it quickly.

00:38:13

KM: Sure.

00:38:13

MG: You had to, I’m like, “Oh me.”

00:38:16

KM: Sink or swim.

00:38:16

MG: Yeah, can I do this? So we did, so this has kind of been our lives for the—

00:38:23

MM: I think it’s really funny that you remember really enjoying like playing calculator and pressing buttons and you know—

00:38:30

MG: And we would take cans out of the cupboard and pretend like we were at a grocery store.

00:38:35

MM: Pretend to own a store.

00:38:37

MG: Uh-huh and my cousin Regina I was talking about, we'd take them all out and line them up and then we'd have a bag and I'd say, "Is that all ma'am?" And then they would even give us money you know and of course at the end of the day I've heard my mother and my aunt say that money was the same. It wasn't short. You know it wasn't lost. Nobody got it. If it was \$5 worth of coins—most of the time that's what they—we had at the end of the day you know, but we'd ring up a can of green beans or a can of corn and bag them up.

00:39:10

KM: Yeah.

00:39:11

MG: And then outside we would make like little mud pies and put berries in them and it would be like blueberry pie or whatever.

00:39:18

KM: Yeah, I—I used to do that too.

00:39:20

MG: Yes, we did. We'd make like a little—like a little house under the oak trees.

00:39:25

KM: Very cool.

00:39:26

MM: And that was not only training for you but that was just—that was a good time, that was fun, that was—?

00:39:31

MG: Oh yes, we do that in the summer a lot. And we would usually walk the shores 'cause people threw their trash in the water if you can imagine that. And in those jars like a pickle jar, eels or hard crabs, stone crabs would get in them and we would pull them out. I wouldn't do it now but we did then.

00:39:51

KM: Sure.

00:39:52

MG: And the eels would curl up in them or the stone crabs and I remember one bit my finger and I remember crying, crying, and crying 'cause he would not let go. That stone crab would not let go of my thumb and finally we pried him off and I think that kind of cured me of that for a while. But yeah, we'd go all along the shore and try to find eels. But that was another pastime.

00:40:17

MM: What year was that—that you started to see some pollution happening—?

00:40:19

MG: Well that was probably let's see, I think it was like maybe '67 [1967]. I was about seven.

00:40:27

KM: Was it—it was common for people to throw their trash—?

00:40:30

MG: Oh yeah.

00:40:29

KM: In the water?

00:40:30

MG: Oh yeah. They always did that.

00:40:33

MM: You know I remember a time when litter laws were created, you know and it seems like it wasn't any enforced laws back then—. I'm not sure if it's the same here.

00:40:43

MG: I mean like I said, most people—now I don't have—having said that I don't ever remember grandma and them throwing a lot of trash but there was always like jars, mostly jars is what it was. And the stone crabs would get up in there and we used to call them swell toads which is the puffer fish that you said—did you say you had last night puffer fish?

00:41:05

MM: Yeah, we had—

00:41:05

MG: They would be in there and we'd scratch their stomach and they would [*makes imitation sound of scratching puffer fish belly*]—

00:41:10

KM: Make that face.

00:41:11

MG: [*Laughs*] So we had a good time doing that, too. Yeah, we'd [*imitates sound of scratching the puffer fish belly*]—that was evil weren't it? [*Laughs*]

00:41:22

KM: No.

00:41:25

MM: So—so Mila comparing your childhood and the way you played and—and passed the time away when you were a little girl compared to now, what do you see are the differences?

00:41:37

MG: Oh my goodness. Well children don't know how to play—well we played with paper dolls. We cut them out of—if we had a catalog, Sear's—that's when Sear's used to send you a catalog and we'd cut them out and we'd play paper dolls. I just—now I mean I see my daughter even—electronics, but she's involved—a lot of them are involved in sports now which we didn't have a lot of that. But now they have the—she's involved in swimming and tennis and of course softball is big around here, volleyball and—. So they do have those kinds of things, but they just—they just don't have any idea of how good that life was.

00:42:18

MM: Uh-um.

00:42:20

MG: And you try to tell them but—

00:42:23

KM: Did you know it growing up or did you feel like—

00:42:25

MG: I guess we thought it was normal. You know it's only until now that we know.

00:42:33

KM: I had a question about a dessert that I've heard people talk about and they talk about milk pies.

00:42:39

MG: Yes, we have it here.

00:42:39

KM: You do?

00:42:40

MG: Uh-huh.

00:42:41

KM: What—now what—how is that prepared? Is it like a buttermilk pie or is it different?

00:42:44

MG: No, it's condensed milk, lemon juice, Ritz cracker—crumbled up crust, you mix that up and you pour that in your Ritz cracker crust and then you put your merengue on top and just bake the merengue just enough where it starts to turn brown. And it's really good. It's that tangy lemony taste and people love that with seafood.

00:43:11

KM: Yum.

00:43:12

MG: That's the seafood, yeah.

00:43:15

KM: I've been wondering about that and I've heard it—Eddie said he loved milk pies and—

00:43:20

MG: Oh yeah which we always called them condensed milk pies. But people yeah lemon milk—

00:43:25

KM: Wonderful. Is there anything that you want to talk about or share that you feel like we didn't get to cover or favorite memories of yours?

00:43:36

MG: Um, like I said now that you—you look back on it, I know they were the best times that we lived in, yeah.

00:43:49

KM: Good, do you have any more questions [*directing question to Mike Moore*]?

00:43:53

MM: No.

00:43:54

KM: What we'll need to do is we're just going to give thirty seconds of silence to capture something we call room tone, so it'll just take thirty seconds.

00:44:04

MG: Okay.

00:44:34

KM: Cool.

00:44:35

KM: Thank you so much.

00:44:36

MG: Thank you guys. I've enjoyed talking to you.

00:44:38

KM: You have? Thank you—.

00:44:39

END INTERVIEW