

Transcription of Interview with Don Newman on April 26, 2016  
by Lewis Taylor for The Ogeechee Project

LEWIS: Today is Tuesday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of April 2016 and currently the time is 5:19 p.m. This is Lewis Taylor, project consultant for c.a.s.e. consulting services. I am interviewing Don Newman for The Ogeechee Project on behalf of the Ogeechee Riverkeeper. We are conducting the interview at the Bull Street library of the Live Oak Library System in the photocopier room on the third floor.

LEWIS: Please state your full name for the record.

DON: My name is Don Newman – Donald Ray Newman Jr.

LEWIS: What is your date of birth, Don?

DON: 8/19/1959

LEWIS: Where were you born?

DON: I was born here in Savannah.

LEWIS: And where did you grow up?

DON: Uhhh. Between Savannah and Statesboro but basically in this whole general area but, you know, up through elementary school here in Savannah then junior high and high school in Bulloch County – uhh, Brooklet and Statesboro – and then, uh, after high school we lived back in Savannah.

LEWIS: So you resided fulltime in the Brooklet and Statesboro area during that time period?

DON: um hmmm

LEWIS: uh, when was your first experience with the Ogeechee River?

DON: The first thing that I ever knew about the Ogeechee River was probably not even seeing it. My granddaddy, my daddy's daddy, you know we lived in Savannah. And he lived out there uhh

LEWIS: And what was granddaddy's name?

DON: Oh, my granddaddy? William Ashton Newman. He had a place out there at Bell's Landing and he spent a lot of time fishing. he lived there with his brother, my daddy's uncle – my great uncle. They spent a lot of time fishing and he would catch fish and sell them – like on the side of the road. He would come and visit us and he'd stand out there by where we were living at and sell these big ole fish for two dollars apiece or you know I just knew he went fishing. He lived out there at Bell's Landing which is at the very end of the Ogeechee River.

LEWIS: How old were you at that time?

DON: Oh, eight, nine. Somewhere around in there. Seven, eight, nine.

LEWIS: It would have been about what year?

DON: Well, I was born in '59 so . . .

LEWIS: '68/ '67 or '68?

DON: Yeah. 68, 69.

LEWIS: Well, that experience was your first introduction to the Ogeechee River?

DON: Right, and I never even saw it or anything. And once we moved, mom and dad split up. Mama moved us up to Brooklet where she was from. Her daddy had a farm. Well he was working on a farm. He worked a farm for another guy. It was down on the way down to Brooklet Landing.

LEWIS: Excuse me Don, what was your mother's name?

DON: Oh, my mother's name is Elise Ellis. Her maiden name was Elise Lariscey. She was a twin. Her daddy was Saul Lariscey. He is the one who lived down there on the farm and farmed for that man. He lived on the way to Brooklet Landing.

LEWIS: Did he live on the river?

DON It was not directly on the river. There was a little creek that ran like through the woods by where he lived where we would play – me and my sisters. It was just big enough to be able play in and get wet, you know, and all that. Some people might call it a ditch but it was a small creek basically eventually it went there. But it was a good couple of miles probably from the river once you got down in there. But he would take us to the river regularly and talk to people that he knew. And, you know, folks that lived around in that area and everything. I, we thought it was fun, you know, because we got to go swimming and play

in the water. There was a big rope hanging that people would swing on and drop off into the water and all that. And there was a boat landing there that people would pretty much constantly be going in and out with their little boats. And towards the end of the day they would be coming in more than going out and then with their fish – showing everybody their fish – and, you know, that kind of stuff.

LEWIS: And what age were you at this time?

DON: I was twelve – right around twelve. Thirteen - twelve or thirteen.

LEWIS: So would you accompany your grandfather to the landing everytime or did you go down by yourself?

DON: We pretty much went with him. He took us as a reward basically for doing farmwork.. Stuff that kids should get to do now. Shucking corn, picking corn, shucking corn, picking peas, shucking peas, you know, that kind of stuff. We, you know, we would have a big old bag of peas and we would shuck these peas, you know, and do this corn and then we would get to go to the river or clean house or whatever but it was usually associated with some kind of farm work.

LEWIS: How did you feel the first time that you were down at the river – the first time that you saw it?

DON: Oh wow! I just, uh uh, I loved it. I guess. I was a kid and at that time in my life it was the most fun thing to do. I may have even been eleven maybe but when we first went up there but turned twelve shortly thereafter that summer 'cause my birthday is in August.

LEWIS: So, did you go just in the summertime or did you go during different times of the year?

DON: Mostly in the summer that I can remember. I mean eventually Mama moved us into town into Brooklet and then eventually into Statesboro. Umm. But, you know, I was getting older and growing into my teenage years and stuff and that was where we would all go hang out sometimes on the weekends. But, you know, people that I knew who had cars and stuff we would all pile up in cars and go down to the river and go swimming and all that kind of stuff and drink beer and other things [laughs].

LEWIS: So, what was the name of the spot on the river that you would go to?

DON: Brooklet Landing. It was a very popular landing in those days. There were several landings on the river. Williams Landing on down to Morgans Bridge. Kings Ferry, Morgans Bridge and then on up to Dashers and then Brooklet Landing, Williams Landing.

