



Interviewee: William G. "Cubby" Wilder
Place of interview: Mosquito Beach, Charleston County, South Carolina
Date of interview: February 14, 2019
Interviewer: Michael A. Allen
Transcriber: Home Row, Inc.
Length of interview: 46:32

BEGIN INTERVIEW

Michael Allen: Well, good afternoon, sir. How are you doing?

William Wilder: I'm doing fine.

MA: All right. Tell me your name and your address, please.

WW: My name is William G. Wilder, 1894 [00:00:16 B], Sol Legare Road, Charleston, South Carolina, 29412.

MA: Okay. When and where were you born?

WW: I was born in Roper Hospital in Charleston. Roper Hospital. 1940.

MA: So, you're a native to the soil here.

WW: Yes, I am.

MA: All right. If you go into the back of your mind, tell me or share with me your first, your earliest memory of Mosquito Beach that you can think.

WW: My earliest memory of Mosquito Beach is when I was a little kid my dad used to bring me down here in the truck, and they used to call it at the time the factory. And when I used to come down in this - on this territory here, it was called the factory. His first cousin, old Joe Chavis, Little Bubba, Kingpin, Joe Chavis, he had a house on Mosquito Beach, and the house - a house store. Part of the house was a store and the other part of the house was his living quarters. And they would come down here and do their - do their little thing.

MA: So, when you came as a youngster, was the factory still here? That was gone by that point?

WW: No, the factory - the factory, the reason why it got the name the factory is because there was an oyster factory down here, and after the - after the oyster factory left somewhere in the early 1920s, '30s, the residents continued - according to what my dad told me - they continued to hang out down here because it - because of the atmosphere. It was always cool down here. So, then Little Bubba, he lost that house. The house burned down. So, he put up another house. And my dad continued to bring me back down here off and on with him. And after that I - I journeyed to New York City at the age of -

MA: When your dad brought you here, what were some of the things that you all would do? What do you remember doing

WW: Well, I remember when I was coming down here, it was so many - it was a lot of palm trees, and most of the - most of the activity was on this end on Lafayette property. And, so, when I realized that - sometime we would drive down to the end and then turn around, then he would point to that - it was a big oyster mound out there on the Walker Left property, and he would say, son, that's where the oyster factory was located. And he told me he used to work - he used to work on the - he had, like, a little - they had, like, a little barge that - with a little motor on the barge, and he used to go out there - the guy would go pick the oyster and dump it on the - like a flat bottom barge, they would dump the oyster on the barge, and then the barge would - would come around and offload the oysters to the factory; whereas, there was the shuckers in there, like people like my mother, my aunt, and a whole lot of the people at the time, I guess they was in their early teens - teen and early 20s, they would be shucking the oyster because it was a good source of income for them.

MA: So, when you came around the oyster factory was gone...

WW: My dad. My dad told me -

MA: Yeah.

WW: Yeah.

MA: And as I understand it, there were some buildings here that people lived in that was connected...

WW: Yeah. Well, it - my dad didn't tell me the building. That's later on. But you want to talk about that now?

MA: Yeah, we can, yeah.

WW: Okay. After I came from New York and my aunt moved from New York, the one who used to work down here, I used to drove it - I used to drive her down here to the - to Mosquito Beach, and she said, take me down to the end. I would take her down to the end, and she said she and her husband, her name was Lila Wilder, and my mother, Rebecca Wilder, she said they used to work in the - in the oyster factory and used to shuck the oysters. And my aunt said she lived in the little hut they had down there, and they were - where you would see P&G Club, somewhere

back up in that area there, the P&G Club. There was a lot of little huts around there, and they - they lived in there, her and her husband and other - and other family members living in these little huts because they didn't want them to go home. They want - it was like a continuous thing - working. So, - and my mother, she used to come - she used to - she used to walk from up to the house to where I live up the street there down here to the factory to shuck oysters to make her money.

MA: So, you consider that that factory that was once here was a source of income for folks living in Charleston.

WW: Oh, yes. Definitely. And when the oyster factory closed down, they - they continue hanging out down here because of the - the atmosphere. It was cool weather down here and the tide was making high and it was so beautiful that they would still come down and hang out to Mr. Joe Chavis' house after the factory closed.

