Interview with Mary (73 years old) and James (75 years old) in their home in Marshallberg, North Carolina.

Q.1.: Connection to Down East

Henry: Tell me about your connection to Down East.

Mary: I'm born and raised in Marshallberg.

James: I was born and raised in Sea Level. I was a fisherman in the summer times. I went into the military as soon as I graduated from high school; maybe it was because I had done fishing before. After the fishing job, everything seems easy. I was in the Air Force for 23 years. We moved back because Cape Lookout and Cape Point... it's a magical place.

Henry: Do your families extend back... how far do they extend back in the area?

James: My family has been a short time in comparison to hers. Hers was here 13 generations. Didn't we figure it up, including our great grandchildren? Thirteen generations that we know that they were in North Carolina in Carteret County. Some of her family were from Harkers Island, or Davis Island, and on the Banks.

Mine was a little bit different. When we came to North Carolina in the Elizabeth City area really, were the first of my direct line. Elizabeth City and then they moved down to the Lake Matamuskeet area. Then my grandfather moved to Pamlico County. My father and my uncle were logging in Cedar Island; I was the youngest of 4 brothers. My uncle moved to Sea Level, because he had sort of logged out the Cedar Island area, and he set up operations in Sea Level and my father was still working for him and the family moved. He bought a house in Sea Level for $200 borrowed money.

Henry: This land here is inherited land. Is that right?

Mary: It belonged to my grandparents and then to my mother and then to us. It's family, this whole corner is family, and still is! And a funny thing that my grandmother and grandfather first married, and were living on Polly's Hill, which is "the place to be" now, waterfront...and they didn't like the rough wind down there and they sold out down there and moved up so that he could do farming, because it was rough with the salt water. Now, everybody is clamoring for all the waterfront, and he didn't like it and moved away from it.

Q.3.: Professional perspective on Down East

Henry: You all ran a tourist service right? Can you tell me a little about that?

James: I had a friend that had moved here from Raleigh, and he bought a new boat. Some of the people around here were running ferries over to Cape Lookout. So Mary: and I started doing tours. The ferries by then there were ferries operating out of Harkers Island, and they would bring us the customers. It really got too big for us.

Mary: It turned out to be quite successful, quite enjoyable for everyone. Hoping to get a little money, but it was not all about the money. It was helping people to enjoy the Cape as we could see it, and give them a history of all the houses that were standing there, history of what went on in the Civil War, different things. It was a history/nature tour that everyone wanted, and always stopped down at Cape Point for shelling. A highlight of the tour. If we passed one of the volunteers with the Park Service digging up a turtle nest as they do and count the eggs, we could stop and let them enjoy that as long as they stayed out the way, so that was just extra free if that happened. And it happened quite often.

Henry: You have a number of work experiences here, including the fishing industry and the tourism industry. What perspective on the area did you get from doing those things?

James: With the failing seafood industry in this area, I think tourism is our only hope. But, tourism is not what a fisherman wants. Fisherman wants to be a fisherman. He don't want to cross train to be a bricklayer or a farmer. He wants to fish. Very slow to change. They just have little desire in becoming any part... the majority of them... any part of the tourist industry. All they want to do… they’re completely independent as fishermen, and that's their thing. It's not that they don't like people, or don't like the people from "off." It's just that they have chosen their occupation, because that is what they grew up with. It's just like kids on a farm growing up on a farm. Being on the water with a load of tourists to them is not working the water.

Q.4.: Community and environmental change

Henry: Do you feel as if the area has changed?

Mary: The changes in each little community might be different. Marshallberg has a lot of people that's come in to build a private home and not change anything. You can look at Harkers Island and there's little shops all over, and they've come in and put up businesses. None one has put up a business in Marshallberg. We've always been a community of boat builders and we have boat builders. But you don't see those little shops where they're selling crafts and junk. So people that's moved here is fine with me; they've built nice homes and they enjoy them. I would not like it if all these other places, little restaurants and stuff started popping up in Marshallberg, and I don't think most Marshallbergers would either.

Henry: Have you seen changes over your lifetime to the environment or the natural beauty of the area?

Mary: I haven't seen much changes. A lot of our woodland has been cut down and cleared to build more homes, but pretty much the same. Some new people moved here and joined our little community club, and helped with our little fundraisers that we have to do a lot of because of our harbor. Rich people are trying to take our harbor away from us, and that's a whole 'nother article that we don't want to get into now or you'd be here a year.