LEWIS: What were some of the activities that you recall were occurring at the landing when you were a child? When you first visited what was going on? What were people doing there?

DON: Well, I'd say- fishing, swimming. Kids were swimming. The old guys were standing around talking. To us they were all old. They were grown and they wore coveralls and they'd be talking to our granddaddies. They would be standing around and talking about fishing and this-n-that and we would be talking, just playing, swimming in the water and stuff, looking at fish and being – well that's kinda' interesting and fun too. But I was from the city really and to me it was all new. Just like country life. Well it was where my mama was from. I mean the country that's in me still to this day even though I like to consider myself a cosmopolitan Savannah guy but a lot of my time was spent up in the country. You know, my mama was from the country and daddy's people were from Pembroke.

LEWIS: What is your father's name?

DON: His name is Donald Newman too, as well. He was senior; I was junior.

LEWIS: Where was he born?

DON: He was born in Savannah as well. But his mother was from, Ella Strickland, she was from uhh Pembroke. She was part Indian. His daddy is the one I was talking about a while ago, William Ashton, that had the place down at Bell's Landing.

LEWIS: How do you spell 'Ashton'?

DON: Ashton.

LEWIS: Thank you. Around age 12 is when you spent most of your time initially at the Brooklet area. Did you ever wander down there by yourself to go fishing or?

DON: I didn't get to 'cause it was a little bit too far away. I don't know I didn't know people and I had two sisters that we would go down to the creek and play around but we really didn't get to go fishing. My granddaddy did some fishing – that was my mama's granddaddy. He did some fishing but he was mostly farmin' – farming and drinking. He drank badly so I didn't get to do too much fishing with granddaddy. I would wander down the road and stuff but I never really made it down to the river.

LEWIS: When was the first time that you actually went fishing at the river/

DON: At the river I went fishing a couple of years later maybe. I might have been fourteen – maybe thirteen, fourteen but my Uncle John who lived in Brooklet.

LEWIS: Excuse me, what is John's (last name)?

DON: Hagan – he was a Hagan with an 'a'. h a g a n. And he was married to my aunt Lily which was my mother's daddy's - she was my mom's aunt. She was her daddy's sister but Lily – I can't remember her original name – anyway but they had a place in Brooklet. He worked in Savannah and he worked hard at Union Camp and on the weekends his thing was to go fishing and sometimes he would take usually my older cousin – my third cousin, the oldest one of this brood of kids that was hanging around their house at any given time. Ummm, usually Tyler would get to go – Tyler Knight but sometimes he would let me and Tyler, and if Tyler couldn't go he would let me and the other cousin, Jimmy – Jimmy Lee - they called him Peewee but we went, me and him would get together and maybe even Little Johnny, Uncle Johnny is his granddaddy. They were raisin' two sets of their grandkids by two of their daughters. But we would get to go and he would take us down there. Usually just off the bank of the river. We would walk up the landing, just up, you know, just off the bank fishing.

LEWIS: Do you recall the process of fishing- what you did?

DON: Yeah. What we would do we would have to go get worms – dig up worms. Sometimes we would stop at the little country store and by crickets and sometimes worms. We would buy worms in the little containers that somebody else had dug 'em up. Generally we would dig up our worms and go down there with our cane poles and just, you know, put worms on the hooks and watch the bobbers and try to catch fish [laughs] the old-fashioned way.

LEWIS: How successful were you?

DON: Ohh, you know, if I had been raised a little more rounded, I might have been better at it. I had one cousin seemed like he could catch a fish with a cigarette butt but, you know. With my luck seems like I always caught the little fish and it wasn't that many of 'em but it was fun. It was something to do.

LEWIS: Did you ever go out in the boat to go fishing?

DON: Let's see. Did we ever go out in the boat to go fishing? I don't remember going out in the boat. I think we rode in the boat with my granddaddy – somebody he knew – we rode up the river in the boat, you know, but if they were fishing I don't remember much. To me the fun was riding in the boat at that point in time.

LEWIS: What were some of the more memorable experiences that you had, at that time, when you were staying on the farm?

DON: Uhh. Well the most memorable is gettin' to go to the river. I don't know. The river always seemed like it was th big, uhh, the fun spot. It was the place where you got to go for your rewards. You got to relax, to hang out with people, you know socialize. It was a central part of your around there. You know, the people, farmers, you know the other country folk. Like the little country stores that also sold little containers of worms for fish bait and crickets – they would have little cages out front with crickets in it and people would take their little cricket holder things and, you know, fill them up and whatever They would sell fish bait, you know, and that was a part of life.

LEWIS: For you, thinking back to that time, did your experiences on the river leave you with an impression that still affects you today – your attitudes, perspectives?

DON: I think so. All the time I think back on the stuff that I got to do when I was a kid and I think that every kid should get to do this – these kind of things. The kids now don't get to do that kind of stuff. They watch tv – a hundred channels. They play video games. If they can get 'em off of their their electronics, then they might play out in the yard a little bit, but you know, pickin' weeds out of fields, and you know, pickin' tobacco, and you know, and shuckin' corns and peas and stuff like that kids don't get to do that. Not as many as they did back then. I imagine that there is still some that do but it just seems to me a way of life that is kinda' gone almost, you know, as far as . . . but, of course, it could just be ' cause I'm not living there now. I don't go down there now.