MA: Earlier you mentioned a man by the name of Kingpin. Tell us a little bit about him....

WW: Kingpin lived in the house. He was my daddy first cousin. He lived in the house that was down here. And like I said, he had something like a little storefront and a residence. The house was in two parts. Store he would sell his little candy, soda, and stuff like that. And not to mention, he's a - he was a guy that lived off the land. He would go catch his fish, shrimp, clam, oysters, and he would sell clam, oyster, fish, crab right out of his house. He would cook it himself. He had no overhead.

MA: So, when you think about Mosquito Beach and think about look at what was coming later here, Kingpin kind of began the process of being an entrepreneur

WW: Well Kingpin, you could say Kingpin was an entrepreneur. He - he was down here and - and at the time it was called the factory and there was more than one entrance coming down to Mosquito Beach I remember; that if you're coming from - from I would say, we used to call it "up the street" but you come from where Harris Teeter is at, the other driveway is coming that way. And then if you come from - from what we call "in the battery", your - the driveway come in that way, but it all runs into one road - one roadway, which road now is called Mosquito Beach Road. But he had one coming from the - I would say from the west and one coming from the east, and the road would go into one - one roadway. And I also remember that when tide was high, the water would come across the road. There's a little creek right down there. You can't get down to Mosquito Beach on high tide, so - because there was no paved road down here. It was a dirt road.

MA: And, so, with that, I was wondering also, when you had storms, or hurricanes bad weather, sometimes was Mosquito Beach flooded or covered with water?

WW: Oh, yes, yeah, it was very - it - Mosquito Beach is really - before they paved the road, it was really a island. It was a island off - off of Sol Legare, and then it became a peninsula after they put the road there because the creek, there's a creek on the back of - of the island of Mosquito Beach.

MA: Help me to move forward somewhat in time to Mr. Apple Wilder and his importance....

WW: Yeah. Well, Apple, Apple was here, and like I told you, my dad, Apple, Joe King - and Little Bubba, Kingpin, they was all first cousins on the Lafayette side. Only his last name was Wilder. My grandmother was a Lafayette. My grandmother was named Mary Lafayette. She married Andrew Wilder. So, they was all first cousins. So, then Apple went to the - to the elderly folks and asked them could he - if he could build in 19 - in the early '51 he went to them and asked them because he put a pavilion over the water on the Lafayette property. And they gave him permission. They were all kind of apprehensive, didn't think it was going to make it for him to build it but he did it anyway. And he built a pretty large structure over the marsh and it was called Harbor - Harbor Light Pavilion. And he built it in 1953. It opened in 1953 - in Easter Monday 1953. I never forget that because I came from New York in 1953, and I lived in New York for about - from the time I was six until I got 13. And that's when he opened it, on a Easter Monday. And people were coming from everywhere to the - well, it - the local people were come to the - come to the pavilion, and it was all the dancing going on. And Little Bubba, Old Joe, he saw a lot of - he - his - his.....

MA: Entrepreneur.

WW: - entrepreneurship was enhanced because, like I said, he had no overhead and that he would go in the creek, catch his own fish, fish, clam, oyster, and shellfish, and he would sell. He would sell that food. He would sell his stuff and people would be out here to about all night, and when they done get through dancing and having a good time, they would go to Kingpin and buy his food.

MA: So, now you have this pavilion that was a Wilder build.

WW: Mr. Andrew Wilder. Yeah, because the elderly Lafayette.

MA: Tell us what happens now when it's built,,,how did that affect the landscape of the area?

WW: Well, he - here what happened. The lodge hall, the Sol Legare lodge hall, number - large hall number seven - six, seven, sixty-seven, used to the center of attraction on Sol Legare. All activity in the community would go through the large hall, like on Labor Day, 4th of July, any holidays that May - May Day and also [00:11:46 unintelligible] Day, everybody would go up the large hall, and that was a gathering point for the locals there, the Sol Legare large hall. The Sol Legare lodge hall serve a lot of function and a lot of activities in the community.

