CHARLES & REX PENNYCUFF
Fisherman's Choice - Eastpoint, FL

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[Begin Charles and Rex Pennycuff]

0:00:00.0

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Thursday, January 12th, 2006. I'm in Eastpoint, Florida, with Mr. Charles Pennycuff at Fisherman's Choice Bait and Tackle. And Mr. Pennycuff, would you mind saying your name and also your birth date, if you don't mind, for the record?

0:00:20.9

Charles Pennycuff: Charles Pennycuff; my birth date is 01/27/54 [January 27, 1954].

0:00:26.6

AE: And you're in the bait and tackle business now, but you used to oyster, correct?

0:00:30.2

CP: I oystered, crabbed, fished, and shrimped.

0:00:34.9

AE: Are you a native of Eastpoint?

0:00:36.2

CP: About thirty-five years.

0:00:37.8

AE: Where were you born?

0:00:40.0

CP: In Jamestown, Tennessee.

0:00:39.9

AE: Okay. When did you get down here—when did your family come?

0:00:44.5

CP: Moved here in 1971. I've been here thirty-five years.

0:00:47.0

AE: What brought you down here?

0:00:50.2

CP: Really my wife—my mother knew my wife's mother and she said—we had nine children, so she said, *Lord*, she said, *You can put every one of them kids to work down there*. So we loaded up and come to Florida.

0:01:06.5

AE: Put them to work on the bay.

0:01:07.3

CP: The seafood—seafood commercial—seafood business. That's what we all were doing to start with—is oystering.

0:01:12.0

AE: So how did—how did that happen? How did you get into the business and—and learn the trade and get the boat and all that?

0:01:18.9

CP: We went to work the second day we was here. Went out on the boat and tonged oysters and culled them; well we actually culled them the first day but we didn't know much about it. I went to work with what's now my brother-in-law and we caught—we were catching oysters, and they'd bring them in and shuck them.

0:01:36.1

AE: So did you have your own equipment when you started or were you borrowing stuff?

0:01:39.4

CP: No, I went—we went on another boat. It was actually a year when I bought a boat—a boat and a motor of my own and went to work.

0:01:48.8

AE: And where did you get your boat?

0:01:49.2

CP: I got it from Central Seafood, which is Fred Millender. And bought a brand new forty-horse[power] Evinrude [motor] in 1973, I think. I bought my own first boat and started out oystering, bought our tongs from what at the time was—was Golden's Net Shop—Golden Marine Works. And we was in business.

0:02:17.8

AE: Do you remember how much the tongs cost back then?

0:02:21.2

CP: I want to say forty-eight dollars.

0:02:28.9

AE: Gone up a bit since then, huh?

0:02:30.2

CP: I remember what the motor cost; it was six hundred twenty-four dollars—twenty-four dollars sales tax on top of six hundred.

0:02:36.6

AE: What would a motor cost now?

0:02:38.8

CP: About 3,600—3,200—3,200 to 3,600 dollars—same engine, thirty-five years later. [That's] bout 100 dollars a year [increase,] ain't it?

0:02:49.4

AE: **[*Laughs*]** How about the skiff; how much did that cost you?

0:02:55.6

CP: The skiff then was running 600 dollars, and now a twenty-one-foot skiff runs—I build them for 2,100 dollars. In the past, I built several oyster skiffs.

0:03:13.9

AE: When did you start doing that?

0:03:16.2

CP: Seventy—I built—me and my brother-in-law built my first one in 1976. I built several—several oyster boats down through the years.

0:03:26.7

AE: Did you start with a pattern, or you knew what it looked like and you just went to building?

0:03:30.6

CP: Well it's just—we cut our plywood and bent it and it was just—every model was basically the same, if you don't have patterns. We just cut it ahead—like building a house—just built it square twelve by twelve—whatever.

0:03:49.7

AE: And so you got into the business more or less of making boats on the side?

0:03:55.6

CP: Well I oystered—I oystered and I wanted my—I wanted another boat, and that's when I built—the first one was about [nineteen] seventy-two—latter part of seventy-two to seventy-three, and I got my own boat in seventy-two. And then I built my own one in [nineteen] seventy-

six and went and put—propelled it with like I said a forty-horse[power] Johnson at the time—Evinrude Johnson.

0:04:18.5

AE: So tell me about your first time out oystering. Was there a big learning curve using the tongs or anything?

0:04:21.7

CP: It was like a bunch of rocks, being a Tennessee boy. It was like a bunch of rocks clustered up. I couldn't tell what was oysters and what wasn't. Basically it just looked like a big old pile of rocks they was piling on deck. And they finally learned us to separate them and showed us how it was. It just looked like going down the rock quarry myself seeing a bunch of rocks; that's all I can remember.

0:04:49.3

AE: Can you tell me some stories about being out there on the water?

0:04:53.4

CP: I've had some good times, and I've had some bad times. We've caught—stories about being on the water? Let's see. Well it just is normally oystering. Some days you'll go out like today, and it's foggy, and you'll see nobody all day long 'til you get back to the hill [or to town].

0:05:14.5

AE: Would you go out on a day like today?

0:05:15.2

CP: Oh yeah;, I've been—I've left many a day—well not many, but several that you never see nobody 'til you get back home. Just take a compass and run a bearing, and you go wherever you want to. You can find the same little old cork you left yesterday or the same little old telephone pole out there. It ain't moved; you can go right back to it. Now you've got GPS [Global Positioning Systems], and you can find a nickel, but then it's just low—I mean compass—oh, yeah; we've worked many a nights in the storms and shrimped. But you have to work pretty well all the time in the weather, unless it's just sure enough rough.

0:05:57.9

AE: Uh-huh. That fog out there is thick. You can't see twenty-feet.

0:06:00.6

CP: Well sometimes—sometimes it gets so thick you can't see the person on the bow. You can see an imprint of a person, but you can't actually tell who they are, and they ain't like but twenty-foot away. That don't stop you going—like people out today.

0:06:16.0

AE: So the—the skiffs, you know, I know you go out there and get as many oysters as you can but how much—is there a limit to how much a skiff can hold?

0:06:24.0

CP: Well now—well, yeah. We can put 100 bushels on them—seventy and 100 bushels, in the past when we could catch whatever we could sell. Now they got a twenty bushel limit, with where if you ever gets twenty. But we have caught forty-five and fifty-five bushels by myself. And I've caught thirty-eight—I've yielded thirty-eight gallons of meat. My wife shucks most of them. My best day was thirty-eight gallons and five pints. That's a lot of meat.

0:06:53.5

AE: Lot of oysters. **[*Laughs*]** And so your wife has shucked?

0:06:56.5

CP: Yes. Yeah, she shucks. She was actually shucking when we got married.

0:07:02.6

AE: What is your wife's name?

0:07:03.8

CP: Lina, L-i-n-a; she used to be a Hatfield.

0:07:10.8

AE: What was that?

0:07:11.8

CP: Used to be a Hatfield.

0:07:15.0

AE: Hatfield?

0:07:14.0

CP: Yeah, they were from Tennessee—Hatfield and McCoy. You hear of that?

0:07:18.8

AE: Okay, yeah. So what did she think about coming down here and shucking?

0:07:25.1

CP: Well when she moved here, she was two years old when her parents moved. I was sixteen when I came. When we moved down here in [nineteen] seventy-one, I was sixteen. I had just turned seventeen.

0:07:39.7

AE: So she grew up in it?

0:07:41.3

CP: Yeah, she don't know no different. But like I said we was—I was sixteen years old when I moved here, and by her being fifteen, and she was already—they—they—she had been already shucking after school and on weekends a lot.

0:07:59.8

AE: So you moved here when you were sixteen, and you say you started oystering the second day you were here?

0:08:02.4

CP: The next day.

0:08:06.2

AE: Yeah.

0:08:06.5

CP: Yeah, went out on the boat with people; I went with Marion Millender and Larry Hatfield my first day oystering.

0:08:21.1

AE: Did you like it when you started?

0:08:22.5

CP: Well it wasn't a lot of money, but I made ten dollars my first day. **[*Laughs*]** That's as much as I made in Tennessee. And, too, up there we sit a lot during the winter. There wasn't much to do—farmland. Usually everything was still up there. But it wasn't long we was able to make thirty, thirty-five dollars a day after we got on our own.