LEWIS: How did those experiences make you who you are?

DON: Well, I remember we moving to Ohio when I was nineteen, twenty years old. Lived up there for a few years. Got married to somebody and everything. But whenever I would think about going hone, I would think about going down to the river – going down to the Ogeechee and, you know, drinking beers whatever and seein' my friends, swimming in the river. The rivers all up there have rocks in the bottoms of them and they weren't as nice as the Ogeechee. They were just little rinky-dink rivers unless you went to the Ohio River which was huge but, yeah, it just wasn't – to me when I would think about going home, I would think about that and as far as it shaped me, I guess the people – I mean, you saw people that didn't have a whole lot but it wasn't important. They were working hard. They were doing the farmwork and eating food that they grew. They would eat fish that they caught, and you know, all that kind of stuff. It was great. I don't know. It gave me an appreciation for the nature, the simpler things.

LEWIS: It seems as if you have implied that kids these days don't have that kind of appreciation.

DON: Yeah.

LEWIS: Is there a reason for that you believe?

DON: Well, I guess because they didn't, we became more of an urban society – less rural, less farming. Corporations kinda' took over the farming business as much as possible. I guess there is still some small farms and stuff but I don't know like me, cause I didn't grow up in the country then my kids didn't grow up in the country. They grew up in town and my mama didn't really live out in the country like that. She lived in Effingham County close to the river down there in Eden and, you know, I would take my kid sometimes, you know, to visit his grandmother and, uhh, you know we might walk down to the river or something but we didn't spend anytime doing anything – just looking at it, throwing rocks in it or something but I don't know if kids get to spend enough time in it to have the appreciation. I don't know. I'm sure they just cultivate that as they grow older.

LEWIS: In that you have been to the river as an adult and had your experiences as a child, how do you think, in what manner has the river changed, the environment around the river and even your perspectives on it?

DON: Well, for one thing, you can't go down to Brooklet Landing any more. They built condos down there years ago and closed it to the public so everybody started going to Williams Landing which was the next landing up the river from Brooklet Landing. Williams Landing is a more over in Wakefield, you know, a little past there even. It's still open to the public as far as I know. Some people have river houses down there and stuff and we've been there. Most people, most are cabins that people use occasionally. They have a cabin down by the river or something but, you know, a couple of times I've driven to the river in recent years. It's like, I, you don't - I don't see any people I know. It doesn't seem like hardly anybody's there. Maybe you might see a car sittin' there with a boat trailer and you figure that they're out there fishin' whatever it is but not like they used to be, you know, you couldn't hardly park there were so many trucks and trailers and people going out there fishing and stuff and I don't know. That's what it seemed like anyway. It just doesn't seem like people use it as much for those kind of things.

LEWIS: Why do you think that is the case?

DON: I don't know. I know that people do. I mean, my sister and brother-in-law live on the river basically.

LEWIS: Where do they live?

DON: They live over at, uhh, uhh, the hunting place – Go Bar, Go Bar Landing.

LEWIS: And what is, what are their names?

DON: Their names? Lisa is my sister. She was a Newman but she's married to Kenny Aegan, Kenny Aegan.

LEWIS: How do you spell that?

DON: Aegan. Lisa and Kenny Aegan. They bought a house up there, oh, 25 years ago and they live out in the country. The road they live on now is not a dirt road anymore. It's been paved pretty much all the way back to their house. Used to be all dirt road to get back there. That was it. Now the roads are all paved. The dirt roads are all gone. Not all gone. A lot of them are gone.

LEWIS: Is their subdivision, Go Bar Landing, located directly on the river?

DON: OK, there's a little branch that cuts from the river right up behind their house and it's like a hundred yards or maybe a hundred feet. It's not that far. You have their cabin, or their house, and then there's another cabin, maybe two, and then the river and then the branch of the river comes up behind their house that they can pull their boat up in and then go out on the river from it just a couple of houses down. And then the river's down there. There's a little landing down there where people, uhh, put in boats. Mostly there's little houses and stuff down there – little houses and cabins.

LEWIS: When she was younger, did she accompany you to the river?

DON: Yeah, Lisa, she was one of, you know, I had the two sisters and me and her and our little sister that we played. All three of us would ride on the tractor. You know like one sister would be on one side, one on the other and I'd be on the back on the thing that swings on the back that holds the plow and stuff while grand daddy drove us down there uhh, you know, after doing farm work. Kids don't get to ride on tractors now, you know

LEWIS: that's true

DON: [laughs] But, you know, when I was a kid people that were older and my age probably thought that the world that they knew was gone. I don't know. I guess that maybe it's a thing of just getting older and not seeing the newer things that are going on. Like I say, my sister lives on the river and they go fishing all the time. They, her, my brother-in-law whenever I'm thinking about what to get him for his birthday or Christmas or somethin', I always think fishing stuff. I always think something to do with fishing 'cause that's what he, that's his thng, he loves fishing. I have gone down there with him. I have gone there with him a time or two. It's way up there. It's a good little drive but when my kid gets to go up



there he gets to go fishing. He's thirty-something now. I call him my kid but, you know, when he was younger he would get to go up there and stay the weekend with them and get to go out on the boat and stuff so that was always good.