Then when the pavilion, the second year of the pavilion, everybody shunned the lodge hall and started coming to Mosquito Beach. And then Mr. Jack Walker, he decided to build a P&J Club. That's the very club on the end down there, and the club is still standing as is the original, with the window opening up and he built his club, and he made a lot of - the second year, 1954, he started making a lot of money. How I know because his son was my best partner, and he made - start making money. And then everybody started seeing the entrepreneurship of

Mosquito Beach. And then there was a lot of other little clubs that started popping up on Mosquito Beach.

And then in - in the - I think in 1955 or somewhere around there, that's when they brought the - the bumper cars. The bumper cars was down here. And the bumper cars, my uncle didn't own it outright. There was another guy - gentleman that owned that. I don't know the gentleman name, but he talked to my uncle and put the bumper cars down here. But my uncle was getting a percentage of the money he made off the bumper cars. And then came along the - from the pavilion the boat races. The few people that - African American that had boats, they would bring their boats down when the high tide and they would run up and down the creek with their boats. And, so, that was a catcher.

And then about 1956 and '57, that's when a lot of clubs start popping up on Mosquito Beach because right where the D & F Club, my cousin Joe - Joe Walker and my cousin Margaret Walker, they opened up a little kitchen right there where almost the D & F Club was at. That place has long - is long gone. But they used to sell food because at one time from the boardwalk, people didn't leave and they be down here just about all weekend and they wanted to eat. So, then all these little food places start popping up. Then my uncle Joe Shaver, his business really start picking up with people wanting to eat and all this stuff, and then my grand uncle, Apple's uncle, he opened up a little shop right there, and he start selling stuff out of his shop. And then about 1959 it was about - it was a club on the end and my - my cousin little food place, and then Hugo - not Hugo - what's that storm?

MA: Gracie?

WW: Gracie. Gracie came along and took the boardwalk. The first boardwalk was over there on the Lafayette property, yeah, it took the boardwalk and a lot of damage. A lot of damage, a lot of stuff damaged. Matter of fact, I remember when Gracie came because we all evacuated to W.Gresham Meggett, the school that's going on the - on the historical record. We all had evacuated our homes and went there because the storm was going to be pretty bad. And, so, we spend the night in W. Gresham Meggett, and when we came back, a lot of places was gone, so my uncle decided not to put the boardwalk back on the Lafayette property. A gentleman named Park Michael, he used to farm over here. He was Caucasian. He sold Andrew Wilder this property right here. And he decided to put the boardwalk over there, another boardwalk.

WW: Huh?

MA: In a different location?

WW: Yeah. Put it right over - where you see the pilings now, that's where he put it at. Almost the same identical building - might have been - yeah, as the first one. Might have been maybe a little larger, little - but he - he opened that up, and in 1959, Easter Monday 1959, and he opened it up. And by this time, Mosquito Beach was really taking off.

MA: Let's talk a little bit about that.

WW: Oh, yeah, and during the time the bumper cars got damaged because when we came back down here, the bumper car was all over - all over the place because they ran on electricity. It was electrical, so it was gone. And then they just move it out never decide to put one back.

MA: Well, let's talk a little bit about that because now you - you painted the picture of the evolution of Mosquito Beach and how it changed. But through all of that it became a beacon for African Americans to come here. Talk a little bit about just African Americans came not just from Sol Legare, not just from James Island, not just from Charleston, but around the country and around, why do you think they came here?

WW: Well, as you know, African Americans just migrate to a place called Atlantic Beach, and that was - and I think that was true beach, I mean, and - Yeah. And what happened is I forgot - I got to go back. Let me regress a little bit. When this boardwalk was - the first boardwalk was here, not boardwalk but pavilion, the mosquitoes came, too, because all the dancing and the - and perspiration. So, this is - somebody jumped on it and said, this is Mosquito Beach. And then people start, the name just echo and people - Mosquito Beach and people stop and mosquitoes all the time, and they's dancing, having a good time, but they didn't know that they were drawing the mosquitoes; you know? So, then the name Mosquito Beach from the first boardwalk echo and harbor - I tell you what's called Harbor Lake?

MA: Yes, you did.