0:08:48.5

AE: So were your parents glad they brought the family down here and put all the kids to work?

0:08:50.7

CP: Well my mother [was]. I didn't have no—my step-daddy had passed away a couple years earlier, and it was just her and us eight kids. One of my sisters is still in Tennessee, but they done moved in here with us. She packed up, and went back, and I stayed and then later—two or three years later she come down. She's living here now.

0:09:14.3

AE: So all you kids went to work?

0:09:14.6

CP: All of us went to work. Which we ain't got but one or two left in the seafood industry. Some of them is—their own business people and some is doing different things, some runs the water management plants and just different—one is a Deputy Sheriff. I don't know whether anyone of them's an outlaw, though.

0:09:42.1

AE: Who of them is still in the industry?

0:09:43.7

CP: The only one I got still oystering is—would be my brother, Bobby Joe [Pennycuff]. He's the only one actually that catches oysters for a living that's left. He's the baby one of the boys. The rest of us like I said, we got out and got our own jobs—got something else because it's dying. It's slowing down. It ain't dying but it's—the storms cause problems. As you know, we've been off for—the bay has been closed for four months this year, so it's hard on the guys to make a living shut down four months.

0:10:19.9

AE: So when did you get out of it? What year was that, do you remember?

0:10:21.9

CP: [Nineteen] ninety-three. I've played with it since but I—I commercial fished all the way from [nineteen] seventy-two to ninety-three. I don't regret it; I enjoyed it and made good money and raised two kids.

0:10:44.2

AE: So what—you turned straight from that to this place, the Bait and Tackle?

0:10:45.9

CP: Yes, I come off [of the bay] and went [to] selling bait and tackle.

0:10:49.9

AE: Was this place already open, or did you start it?

0:10:51.5

CP: No, it was just a dilapidated old run down service station, and we bought it and decided we'd—they went and made the [cast] net ban in [nineteen] ninety-two. And we decided if we couldn't beat them, we'd join them, so we decided we'd sell them bait. That's how I got in it.

0:11:13.8

AE: How has your business grown over the years?

0:11:17.4

CP: What would you say, Rex?

0:11:19.0

Rex Pennycuff: Well we probably increased twenty, twenty-five percent, since we started up until last year. And then last year we actually probably went down twenty, twenty-five percent due to storms and red tide [which is a bloom of dinoflagellates that causes reddish discoloration of coastal ocean waters, which is often toxic and fatal to fish] and gas prices and just wasn't much went right last year. The retail market here selling fresh shrimp, feed, and different things—was unable to get the food when we needed it and when we could get it—it just wasn't any population to buy it. You know, so it just turned out not to be a real great year.

0:11:58.0

CP: That's my son, Charles Rex Pennycuff.

0:12:02.0

AE: So is this one of the only bait shops in the area, or do you have some competition?

0:12:05.6

CP: The only one in this town that sells directly bait and tackle. And you got two on St. George Island and Apalach[icola], one or two. Carrabelle—every town has got—but we still deal in fresh seafood.

0:12:17.3

RP: Every town there's two or three people that will do the retail market and sells just food to eat, and then there will be a few that do just a little bit of tackle. We're really about the only one here in Eastpoint that does a full line of bait, tackle, seafood, and basically anything you need. There's a couple in Apalach and really you got to go thirty-five miles away to [Port] St. Joe to get to another one that does a full line. Just the market in the area is just not enough population. Usually, you got one pretty good sized store that meets most of the needs, and you got several smaller stores that will produce little products and, you know, market that helps get by. And what one person don't have, someone else will have, you know.

0:13:13.7

AE: So what kind of bait do you have here, and where do you get it?

0:13:16.2

CP: Well, we sell—eating shrimp for fishing are eatable. I mean, they both are caught fresh daily, and we get out live shrimp—they come out of Keaton Beach for bait; our local shrimp is caught here by the few shrimpers that are still in business. We've got some that was caught yesterday—beautiful eating shrimp and bait shrimp. Everybody classifies bait shrimp as bait shrimp, but there ain't no such thing; all shrimp is eatable if they're fresh. We keep them ice-packed whether they're eatable or fishable. And we have people [who get] twenty, fifty pounds and take them back to Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Indiana—wherever they're going back home. We'll pack them and process them full. We still handle the food products. We don't handle the oysters. The fish we usually buy if people wants them, but the fresh shrimp we still handle daily.

0:14:07.2

AE: What kind of fish you have coming through?

0:14:09.4

CP: Hmm?

0:14:09.9

AE: What kind of fish?

0:14:11.7

CP: We get—what kind of fishing do we have? We have trout fishing, red fishing, sheepshead, and in the spring of the year we have—brim is excellent, bass fishing is good, and we have—catch several flounder, pompano, pretty well any kind of salt—we handle bait for fresh and saltwater product.

0:14:35.0

AE: So you have local fisherman that bring in their catch to you to sell?

0:14:38.3

CP: No, uh-uh. We don't deal in fresh—just a few mullet is all, which we sell for bait and—we're not a full line retail, but we do handle mullet and shrimp and we handle mullet for—we handle them and sell them for—eat or fish with, and they use them for cut bait or either whole for shark bait, but we don't have no—no commercial guys that go get it for us.

0:15:04.6

AE: And are there any other baits that people use besides shrimp or mullet for cut bait?

0:15:08.2

CP: Not to eat. Oh, baits? Oh, yeah, we have worms, crickets, crappie minnows—all freshwater. Mostly your saltwater [bait] is either live shrimp, dead shrimp, mullet for cut bait, cigar minnows, squid and all that, which just about every bit of it is eatable. They do sell it in the fresh market state, but a lot of ours is froze[n].

0:15:33.6

RP: One of the reasons we really hadn't got into a full line retail market for food is because of the season regulations and availability now of fish—just about have to sell frozen product to keep the fresh supply. Shrimp we do a pretty good job; you can pretty much keep them year-round here and Apalachicola. But with grouper and snapper, you know, the season is so erratic that you can't keep a fresh supply daily. You know and—and we just can't bring ourselves to tell the people that froze stuff is fresh because it's not. You know, if we tell you it's a fresh product, it's a fresh product and that—and a lot of regulations on oysters, so we haven't messed with oysters in the past for that reason. We're just not set up for it. That's sort of why we learn more toward bait and tackle than a full line of retail. And that's—that's just availability of product and being able to present what you can present fresh to the public.

0:16:42.4

AE: Sure.

0:16:43.0

RP: It's imports and farm-raised product is seemingly taking a lot of the market for food consumption. Now, you know, you pretty much—to handle it, you have to have some sort of food preparation, license, have to keep real strict records, you know so it's—it's a time-consuming process. And when you weigh out what you can make for the product to offer the public something at a good price, you just really can't do that with fresh market, and that's why most people has went to a froze market product which—and the sad thing is you—a process that protects the consumer is actually a process that actually, in return, hurts the consumer because it drives the prices up and also limits the availability of fresh market, you know. So it's—it don't really matter whichever you go you know—somehow or another it's going to affect the consumer.

0:17:49.1

AE: [To Rex] So have you grown up here in this bait and tackle place or have you—?

0:17:51.3

CP: No, he oystered. He's actually oystered.

0:17:54.9

RP: I've oystered and shrimped.

0:17:57.8

CP: He's been my deck hand throughout the years.

0:18:00.6

RP: I've done a little bit of all of it but I've—done a couple years in college and was going for an education. [I] had a [car] wreck, which changed plans—just a part of life. And since I've been here, probably now the last eight years pretty much full-time and you know, just—and happy doing what we're doing right now. The area is changing and the time is changing, and you don't know what the future holds for us.

But in the past I've done oystering. I grew up oystering; it was a great summertime job and an evening job, when I was going to high school. I could go out and make fifty, sixty dollars in the evening or 100 dollars on the weekend, you know, and that was pretty good money for a sixteen year-old kid—junior or senior in high school to have, you know, on a part-time job. And then, of course, when the storms come in, started regulating that out and it become tougher to do. When my father opened the store, you know, basically seafood was—it's a good life, but the

restrictions started coming in and more government regulations and money is not stable and you really have—sometimes you do real good and sometimes you don't do much at all. So you got to really be able to budget, and I sort of elected to go a different path—something that's more stable. And I started, like I say, in education, and then now I've sort of switched avenues here into bait and tackle. And it has up and down times, and still we're depending on the oystermen and shrimpers to get out. When they're down, you suffer, but we've managed to work a multi-faceted business together, so usually something will sustain you when everything else is down. You know—but so when it's all said and done, it's a little more stable than oystering or shrimping—something like that that's really depending on weather and basically any—any environmental element or government element that may come by.