LEWIS: Did you introduce your son to the Ogeechee?

DON: Well, yeah, my sister and them did. He would stay with them and they would take him out over the weekend that he was there and go fishing, whatever, go swimming.

LEWIS: Thinking back to when you were with your grandfather, what about your grandmother? Was she there too?

DON: No, she had passed away so it was just us. Actually, I think she might have – they had been split up for years – but they uhh. I think she might have been in Savannah. She may have been in a nursing home by then with grandmama's momma, Luella.

LEWIS: During that time when you were nine to twelve, fourteen years of age, do you recall conversations with your grandfather or his friends and neighbors or just overhearing conversations between them in which they discussed the river? And can you recall any of their perspectives or the things they thought were important about the river to them at that time?

DON: Uhh, well, at Uncle John's house they was always talking about the fish that he'd come home with and how many they'd caught, how big they were. I mean he loved it. He loved it. It was obvious that he loved it. Always it was always nice to get to go down there with him. Even though I might not catch any fish, it was always the experience of it. Yeah, I mean, he, they, that was his thing to do on the weekends to go down there and go fishing. Umm, you know, the fish eggs - the whole thing with the fish eggs that's where I first

LEWIS: What thing with the fish eggs?

DON: Well, Uncle John, one time he went fishing and he caught a bunch of fish. Him and my cousin. And they came back they, you know, they cleaned 'em up and they were cookin' 'em kinda' like a dinner – a Sunday dinner or lunch or whatever – and Aunt Lily fried all these fish but she made grits and eggs with them and there was this big giant bowl of eggs that was kind of green-looking and I was like hmmm but they were eggs so I didn't, you know. Everything in the country was different and they had brown eggs, you know, instead of white eggs, so I thought, 'well they're eggs', so I got some and they were - I even commented on how good they were and Uncle John goes, "They's fish eggs." And I was like uhhg and then, and then, like they were really good and then, all of sudden, it seems like they weren't and then I was like slow to eat what was left. But when I look back on it, I'm glad I got to eat 'em, you know. And she may have mixed them in with regular eggs or somethin'

to stretch them out maybe but they were probably, they were some kind of, I mean he had enough of them that they could cook and eat and they were really good. Really good. But he was always proud when he could catch a fish that had a bunch of eggs in it. Sometimes they would catch really big fish. I don't know what they were. Shads maybe but I know mostly they were redbreast and little crappies and stuff. They would sometimes catch these big old shad or catfish sometimes too.

LEWIS: Did they rely upon fish from the Ogeechee as a food source?

DON: Well, they did, I think uhh. You know, Uncle John worked at a factory down in Savannah so he made decent money but they had a lot of kids to raise and, I mean, it was a regular thing to have a dinner there with fish that was caught from the Ogeechee River. You know, they were raisin' - one, two, three, four – seven of their grandkids and then plus us. My mama was single so we would go down there after school until she got off work to come and pick us up so, I mean, they weren't directly raisin' us but they were babysittin' us or watchin' us for mama so, you know, they had a brood of kids around there and then of course kids from around the neighborhood would come down there and hang out because some of the, some of the kids were girls and the guys wanted to come and hang out and, you know, talk with girls – yeah, so

LEWIS: You had a horde of children there at one time

DON: [chuckles] Yeah. It was good times though looking back right in Brooklet in that old house.

LEWIS: Were the experiences of your friends there similar to your experiences?

DON: Yeah. I think that some of them had, you know, they had lived there most of their life so they and so they, like Kyler, he was the oldest so he got to go with Uncle John fishing a lot until he got to where he was doing other stuff – runnin' around chaisin' girls, I guess but, and then Peewee started going and hanging around with him more and fishing and then Johnny, uhh, you know. And, of course, I grew up and got into my groups of friends and we always kinda' got spread – you know, farmlife – we always see each other now and then and somebody's funeral or something you run into some of them, but uhh,. So, yeah, the older people they just, I guess they looked at it as a place to get food, like you say, it seemed like it was a central part, a central part of life at that time and I don't know if that's the case anymore. But, you know, certainly people such as myself, my sister and brother-in-law live on the river and they have boats and they go fishing and things. The population in all the towns has boomed and Statesboro has a lot of college kids and a lot of people who are there for other businesses and jobs and this and that and, I mean, I don't know, there's probably people that live up there that have never been down to the river, you know? I would venture to say that back then there was very few people who had never been down there to the river

and done something with their people – their, you know, relatives and stuff. Over the years you get more and more people movin’. Just like in Savannah, there’s lots of people that live here who don’t even go downtown. They live all around Savannah. They work at the factories and this and that but they don’t go downtown. They don’t go to the riverfront. Or even out to Kings Ferry and stuff. They might go out to the beach or something. Maybe. Even Kings Ferry that’s on the Ogeechee River I don’t know. I would say that there’s a lot of them that have never been out there that live here but back when I was younger that was a very popular place to go to go fishing, boating and swimming. And it still is in the summer some, I think. Uhh, but uhh, I don’t never see as many people down there as I used to. And they paved it and turned it into a parking lot kind of.