WW: Harbor Lake, they used to call it Harbor Lake, but then the pavilion started going - started we going to Mosquito Beach, although the pavilion was the main attraction and all these other things, but - so then Mosquito Beach name came up from the first boardwalk. And then as people started migrating to going to Atlantic beaches, all them places, the talk I'm talking about I'm not going to Atlantic Beach. I'm going to Mosquito Beach, so - and then the name echoed because all the Lowcountry people that didn't realize that it was a beach here on - and then there was also Riverside Beach on Remeley Point. And I remember we used to go over to Riverside Beach, but Riverside Beach didn't have a good reputation; you know? So, then everybody was coming to Atlantic Beach. So, I mean, to Mosquito Beach. And, so, from the church - from the Lowcountry, the word pass all around from Mt. Pleasant to Holly Hill to - to Hollywood to all over, we going to Mosquito Beach because we having a good time down there.

MA: Well, let me ask you this: Why do you think the African Americans felt it was so important that they would come here?

WW: Well, you know, for the males - I could speak to the males. The males followed the women, and there was a lot of women coming down here from everywhere. So, the male - the male got to follow the women. And then the women going to follow the men, so there was a lot of - there was just a lot of dancing. And then some people come to, you know, you don't - you all right, but the dancing was the catch, and you know, and the - when Sam Cooke come up with the cha-cha-cha and all them things, but you could see everybody try to outdo each other with the cha-cha-cha, and all them other dancers that just come out back in those days. So, people used to come to watch other people dance, and then they come to watch the girls and the guy - and the girls come to watch the guys. So, you know, it was just the birds and the bees.

MA: Oh, okay. Birds and bees. Ok, that's one thing. So, tell me, how was this a draw from a Civil Rights perspective?

WW: Well -

MA: Civil Rights angle.

WW: Of course. You know, we had aRight. As you realize, there was a beach - a real beach just two miles from us. Not even two miles - maybe a mile and a half. And we could - we were not allowed to go to Folly Beach. We were not allowed to go to Sullivan Island. And what's the other beach over there?

MA: Isle of Palms.

WW: Isle of Palms, We were not allowed to go over there because we were black, so - or African American. So, the drawing card, although Mosquito Beach is not a true beach by -

MA: On the oceanfront.

WW: - oceanfront, the drawing card is that you going near water. You was in the water in the inlet. So, people wanted to be near water, and with the water and the breeze and the good time, and believe it or not, we did swim down here, the locals. Not too much of the - of the folks came down here and swim from off because they didn't know the water, but the locals, Sol Legareans, they knew the water, so they could - Sunday afternoons they would be out there swimming. And the boat races would - would come, and the people wanted to ride in the boats. And that was a drawing card when the tide was right and everything was the perfect setting on a Sunday afternoon, Saturday afternoon, tide is high, you have boat races and people want to ride in the boats.

MA: So, would you say or at least believe that Sol Legare was a safe place in terms of Civil Rights where people could face the challenges of life? -

WW: Yeah. Mosquito Beach was a safe haven for African Americans at the time. It was - sure, they had their little incidents, but it was really safe, and you didn't have to worry about being in a hostile atmosphere when you try to invade the Caucasian communities or try to invade Folly Beach or these other - the other beach near the ocean that had the real oceanfront.

MA: So, I guess it was , there was a sense of pride that was here because of that.

WW: Oh, yeah.

MA: Can you talk about that?

WW: Oh, yeah, the - the folks love Mosquito Beach, and the thing that [00:22:53 unintelligible] like the fact that it was all black - all black owned and guess what? There was a lot of white folk

came down the - the parties down here on the beach also. They thought they were going to be ran away, but - from the beach, but there was no running away. They fall right on into place. They were a little apprehensive as to how they going to get treated, but if you're out to have a good time, you can have a good time no matter what your color you are.

MA: Would you say that - how do I explain that - would you say that's kind of a challenging thing that you couldn't go and party on Folly Beach with white folks, but white folks could theoretically come and party with you [00:23:34 crosstalk] -

WW: And it will have no effect. They was a little apprehensive, but when they see nobody is bothering them or threatening them, they fall right in because you hear a lot of white folks say, I used to party on Mosquito Beach. Some of them say I used to come down and party on Mosquito Beach. There was no animosity.

MA: No division.

WW: No division, [00:23:53 right], but the thing is, and I know you all interview my cousin [00:23:59 Roper], but they met hostility when they passed the Bill in 1963-64, the Civil Rights Bill, and they went to Folly Beach, said they going swimming, and they met a lot of hostility - hostility there, yeah. But when the white folks came here, there was no hostility toward them, yeah.