0:20:14.6

AE: Had you been able to stay with the school and the education degree, would you have come back to Eastpoint, you think?

0:20:23.4

CP: Yeah; I would have been in Eastpoint. I'd—I'd have grew up in Eastpoint or Franklin County area, planning on continuing to live there for a while. A lot of changes to the area and don't really know if ten or fifteen years from now I'll feel the same way. And then again, I may. It's—it's what I've known, so I'm sort of reluctant to change. [*Laughs*]

0:20:49.1

AE: Can I ask you, Charles [Rex], to state your birthday for the record since we have you on it now?

0:20:51.9

RP: Yeah, I'm Rex Pennycuff, and my birth date is one, nineteen—excuse me—

0:20:59.8

CP: One-seventeen—. **[*Laughs*]**

0:21:00.5

RP: **[*Laughs*]** Excuse me, one, seventeen, seventy-five—[January 17, 1975]

0:21:03.0

CP: Nine-seventeen—.

0:21:03.8

RP: Nine-seventeen—seventy-five [September, 17, 1975]

0:21:06.2

AE: September 17th, 1975.

0:21:08.4

RP: I don't even know when I was born. You don't want—. **[*Laughs*]** You don't want me on the record. **[*Laughs*]**

0:21:13.0

AE: **[*Laughs*]**

0:21:13.1

CP: September 17, 1975.

0:21:15.8

RP: September 17, 1975.

0:21:17.3

AE: You're not old enough to be forgetting your birthday. I was about to tell you happy birthday [if it were] January 17th.

0:21:25.1

CP: My daughter turned eighteen [on] Monday.

0:21:28.9

AE: She did?

0:21:31.1

CP: I mean Sunday. Yeah, it was her birthday—1988.

0:21:34.4

AE: So what do you think about your son here, staying here at the Bait and Tackle with you and—?

0:21:38.5

CP: Well, it's good and he—I mean, he helped us out, and it takes a lot of pressure off. We—we work as a team; we were able to go and do business. With some kids that was drinking one night and partying and they hit him, and that's the reason he decided to quit going to school and broke every bone in his foot. So he decided to stay, and he lost a semester and a little bit of politics in the school here, and so he decided to help me, and that's the reason he stayed out—to help me. But we work well. Me and him and his mama and my daughter runs it. We work seven days a week.

0:22:12.8

AE: So tell me a little bit about what you have here and what a general day is like.

0:22:16.5

CP: We have probably any sized rod and reel you'd look for—for deep-sea fishing to right on down to a crappie, crawfish—cycle-eight, whatever you want to call it—speckled perch to a brim. Any kind of plug for fresh and saltwater. We have live bait. The live bait consists of shrimp for saltwater, crappy minnows and bass shiners for freshwater, earthworms, wigglers and crickets for freshwater fishing. We're just a full line bait and tackle. We also handle feed—livestock feed and hunting dogs—dog food for most of the hunters. We've got roughly a couple hundred hunters in the County that still hunts and runs dogs.

0:23:10.1

AE: What are they hunting for?

0:23:12.1

CP: Deer—deer hunting and a few hog hunters left, a few still hunt ducks; we deal with duck hunters, turkey hunters, dove hunting—just a general line outdoors—tackle and—.

0:23:32.4

AE: Are you open seven days a week?

0:23:33.1

CP: Open every day but Christmas.

0:23:35.9

AE: What kind of hours do you keep?

0:23:36.8

CP: Six a.m. 'til six p.m. in the winter and six a.m. 'til seven p.m. in the summer, seven days a week.

0:23:44.5

AE: So do you ever have time to get out on the water yourself? Do y'all switch up [work schedules]?

0:23:49.0

CP: Oh, yeah. I went fishing yesterday. I caught speckled trout. I get to fish—I get off during the weekdays, and they work it during the weekdays, and they swap weekends, and then I get off during—usually get out of here about ten o'clock on weekdays and get out and get to do what I want to four or five days during the week, but I open every morning pretty well.

0:24:09.6

AE: And then you have, obviously, a lot of local customers, but when the—when it's high season out on the island, and all these tourists come through, do you have some good business from them?

0:24:17.0

CP: That's when they're hunting and they're fishing. Our fishing is off but our hunting is up. Deer hunters go and buy chicken feed, dog food, archery equipment, and stuff like that kind of keeps that—plus our oystermen, we depend on them to keep us going in the winter, too. It's all pretty well—say ninety-five-percent is local trade December and January and February and March, them wild kids get ready to start coming back.

0:24:50.3

AE: Do you hunt yourself?

0:24:52.7

CP: No, ma'am.

0:24:53.8

AE: Because I've been hearing about on St. Vincent's Island they opened that up?

0:24:56.6

CP: Yeah, they have a sandbar which is about a 300 or 400-pound deer and they have a big white tail over there. They have a sandbar hunt and that's a draw—a drawed hunt. That's where they can get drawed—they send their names all in, and they draw so many names out.

0:25:15.3

AE: Oh, okay, so the limit it?

0:25:17.6

CP: Hmm?

0:25:17.8

AE: They limit it pretty well by just picking names?

0:25:20.2

CP: Oh, yeah, that is—.

0:25:21.2

AE: And then you can—?

0:25:22.5

CP: In the National Forest, now, you can kill a deer every day on it for the six—eight weeks during the season. Well it usually opens here around the tenth—I mean the—Thanksgiving 'til about February fifteenth.

0:25:34.2

AE: And then on St. Vincent's you can't—do I understand that you can't use—?

0:25:40.5

CP: They have archery. They have archery season, and they have a muzzle loading, which is black powder season. In fact, each one of them consists of a whole weekend. I believe that's all it is. I ain't for real sure, but I believe it's just like a four-day hunt for black powder, and then they have like a four-day bow season. I don't think they have no primitive weapons.

0:26:09.2

AE: Well let's go back to when you were working on the bay and some of the other stuff you did. You said you were crabbing for a while and—.

0:26:14.6

CP: Well when me and my wife first got married, I crabbed and got a couple hundred crab pots, and we could catch 500, 600, 700, 800 pound of crabs and I got off on a bad foot. What happened is the dealers—I was young, seventeen, eighteen years old, and the dealers already had their crabbers—when you get 600, 700, 800, 1,000 pounds of crabs a day. They looked out for their—their people that crabbed all year, and I was just a new starter. I done good but I didn't—so I went back to oystering in the fall. We played around that summer; we had crabbed a little.

0:26:54.1

AE: Did you build your own traps—pots?

0:26:56.9

CP: No. No, I bought them already built.

0:27:00.5

AE: How many of them did you have did you say?

0:27:01.9

CP: I had a couple hundred at the time.

0:27:04.3

AE: So you made an investment in those crab traps.

0:27:07.6

CP: Well me and my—me and my boss man did, me and the owner. But we invested like 200 dollars. All we done is turn around and sold them back for the money we had in them.

0:27:19.0

AE: Okay, where would you set them out to trap the crabs?

0:27:22.3

CP: Just along the shorelines like the rest of them. You put them in a straight row, usually about twenty-five to forty per unit, and then you'd go move them a little farther. It was just like anything else; you'd have to shift them from time to time.

0:27:36.9

AE: And how long would they stay out there?

0:27:40.1

CP: Well you'd usually run—start in March and it kicked off about August or September. That was usually pretty well the season then; now they crab a little bit year-round.

0:27:52.6

AE: Did you ever cultivate any soft-shell crabs doing that?

0:27:56.3

CP: One season—one season.

0:27:58.5

RP: One season was enough of it.

0:27:59.2

AE: Can you tell me—can you explain how that works?

0:28:03.6

CP: What we do is we take what they call a peeler and rank—it's a small crab that's got signs in his fins showing that it's going to be a—getting ready to back out of the shell and have like a—when they turn real pink, and all it will be a pinkish looking on their back fin, and he's probably going to back out tonight or in the morning. You got to get him back out of that water within an hour or two, or he'll be turning hard and that's—you've got to do that four hours around the clock. And we did try it one season.