LEWIS: It’s been about - more than - 45 years since you spent time on the river as a child. In that time has the what you view, and understand, as the rural nature of Bulloch been transformed?

DON: I think so. I think it has, you know uhh, just knowin’ people that live up there and, you know, there’s still people that live in the country – country people – uhh you know but I think that – I don’t know, the ones that lived on farms and things – I mean some of them – like my great granddaddy’s farm is gone. It was a working farm when I was a kid. That was my mother’s granddaddy.

LEWIS: Where was that?

DON: It was in Leefield. They were Palmers. Forest Palmer and then my grandmother, my mama’s mama, she was a Palmer and then she married granddaddy Lariscy – became a Lariscy. They lived out there in Leefield off Highway 24 or 40 – one of those roads that cut through there. Backroads from Leefield. And they had a big old house with pigs and cows and, you know, big gardens and stuff and then a little pond out back that you could go fishing in. Sometimes when the water was low you could go back there with a stick and knock fish out of the pond. [laughs]

LEWIS: Please describe to me how you would knock the fish out of the pond with a stick.

DON: When the water would be so low, I guess the river would be low so the ponds would be low and everything, all the water, was real low and you could see the fish – little fish would come up. They would probably see you and think you were going to feed ‘em or somethin’ and then, uhh, you could just take a stick and hit ‘em. If you were fast enough, you could knock the fish out of the water. [laughs]

LEWIS: How often did you do that?

DON: Oh, you know, a couple or few times but that wasn't fun because, you know, there was no sport in it [laughs].

LEWIS: It saved on the use of worms though.

DON: Yes it did. And they were little – little old pond fish. So granddaddy's farm is gone and he passed away and Uncle Homer that lived there with him passed away and then the farm went down to one of their kids and he, I think, they sold it. They sold it and split the money between their kids or something.

LEWIS: What occupies that land now?

DON: When I was last there they tore the old house down so land that just sits there since it was last divided up. I think that some people have homes around it but its been, its been ten, maybe fifteen, years since I went down there and looked around to see what was left and to see what was there. There wasn't a lot. Just land sittn' there. Probably, I expect, there is houses on it now. I have to ask my sister if she knows anything about it. She's been up there lately. But Lisa she lives up there, lives down there in Go Bar which is not too far from where they lived. They, she keeps up with stuff a lot. Maybe I can find out from her.

LEWIS: When you were working on your grandfather Lariscy's farm, what did he have you do? What did you have to do, for instance, to be rewarded with a trip to the Ogeechee?

DON: The worst thing was to have to pick weeds out of the fields. That was the worst. Ohh. You didn't want to hear 'We got to go pick weeds' [laughs] 'cause that was going to be very hot and tiresome and dirty. Uhh, now, going and pickin' corn, or pickin' peas or pickin' corn – uhh, and then shuckin' it and shuckin' the peas, it wasn't as bad but those are the things we would have to do but pulling the weeds though – that was the worst. You didn't want to have to do that. Pulling weeds out of soybean fields and stuff like that – no fun. [laughs]

LEWIS: I assume that you were part of team of kids your own age out there.

DON: Oh yeah. Granddaddy would be even doing it too. It was just part of having to work the land and work. You know, I mean, I guess they didn't depend so much on, uhh, herbicides and all that stuff back then as they do now. People would actually go pull weeds out of fields, you know, and you get a bunch of kids out there and pull the weeds out of the fields.

LEWIS: What would a typical day be like for you – one of those summer days?

DON: You wake up. Probably eat some cereal or whatever. Drink some coffee maybe. And mama would go to work. Granddaddy would say 'I got to go do this or I'm gonna' be on the tractor today' and we were ten, eleven, twelve and we could kind' watch ourselves and he wasn't far away but he, uhh, would more often than not he would incorporate us into what he was doing – pulling weeds, you know, pickin' corn whatever it was but, uhh, there was a good many days of pickin' weeds. Uhh, but you know, then but whenever we got done we'd get to go down to the river. It seemed like pretty much everyday but I know it was at least a couple of times a week, you know. Ya'll get finished pickin' those peas, pickin those beans and shuckin' 'em – you know, uhh – and finish up in that corn and we can go down – then we would go down to the river – fishing, swimming or whatever. Be loving life. Go back home. Supper. And mama would come home from work. [laughs] Loving life.

LEWIS: The food that you, the crops that you, harvested – were those crops used as food for your table as well?

DON: Yeah, because the land that he worked – mostly a lot of that was soybeans and stuff. tobacco but then the big, huge, gigantic garden behind the house was always for food and then there was always leftovers stuff. You would have so many tomatoes there was no way you could eat them all so you would give some to people or sell some or whatever. Granddaddy, granddaddy used to sell peaches occasionally, you know, I guess if he wasn't farming or whatever he'd always be doing something it seemed like agriculture-related. He would sell baskets of peaches at a little peach stand by the road but he would take, uhh, sometimes he would take stuff down to the – whaddaya call it – the farmers market. The first time I ever went to the farmers market was down here in Savannah with Granddaddy Lariscy. We'd go down there and take stuff down there. Sometimes he would just be checking on people he knew to see what they were doing. Go get some produce [chuckles].

