

Ira Lewis
Harkers Island, NC

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Date: June 7, 2016
Location: Harkers Island, NC
Interviewer: Keia Mastrianni
Transcription: Shelley Chance
Length: One hour, seven minutes
Project: The Saltwater South: Harkers Island, North Carolina

START INTERVIEW

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

00:00:00

Keia Mastrianni: One second, one second. This is the Southern Foodways Alliance Oral History Project on Harkers Island. I am interviewing Ira Lewis in his—inside of his home. My name is Keia Mastrianni and it is Tuesday, June 7, 2016. Okay Mr. Ira, can you tell me your name and birth date?

00:00:30

Ira Lewis: Ira Lewis, birth date is August 2, 1910—I'll be 98 come August.

00:00:45

KM: August 2nd?

00:00:46

IL: Huh?

00:00:47

KM: August 2nd?

00:00:48

IL: Yeah.

00:00:49

KM: 1910.

00:00:50

IL: It's coming.

00:00:52

KM: It's coming up.

00:00:52

IL: Yeah.

00:00:53

KM: And you'll be how old then?

00:00:54

IL: I'll be ninety-eight.

00:00:58

KM: That is amazing.

00:01:01

KM: So I was going to ask you what you knew about your—

00:01:04

IL: Number two there—the ancestor on my father's side I trace them back to England—English, Lewis is English. Montmouthshire I trace it back to Montmouthshire England around 15—1500. I trace it back that far.

00:01:30

KM: Wow. How did they get to Harkers Island?

00:01:34

IL: And then they come over—I think they come to this country maybe in—in the late 1600s and most of that crowd landed around Yorktown and Jamestown, Virginia and migrated right down in the Carolinas.

00:01:51

KM: Got ya.

00:01:52

IL: My—my first—Howard Lewis, he—he met a lady up in Currituck County, Deborah—Deborah Bonner I believe it was and they—they hooked it up. They wound up there. Most of them settled right down when you got down in here, down around Swansboro and Hubert but we call it Bogue and it's the sound Bogue Sound. You know what I found out since I've talked to you? I talked to some lady and them Lewis(es) they had—from when come out of Swansboro, the next little town Hubert and then from down there to—to Camp LeJeune it's about twenty-five miles. And them Lewis(es) own most of that land from Hubert on the bay side—all the way down to Jacksonville.

00:03:00

KM: Oh wow.

00:03:01

IL: They're just loaded with land. But when they bought—when the government established Camp LeJeune Base they took all that land they wanted, just about all of it, some of it they give them a little bit in payment and most of them they didn't—got hardly nothing.

00:03:24

KM: Oh wow.

00:03:23

IL: Well then you had the private—they had the private cemeteries, all that stuff on that and they took a bunch of them and now when you get to Jacksonville, you hit that 17 route going south you make a left on it and go a little—just a little ways and come to what's called Federal Cemetery. Now that's what the Camp Lejeune crowd took them Lewis(es) body—what remains left and carried them up there and put the—I think a couple of graves they put the names on them

but most—it was like Lewis One, Lewis Two, Lewis Three, Four, Five—to about Ten or Twelve, so you didn't know who was who was who.

00:04:08

KM: Wow.

00:04:09

IL: Only, nothing but a number.

00:04:11

KM: Wow.

00:04:12

IL: So that was—and I under—I went on down to Verona and I understand there's some down around Sneads Ferry but I never did get down that far. But they were scattered all around in that area and they—and of course they migrated on out of here see.

00:04:29

KM: They did?

00:04:30

IL: Carteret County and down Shackleford Bank and everywhere. Did you know that—did you know that a lot of them Lewis(es) when they hit this country they went to Massachusetts?

00:04:43

KM: They did?

00:04:44

IL: Yeah, I—I read about it. My uniform I had there when I went in the service in 1938 I went in the coast—it was named by the coast guard but it was a carryover from the old Life

Saving Service. See what I mean and we had a special uniform. So I got a letter one day out in the mail from a man out in Washington State—west coast. He said—said Margaret Anne my daughter there she put me on that—my history on the internet. It's—have you ever searched it out?

00:05:36

KM: I have a—

00:05:39

IL: Well it's on there.

00:05:39

KM: It is?

00:05:41

IL: Yeah but anyway he—he told me, he said his name was Al Lewis and said we—we retired out of the coast guard and said we get together and drink coffee and tell lies [*Laughs*]. And said we run across that there—you on the internet there and said and that uniform has got us all stumped. What kind of uniform is that? So they thought it was a sailor you know, surfman — but no, we had our own uniform.

00:06:15

KM: Wow.

00:06:17

IL: It was straight pants, a single coat, and if you got to be a chief, you had a double breasted but—and said, “What in the world kind of service is that?” And one of them said, “Well, we'll find out. We'll call the chief.” And that's when I got the letter and I sat down and wrote them a little letter and told him how it all started back there. So you know then I called

him and talked to the man. I said the Lewis(es)—he said, Up in Massachusetts where I come from,” he said, “the place is loaded with Lewis(es).”

00:06:58

KM: Wow.

00:06:58

IL: And in the meantime I found out they’re scattered all over the Florida border.

00:07:04

KM: Wow.

00:07:04

IL: There’s a whole—and they’re scattered all over the United States, Lewis, and every one of them come from England in the beginning.