0:28:40.6

RP: Yeah, when the—when the season is really going, and you're checking them every three hours, usually it will take you about an hour to do it, so that gives you two hours in between and that's—that's just running the vats, and then if you're going to get the crabs, you're going to have to run your traps sometimes, too.

0:28:55.3

AE: What do you mean by running the vats? What does that mean?

0:28:58.3

RP: That's just checking—

0:28:58.0

CP: That's running through and separating them and getting the rank ones out, and the ones that are fixing to shed you got four stages—got rank, a pink, and a—

0:29:04.3

RP: You've got what—thirty minutes?

0:29:08.1

CP: It usually takes thirty minutes to an hour to run the vats. See, you got these full bait vats with about four inches of water in them, and you bring them crabs in, and you have to separate them. Because if you don't, the—the ones that are not fixing to shed will kill the others. They'll break their pinchers and all, and when they hatch out they'll eat them, too, and tear them up. And the idea of the soft-shell is to keep him soft.

0:29:32.9

RP: How long does the soft-shell take to harden when he's filled out?

0:29:36.4

CP: About three—three to four hours, he'll be back hard again.

0:29:41.5

AE: So you really got to stay on top of it.

0:29:41.6

CP: In—in two hours he'll be a paper-hulled. And too, that depends on the water. If the water is real warm, it could even be less.

0:29:50.9

RP: Do have you have one in there in the vat that's not a peeler who's done turned, he'll eat your soft-shells.

0:29:55.8

CP: Tear it up, anyway.

0:29:57.9

RP: So if you're not there to get him, a lot of times he'll be damaged.

0:30:00.8

CP: That's why you got to separate the stages in them and keep the ones that—once they're fixing to shed out, they hardly move. They won't even pinch you. I mean they—they're getting ready to back out of the skin or back out of the shells.

0:30:15.3

RP: A lot of times you'll get to the vat and one's fixing to pop out, and you have to wait on him because, if you leave him, he's going to be hard by the time you—the next time you run it. That's a lot of times—if you got a lot of crabs, you know, everybody—you just go over there and finish with your vats, and by then he'll be backed out. If you don't have a lot of vats, a lot of times you still got to hang around an hour or thirty minutes or so and wait on him to back out, so that you don't lose him. And that's one of the problems with—with crabbing; it's probably one of the hardest lives. Because if you're going to get them, you pretty much have to run your pots regularly, and a lot of times a lot of other seafood industries you can take off sometimes. But if you've got crabs out—the difference between you catching the crabs or not, is your pots being baited. And if you—a lot of times you've got to go, no matter what the weather is and bait your pots. If you don't, you're not going to produce any crabs because they're not going—you're not going to catch them. So you pretty much—it don't matter what the weather—windy, rainy, blowy, cold. It don't matter. You got to go bait your pots and do all that, and that's a half-day to a full day job, depending on how many pots you got out. And then, if you're doing peelers, you also got to maintain your vats every four hours. So you just about—one man just about can't do

peeling by his self. He has to incorporate his family into it, and everybody who does it I really respect. **[*Laughs*]**

0:31:48.3

CP: All the seafood business pretty well is family businesses.

0:31:54.0

AE: Well for the people that—

0:31:54.6

CP: The oysterer needs—the wife shucks; you crab, your wife helps you process. Now shrimping, you can get by either hiring a deck hand—.

0:32:05.0

AE: So the people who are crabbing and doing the—the peelers, the soft-shell crabs is a—for the people who have the patience to do that, is the price good enough for the soft-shell crab to make it worthwhile?

0:32:13.5

RP: Right now—

0:32:15.5

CP: They'll make twenty-six dollars a dozen—thirty-six dollars a dozen, like that they make. Hell, I mean, it's good, but the last four or five years the crabbing has been awful bad—real bad.

0:32:27.9

RP: We got some of our friends now that's—they—the box they got out they'll run and forty-five, fifty pounds is what they'll get.

0:32:40.9

CP: Out of 200—100 or 150 pots, and they'll run, and some crab traps won't have none in them, and some will have two or three crabs, that's it. It's just that bad off.

0:32:51.8

RP: When it's all said and done, on a bad day, you probably don't pay for gas and bait. On a good day, you make a little bit, but you have to sort of supply the market, where a little later in the year, when it's good, you'll have someone to sell to.

0:33:06.0

CP: That gets back to that lull, when he looks out for in the summer when the ones that pop in and get the money **[*Laughs*]** don't get the money.

0:33:15.9

AE: So why do you think crabs are—are low right now?

0:33:19.2

CP: I don't—they say that it's something to do with red fish and—and that eats a lot of them. Something, too, they claim is in the water that don't let them reproduce like they do these scientific studies. I've seen it on TV, but I don't know really myself.

0:33:35.7

RP: I think a lot, too, is up until the last couple of years we haven't really had a lot of rain, and the salt content and the fresh content of the bay in this area really has changed over the last few years. That's evident, I believe, in crabbing, as well as fishing. We now are seeing different species of fish that ten years ago really was not in this area.

0:33:58.7

AE: Because the water is saltier, you're saying?

0:34:00.3

CP: Saltier.

0:33:59.9

RP: The water is saltier and that's—has to do with several things. The damming of the river controls a lot of the fresh, as well as the last few years—well the last couple years we've had good rain, but before that, you know, five, six, seven years, we really didn't have the adequate rain north to—for run off to come down the river and add freshwater to keep the salinity where it was, so now it's—it's saltier in content. We're seeing a few juvenile tarpon that usually wasn't around a few years ago—that now are pretty much—some of them are staying year-round, you know, and you see a few more of your grouper and snapper in closer. And I think that's also a evident that the salt content is up in the bay area.

0:34:55.3

AE: And you were—before I forget, I want to ask you, you started saying the four stages of the—the peelers—what are those again?

0:35:01.6

RP: What are they?

0:35:04.6

AE: What are they?

0:35:05.5

CP: What?

0:35:04.8

AE: The four stages?

0:35:06.1

CP: The green one—the green one is the first stage; you might not get them all but you got a—you got a green stage, and he's real lively, and he's got just one little old marking in his fin. And all the crabs, you look at them they look all the same, and then you got a rank and you got a—what they call a pink one—let's see—green, rank, pink—

0:35:46.2

AE: Is rank r-a-n-k—is that what you're saying?

0:35:47.6

CP: Yeah, what it—I really don't know the four stages. I know—I know what they look like when you handle them, and it's been a while since I've done it. But I know green is the first stage and then you got a pink—no, rank probably sounds like it's rotten but it ain't. It's ready to—and then they call it a popper. The popper is the one that his back will be literally popped up for him to get ready to put back. That will be the stage that, if you leave him with the green ones, they'll start nibbling at that soft part and kill him before he ever backs out. Green, rank, pink, and popper, I believe. I might have some of them numbers—named a little bit—but I do know the green and the poppers is the ones that's going to shed within usually the next two to three hours. He'll be all raised—his hull will separate, and he's ready to back out. You can sit there and watch him back out on paper for two or three minutes. He's got to pull all them fins and those pinchers and all.

0:36:59.6

AE: And then how do you keep them? How do you keep them once they're soft?

0:37:03.9

CP: Once you take him out of water, you put him in refrigeration, and he won't get hard. That water is what—lets his shell get back hard, but you can put him in like tissue cloth—wet tissue cloth and keep him in the refrigerator around probably forty-degrees and he won't—he won't harden. I don't know how long he lives—it's several days because they'll ship them. They'll ship them to Maryland and all live, so three to five days at least he'll stay soft. But if he's in that water about an hour or three hours, he'll be back hard as he was before.

0:37:44.1

AE: When you were doing that, did y'all ever cook up a soft-shell crab?

0:37:46.7

CP: We don't—we fry them. We just take the back and pull the guts out, and we got to pull the guts out, or I ain't going to eat him. And then pull the back—we throw the back away, too. We just fry the crab and the legs—oh, yeah, they're wonderful. We eat them now and then.

0:38:08.1

AE: So let's go back to oystering then. Now, you got out of the business because it was going down. Now what do you think about the future of—of oystering and folks working on the bay?