MA: Besides, you know, the clubs that were here, the food that [00:24:28 unintelligible] selling, [00:24:30 unintelligible] the enterprise of bootlegging going on. That's a part of the history, so we can't run away from that, so talk a little bit about that.

WW: Yeah. [00:24:40 unintelligible] back up a little bit. Kingpin, Joe-Joe, Little Bubba, he sold moonshine. And he didn't make it. He would buy it from the locals and sell it. And they had the different quantity. They had the quarter shot, the 50 cent quart, the 50 cent shot, and the dollar shot. The different shots. But my uncle [00:25:12 Andrew Apple Wilder], he made - he was a boot - a big-time bootlegger, and I think that's how he got started to get - find the money.

MA: So, in some respects, how do I - bootlegging may have helped to finance [00:25:23 unintelligible] -

WW: Yes. Well, yes, because time was hard, and after the oyster factory - after the oyster factory closed, they tried to live up to - up the creek. Most of - like my dad, he was a fisherman and farmer, and, you know, if you have a good catch and have a good year with farming, we ate good. But there were time that they didn't - they didn't have a good catch and the good farming because of the - either the weather or whatever, so it was bad times. So, even my dad made some moonshine and - to make ends meets. And when they make the moonshine, the moonshine would be bootlegged to the City of Charleston.

MA: [00:26:13 unintelligible] so people would transport.

WW: Transport. They would transport and sell the moonshine in the city.

MA: In white establishments, in black establishments, or both?

WW: The mostly white - black establishments because there were more clubs downtown Charleston that did the bootlegging liquor.

MA: That [00:26:34 unintelligible] -

WW: Yeah, that needed it. So, yes, bootleg was a big part of - of people making ends meet other than the traditional farming and fishing because some - sometimes was good fishing, and sometimes it was bad. And I must remind you that the people - the [00:26:59 unintelligible] folks, they was very indigent and they had - they caught on hard times, so I could tell you right now, you either kill a hog in - this time of year, January and February, they would [00:27:11 unintelligible] their old hog and [00:27:12 pigs] and stuff like that, and they would kill one in January and February, and they would share. They would share. So, bootlegging was like an entrepreneurship to help ends meet; whereas, the other industry, like the fishing and the farming didn't come through.

MA: [00:27:33 unintelligible] -

WW: Yeah, right.

MA: So, now that you talked about the birth of Mosquito Beach, you talked about some of the pioneering people of Mosquito Beach, you talked of people coming here, I see there's a large structure behind you today that somehow played into that. Tell me a little bit about that structure that's behind you today.

WW: So, like I told you, I mentioned to you before, I didn't mention it, but the bus excursion, there were bus excursions just like we used to take a bus excursion go to Atlantic Beach and it would take us almost two hours or three hours to get there, and I was [00:28:09 unintelligible] were going across that [00:28:11 covered] bridge, the old [00:28:12 covered] bridge on that bus.

MA: Well, that's always a great [00:28:16 fear].

WW: That was a - that was the scariest thing that I witnessed in my lifetime going [00:28:21 through that covered bridge] with a busload, yeah, busload of folks got their little fried chicken and their little sandwiches going across that bridge to go to Atlantic Beach.

MA: That was a Green Book experience.

WW: Yeah, exactly. So, what happened is the - the - with Riverside Beach being there and we migrating to Atlantic Beach, and people [00:28:51 are not to do that] anymore, to go to Atlantic Beach, and the talk of Mosquito Beach being a black beach, the people start taking bus excursions. I can't remember all - all the - where people are from. I know Holly Hills was one of them. Holly Hill.

MA: [00:29:07 unintelligible] -

WW: Yeah. [00:29:09 unintelligible] County, and I think some came from Florence County, and I can't think real far back, but they used to come and they used to park right over there by waterfront - the waterfront [00:29:24 unintelligible] that club wasn't as large as it is now, but that used to be a parking for the boats would be parked over there. And people did not want to leave the - I think I told you - they party all night all day Friday, Saturday, Sunday. So, some would just be sleeping in their cars. So, then my uncle [00:29:42 unintelligible] came up with the idea that we need a build a - we need to build a hotel.