00:07:11

Now on my mother’s side, on my mother’s side she was come from the Willis(es). Now the first Willis that ever come to Carteret County they set a little town outside of Smyrna there and it—it was—goes by the name Williston.

00:07:34

KM: Ah Williston, yeah.

00:07:34

IL: And so—and she was the fourth generation from the man—the first man John Williston and so anyway she—over time she come and they had a lot of land around here. My grandmother on my mother’s side now, the Willis(es) right down—you go right down the corner here and you make a left turn right over there and there’s a creek called John’s Creek. And she—the old home was right down there on the shore there from there. And she owned—her father

owned—gave her 180-some acres from that creek down that shoreline all the way up there. Now the Harker(s) before they—when they got it, they—they divided this land, see. You got to go dig in but anyway the Harker(s) from around here and they—running right down back of this—my lot right there all the way over there, all right.

00:08:42

Now she said when she grew up my grandmother—there only about ten or twelve families scattered all over Harkers Island here—the old island ain't nothing but a bunch of briars and—

00:08:56

KM: What did the—what were the homes like back then? What did they look like, the old home place?

00:09:01

IL: Honey, you got to talk slow and plain to me baby.

00:09:05

KM: What did the old home place look like?

00:09:07

IL: It's over—right over here.

00:09:10

KM: Can you describe it?

00:09:12

IL: It's—honey them old people they weren't very worried about class—they had just a plain old house and a little kitchen off from it and a little old iron stove to cook on and they had a little fireplace. Most of the people had fireplaces and later on they got a little bit better and they

got them a little heater. But I used to spend a lot of nights when my grandmother lived over here and I was a little boy seven or eight years old and she—and get up in the morning and the only noise you'd hear around there was the birds singing—no kids, nobody—. And it had the fruit trees out in the back and she'd get up and cook the breakfast on that little iron stove.

00:09:57

KM: What did she make for breakfast?

00:09:57

IL: I found—I found a part of that little stove right up there, a piece of the damper off it. I got it around here somewhere—

00:10:07

KM: You did?

00:10:07

IL: Yeah.

00:10:07

KM: What did your grandma cook for breakfast?

00:10:10

IL: Huh?

00:10:12

KM: When she cooked you breakfast what did she make?

00:10:15

IL: I—I—honey you're going to have to repeat—.

00:10:21

KM: Sure, hold on.

00:10:29

IL: You can't do—

00:10:32

KM: That's okay. [*writing question on paper to show Mr. Lewis*] There you are.

00:10:43

IL: What did your grandmother cook for breakfast? Honey it weren't—sometimes they'd have eggs and whatever was available.

00:10:54

KM: Whatever was available.

00:10:55

IL: And sometimes maybe bread, butter, or a little jam. They weren't no big heavy—fancy eating—

00:11:06

KM: Right, right.

00:11:05

IL: But honey it was—it was rough.

00:11:09

KM: Yeah.

00:11:10

IL: In my day when I come up it was rough. And that—and that there—and—

00:11:20

KM: You said it was rough.

00:11:22

IL: Said it was hard. Honey—

00:11:24

KM: What was hard about it?

00:11:25

IL: There weren't no employment. Everybody was loafing around on this island and there weren't no farm because it's not farming country.

00:11:34

KM: Only fishing.

00:11:34

IL: Most everybody worked in the water. I dug clams off the—out there or picked buckets, rolling off for seven cents a pail.

00:11:54

KM: Seven-cents a pail?

00:11:55

IL: Thirty-cent for a bushel and it took four and a half for a bushel at thirty cent, divided by four that's about 7.5-cents a bushel, pay, and they weren't—they weren't all that thick. You had to go and stay five, six, or seven hours—haul tide

00:12:17

KM: Hmm. That's hard.

00:12:17

IL: No—no outboards. So most—most would pole a rote and you can—some got—got this sailboat with the sail and we could sail over to the other places. I can remember the first

outboard that ever come to Harkers Island. It was about—let's see it was about the late '20s [1920s]. Man up around the Raleigh area and that—and that—the tobacco growing country, tobacco farmers come down here and bought lots and well we thought them people were rich compared to us.

00:13:03

KM: Yeah.

00:13:03

IL: And he bought—the man right across from the school, he had a house and he—he brought a little boat down here with a little outboard on it—this thing about that big [*gestures*] and you got to wind it up and boom, [*gestures motor running*].

00:13:18

KM: And you never saw one of those before?

00:13:20

IL: Go about five, six, seven miles an hour and we thought she was flying. [*Laughs*] I mean when you're poling everywhere you go or rowing and somebody going a little bit— [*gestures*] we said, "Boy, he's going to knock it off." But anyway now everything is outboard. But honey most of the people—

00:13:41

KM: It was hard. Tell me about the first time you saw a man in uniform.

00:13:48

IL: The first time you saw a man in uniform. Now at that time I grew up, now over to Cape Lookout now you had the coast guard station. See the coast guard station first it was the life saving service and—and the primary duty was patrolling the beaches, standing lookout

watches, watching for wrecks from all the traffic up and down the coast with sailboats and commerce and everything. There weren't no trains and they had a station there to Cape Lookout and over to Fort Macon they had one and once in a while we'd get a chance to go down to Beaufort and that was going to the big city. Go down there to Beaufort on Front street and sometimes when them boys—and I said them boys had that—you know that uniform up there you can see it on the—on the—it's what they called a surfman uniform.