0:38:18.2

CP: I don't know where—there are probably going to be oysters as long as we're here living, but the pollution is what kills oysters and kills the—you get so much bacteria and they won't—see, the oyster lives on bacteria, but they won't let you process it. See they—this time they said red tide is in them, and they've had areas—part of the area, about a third of our bay is still closed from September second and then we had—it was two months, a third of it stayed close. Three months later, the second third opened and then the other third they still say got red tide, and it's closed. Oystering, I believe there will always be oystering but—and there will be a demand for them, but I don't know if the workers is going to be there with the price. It's been a struggle ever since probably [nineteen] eighty-five.

0:39:19.4

RP: Right now, one thing that the local people are facing is there's sort of a trend to unite laws all through the United States, and you keep hearing about a—a water temperature degree setting it, and if it's not a certain temperature, you can't produce oysters out of that water.

0:39:44.7

CP: Because the bacteria is higher.

0:39:46.0

RP: Because the bacteria is higher in the summer.

0:39:46.5

CP: They're talking about closing it like five to six months during the summer. Once the water reaches like seventy-degrees, seventy-two, then it will stay closed 'til it gets back to that in the winter.

0:39:57.2

RP: You know, and some years that could basically shut you down as much as six months.

0:40:02.7

CP: It's hard to work a job six—five to six months out of the year.

0:40:04.6

AE: And make a living, yeah.

0:40:05.8

CP: And make a living.

0:40:07.2

RP: You know and oystering right now, already, with everything that's going on, it has sort of become a part-time job; there are still people doing it full-time, but you really have to budget yourself. And a lot of times like the—the last year, you haven't had a great year, you know, you—you did without. You know, some years you'll do real good, but as—if that happens, it's going to force oystering more and more as a part-time job. You're going to have to have something else just regular, which in a sense, the area has seen that. And, you know, it's just always everybody is linked to some other branch of seafood to keep them going. Like my father, I mean he's—he's done a little bit of all of it, and that's what it's taken in the years past to survive is you do a little bit, and then if that's down or you can't make it on that, you swap to something else to get you by, until you can go back to oystering or shrimping or whatever you do as your primary living.

0:41:09.6

CP: Well our primary living was shrimping about nine months—eight months, probably, and oystering four months during the winter, and that's what I was doing when I quit. We shrimped usually March to August—I mean, Thanksgiving—and then from Thanksgiving to November,

December, January, and February, we were back on oystering and done that for the winter season.

0:41:35.0

RP: Now the sad thing about the area is people will swap from—if they shrimp—swapping into oystering as a sideline. A lot of them now are having to swap to either construction or either to cleaning houses or something just tourist-related or either something—a lot of people now have swapped to some sort of government job that will allow them some free time to oyster or shrimp on the side to make—make ends meet, and it's really—it's changing the way of life around here because you can't—it's harder to depend on the seafood industry twelve months out of the year. You know, in years past, you could do that,, but now it's becoming harder and harder because, you know, when they shut oystering down for nearly five months now in areas of the bay, you know, that puts a lot of pressure on floundering or either mullet fishing or shrimping. Well it just so happened the shrimping, during that time, a lot of people don't have the means to do that; this year it put a heavy emphasis on people floundering on the sideline. Well there just ain't enough market, you know. You have people who do that continually for a living that supplies the market, and if you get, you know, fifty-percent more people doing that, there's just not enough market for it, and you either have to sell your product lower, which doesn't do you any good, because then you can't meet your bills and other things, you know. Or either you have to find something else to do.

Mullet—the same way. Since the net ban it's—mullet has sort of changed in the area. The demand has sort of changed, so now there is a limited supply for the mullet outlet. And then

when oystering is closed, then you have extra people get into mullet fishing and that puts too much on the market, so then you have to find something else. You know, where in years past, pretty much everything maintained and stayed along, and you could swap back and forth, you know. If you had to depend on one thing for a while, it was a short time, and something else would open back up, so you could turn around and go right back. Well it's becoming more and more that you can't do that. If they close it, it's liable to be closed for three or four months, so you can't depend on any—any other of the seafood markets. You have to look outside of the industry to find something to keep you going.

0:44:13.8

CP: And, too, they pulled all of our crab permits; if you don't make a percentage of your income from crabbing, they pulled their—pulled their license on them. And all the crabbers, they is—either you just about have to crab for a living—you can't oyster part of the year and crab, if you don't make that quota. And about three years ago, they pulled all the crab licenses, if you didn't make a standard—if a percentage of yours wasn't crab, you couldn't keep your license; you'd lose it. So that eliminated this swapping season thing, and that's the State of Florida. **[*Laughs*]**

0:44:56.4

RP: But that's—that actually has been the trend in a lot of the seafood. Every year another product is put on the restricted species, so you have to have a restricted species endorsement to do that—that process. So, you know, a lot of people that hasn't depended on that when, you

know, if they depended on shrimping and now oystering becomes a restricted species, if you haven't showed where you've caught oysters in the last year, then your license is invalid. You can still have the harvest license, but you can't catch oysters or you can't catch mullet or you can't catch flounder. You know so it's—

0:45:42.0

CP: If you don't have a restricted endorsement.

0:45:43.2

AE: Can that be—if you—if you fail to meet the quota one year, can that be renewed the next year, or it's just gone for good?

0:45:48.1

RP: No, usually when you lose it—

0:45:50.1

CP: When you lose it, it's gone. We'll—we'll probably never have another crab license. They was several who lost them because they didn't do enough. By me running this business, I wasn't able to crab and keep mine up, so I lost it. Some of the crabbers that went out and got private

jobs, they lost theirs, too. So it's down to probably roughly ten crabbers in Franklin County or less.

0:46:19.9

AE: Wow.

0:46:22.3

RP: You know and it's—it's a shame but that's—that's just the process. Now the State can—if they felt necessary, they could reissue some licenses. But crabbing, like you said what now twelve years, probably, they started the process, and slowly every year they've eliminated a few that had a crab license because they couldn't meet the quota to keep their license. So now it's down to very few have it, and each year it seems like they've added another species to the list. It [oystering] hasn't been affected as drastically as crabbing, but it's on the way.

0:46:58.8

CP: One thing, it wasn't—now this wasn't on a one-year basis; this was based on a three-year period. One of your leading years had to be in crabbing. They gave you three years to get qualified for another three, and if you didn't make a percentage in crabbing,, then you lost it. It wasn't just snatched away one day but—but if you didn't have records to where you caught so

many crabs in three years—which they do it now on grouper and snapper and all too—you lose that endorsement. You go for something else.

0:47:33.3

AE: So do y'all know many young people who are going out working the bay?

0:47:39.0

CP: Well we're trying to convince all the young people don't do this because of the hardship. We've got a few kids that—that quit school and fished.

0:47:49.2

RP: There's still a few people that do it; most of them realize that there's—the future in it is going to be hard. They can do it, but it's going to be hard. Now ten or fifteen years ago, there was a lot of kids that was still getting into the industry. But since then, probably in the last fifteen years, fewer and fewer of the local people have really encouraged their kids to get into the seafood industry. Most—most adults that's in the area—and has been at that time—is trying to get their kids something else to do because it's—it's just really become real hard to maintain year-round.

0:48:31.1

CP: I probably pretty well know every fisherman in Franklin County, if he's been here for years, and we've all worked together because the bay ain't but thirty or forty miles wide—I mean, long—and a mile and a half, two miles, three miles wide. But some of the kids followed and some went onto college.

0:48:52.1

RP: There's a few fortunate people like us that get into something that's related to seafood that's just slightly out like retail or—or either bait and tackle, but the problem is the demand, you know. It's just not enough. Everyone can't swap to something that's close, you know. As people are eliminated, they have to find something new, and there's just not enough market in related areas. They have to go out into something like construction or, you know, some other field of labor.

0:49:23.6

AE: What about the market for recreational fishing and—and guides? Is that—is there a turn that's taken—that's taken?