MA: [00:29:46 unintelligible] -

WW: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. And then they had a hotel downtown in the city [00:29:52 used to be] called hotel [00:29:53 James]. That was a - that was a real hotel and it was huge. I mean, in that - by that standard then. But it - they were also expensive, and these people [00:30:04 that traveled], they didn't have that much money and they're spending their money and stuff like that, so my uncle decided to build - I think it was 14 rooms with a kitchen.

MA: I was going to ask you, so how many rooms were in this facility?

WW: Top and bottom, he had - he build that in - in somewhere in the '62 [00:30:20 unintelligible] he started in '61, finished in '62. And he had - I think he had 14 rooms, seven downstairs and seven upstairs.

MA: Do you remember the cost per night to stay there?

WW: It wasn't over 15 - either 10, \$15 because it wasn't that much money - \$20 at the most, yeah. And what would happen is they had a kitchen in - he had a restaurant down here, and the people could go in the restaurant. I don't know the name of the restaurant. The Island Breeze or currently Island Breeze, but I don't know the name of - I think it was Apple Kitchen or something like that. But anyway, they would stay - they would stay at - instead of sleeping in their car, they would get a room and -

MA: One of 14.

WW: Yeah. And they had a joint kitchen. I mean a joint bathroom. One bathroom shared upstairs and down, and the kitchen up -

MA: One bathroom [00:31:27 unintelligible] -

WW: No, upstairs and down.

MA: [00:31:30 unintelligible] two.

WW: Yeah, two: one downstairs, joint used bathroom or community bathroom, and one upstairs. And then they had a kitchen - community kitchen - yeah, in the back. Yeah, then the

room - the room was small. The room didn't have nothing but a cot, a nightstand, and a lamp, and a little bucket; you know? Yeah, in there.

MA: But people took advantage of this building here [00:31:56 crosstalk] -

WW: Yes, they did. And then at the time of Hugo, when Hugo hit, yeah, '89, it was three families in there because that's the time I was able to preserve - that I was able to - to show that they were three families living in there when the county come and acted to take the building down. Oh, no, I was trying to get it appraised.

MA: Yeah. So, how long was this establishment in operation?

WW: From '62 until -

MA: '89?

WW: Yeah, Hugo came.

MA: Wow.

WW: Yeah.

MA: So, probably hundreds of people stayed in [00:32:42 unintelligible] -

WW: Oh, yeah.

MA: Yeah.

WW: Oh, yeah. Yes, yes. And like I said, they had a restaurant. People would - if they needed to eat, they would go over and eat in the restaurant or go to Kingpin, eat [00:32:57 some of his fish] or whatever he had cooked, yeah. And he - his wife was a very good cook. She'd either fry up a bunch of fish, fry oysters, do crabs, and clams and all that stuff. So, people just loved that food. That's the old man used to say. His wife really fixed the food, though, yeah.

MA: Let's think this about this place today because you shared with us I guess [00:33:25 unintelligible], how do you see this place now [00:33:34 unintelligible] -

WW: Well, I see a chance in talking with folks. The first anyone says, this is a beautiful place. And the folks all around here driving through here every day to take pictures and stuff like that. And I know I think they're a little disappointed with what they see because they hear about Mosquito Beach, and right now almost all the original structure that was here is not here anymore. Number one, the pavilion is gone. The pavilion is gone. The restaurant and the other little [00:34:24 unintelligible], it's still standing, but it's a restaurant now. And all the - the businesses that were down here that people could have drive up and down - was driving up and down getting something to eat and dance and having a good time, most of those structures is not standing anymore.

But there's hope that hopefully with some investor that comes in, I don't know if it would be back where all the dancing takes place because I think most of the entrepreneur down here that got businesses, they looking more at restaurants. But there still could be some dancing going on because that would - that's a drawing card, folks who still like to dance. I think that most all the structure down here need to - to open back up. Some of them - some of them open and some are closed, and I think it's coming from a - from a financial - financial standpoint [00:35:34 unintelligible], and people are not coming like they used to because if you take a look at it right as she stand right now, [00:35:46 there's some changing] - the old motel is in ruins right now.