00:14:50

KM: Surfman uniform.

00:14:52

IL: And I always—I said to myself, *That's what I want to be.*

00:14:58

KM: He looked sharp. You thought—when you were in Beaufort you saw him—?

00:15:01

IL: I saw them boys and I wanted—it was like you say it was a straight coat, four or six-button on it, pockets here and pockets—buttons and straight legged pants, black and a cap and a little cross of oars I got a picture of it, with a little anchor on it. That was the emblem of the coast—that meant surfman need people to go—. See honey, in them days there weren't no rescue—no radio and weren't no fancy—they had at Fort Macon, beachfront station and them wrecks offshore—the boat's would go right there and no way to get to them and it was sometimes you'd try to get—it was [*inaudible*] where them boys capsized a boat and drowned, the whole crew trying to get people to save them—surfmen.

00:15:58

KM: Surfmen.

00:15:58

IL: But it got—later on it got a little bit better and then in any state they were going to get motorboats and of course now it's a big deal. But—but it—it was a—and I come of age—now my—my older brother, I had an older—say now my father, let's see my father he married his second wife. The first wife—second wife was my mother had the first—had an older son, oldest first child, well they said that the first little baby—little girl she lived a couple days but—but the first boy Theodore then comes—he went up in the service in 1929. The boys would leave and go up north—.

00:16:52

KM: Yeah, what made you want to join the service?

00:16:55

IL: Well—

00:16:57

KM: What made you want to join the service?

00:16:58

IL: Like you say, one thing it was steady employment.

00:17:03

KM: Sure.

00:17:04

IL: And you're doing the public service. Can you—and get anything greater than saving somebody's life?

00:17:14

KM: I don't think so.

00:17:15

IL: I saved nine on my career.

00:17:17

KM: Nine?

00:17:19

IL: Yeah.

00:17:19

KM: Wow.

00:17:20

IL: Two one time and seven another up in Long Island [New York].

00:17:24

KM: Right.

00:17:25

IL: But go back to—and my older brother went up there in '29 [1929] him and another boy from the island and—and then in 1930 my second next to him, he went up. He stopped in Jersey and he wound up and married a girl and had his own family and stayed there and buried there. But he married the nicest girl.

00:17:46

KM: Theodore was his name?

00:17:48

IL: Yeah, she was a local from Jersey.

00:17:51

KM: Uh-hm.

00:17:52

IL: Now and he went up there in '30 [1930] and in '38 I had—I got out of school about fourteen. I think I had too much education and was going to go work on the water. I lost interest in school, course I look back and I could have used it. But I—I had—it was seventh grade competing—but when the fish was down I had these parents but they all had oyster beds. But when I left up there I was the top man in that—on that Long Island on that—in that surf crowd—I was the top man of all them surfmen up there. The man told me.

00:18:40

KM: How did you get—how did get you—?

00:18:41

IL: When—when something bad happened, “Get Lewis, get Lewis.” I went up—I went one time and in a snowstorm and the snow—and the boat, we had an open boat, there’s a picture of one of them up there, and I went—see them stations have this and the prohibition days honey they had them—about every three or four miles apart on account of whiskey coming in see. Well after that—then they had them—left them buildings sitting there and they had an annex station for just a few and I got one there. But I remember one night I was stationed—I went in there—on that [*inaudible*]—every little creek up there, I’ve been through every one of them.

00:19:39

KM: Yeah?

00:19:39

IL: I can't—yeah I been through every one of them just about [*Laughs*].

00:19:46

KM: How did you get from here up north to join the service?

00:19:49

IL: How I got up—? Seemed like up there you had a better chance of getting in the service because down here there's a lot of politics down here, there was—I had a second cousin, lady. She married a man from Atlantic and he was in the coast guard. And he had—he had a brother—two brothers beside him that was up there in the coast guard. And he was home on leave and I was fishing on that *[inaudible]* shore and me and the boy one night, I told him, I said, “Buddy I quit this. No more.” I come home that night and told Papa—“Papa I ain't doing it no more—no more.” He—I said, “Papa”—well put it this way. Father did it all his life and now he's—retirement age, no benefits. I said, “Papa you worked all your life on that water and all you got to show for it is two empty hands.” I said, “You expect me to do the same.” I said, “No, something better than this I'm going”—and I got a hold of that man that was on leave and I got—and I caught a ride. I had a brother already up there. Now he—he knew him see, there was a bunch of boys from the island there. And I caught me a ride up there and stayed and what we would do honey, when they're going to take some new men in like surfmen only, I don't want on no ship, surfmen only, Surf Station. So just it would say—they said they were going to take—they sent—there was a district office and that all those—them youngings scattered and every time we tied into the district office and the district office—pick up the phone and call all right down the line see. And I—and when they wanted to take in some new men they'd call down and say now we're planning on taking us some surfmen and if you got some candidates or—all right.

00:22:08

So I went—when I got up there went over to that station and my brother was there. I told him I said, “I come up here for one reason to get in the service,” and I went and I got up there last week in June so I stayed up there in July. I said, “Oh my,” I said, “My Lord.” And it come

the first of August and it just turned my birthday and they called from the district. My brother come and said, “They called today and said they’re going to take in surfmen. The man wants you to come up there,”—boom. I got them papers and got them in.

00:22:46

KM: Yeah.