LEWIS: What kind of crops – what were the primary crops that he would sell at the farmers market?

DON: Corn, I remember corn, sometimes peas or beans – snappeas or snapbeans. And, uhh, sometimes tomatoes. Usually tomatoes though, 'cause they, I guess 'cause they didn 't last as long, they would usually be – we would eat as many as we could and then they would give them away. But sometimes they would be fresh enough you might have a few tomatoes too.

LEWIS: Were there any non-edible crops that were raised on the farm?

DON: Well, there were soybeans. They weren't directly edible right at that moment. You know what I mean? We couldn't go out there and pick soybeans and eat 'em. I guess we could have but back then edamame wasn't as big a thing as it is now. [laughs] And then, uhh, the dried-up, crunch ones. But, yeah, not that I can. Well the tobacco. Certainly tobacco was the big thing that was not edible. There was a lot of time and money and effort

spent in the tobacco industry and fields. You'd go down to the river and there would be tobacco fields all over the place everywhere on the way down in there – lush, green, you know. The closer you got, the more noises you hear – the crickets, the frogs and all the stuff. And you always knew the road would start curvin' a lot the closer you got and then you'd hear these noises and you knew you were almost at the river. [chuckles]

LEWIS: Did your grandfather raise tobacco? Were you actually intimately involved in raising it?

DON: Oh yeah. He did grow some and he also worked for other people who did. You know, he would work on their farms but not only that, not only the little bit that he would grow, because the farm he worked on wasn't a huge, gigantic farm but he basically farmed it for whoever owned it and then, but then, he would also go work at other people's farms helpin' them like doing tobacco stuff. It was a big huge business and a lot of people were involved. Kids would come. They would pick the tobacco, you know, and then tie it to a string when it was green. Row it up into the barns – you know, you would have a row of people who would be stringing it and they would pass it and then string it and pass it and then, then the sticks with the tobacco tied onto 'em, you know, would finally make it into the barn and somebody would be up there hanging it in the barns and then after it was all over and it was cured and time to sell it, it was the exact process reversed. They would, you know, unload the barn a stick at a time and people would take the sticks and then there would be a great big gigantic piece of burlap with a circle in the middle of it and and then they would unstring it and pile it up in a big pile in the middle of the big burlap. And then they would take it and tie it up once the circle was pretty much filled. Tie it – these corners together, then these corners together and then that was a big bundle of tobacco that would go to the tobacco farm – uhh, warehouses to be sold.

LEWIS: What are some of the sensations that you can remember from being in the tobacco warehouses – smells or sounds?

DON: Well, you could always smell it. You could smell the tobacco. And people smoked a lot back then and they were smoking the nonfiltered cigarettes and the Prince Alberts that they rolled themselves. And I'm sure that some of them were smoking tobacco they they had grown and you had these people that bid on tobacco, I guess the brokers, the people that would buy it, would come through there. And it was kind of loud on a big sale day selling tobacco at the warehouse and, you know, they would walk along and check it out, you know, and they would be hollering numbers, you know, and this-and-that. It was a little bit beyond anything that I was, you know, in to. Once it got to that stage it was sort of beyond me but I do remember, you know, being there, hearing that and seeing it all. But the particulars of it – what they were doing, how much they paid, this-or-that I don't know anything about. [chuckles] But that was another one of those experiences that people really don't do anymore. Nowadays it's more automated. They have, they do have some people that still

pick tobacco but they load ‘em onto these metal things and then the metal things get slidden into the barns – different metal barns – and the tobacco cures in there. And then, you know, it comes out. It’s a little different.

LEWIS: You haven’t mentioned your Grandfather Lariscy’s farm in the present tense. Does it still exist? Is it still in the family and, if so, how is it used?

DON: No. It was, soon as granddaddy, uhh, died he – actually whenever he, I think he quit working on that farm and started getting social security or something ‘cause he had been a truck driver in his younger days and had done other things. Mama used to tell us that when she was a kid she remembered riding from Brooklet to Savannah to go to the farmers market on the wagons with the horses pulling them or mares. She remembered, you know, hauling stuff down to the farmers market to sell when she was a kid before they even had their truck. He ended up in a trailer – a little trailer in a little teeny trailer park with two or three other trailers and that’s where he ended up passing away. That’s where he lived when he died. I guess he must have made enough money over the years to draw some kind of social security check or something.

LEWIS: About what year did he actually leave the farm?

DON: It was probably sixty . . . seventy before he moved. Somewhere around there that I can remember. I think that’s when he moved from there. Maybe, maybe even before then. I don’t know, He might have even only, you know maybe once mama moved into town, I think he ended up - that’s right he had a trailer at Aunt Lily’s that, where all the kids were - Uncle John’s. That was right behind Uncle John’s house so maybe I think he might have not, he might have let that go.

LEWIS: Did your grandfather own the farm.?

DON: No. That was the one he worked for the people. And you know what I mean?

LEWIS: He worked for another family?

DON: Granddaddy Lariscy always worked for whoever he was working for farming. Granddaddy Palmer, his wife’s – my grandmother’s people – they had the farm that ended up getting split up and everything. That was their land.

LEWIS: Do you recall the name of the family that your Grandfather Lariscy worked for when you were there?