And as y'all don't know, I got a notice from the county, Charleston County, to demolish it. But luckily to me, the - the historical Charleston Foundation stepped in and said this building should not be demolished. A lot of other preservation folks stepping - organizations stepped in [00:36:11 unintelligible] this thing need to be preserved. And hopefully if we can get that preserved, that would be a starting point to start bringing Mosquito Beach back to permanent the way she used to be one time back.

MA: We know in this [00:36:25 process here] folks refer to you as the Kingpin of Mosquito Beach today.

WW: The mayor.

MA: Yeah, the mayor of Mosquito Beach today.

WW: Yeah, yeah.

MA: Why have you taken on the role of [00:36:39 unintelligible] you have lived your life, [00:36:44 unintelligible] a lot of things, traveled, you could be home resting. Why is this - why [00:36:50 unintelligible] -

WW: Yeah, I - I feel like this is a part of our - of African American history. I can't begin to tell you the number of people that I ran across, even when I was in the United States Air Force I met in Thailand, I met in Germany, I met in Korea, and many places I traveled, the minute I say I'm from Charleston, and here [00:37:16 unintelligible] the question be asked of me immediately, you ever heard of a place called Mosquito Beach? Said, yeah, that's where I'm from. I'm right from that area. [00:37:25 unintelligible] boy, I had some good times down there. We used to party all night long.

And even when I was in college, I went to [00:37:30 unintelligible] College and I brought a bunch of my classmates and friends down here, and this is - it is unbelievable. They never seen nothing like this before. When we going back to Charleston? Because - and we were coming on Friday night, you know, when we were trying to get away, and they said they never seen nothing like it. People up and down the street, people walking everywhere. And like I said, the birds and the bees, the girls and the guys walking back and forth and dancing - dancing everywhere. Every club you go to, they was dancing. And at the time, you know, the [00:38:01 unintelligible] the blues thing was - was people like Sam Cooke, Chuck Willis, James Brown, and all these people

that - that used to put on all these hit records, and it was just a lot of dancing going on. Sam Cooke, he was one of my favorite. He brought up - he did the [00:38:18 unintelligible] and then when Chubby Checker came out with Let's Do That Twist, oh, you could see the butt - butt flying, yeah.

MA: [00:38:28 unintelligible] how was music connected to this place?

WW: Music is the backbone of African American culture and heritage; you know? We express ourselves through songs - through songs.

MA: A lot of [00:38:47 expressions] came out of this place [00:38:48 crosstalk] -

WW: Oh, yes, through songs and food, the good - the - there's no [00:38:54 unintelligible] he was [00:38:56 unintelligible] cook them crabs, but there are people that say, that's the best crab they ever eat; you know?

MA: Yeah.

WW: And [00:39:02 unintelligible] clam, needs to steam the clams. So, the food, the music, the dancing, and the conglomeration of interaction with - with people from all different places, and people came to have a good time. And after they had a good time, that's why they didn't want to leave.

MA: So, we are here today -

WW: And they got treated right.

MA: Yeah.

WW: There was no - a whole lot of fighting and stuff going on, and just not this - the thing that happening nowadays, that our young - with our young people.

MA: I was going to ask about that. I mean, do you see a young person today who [00:39:38 sees Mosquito Beach] through the same eyes as you saw it?

WW: I think some of them do, but I - I hear a lot of them talk about [00:39:45 We] Beach. A lot of them talk about, this We Beach, We Beach. So, I'm trying to get the definition of what it means by We Beach, and I'm thinking [00:39:57 that coming from], this is a black beach. And when they say We Beach, and I hear a lot of them saying that, and me being the older person, and so I asked a couple of them. I said, what do you all mean by We Beach? I said, if it's We Beach, and I know the other negative things that [00:40:15 unintelligible] the drug thing, and I said, well, if this is y'all beach, why do y'all exchange drugs on We Beach? And y'all know what I'm trying to do, trying to preserve it, so why you want to exchange - selling drugs on Mosquito Beach?

And he said, well, we don't look at it that way, but as exchanging drugs. I said, well, you know what? You can't go to Folly Beach and sell drugs, so why would you do it here? Oh, there's a lot of drugs on Folly Beach, but why would you do it here? A lot of folks that come down here pick up a - you exchange a drug for money; you know? It's a economical thing. I don't have no job. I said, so you had to trade yourself in for - or your reputation or risk your reputation on going to jail for a little exchange? I said, you not making no money.