00:22:46

IL: And in a couple days—and said get that boy, Lewis, get him a physical. And he—I didn’t have no car or nothing—the boy had—take—had to go to Trinity Mall to get to the closest doctor when I was living there.

00:23:05

KM: Wow.

00:23:05

IL: Got my physical and come back okay. And a couple days later they said now it worked out on the 10th of August or 11th—no wait, the 11th of August I believe they called him and said I want him—have that Lewis boy in the district office. The district office was about almost seventy-five or eighty miles from where we were at—at the point. And he told one of them boys he said go there and fill your car with gas and carry that boy up yonder. And he carried me up there and to the district office and I go in there and—the coast guard.

00:23:53

KM: And then you were in the coast guard.

00:23:55

IL: Then he got on the phone. I heard him talking to somebody and he was talking about—see he could—at the recruiting office he—he could call down any line of wherever they

were going to send you see. He called up—I heard him talking to somebody and said, “I’m going to send you a new man,” and said his—well he asked me before he called, he said—he asked me he said, “What part of the country do you come from?” I said, “Down in North Carolina in a little place called Harkers Island around Morehead City.” And, “Oh yeah, oh yeah,” but he probably—but anyway [*Laughs*] he called that man and said, “I’m going to send you a new man,” and he said, “he’s from your neck of the woods, so I bet he lives close by.” And he said, “Well tell him to drop him off in a little town Bell Port, always remember that name Bell Port—“

00:24:54

KM: Bell Port.

00:24:55

IL: “And it’s a little bay there and a little yacht club dock and you go—and the station is right across the bay.” And he said, “Tell him to drop him off there to the yacht club dock.” And so he dropped me off and I saw the boat coming. The—see they run back—you couldn’t drive down there in no car ‘cause there weren’t no way in—in and out and I don’t know why.

Everything was by boat.

00:25:22

KM: Everything was by boat.

00:25:25

IL: I saw the boat come in and I told him, I said—he said we’re—“We know you’re coming.” He said, “Hang around here.” He said, “The boys will be going back I’m going off on liberty. There will be boys going back,” and he said, “just hang around the dock and then the boys come a little late and we got over there at three or four o’clock and ate supper.” And the next morning I went on watch at four o’clock.

00:25:51

KM: You went on watch?

00:25:51

IL: The next morning, Saturday morning at four o'clock I went on watch, 4:00 to 8:00 watch—get that clock. *[Laughs]* And I was—on surf station every Saturday is cleanup day. And everything—all—our fittings, everything is brass and all the floors shined and after I got off of watch and I ate and the man in charge there, I found out he was from the Atlantic.

00:26:19

KM: You did?

00:26:20

IL: The Skipper.

00:26:21

KM: Wow.

00:26:22

IL: Yeah and he said—

00:26:23

KM: Small world.

00:26:23

IL: “—Lewis?” He said, “I want you.” We had some—we had some boats down there. He said, “I want you to go down there and all the brass on the boats, and then polish them and wipe and clean the white work, and gas her—that’s your first job at the coast guard.”

00:26:42

KM: Wow.

00:26:43

IL: I can remember just like I'm talking to you. So you're in the service. And of course he's giving me little lectures. "Now Lewis, now you're in the service, you're—you're—now you keep your nose clean and you'll have no problems."

00:26:59

KM: Yeah.

00:26:59

IL: He—he get—and did you know that a man on there the same day that I went now there was a man that come up there and stopped with his suitcase and got on the boat with me. I got talking to him and he was from Massachusetts. He had been in the service about seven or eight—he was a surfman now, been about seven or eight years. But he had his suitcase and man he had been transferred over to that place too. Well it didn't take very long to find out why. He messed up. Now that man had there—where I was at had—he straightened you out or you went out.

00:27:47

KM: Right.

00:27:47

IL: But he let me know. I said, "You ain't got nothing to worry about." And sure enough, by Christmas—before Christmas he was discharged. Man fooled—anyway I—I went in there to stay and that man told me, "Now Lewis, you—you can do this you know," and I got the message. And I kept that nose clean.

00:28:15

KM: Yeah, you did and you had a really successful career.

00:28:17

IL: See we're—we're graded. They kept a list on everybody and your rating and conduct—conduct as high as you can get is 4.0.

00:28:31

KM: You had a 4.0?

00:28:32

IL: Yeah, I kept it around 4.0 and for [*inaudible*] and rating it means your eligibility to get a little raise on up. You see you start to the bottom. You got to go to the next step and the next step and the next step and the next step and—. So I kept it—I kept it there. So I wound up as a chief petty officer.

00:29:02

KM: Chief petty officer.

00:29:03

IL: Yeah, that's right. In the meantime now right there that first station I was up there and I went up there in '38 [1938] and this is nineteen—when I left home, and I had left—I told you before, there was a little girl down the road there [*Laughs*] that I used to—I got out of school there probably about fifteen and you know you—.

00:29:38

KM: Yeah.

00:29:39

IL: You know what I'm talking about. [*Laughs*]

00:29:40

KM: Yes.

00:29:42

IL: You know.

00:29:43

KM: I do remember.

00:29:44

IL: And I went out and the other boys went out too and I got pictures all around here, and that's when I—and you know coincidence, the same year I went in, in August of '38, her father died that same fall.

00:30:04

KM: Wow.