0:49:30.6

CP: Some of them has taken that turn. We have a lot of guide fishing, which they had a rough year, too. This year has been the worst year on guide fishing due to [Hurricane] Kate—I mean, Katrina and Rita and Dennis, red tide publicity, people wouldn't come. Had a good year fishing, but the business was off to probably 64,000, and all your guides usually are seeing less of them. So they've had to—some of them lays tile; they'll fill in and work carpenter work, whatever it takes to pull in. And they'll try to get them a job to where they can pick this trip up when it's—the ones they've got booked and most of them got friends or family in the business, and they'll work them a day or two and kind of fill in. That also is for shrimping, oystering, fishing and all; it runs hand in hand. Most people—know the people and they work together.

0:50:28.7

RP: The trend in the area as far as recreational fishing is increasing over the last few years. The problem though with guiding or charter fishing or something like that is, basically the same thing as any other field—if you get too many people in that field, there's just not enough people to do it. And then, of course, they have boat payments and insurance payments, licenses that they have to maintain. And if they can't—if you over-populate that field, and there's not enough business to meet them—the demand, if there's not enough demand you wind up—you have a few of them that eventually are forced out of that field, and then they have to go into something else, too. A lot of people that cater to them can use the seafood industry as—as a mixture; you can—you can guide for recreational fishing as well as oyster or shrimp or something like that on the side. But then again, the problem with that a lot of times is the seasons coincide with each other. You know, like this year the storm shut down the oystering, and it also shut down the guide business

because there was no people coming in. So it's—you know, it's hard to maintain—it's hard to use that as an alternate source because a lot of times it's affected by weather. The same things that affect one, affect the other, so a lot of times you can get out of the field and use that as a—a source of income when the seafood industry is down.

0:52:03.8

AE: Tell me how [Hurricane] Dennis affected the community here in Eastpoint. Because this waterfront is just devastating.

0:52:07.2

CP: How many what?

0:52:07.5

RP: Dennis?

0:52:08.8

AE: How Dennis affected the community?

0:52:12.0

CP: Other than their income—but it's—it—we lost four or five restaurants that didn't rebuild; we lost—in other words, every business on the water suffered minor to great damage—some was total—total[ly] wiped out. Three—three oyster dealers in Franklin County—I mean, in Eastpoint rebuilt, two in Apalach—had to—one of them didn't have to, but one of them had to rebuild. See, I think we've got seven oyster dealers left in this county. At one time, they was in—in the [nineteen] eighties. This has been a downhill trend ever since probably—approximately [nineteen] eighty-five. It was somewhere around forty-eight dealer licenses issued, and now we got seven oyster houses operating in the County [Franklin County].

0:53:21.5

RP: Dennis itself hurt the area really in many different ways. Of course, to start with, you had the weather from it and the storm surge, which wound up doing destruction to different places on the water and flooding anywhere near the water here. But that was just the beginning effects; it actually brought the red tide and that's what started the bay—

0:53:47.7

CP: No, Dennis done the damage and Katrina brung the red tide.

0:53:51.3

RP: Dennis done the damage and then was followed by the other storms that brought the red tide in.

0:53:54.4

CP: Katrina.

0:53:55.3

RP: And of course—

0:53:55.5

CP: And then [Hurricane] Rita right in behind it brung it even stronger then.

0:54:00.1

RP: St. George Island was devastated by Dennis, which wound up—they're a more of a tourist industry, but a lot of the houses there that were for rent and the beach, which attracts—was messed up, so the people was not coming in. So then you'd have red tide come in; so that stopped all your oystering and a lot of your seafood industry. There was no tourist industry because there was no place for them to stay—red tide—.

0:54:33.6

CP: Sewer lines, swimming pools was full of sand, just—I mean a big impact on the County.

0:54:41.1

RP: And red tide, a lot of people are not educated about it, so a lot of people wouldn't come to the area when red tide was here. You know, so that hurt the tourist industry. And then, of course, the storms this year also affected the gas prices, which also caused people not to travel much. So when you put all three of them together, the whole industry from the time Dennis hit—

0:55:07.4

CP: Suffered.

0:55:07.8

RP: —suffered. There was some people that wound up, if they was in construction, they had plenty of work immediately after Dennis, trying to get houses on the island back and yard work and trying to repair stuff. But then once that was—once they got everything back to normal or semi-normal, you know, there was no income from outside coming in to help support that. And it really—it hurt the whole industry in this area.

0:55:39.3

AE: Well, and seven months later you have restaurants that are still gone, oyster houses that are still gone, a lot of the community without jobs, so what are they—what are they doing?

0:55:50.4

CP: Well they—

0:55:51.5

RP: More and more of them has looked for something outside the industry to go to work at. We see—it seems like every week—we'll see one or two people come in and look for a reference or look for a job.

0:56:04.9

AE: Are there jobs?

0:56:06.2

CP: There's some State jobs out there. A few more people are getting into building, which is—real estate has become something that people are looking to which is—actually causes more of a

burden on local people because, as real estate prices go up, it's good for a few, and it's good for some jobs, but it also it costs you more to live here. And then we've had some that's moved inland; some are doing different things, you know. We've had a few that just had to move away from the area. You know, the good fortunate thing for a lot of people is that they own land and all—they still can maintain. You know, you just cut back and you—you don't spend excess money, and you just do what it takes to survive and hope for a better year next year. And so far this year, it looks like it's going to be a pretty good year. The seafood is starting to kick back, the tourist industry is starting to come back, you know, real estate is still up. You know, so it—if everything gets back to normal and we have a good year and don't get any storms this year that do a lot of damage—pretty much everybody should be able to kick back. The only problem is there's probably going to be more regulations and—as well as other things that go with population growth, and that's going to affect—eventually push more and more people out of the seafood industry.

0:57:39.5

CP: What I've seen in the past year or two years is most commercial fishermen has done enough—electrician or—electric—electrician helpers or carpenters that they can go out and get a job. I mean a lot of them just want to oyster—I mean it's freedom. Go out there and sit on the bay all day, and nobody is hollering at you and screaming of wanting this and wanting to do that; you got to pull a time clock. It's freedom in it, and that's the reason a lot of people loves to fish, shrimp, and oyster. It's kindly—you're your own boss, you do what you want to, you go work hard, and come home and stay and don't bother nobody. But through the years, most of them has

knowed other things or learned other things that they can just about do anything they want to. I mean I—construction work or—or electrician—I ain't above a ditch—digging a ditch. I mean they—and a lot of people has went to County jobs, State jobs, Parks and Rangers, and another thing that's really took big here is Correction Officers. There's so many—used to be seafood workers now—probably ninety-percent of the correction workers was a seafood worker. Now he can still have his correction jobs and he might not get but one or two days a week, and they still oyster or fish and cast net or something. They've gone to—most of the people—I don't know what the percentage is, I don't know how—well I'm sure you could find out—but just about every quarter you hear of ten to twenty going to Corrections School in the law field—Corrections Officer School because they build prisons in Gulf County, built a new one here that's going to employ 105 people. And the majority of them—some of them moved into operate it, but the majority of them live here. And they droved to Wakula and they drove—Liberty up yonder, and they drove to Howard's Creek and drove to Apalach, and now a lot of them is about filling them correction jobs and moving out. And they're getting to move to Carrabelle by the new prison over there. And there's people that gone into County agencies—courthouses. I mean there's women over there in the courthouse that shucked twenty gallons of oysters, but they've had to get away from it. So it's been—

1:00:17.7

RP: The trend in the last few years—ten, fifteen years ago, seafood was the main industry. It was—it brought more income into the area than anything.

1:00:27.6

CP: At one time it was ninety-percent of [Franklin] county.

1:00:29.9

RP: But now you're seeing a strong surge in either construction work in—which—or either something related to tourism, which construction sort of ties into it. Or either governmental jobs to the area. Other than that, we really are lacking for any good industry—any good clean industry in the area. You know, and that's—that's sad for the—the younger people that are here because they either have got to compete in that market which is a limited market, or either they have to move away from here, especially when you consider the taxes in the area and the land prices in the area.

1:01:10.1

CP: I'd say in 1984 probably seventy-five to eighty percent of this income was seafood. Now it's probably twenty-five or maybe thirty—twenty-five to thirty-five-percent will be seafood related in—in fifteen years. Over the years, it's just been a slow—you see, more and more—at one time we had 900 and some oystermen that bought licenses; now we're down to a little over 100 over a period of fifteen to twenty years.

1:01:44.2

RP: And that just goes back to what we was talking about—

1:01:46.5

CP: And some of us buy licenses that don't even fish. Me and him bought a commercial license ever since we've had this business. I mean we don't use them, but we've got them.