MA: No Kingpin money.

WW: No kingpin money. I said, what you doing, you're making chump change. What you selling right now, the money is at the top. You got to bring the money to sell drugs there, you ain't making no money. Well, I didn't look at that, Mr. Wilder. I said, yeah, but you need to look at it that because you get caught, you going to jail, and your reputation is forever tarnished; you know? So, I try to talk to the young people, but I think there are some of them have seen the big picture. And then some of them, [00:41:42 unintelligible] that ghetto atmosphere want to - want to still hustle their little drugs.

MA: Do you think that five years from now the building behind you [00:41:53 unintelligible] go and see it and experience it as you saw it, or a historic sign is up that will tell people because right now you can go - I mean, you and I know the [00:42:10 unintelligible], but there's nothing there that signifies that. Do you think when these things come to pass and all the work that you're doing here come to pass that may help - that will [00:42:20 unintelligible] connections to the place?

WW: Yeah, I think once these kids and the younger people, the young adults [00:42:30 unintelligible], once they know that [00:42:33 see a place that's] kind of fixed up and got a good atmosphere and the landscaping is getting improved, and they see a nature historical structure with a nice little [00:42:47 unintelligible] historical plaque that this is a historical building, I think they will - people will get more pride in the fact that this is African American place that's historical for African Americans because at one time - if we got to put the narrative in there that at one time your ancestors could not go to Folly Beach, Sullivan Island, Isle of Palms, but they could come here and have a good time and listen to your music that you like to play and all that stuff.

And, so, I think it will instill some pride in them and they'll see - because I get the - the comment all the time, why you all are fixing Mosquito Beach up? And, so, just give it a little time. It's going to happen. And I think if we could beautify this place and get and enhance it a little bit, I - and it will start back drawing the crowd. I don't know if it - the crowd would be [00:43:47 unintelligible] dancing [00:43:48 unintelligible], but I think we could get that dancing [00:43:50 unintelligible] back if they do.

MA: As we come to a close with this interview, tell me one thing that - one reason why you think [00:44:00 unintelligible] -

WW: Well, in my early travel, and like I told you, I met people have heard of this place, and it kind of put nostalgia in me [00:44:13 unintelligible] no matter where I go at that if I mention I'm

from Charleston, I'm talking from the older generation, it would be - it would be mentioned that you heard of Mosquito Beach. Then even now, if I go downtown Charleston, anywhere I go North Charleston and I say I'm from Sol Legare, what's going on with Mosquito Beach? I remember I used to party out there on Mosquito Beach. And this coming from the older folks, you know, that don't - don't party. They more or less going to church now.

So, you know, and so I think that if we could preserve this place, a African American historical place from the Civil Rights era, this would be a tremendous, tremendous, I would say, achievement because I don't think you could find no Charlestonian that don't have a history or have some kind of interference with whatever happened on Mosquito Beach or how they participate on Mosquito Beach. So, to preserve it, it would be a part of African American culture and history from the Jim Crow era.

MA: Anything else you want us to add as we close out all this interview about [00:45:37 unintelligible], anything that I didn't ask or [00:45:39 crosstalk] -

WW: Yeah, I enjoyed riding that - driving that bumper car and bumping into other people and wrecking - wrecking them. I used to enjoy that.

MA: And we were wondering, what was -

WW: Yeah.

MA: - the cost to riding the bumper cars?

WW: Twenty-five cents.

MA: Twenty-five cents.

WW: Yeah, 25 cents to ride the bumper cars.

MA: How many bumper cars were there [00:45:52 unintelligible] -

WW: They had about 20 in there I would say. Yeah. And that was enjoyable. Another thing that - that I didn't discuss on a high tide on a Sunday afternoon, the guys used to like to show off in front of the girls. So, if you get [00:46:11 clean], if you had your Sunday - little Sunday best on, and them guys see you, and some of the guys see you, they would pick you up, a bunch of them, and throw you overboard. And you can't get mad. And then once you get overboard, you look at somebody else over there that's clean and trying to impress the girls -

END INTERVIEW*

*The camera stopped working suddenly so we had an abrupt end to the interview.