00:30:04

IL: He was a regular old man, a handy man and he did carpenter work and brick work and worked on the water, you know but he was working fishing and he got a fish bone in his finger, you know a little bone in there and she told me later, the girl. Well I went up there and I got a letter from home about Billy had got—and what it was, she—she told me later he got home there one night and that thing got to hurting him and he got to probing. I don't—I'm not sure what it was—but anyway, trying to get that bone out and instead of getting the bone out he got an infection.

00:30:53

KM: Oh.

00:30:53

IL: And to the infection—to the doctor in Beaufort and he checked him out, good and honey diabetes is a bad thing. And he found him—that poor man was ate up with sugar and

didn't know it. And he wound up in Duke, huh. And they removed the—the arm—I forget which one and the sixth—I believe it's on the sixth of December they buried him.

00:31:36

KM: Wow.

00:31:37

IL: But anyway there—he left that—that man left two—a girl, oldest girl, and she was nine, but I'm talking about how the man—the mother died. The mother died in 1920. I remember her mother died. And the next one was a boy and the next one was her, so she said she was five years old when her mother died and—and the youngest one Paul—

00:32:08

KM: Can I ask you one of these questions? Can you talk to me about Yaupon tea and your memories about it?

00:32:19

IL: So anyway I went—when I got—I got to the first year I had been gone six months see and the man from Atlantic was going to come home for Christmas. And he said, “Lewis would you like to go home for Christmas?” [*Inaudible*] I said, “Sure.” I come home with him and I didn't have no car. And I come home and honey it really tore her up. Anyway I—I said—dad, I went one step better and I married her.

00:33:00

KM: Yes, you did.

00:33:01

IL: Give me Margaret Ann—and the boy. All right, you—

00:33:09

KM: Yeah.

00:33:10

IL: Yaupon tea. Honey history bears out—when the foreigners come over here from in the beginning the Indians naturally were here. We know that. They introduced him to Yaupon tea which was a standard drink. The bush would grow wild all over the island and Outer Banks, everything is loaded with Yaupon trees. So anyway it's a little—little green leaves and you take the leaves and cure it.

00:33:49

KM: Cure it.

00:33:52

IL: The leaves are green and you take a bunch of them and chop them up and put them in a pan, a shallow pan and put them in the oven and you kind of stir them up. And why that is as—as you get the moisture out, see and when they start to turn a little light brown it's there—but anyway. But now you are keeping them too long you'll burn them out. You got to know just when to take them out and get that—get that done and take them out.

00:34:23

Now when you want to make tea I found overall you would take a standard cup, take that and about a quart—quart and a half of water and take it to a boil like this and fill it with about—. Now you can wait and put the water high or you—wait 'til it gets hot or you can go ahead and throw it in there and as the water gets hot it starts—it starts to get this color and it—and drink them. And it gets about the color of iced tea—amber

00:35:06

KM: Iced tea.

00:35:09

IL: And then you got to take all that—all them little sticks that are in there. You have to take them out in a strainer and you pour it all off and you come there with clean tea. Now you—you can drink it hot and I like it hot but you can put sugar in it. That's a matter of choice. Or now if you're going to have it hot you can put a little bit of milk if you want to see and a little bit of—a little sugar maybe to get that—it's all suit to taste.

00:35:52

Now me, I like it hot with just a little bit of milk but no sugar. But then you take it and you—if you made a batch of it and say you got a quart you can take that if it gets room temperature and you want to take it and pour it—take some ice like how you make iced-tea. Take a glass about two-thirds full of ice and you can sweeten that tea with no milk now. If you're going to—no milk with it cold. Take a little bit of sweetening if you want. It's all—the sweetening part is up to your taste. And you just put that sweetener in there and you put that in there and you stir it up. If you want to put some lemon—it's just—it's better than iced-tea.

00:36:47

KM: Bitter?

00:36:48

IL: Yeah, so now they claim it's got a certain medicinal principle. You can take some time like if you drink it as a tonic it's like it will flush your system out. But according if you overdo it, you got to—you know how to balance. And—and like you say, you got hot tea and cold tea and then ice just like that.

00:37:24

KM: Can you tell me about the pot in the backyard?

00:37:28

IL: Let's see, can you tell me about the pot in the backyard? [*Laughs*]

00:37:34

KM: Didn't someone make tea in that?

00:37:36

IL: I still got it.

00:37:36

KM: Yeah.

00:37:37

IL: My mother had a sister. She was the oldest of—on my mother's side there was a—there was—there was three girls and two boys in the family. The oldest child was Martha Ann, a girl. And then they had Joe, a boy, and then another Lewis boy, and there's another daughter named Dora.

00:38:13

KM: Dora.

00:38:13

IL: She—now Martha Ann never married. The boy married, both the boys married locals, and—and there's another girl down there Dora, she—she was about thirty-seven years old. Honey them people—the men, some they couldn't fight. They had—anyway she died. I remember when she died. I went with my mother—my mother was the youngest one of all the girls and she had married my father. I went up there to the house and looked at her and she

carried her out there to the cemetery and buried her near the shore and where they buried them to the shore, it was just as far as that—that big tree there from the water or farther. And seven or eight years ago I had to go down there. I know right where they was laying and the erosion stuck out and it kind of put a jetty there. The jetty got that classified as a—a historic cemetery. It's a bunch of them there. That's one of them.