1:01:56.9

RP: And then that ties back to what we said earlier, if you don't use them you're apt to lose them.

1:02:00.9

CP: Eventually the oystering will be—

1:02:04.9

RP: You know, so you got a market that's running people off, in a sense, and then you have governments coming in and taking a lot of your license, so you can't turn back to it, and then, if you're forced—if you do get a job that sustains you, you can't—you can't stop it to go back and

maintain your oyster license, so a lot of people are going to give that up and stay at the job they're at.

1:02:34.0

CP: I've got a number of friends that's Corrections Officers or the Department of the State which is the Wild Forestry Service; I've got friends in the Sheriff's Department, in the County Court system, even in the State and County facilities—road work and all that I'd never thought I'd see over in that job.

1:02:59.4

AE: So do you feel fortunate that you got out when you did and started this business? That you can still stay connected [to the seafood industry and the bay]?

1:03:05.2

CP: Well, yeah, but—we make good money, but it's been harder. It's harder to make a living oystering, fishing, and shrimping. We shrimped, like I said, about eight months out of the year, so it was—it's pretty stable—hard work but it's stable.

1:03:20.9

AE: Well what would you want people to know about Eastpoint and the bay and this area?

1:03:28.8

RP: Probably the thing that stands out in my mind about the area is the people that live here. It's probably some of the best people that you'll find in the country.

1:03:36.7

CP: In the world.

1:03:37.5

RP: They're hard—they're hard-working people that just sort of want to live their own life, you know—

1:03:44.0

CP: Be free.

1:03:44.4

RP: Be free, you know. And strangers that they meet, you know, they're friendly to them, you know, and don't mind sharing with them, but it's—the area is changing, you know, and people are having to adapt with it, and that's probably one of the greatest things about this area—that, and, you know, it's just a beautiful place to live. You know, we're fortunate to live in this area that we see a lot of nature and a lot of the things on the bay that other people never will get the chance to live. Now you can go north, and you can see mountains and rivers and streams, you know, there's a lot of—lot of different areas. Or you can see the desert, but I just—the diversity in this area, as far as the land change and the water and the nature that you see, is just—it's hard to imagine anywhere else that's as beautiful as this.

1:04:39.8

CP: We're in Paradise. That's the reason so many people loves to come here. We can fish year-round and hunt during hunting season and saltwater fish and bay fish and freshwater fish and hike and trail through the woods and see the bears pretty well year-round and watch the deer. I mean we got paradise here right at our fingertips. But so many times the local people get discredit[ted]. Me and you can go walking through town right now; we'd see 100 people—100 people will treat you just as nice as if they did know you. You could walk through town by yourself and ninety-five or ninety-eight of them would be the same. I mean I have one or two influenced—general rule, it's the people—I mean they're just nice people—good people.

1:05:28.9

AE: Well and there's obviously a respect for the area. I mean people have lived their lives living off the land and living off the bay, and there's been that balance there and appreciation. And now it seems like it's just kind of been turned on its ear.

1:05:40.6

CP: Well now you've got condos changing that and they don't—the worst thing that a person here hates to hear is somebody hated where they was at, and the first thing they see them over there in Planning and Zoning trying to change something to where they were. I mean they loved it—they loved—the reason they moved here but they—they want to change part of it back to where they come from and the local people resent that. But they don't meet a stranger—good working people—hard working people; I've worked with them thirty-five years. Like I said, at one time, I knowed everybody in Franklin County just about. I still know a lot of them—several. My friend told me one time—said, *Charles, Franklin County has got 10,490, and you know 10,000 of them*.

1:06:28.0

AE: Has your place over the years been like a hub of kind of news and gossip and—and word on the bay?

1:06:36.7

CP: Well I just—with a lot of the local folks here, people stop and ask for info. We will take a minute and talk to them. We—but there is lovely people here. There's a few we could do without, probably. [***Laughs***] I'm sure you find them in every city, every town.

1:07:01.6

AE: Well is there anything that I haven't asked you that you might want to mention?

1:07:04.9

CP: Maybe shrimping.

1:07:06.1

AE: Shrimping?

1:07:06.6

CP: Yeah, I commercial shrimped, too. Like I said, we—me and my wife done it a lot during the year. That boy [Rex] throwed his bottle away on the boat.

1:07:12.5

AE: Did you have your own boat? Say that again.

1:07:14.8

CP: He was nine months old, and he throwed his bottle overboard. I made a big old circle at night, and we took the spotlight, and we found that bottle and dipped it back up with a net and didn't tell him about it. He was—I think nine months old or something and he'd—he'd want the bottle and I'd say, *Bottle*—I'd say, *Bottle gone—gone*. And he'd go on about his business. And that's how long we shrimped. We shrimped up 'til [nineteen] ninety—probably [nineteen] ninety-four. And we've seen good times and we've seen hard times, a lot of enjoyable times in shrimping. We've caught probably two shrimps to 2,000 pounds a drag. My best drag was 2,200 and something pounds—forty minutes. My worst drag was probably one or two head—just going along spot-checking. I had my brother on there one day, and we had a 2,200-pound drag in forty minutes. We've had 1,000-pound drags and, like I said, we've had three—four pound drags. You never know what you're going to catch; it's a great experience.

1:08:21.1

AE: Did you have your own boat that you worked?

1:08:21.3

CP: Huh?

1:08:21.7

AE: Did you have your own boat?

1:08:23.6

CP: I did then. I had a twenty-eight-foot bay boat, four—four cylinder Perkins diesel—cheap to operate and made good money. I raised that boy [Rex] and paid for a little bit of land.

1:08:37.8

AE: Now shrimping seems like a whole different ballgame because there's such an investment with the—all the equipment and the boat itself.

1:08:44.1

CP: Yeah, the boat and the net.

1:08:46.0

AE: And the gas usage and the nets. So is that something—?

1:08:47.9

CP: Well, like I said, I had a twenty-eight-foot shrimp boat, bought a brand new engine. The engine alone was ten-grand. The boat—and the equipment—you can run into 2,000 or 3,000 dollars on nets and [shrimp] doors; now you can run 10,000 or 20,000 dollars on electronics and even enhance it more.

1:09:10.3

RP: Most of the people now that get in shrimping has help. Their family is either in it, and they slowly branch off with the support of their family. You know, as far as just someone coming in outside and successfully doing it, a lot of times you just—you don't hear that because you've got to know the local area; you've got to know the bay; you've got to know how to do it, you know, plus you've got to have the equipment. So a lot of times as people get ready to upgrade they'll—they'll recycle some parts from friends. It's—it's really a good—it's a good network of people, you know. It's not uncommon to hear of four or five shrimpers—

1:09:47.1

CP: They've got to work together.

1:09:47.2

RP: —get together when the boat is out, and four or five of them get together to clean the boat and get it ready to go back in the water. You know, and a lot of times they'll—they'll support each other and help each other out. You know, if one of them has been down for a couple weeks, they'll try to have some kind of fund-raiser for them or either, you know, offer to let them go with them for a couple days to help them make enough money to go ahead and finish their boat up and get it back in the water, so they can make a living. And it's just a circle—circle of friends that they just continue to help.

1:10:22.7

CP: Most of our shrimpers today is thirty-five to forty-two year-old—young boys that come up, and most of them, their daddy done it. Either the boat is passed down, or they bought it. They were trained in it.

1:10:36.5

RP: Yeah, a lot of times, as people get older, they'll let someone younger that's been working with them start running the boat.

1:10:40.8

CP: Operate the boat.

1:10:42.6

RP: And that a lot of times will open up the doors for him to eventually buy that boat, you know, and that's—there's not really hardly any new people getting in the industry. It's sort of a transfer of people that's in the industry or either young kids that's worked with the people for years that are getting in the industry that now own boats and someone else—.

1:11:07.2

CP: All the Gilberts and the Dashers, they were—their daddies had them.

1:11:11.0

AE: Now and talking about regulations, though, now, how has it been for shrimpers with all the turtle shoots and—?

1:11:15.8

CP: The turtle shoots—well—

1:11:16.4

RP: Every year it's something new.