DON: I have no idea, really. My mama could probably tell you that but I don’t know. I’ll have to ask her.

LEWIS: Speaking of your mother, have you ever talked to her about her life as a child in that area? Did she share with you any impressions about the Ogeechee or anything outstanding about what she thought about living out there?

DON: Well, I know different things. I know she – ‘cause I did ask her – I said ‘Do you have any uhh, any uhh, recollections or anything that are connected to the river?’. Her, her answer was almost like mine. She said when they were kids, they would go down there to go swimmin’, to swing off of the rope that was there, I guess if it was there then it was the same rope as when they were kids they could swing off of them and swing into the river. She said people were fishin’. There was always people fishing and stuff. That granddaddy sometimes would be fishing but they were there to just play. And they ended up living in Savannah when granddaddy was driving a truck whatever he did at a different time. And then they ended up coming to Savannah. I guess when they – mama and her sisters grew up and got married – granddaddy and grandmamma split up and he went back to Bulloch County and grandma went to her people’s house.

LEWIS: Can you place a date on the time period during which your mother may have been going to the river?

DON: Well, she was born in ’41 so she would have been – December of ’41 – so it would have to have been in the early Fifties, most likely. Early Fifties, maybe late Forties. As a kid, I know that she ended up marrying and having me when she was seventeen. She was married when she was sixteen so by ’59 she was not living, you know, anywhere near there. We were living in Savannah and grew up here. As far as, that’s where she met Daddy but they lived down here with her mama. That’s right. And grandmama lived there. So, her and her sisters – they all got married and had kids. And Eloise got married two years before mama did.

LEWIS: Who is Eloise?

DON: My mother’s twin. She got married when she was fourteen. Had my cousin when she was fifteen. And I guess that was a common thing back in those days. [laughs] Pretty much unheard of now-a-days. That was her recollections of the river more-or-less. I think my aunt pretty much said the same thing. I asked her too.

LEWIS: Were there any events – outstanding events – associated with the river that you can recall?

DON: Oh, I remember what mama’s other thing was. It really wasn’t directly related to the river but, as far as the river itself, but there was a place down at Dashers Landing called Dashers. There was a restaurant there but there was also a big social hall they had big dances



in and they would go there and go square dancing and all that kind of stuff. It was right there – right on the river in Eden – Dashers Landing. That was something that she remembered that they did that was close to the river.

LEWIS: I have heard of the Dashers Landing social hall.

DON: I think they even had another one at one of those other landings. What's the name of the landing? Is it Williams Landing and on up from there – whatever that next one is. Steel Bridge. I think there was one there too back then. She said they used to go dancing there too.

LEWIS: Are there any other things that you thought about but I didn't ask about? Any other aspects of the river? Or things that are imprinted in your memory that are important from that time?

DON: I guess those are the main ones. Granddaddy Newman, catching fish and selling them by the road, living down at Bell's Landing way down at that end of the road and then Granddaddy Lariscy way up in Bulloch County, you know, farming and getting to go play and stuff.

LEWIS: Bell's Landing is in Chatham County?

DON: Yes, it's in Chatham County. It's right there. I guess they call it the Little Ogeechee at that part – the part that winds back.

LEWIS: The estuarine section of it

DON: Yeah. So, once you get out there, I think, it starts turning into the ocean if you go much further down. It's down from King's Ferry – Bell's Landing. You know where that is right?

LEWIS: I do. I know I've been to Bell's Landing.

DON: Just past Armstrong. There used to be a little restaurant down there. A little bar. I guess some developers, you know, some sharp people way back in the sixties saw, had a vision that was all going to be something besides what is now and bought it from granddaddy and he ended up spending the rest of his life on the river down in Darien - the Altamaha River. Or maybe it might have been the Darien River. I called my cousins 'cause there were only two aunts left who were sisters of granddaddy. And I called up there and told my cousins to see if they could find out from their mamas where granddaddies place was 'cause they couldn't remember exactly where it was either. I was trying to find that out just out of curiosity. But that's where he spent the rest of his life. He went from one river to another.

LEWIS: So he actually owned the place where the Bell's Landings condos were?

DON: Yeah, in that day there was a little dirt road that went down in there and off to the side, you know, where the river came, the back of those lots were on the water and his was one of those big lots. They had a little house on it. They even had an outhouse. That's how old that place was. It was a little old place but, yeah, he owned that – granddaddy owned that.

LEWIS: Which grandfather is this?

DON: Granddaddy Newman – daddy's daddy. And so, uhh, even to this day I think of - I think of my granddaddies both being associated with the river in some form or fashion. But the whole – when I ride back there where that Walmart is now, back behind it, you can see the water, you know, back behind it and I'm like 'what an awful thing to have right on the water'. You know? There's a parking lot for Walmart basically. It's unbelievable but that's life, I guess. And, yeah, everytime I ride down through there I try to figure out exactly where it is. But those condos are over on the left, mostly, and his place was over there on the right on the side where the restaurant was on down there. It was just up from the restaurant. I don't know that it was actually on the end. I don't think it was. But the house is gone certainly 'cause I couldn't find it.

LEWIS: Have you ever wanted to live on the river?