00:39:33

And they went and put that rock part there but then the water began behind it and I went down there and there was the remains/bones right there behind it. I went down there myself—every bone I could find, a whole crowd full of them, mother, grandmother, and aunt and two aunts and carried them up here—up to the families up there and take them all and put them real neat and went in there and got me a slab and went to the man and got me a headstone and put every one of their names on there. They're sitting right there.

00:40:25

KM: Okay, tell me about Martha Ann.

00:40:27

IL: Martha Ann she used to go out there and cut the—she knew right where to go. Now you—Yaupon has got one, it's—and one of them has got berries—red berries on it. Like they might call them male/female and don't get—the red berries are bitter. She—and she cut all that stuff there and she'd take it and the trees that grow seven or eight feet and she'd take big limbs and she'd—then she'd cut the limbs like this [*gestures*] and then she'd get the little small limbs and clip them and put them—and she had—she had that pot and she'd dump it in there and she had a little pouch and then she'd roll it all the way up 'til it got that light brown and get the moisture out. And when she got it she knew just when to take it all out and put on the tray and let

it cool and put it back. She used to sell that. People over the bank—the men over there at Beaufort they were regular customers. But Papa said—said when they grew up there it was a standard drink. The only time you got coffee was on maybe Sunday. So everybody drank it.

00:41:44

KM: Hmm.

00:41:46

IL: And that's why I got the idea from her. So you got to get the green—you got to know which one to get and then you clip them and get them right down there and put them—. And another way you can dry them out too if you're not in a hurry for them, you can cut them out. You've seen these bags of—of—a bag where you bring oranges and stuff, mesh, you can take them and throw them in there and hang them out in the sun and eventually they'll get the moisture out of there, too. But if you're in a hurry for them you go ahead and get it in the oven—. . But anyway like you say, you put it in—like you got like you want.

00:42:30

I'm going to give you a little bit and I want you to try it when you get home.

00:42:33

KM: I would like to try it.

00:42:34

IL: Now you tell me how you're going to do it.

00:42:37

KM: I'm going to get a cup of the leaves and put a quart of water and—

00:42:41

IL: A quart at least. You want a quart—let it boil and you're going—now I'll tell you. Now when that starts to boil you got to watch it, if you don't it will foam up and boil over. And when it gets to say—you got to keep it a low boil. You follow me now?

00:43:00

KM: Uh-hm.

00:43:02

IL: And you take the spoon and you got—but the more you boil it the darker it gets and when you get it a nice color like you want it it's like—. Of course you—like I say it's hot.

00:43:21

KM: Tell me about that pot. Didn't you lose it and you got it back from somebody?

00:43:25

IL: The pot—

00:43:32

KM: Someone stole it?

00:43:33

IL: —she had was one of the biggest. See the first one, see, but in 1948 she had the old man who run her store to get her another pot. That pot was big. So I remember the first pot, I don't remember her—I wasn't around when she used it but I knew she had it. So when I come out—the first one, I don't—maybe it got damaged or something like there. Anyway when I come home she had—she bought that back in '48 [1948] and I come home and my sister over there, my sister had it hard—had alcohol. And there's a man down—the meantime Martha had died and—. So and the man that lived down the road, you know he came—everything he'd see, and

he said he wanted that pot. He bought it. I don't remember what she paid for it for sure, but anyway he gave her \$5 and he got the pot.

00:44:43

So I come up and I said—I asked him I said, “What happened to Sissy’s pot?” Well [Owen] wanted it—the man [Owen] and so I sold it to him. I needed the money. I went down there and I said, “[Owen], I said, “You got the pot?” “Yeah.” I said, “Now listen [Owen]. I don’t need no pot but it’s whose pot it was.” I said, “That remains a sentimental thing to me. I want that pot. I will buy it back off of you.” Now in the meantime, I retired and brought back a pump, big heavy duty pump from the lighthouse had been replaced and it was—and he knew I had it. He said, “I’ll tell you what.” Said, “That big pump you got there,” he said, “I’ll trade you.” I said, “It’s a deal. Take the pump.” I got the pot sitting in the yard. I told them, “Don’t let nobody get that pot.”

00:45:50

KM: Yeah. It’s a special pot.

00:45:50

IL: Too much sentimental, Sissy’s—we called her Sissy, Sissy’s pot.

00:45:57

KM: Sissy’s pot.

00:45:59

IL: Well honey I got a little thing that popped up that may mean—[inaudible]. They ain’t nobody buying them. Some people make no difference. [Inaudible]—sentimental they are. So—

00:46:20

KM: I want to know—what are three of your greatest life lessons.

00:46:26

IL: Tell me three of your greatest life lessons. Well honey—

00:46:32

KM: You've lived an awful long time.

00:46:36

IL: Regardless of what we accomplish in this life I got a little book I could get it. And I read it in there, it's a biblical book. And he puts it this way. It's called Hailey's Bible Commentary, Hailey's Bible Commentary. And he made the statement once, when we think—he puts it this way. When we think of the price that Christ paid to let that crowd of Jews stretch him out, set him on the cross, the most horrendous device that ever was invented to take a life—Nero Emperor in Rome. And of course Jesus [*inaudible*], see honey before Jesus come man—in the beginning—in the beginning Adam was made and Eve his wife and he give them—he made them like unto them.