1:11:18.1

CP: Well, the turtle shooter was just a small thing, and then they come in and they had to put a fish shooter in front of that. In other words, you can imagine taking a bag and putting this—I know you got a flap to keep it closed, and ain't supposed to have nothing go out but a canon ball—but a big old turtle or something. But anything you catch is going to open that flap, so it's going to go—well then they come in front of it and put a fish shoot—certain mesh [is] cut open. Now the fish shooter is designed to throw the fish out, but yet let the shrimp go to the bag, so you got another area that you're going to lose a percentage. And if you accidentally catch an abandoned crab trap or a stick or a log or a limb or root system off a tree, it's going in there, and it will open your flap, so you're going to drag two hours or an hour-and-a-half for literally nothing. Whenever you caught that trash, everything is open. So you dragged and fished for nothing.

1:12:20.6

RP: When they work right, the—the effects is minimum; when they don't work right, it's—you basically—you've worked for nothing. But it—to describe what happens with a net, it's like having a bucket, and you're holding water, and then you're poking holes in it. Every hole you put in it may not let but just a little bit of water out, but that's still water that you're losing. With the shrimp net, every hole or something that you put in it, that's shrimp that's getting out. It may be a few, you know, and—and we understand the regulations, you know, are good in some aspects,

and then in some aspects, you know, the people are over-zealous. Turtles in this area—very few turtles are caught in this area and ones—I would say, the ones that was before the net ban, I imagine ninety-five-percent of them was released unharmed back alive. You know, and then the ones that didn't live, you know, you're liable to have one or two shrimper men that may wind up catching the same dead turtle that they've released—

1:13:28.3

CP: I fished twenty years. I've seen three or four turtles on my boat in twenty years and one of them dead—either drowned by me or somebody earlier than me or—or either drowned on its own reason—and I seen three live ones. That's out of thirty-five—I mean, twenty years of working this water up and down eight months a year. And it's just—we didn't have the problem. But what it created when they put that fish shooter in there, that created fish constantly coming out of that bag and then they got these tarpons—tarpons, porpoise, what we call a porpoise or dolphins, and they're running and picking at that bag all the time, and they'll tear that sucker all to pieces.

1:14:13.5

RP: You've also created a thing with sharks. A lot of times you're working—

1:14:18.4

CP: A shark will tear the bag because they're used to that steady flow of feed coming out, so they're there grabbing them fish that accidentally get tangled. They'll just tear out a whole piece, and you'll take that net up, and you'll have to repair it—either down and repair it that night, or sometimes you can finish it at night, and sometimes you have to quit. That's the biggest thing on that.

1:14:38.8

RP: It's not really the things that are imposed—them—that product itself not really is what hurt it; it's the byproduct that happens from a turtle shooter or a fish excluder that hurts you. You know, it's—it's one it gets tangled or when it's—when it's shooting fish out, and a porpoise or a shark realizes now a net as a food source, you know, now they're coming up—they've become the problem. They're the ones tearing the nets or, you know—so it's not necessarily the fish excluder or the turtle excluder that's the problem; it's something that it does that has changed nature that for—that causes the problem.

1:15:25.7

CP: The biggest thing, too, that's hurt shrimpers is domestic prices. I mean, you cannot—you cannot produce with the price of fuel that they can buy them for.

1:15:40.7

RP: You know and—

1:15:40.5

CP: For instance I can buy grouper [at] three [dollars] and fifty [cents] a pound—four dollars. You get three [dollars] and thirty [cents] a pound before he's ever just gutted—the whole grouper. You can't compare a three-dollar-a-pound fillet—boneless fillets—upside of three [dollars] and thirty [cents] a pound for the whole fish. I'd put that fish—if you lose half—or even shrimp is the same thing, if you lose half of it at three [dollars] and thirty [cents] a pound, all the math—the boat is going to get six dollars and sixty cents. You're buying this domestic for three [dollars] and fifty [cents]—wholesale, so there is no comparison. I mean you can't even buy it and try to make money on it.

1:16:31.5

RP: You know and that's—that's one thing that a lot of people here hate to see is, especially with importing, the stipulations that shrimpers or fishermen live by is not enforced overseas. You know they don't have TEDs [Turtle Excluder Devices]; they don't have fish excluders; they're not maintained—they don't have to keep the trip tickets that local fishermen do; they don't have to live up to the same standards.

1:17:01.7

CP: Well their environmental standard ain't near as much as ours.

1:17:05.6

RP: So, of course, they can produce a product that's nowhere near in comparison, but it's a lot cheaper, you know and—and when it's put on the market, some people like the domestic but then again, a cheaper inexpensive product is going to appeal to a lot more people that before may not have been able to purchase it anytime they wanted.

1:17:29.2

AE: What's a trip ticket?

1:17:30.8

RP: A trip ticket is a ticket that records—

1:17:35.5

CP: Daily catch.

1:17:36.7

RP: The process of seafood domestically here, from the time it leaves the water, there's a trail from it to the time it gets to the consumer that insures quality and—and environmental safeness. When it's caught from the water, it falls under a HACCP [*pronounces this Hass-ip. This stands for Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points, which is to ensure food safety in retail establishments*] plan that when they—when it gets to the wholesaler, they have to record the temperature it was—it was received, the timeframe it was caught, where it come from in the bay, you know, basically a map of every—from the time the shrimp is caught in the nets, to the time it hits the table, there's a record of it, you know. So that means that people somewhere in between is having to keep a record of that. You know, I do trip tickets here; I keep up with the shrimp. I have to label. I have to tell how they were caught and how many people was on the boat when they caught it, the license number that they was recorded under, the area of the bay that they was caught in, and then I have to maintain how much of the product—what size of the product—.

1:18:43.4

CP: What we paid for it.

1:18:44.8

RP: It was—what we paid for it.

1:18:45.4

CP: And then the State gets a copy of that.

1:18:48.9

RP: And then the State gets it. At the wholesale level you do the same thing. They record the temperature that it was caught, the quality it was caught at, when it was caught, you know, and then they keep a record until it's to the retailer, and then the retailer keeps it until the time of the consumer. And that's—that's a good process in a sense because it insures anyone who is doing it right—it insures that the product is good. You know, if there is a problem, you can trace the timeline of it to find out where the problem was. The biggest problem I see with that is, most of the people that adhere to the laws are the people that probably wouldn't sell a product that would have hurt you anyway. The person who would sell a product that would hurt you is probably not going to be doing it legally, anyway. You know, so it—it adds someone who is trying to do legal and what's right—it adds more cost and more time on them, where someone who is not doing it the way they should, probably is going to be the one that hurts someone in—in the future.

1:19:53.2

CP: You take a poacher; he ain't worried about the laws. He's going to catch it—and get rid of it.

1:20:01.6

AE: Huh.

1:20:02.0

RP: But that's another aspect of the industry that has changed over the last few years. Twenty years ago, you know, everyone pretty much caught fresh shrimp and kept them and took care of them and sold them to the public, and they didn't worry about someone getting sick or someone getting hurt. But you get one or two people mixed in that really don't care about anyone else and don't care about the product that they're producing, you know, that brings a bad name to the ones who's tried everything they could to provide a—a good product to the consumer, you know. And you get a bad rep from them. You don't hear about the hundred good people that's doing it right and taking the steps to insure that the product is good. What you hear about is the ones that didn't.

1:20:49.2

CP: That one percent.

1:20:53.7

AE: Complicated business.

1:20:55.7

CP: Hmm?

1:20:56.5

AE: Complicated business.

1:20:57.7

RP: It can be. **[*Laughs*]**

1:20:58.4

AE: **[*Laughs*]** These days, anyway. Well, I won't take up y'all's whole day, but I appreciate y'all giving me this time here. Anything that you—any final thoughts you'd like to add to the recording here?

1:21:16.6

CP: Eat—eat Florida seafood.

1:21:17.6

RP: No, I think—

1:21:18.5

CP: Eat American seafood.

1:21:22.6

RP: We could add a lot of stuff, you know. I mean but everybody's experience is different, and that's the good thing about the industry. You know, the only way you really could get a real feel of the industry is actually to be part of it, and then you only get your perspective, you know, and that's—that's the great thing about the seafood industry.

1:21:46.2

AE: Well I sure thank y'all for sitting here and teaching me.

1:21:50.9

CP: How long you going to be here?

1:21:52.2

[End Charles & Rex Pennycuff]