James: Harkers Island is the best example we have down here. 25 years ago when the fishermen started coming to Harkers Island, they needed restaurants and people supplied them for them. And they brought Uncle Joe down the next trip, and Uncle Joe's just retired, and he's not going back up to that pig farm. He's going to sell that, and take his pocket full of money, come down here, and buy him a place on the water and he can fish any day he wants to. Well, the people started selling, and never realized that that piece of land that their mothers and fathers and grandfathers and their ancestors back for hundreds of years had lived on had a value to it -- a money value. Somebody comes in and offers them $100,000 for that land; they couldn't imagine that much money. They sold out to Uncle Joe. But they’re not going to move anyplace, so Uncle Abe gave him a quarter acre across the road. What do you care about the water as long as I can get to my boat? First thing he knew there was a fence in front of his old house while they were tearing it down, and there was a fence near the water. He had to go around his property to get to his boat. It wasn't very much longer, he found that as other people moved in, that's all up and down the waterfront of Harkers Island you couldn't get to the water. They find out all of a sudden that they can't even get to the damn water. By then, the property that they've bought across the road, that's worth a couple hundred thousand dollars. So, they sell out and move to a trailer park on this side of the bridge.

Mary: My grandfather went down that path to the creek to get on his boat to make his fishing trip that he made and come back. He didn't care if he could look at the water; it wasn't a pretty thing to look at. He didn't go out there to go swimming or water skiing. That was his job. Now people want it where they can look at it, and that's a completely different way of life. He worked it. He spent his earlier years as a sailor. He had all the salt water he wanted! He wanted away from it. He didn't like the wind and the storms, and it bothered his farming.

Q.5.: Vision for the future of Down East

Henry: What would be your vision for the future of Down East if you could have it any way you wanted from here forward?

James: Well, I would like to go back, but that's impossible. That's not ever practical. What I’d like to see commercial fishing continue to prosper to the point that a person could make a living wage. Money is not the most important thing to these people. It's a living. That's what they want. If it's not a big salary, they'd be happy to have a small salary. If they could just work their boats, and they'll work hard. They'll work hard, but give them a reasonable set of rules and they'll follow them. They're law-abiding people. I would like to see some type of a co-op where all the fishermen take a fair share, and you run your own business. You have somebody in charge of the business, but it's run by fishermen basically. You buy and sell your own stuff, and not sell it to an independent fish dealer. You go in, and it's your... you're part of the company and you share in the profits and have a place that could make loans to the fisherman at a low rate or they could have a place to pay it back at a low rate.

Henry: Should there be more growth or should there be growth in some areas and not in others?

James: We personally don't like to see a lot of growth. I say that, and I just had a friend of mine build a house -- they live in Israel 6 months of the year and in New York probably the other 6 months -- these are people we have known over 40 years. Well, we know he will be good for the community. He would be a welcome addition to the community.

Q.6.: Barriers to and opportunities for achieving your vision

Henry: What do you see as the barriers to make your vision happen, or perhaps the opportunities that would help it to happen?

James: I'm against these sewer plants. They'll put in a project and then put in a sewer plant, and two or three years from now, it's broken and it's all over the streets. Seen it happen on just one small resort on Atlantic Beach... down near Fort Macon... that flooded several years ago and raw sewage was running down the street.

Also, the type of people that they send down here to govern these things and to make these rules…. Most of them are PhDs, and like I say, they're very intelligent people, but there's a lot of things they don't know or don’t think about. This is foreign to them. It's completely like putting them in a new world. They've never even seen places like this. When they were having the big meetings on running the sewer line to this big farm out here. They were explaining to the local people that it was going to run out and people said "where is it going from there?" Well eventually it's going into North River. Well North River is one of our big hatchery areas in this area. They said "oh no problem about that. The sewage won't kill anything when it runs in the North River." "Oh it won't?" “No, you can drink the water that goes into the North River." "Well, what's the salinity of this fresh water." "Well it's fresh, so none at all." That's my point. Fresh water kills baby shrimp, juvenile shrimp, clams, scallops, everything is growing in that water that's probably 50/50, and now they've adapted and that's why they're here. They want the salt in our water to be 50/50 or whatever figures they use. They didn't know that what controlled what seafood lived there was the salinity and the temperature of the water.

Henry: Do you have any suggestions for how people who have practical experience here Down East can have a voice in making plans and things like that? How could that be done better?

Mary: I don't know. They don't come to the local area and ask local people anything. They say “here's our plan, it's good, we know how to do it.” They want to do it right now. You have to come to the local level and say “we're planning on doing this program. Would you please tell us what we need to know to do it right?” But too many people think they already know how to do it, so they don't ask.