00:48:14

Now he put them in the Garden of Eden and said—other words he wanted to start a generation. So now I got all of this—you got all this here. You see that tree over there—hands off. Hands off, the day if you mess with that, either that you're going to die. It started off then all of sudden she got curious. She got curious.

00:49:12

KM: I know the story.

00:49:17

IL: And Eve—the Bible says Adam was not deceived. Eve been deceived was in the translation so you women started it.

00:49:29

KM: Oh come on. I know that's what the story says...

00:49:35

IL: Adam made a mistake by listening to her. She said, "Oh it's good." He made the mistake by—I mean she—if he'd have said now listen, he said no and no it's going to be. But he listened to Eve and he tried and then passed upon all [*inaudible*]*—because one disobeyed.*

00:50:08

KM: Right, so what are your three greatest life lessons?

00:50:13

IL: Now—

00:50:15

KM: And you've lived—

00:50:16

IL: —the greatest thing in anybody's life is when they make a decision once and for all where you're going. Honey when we leave here this is just a stage for you to get ready to go to a better place. You believe that?

00:50:34

KM: I do.

00:50:38

IL: And we make up our mind which way we're going to go. He don't push it on us—whosoever will may come and take this life freely. He gives it—it's a gift. It's not a works lesson, a man shouldn't boast, it is a gift of God, a gift.

00:51:09

KM: So your faith is one of the most important things to you?

00:51:11

IL: Yeah, so people—I—I don't know if you—see the Catholics, why they can't see, they say you got to come to me and then—no. Jesus said, “I am the way, no man comes to the father except by Jesus,” not no—not no Pope. No, no, no, [*phone rings*].

00:51:43

KM: Oh. You know you've been here almost ninety-eight years—

00:51:47

IL: The most important—the most important thing is—is just what we talked about.

00:51:53

KM: Yes, sir.

00:51:53

IL: *Honor thy father and thy mother.*

00:51:59

KM: Yes and—

00:52:01

IL: *That the Lord thy God will lengthen your days*—which is the first commandment with promise. And He said *if—if you live for me and honor mother and father I'll give you long days*. I give Jesus God the credit for—I always honored my mother and father.

00:52:29

KM: Yeah.

00:52:30

IL: Yeah.

00:52:30

KM: But you've been here ninety-eight years.

00:52:34

IL: But also keep his commandments. You say born a Christian, well live like a Christian. A Christian don't go out and get drunk on Saturday night. Going out stealing—he lives—he goes—still a man has got to go to the house. Honey I don't say—I get about half a mile away, you receive by giving. Does that make sense?

00:53:14

KM: It does.

00:53:15

IL: You receive by giving. You can't out-give God. I got two, three, or four right there. I—I give Uncle Sam, twenty-one of the best years of my life serving my country and anybody that ain't got enough gall and ain't got enough pictures hidden—work and be willing to fight for our freedom he don't deserve nothing. [*emphasis added*] Honey if that crowd—if we—did you know—do you know England Nazis, you know Hitler and all that right, you know.

00:54:00

KM: Yes, sir.

00:54:01

IL: Did you know England was just about ready to throw the towel in? They were going to bomb right across the channel there. And we saw it and went to the rescue. Changed everything right around—saved them.

00:54:27

KM: Hmm.

00:54:28

IL: That's right. And anybody that ain't willing to go fight for what freedom they don't deserve no freedom. A fellow told me he went—and in Vietnam honey they said they estimated 150,000 Soldiers went to Canada to avoid and to get out of the draft to go to Vietnam. And now that the war's over—now they want to start crawling back—all the men, they should be court martialed, deserters. Anybody ain't willing to fight they don't deserve nothing. [*Emphasis added*]

00:55:06

KM: Tell me about the memorial you created on the island. You made—you helped put together the Veterans Memorial?

00:55:12

IL: Yeah, yeah, right. But you know what? You know people—even on that there monument they got short memories and I told my pastor about it too. I said I perceived you—how did—weren't very patriotic for the military and they didn't mention about no memorial. Other churches but—put flowers on them and put all that there—but he didn't do it.

00:55:53

KM: Hmm.

00:55:53

IL: Yeah.

00:55:55

KM: But you helped put that memorial on the island.

00:55:57

IL: Yeah, yeah.

00:55:59

KM: How did you do that?

00:56:00

IL: Just a little boy on the island here he come up the hard way and didn't know who his daddy was—poor fellow, rough. I was—he went to a friend's around the corner here and both [*inaudible*]. His name is Joseph. And they told—they said we want to get us a monument for all our servicemen—Harkers Island servicemen for the size of this county honey. Did you know this little island as small as it is, five boys never made it back home that I grewed up with. One of them was my second cousin.

00:56:56

KM: Oh wow.

00:56:57

IL: So I had—and that little boy said, “We ought to get names,” and he spoke to his friend and yeah. And then they—them two come to me. And I said, “What you said,” and I said, “Let's go with it. Let's go.” So and we started and formed a committee and got a committee and we said, “Well, we got to find out how many Veterans there are.” We said, “Harkers Island bred and born.” We said how—the other boys married off yonder—girls married soldiers off yonder come over here. And we—that's where we made one mistake. I had it over again I'd have stuck with it—Harkers Island born and bred, but now I said fix it. If the girl had married a boy from off and he come—and if you've been here five years or more, if you come here five—we'll consider you as a local. And some are right there now from off yonder. But if I had it over again I'd have

said Harkers Island. But we can't—we can't—. So we made—said how are we going to get the money? First we had to find out—me and them and we canvassed every cemetery on this island and Margaret Ann was our treasurer and we typed it up and put it on the stores and if you know—knew anybody in your family that served in the military and was honorable—honorable, put the names on there. And she did that and we went on for about—three or four times and we got—and we looked and we found and we put down and put it there. And then we tried to sell—take a lot of—we got the man to check the stone said it was going to run about \$20,000. And so we went around to the business people but you know on this island, that—that grocery store around there, I went down there and he had—

00:59:35

KM: Was that Billy's Grocery Store?