DON: I wanted to and often think that if I had enough money I would try to find a place. Certainly if not on the river then on the water somewhere. I would definitely like to consider it anyway. If I had enough money, I'd have a river house, a beach house, a mountain house, a condo, a penthouse in Atlanta. I'm a little old for all of that now anyway. Even if I had that much money, I don't know if I'd have all of that. I'd put my money away and let my kid's have most of it and just have one nice house somewhere for my wife with someone to clean it so she didn't have to. [laughs] Or so I wouldn't have to. Somebody else would.

LEWIS: One thing I started to ask you about earlier Don that you alluded to but did not go into detail was 'food' – the food that you ate. I assume that most of the food that was served by your grandmother and grandfather at the table was from the fields. If you can recall, do you think that food was a lot better than most people would get if they go to a restaurant?

DON: Yeah, I don't even know if it as good now at the farmers market as it was back then. I mean, now I love it 'cause it's good whenever you can get that kind of food. Like the little farmers market that they have in Forsyth Park every Saturday – there's some really good stuff there. But, overall, I don't know if you can catch fish as big as back then down there. I know people grow tomatoes. Whenever I get to eat it, I love it 'cause it is good old country

food and it's usually from people's' gardens and stuff. Like my brother-in-law. He has tomatoes he plants every year. His tomato plants always do better than mine do. [chuckles] And he has that sandy dirt down there by the river. You know, somehow or another, he grows good tomatoes. I grow mine in containers.

LEWIS: Was the cooking at the farm – was it something that is etched in your memory as being outstanding? I guess my questions should be 'Did the food taste better on the farm than it tends to taste (elsewhere)?'

DON: It was always wonderful to get to have fish. If somebody had gone fishing and had a mess of fish for dinner, that was always the best 'cause then you got hushpuppies, you had homemade hushpuppies, and usually fried fish. You just had to be careful with the bones – that was the only thing, you know. Of course, that's what the hush puppies were supposed to be for – to help you if you got one stuck in your throat. But, yeah, every now and then you might get a good fish dinner like that.

LEWIS: You almost seem wistful when you think back to those days.

DON: Yeah, I am, 'cause I just don't – don't get to do any of that anymore. Maybe I should start spending more time with my sister and brother-in-law down at their place while they are still around. 'Cause they don't have any kids. My kid will probably end up with it. They talk about who will end up with it. Kenny has a nephew that may get some of their stuff. Then Donny, my kid, is the other one. So he might end up with the house. Who knows? He would love it. He would have a great appreciation of it.

LEWIS: Well, is there anything else you would like to add?

DON: The only thing that I – I just always, one of the reasons I like living here in Savannah and this area in this part of Georgia is because of the rivers – the Ogeechee River down at the south end of town and the Savannah River right there at the north end that empties out and, of course, you have the beach scene down there at Tybee. But then the Ogeechee River is more rural, more countrified - more, to me, blackwater kind of river. And I think it is a blackwater river basically. But it's nice having those natural resources close by and around – even, they've been through a lot – both of 'em – I remember when I was a kid you couldn't even eat the fish out of the Savannah River for a while there 'cause of the mercury that was in them. And then the thing that happened a few years ago at the Ogeechee River. My sister – I asked her about it and she seems to think that it almost back to where it was before that big fish kill but I don't know. I passed her name and information on to Simona and I think that Simona has actually contacted them. And they called her but I don't know if she got back with them. Last I heard she decided not to do it right now and this is a big project. But I told her to drag Kenny 'cause Kenny is a bit resistant, you know. He likes staying in his house in the country and doesn't like to have to go anywhere he don't have to. And he's retired.

He's my age but he works some here and there but their house is paid for. He was a chemist. He worked hard. He graduated from Georgia Southern; was a chemist. Worked in labs and stuff. He made good investments and saved his money and they paid their house off. And my sister works at Gulfstream and pays the bills and he makes whatever money he can here-and-there doing whatever he wants to do, you know, but he doesn't have to do anything.

LEWIS: Well, I'm sure that Simona will probably contact him..

DON: I told her to tell him

LEWIS: If you have anything else you want to add later on, you can contact her or me.

DON: The fish egg story – I remembered that. I sent Simona an email about it. I was like, oh wow, I forgot all about that. And Uncle John, I didn't even mention him before so I was glad that I remembered him.

LEWIS: You paint very vivid pictures in your stories. I almost wish that we had a video camera to capture your descriptions with your hand gestures – especially the process of curing tobacco. You gave a very detailed description with your hands as to how those things occurred.

DON: Yeah, and it's a lost thing. There might be some videos of it around but you didn't really see any video cameras back in those days and if someone did have one they weren't in there videotaping people working in the tobacco barns and stuff.

LEWIS: It's really been great to talk to you, Don. I really appreciate you taking the time to come in and share these stories. If you think of something else, we can get together. Or if you talk to others, we can add those recollections to what we have today.

DON: It's an integral part of life around here, I guess. Wouldn't be the same without the rivers.

LEWIS: I think you made a very important point, that is, the people today who live near the river don't experience it in the same fashion. They don't even understand it in the same way and, as such, their lives are more poor. They are not enriched by the influence of the river on their life. Thanks again. I really appreciate it.

DON: Thank you. I appreciate the opportunity. It's my pleasure.