

## Styron, Milton: Born A Commercial Fisherman <sup>[1]</sup>

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### Milton Styron: Born A Commercial Fisherman

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) <sup>[2]</sup>," *News & Observer*. Published 3/9/2008. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

I visited Milton Styron in Davis, an old fishing village on Core Sound. He was a commercial fisherman for more than half a century. By all accounts, he was one of the best, a man who could make his own nets and gear, had a nose for fish and wasn't afraid of hard work or rough weather.

Now 83, Davis grieves the cataclysmic decline in commercial fishing, but he hasn't given up. He still fishes occasionally and still speaks out against unjust fishery regulations and out-of-control coastal development.

#### In Milton Styron's words:

I'm a fourth-generation commercial fisherman. I never wanted to do anything else. I guess that's bullheaded or hardheaded, but I never thought about doing anything else. I was born a commercial fisherman.

I had a twin brother, and as young'uns, we always wanted to go fishing. I remember, they were menhaden fishing on Core Sound and they let us go occasionally. My grandfather was captain. But when you're 5 or 6 years old, you can't be let. They'd let us go one day, and the next day, they'd leave us home. That's about as much as we could stand and them too probably, looking out for us.

I remember one morning, we woke up and the sun was shining just like it is today. They had already gone fishing. We cried and cried because they left us! That'll give you some idea what fishing meant to us.

At first, I worked on Daddy's boat. She was built in '41, a 37-foot boat. We've shrimped in the ocean in her and been all around in her. She was called The Boys he had five boys. But after a while, your family has to branch out, so I got a boat Way back, it would take you a right good while to get to the Banks , the barrier islands 4 or 5 miles east]. The boats they had were slow. They didn't have engines in their boats they sailed.

I've heard them say, back years ago, that Grandpapa Joe used to set traps to the Banks, catch mink. There was one fall that he went over there 27 days and it was so calm that he never set his mast. He had to pole to the Banks!

Peeler crabbing was a big thing way back. People's families would go over here on the Banks and build camps. There's plenty of rushes growing over there, and they'd put up a frame and line it with rushes. You can make it 100 percent wealth. They caught the peeler crabs with little nets with two men pulling them in those muddy creeks. They put their crabs in the floats right in the creeks and shed them out right there. That is the secret to peeler crabbing to learn to do that.

They would also go with dredges and catch a boatload of scallops and they'd bring them home and open them. It takes two days for scalloping. You go catch them one day. The next day, you got to open them. Mostly the women opened them. I scalloped from '62 right on up to, oh, it's been three or four years since I brought in any scallops. We opened a fish house mainly to open scallops during the wintertime.

In the wintertime, you didn't have any way to make any bills. Scalloping was about the only way that you could make any money, and that wasn't very much. You got along.

Right over here, an old fellow named Ammie Paul had a blacksmith shop. He made the scallop dredges. I can remember, when I was a boy, going over there. He pumped that bellows on that forge and put his piece of iron in there. He'd get it. Didn't make any difference how cold it was, you could scallop or clam. In fact, I've worked over there days that the ice never thawed off the dredge pole.

You had hard crabbing, scalloping and clamming. The hard crabbing would be just before the shrimping started. You shrimped in the fall, right on until cold weather. The shrimp would go in the ocean when it got too cold in the inside. Then you Shrimping was always the money thing. You made your money out of shrimp. I always told my son, Milt, as long as we had shrimp, we'd have money in our pocket. But you see, you didn't do this to get rich. You didn't think about retirement. I haven't ever had much. I'm not looking for a whole lot, see. I wasn't a commercial fisherman to get rich. As it is said, I brought nothing with me and I'm going to take nothing with me when I go.

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