00:59:37

IL: Let me get it right. He married a daughter of the girl her father was in the service so we got—and I sent a message to him sort of about maybe he might help us out and he give me a sad story. I felt like I ought to give him \$5 to help him out. Well not one dollar—.

01:00:04

I had another man over here born and had people in the service and had a big business and still got a big business. I asked him, "How's business?" "Pretty good." I said, "We got a little program going and maybe you could help us out—instead of giving it to the government give it to us and it would be tax deductible." He didn't give us a dime. But you know what? We did this and we did—and one year we set it on the lot over \$20,000—.

01:00:50

KM: Wow, you raised all that money.

01:00:53

IL: Yeah, and that—

01:00:54

KM: That's amazing.

01:00:54

IL: —that little boy there he—he died, the one that started the whole thing he died right in the middle of it but we got about 400 names on that—that monument.

01:01:07

KM: Wow.

01:01:08

IL: But you know this—this is the last point I'll make. There weren't no—I noticed and I read in the paper that Morehead and all them—them people, them clubs, and when they go there and put flowers all around it and I didn't put nobody—not one flower out there—that crowd. And I told them a week ago, I said—told the pastor, and sitting around the churches you know we wanted to have a cleanup day out there. The big tree in the background and we wanted to trim it up and—and we were going to be out there at ten o'clock and volunteer to help out.

01:01:52

I went out there last Saturday and I got out there about 9:30 and my granddaughter, she goes to one church down there and she showed up and Margaret Ann showed up and my—my nieces, my niece's boy, one boy come down there. But there was three—and the church for that boy I go to and I had one boy down there. And every one of them showed up and we cleaned it out good and nice and all that.

01:02:32

KM: Very nice.

01:02:32

IL: So I told that preacher about it. I said, “Announce it,” and one boy come. Margaret Ann’s church, my daughter and her and a whole bunch of the men in the service, see you always want to be on the glory side but when it’s a little bit of work—. But I love to go out there and clean. I mean I went out to the tree—. When you go to the road you look, when you’re getting ready—if you—when you’re going by the road if you’re going this way you look right over there. That morning and the flag pole is—when you look it’s right dead center on the backside right in the middle. And right behind that is an old big oak tree spreading out yonder—and that tree is right in the background of everything. And we went up there and cleaned all around it.

01:03:35

KM: How nice.

01:03:36

IL: Margaret Ann and Joanie and that one boy and myself worked out there from 9:30 to 1:30.

01:03:44

KM: Wow, very nice.

01:03:47

IL: So some will and some won't.

01:03:49

KM: That’s right. Well thank you so much for the interview. I—it’s always a pleasure to talk with you. What I’m going to do is just—

01:04:02

IL: But the thing about it—who is going—when we're old and gone, we grew up around here. Honey, history bears out. If we had lost that war the whole world would have been changed—Nazism but you wouldn't be around here. You'd be doing what the Nazis said—Nazis. England was just about ready to throw in the flag, we went D's Day—over there and—and got—it made the difference. Can you imagine honey sending troops and supplies 3,000 miles over water and fetched it with submarines? They said them Germans from Africa—listen, Africa—up the west coast of Africa, all around Iceland and Greenland and down the east coast, all off the North Carolina coast, with—with that—all of that with the war already in the Pacific.

01:05:42

KM: Sure.

01:05:42

IL: And then submarines laid right there waiting for—and they stayed in the—the first boy ever killed the Brooks boy, [*laughs*]*—well anyway we won the war. And we're going to keep on—.*

01:06:09

KM: And I thank you for your service and for your time.

01:06:12

IL: I enjoyed going—working out there. But it's—honey this generation they don't think that—they don't—if we got—if we—this country got involved right now like we were involved in 1942 with the enemy—the war in the Pacific and the war in Africa and—and Italy and Europe and all them places, with the manpower that you had to draw from, we would never make it.

01:06:52

KM: Hmm, well thank you.

01:06:53

IL: But them boys back then they had it—they left their families and these kids and the jobs and went over there. They kicked their butts and come back home. And that's just what they did. They didn't go in there and play any games. They—they took care of that crowd and let them know we ain't going to take it. And it's changed. We—this United States has changed the whole world.

01:07:20

KM: Yes, sir, okay. Thank you for the interview.

01:07:23

IL: And I'm glad I'm an American. I—I'd go again right now. I'm still—that's why I'm still in the military. They don't have that many—there ain't no military. He wants to give—.

01:07:42

KM: Thank you so much. Thank you.

01:07:44

IL: Okay honey. What time is it baby?

01:07:52

KM: I think it's close to 11:30.

01:07:56

IL: Is it time to eat? Let me go—. Let's see. I got to make—. I'll be right back.

01:08:24

END INTERVIEW