

**MARK MARHEFKA**  
**Abundant Seafood, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina**

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**Location: SFA Oral History Bus, 2015 Charleston Wine + Food Festival**  
**Marion Square, Charleston, South Carolina**

**Interviewers: Kate Medley, Sara Wood**

**Transcription: Shelley Chance**

**Length: Forty-nine minutes**

**Project: Charleston Food + Wine Oral History Bus**

**[Begin Mark Marhefka Interview]**

**00:00:00**

**Sara Wood:** That would be great.

**00:00:02**

**SW:** The next time I come to town and figure out how to make it work with your schedule I'll bring my tape recorder and we'll record you—

**00:00:11**

**Mark Marhefka:** Cool; yeah there you go.

**00:00:12**

**SW:** I think that would be really nice. But you do have to tell the story of how you guys met, because I think the first conversation I had with Kerry is she started by saying a lawyer had to clear our first date 'cause she was—was she with the DNR?

**00:00:26**

**MM:** She worked for the Federal government, yeah; yeah.

**00:00:27**

**SW:** What does she do?

**00:00:28**

**MM:** She was fishery biologist and she worked in policy and helped—she helped make the rules that I had to live by.

**00:00:38**

**SW:** So she probably does have an opinion about the—.

**00:00:40**

**MM:** Yeah; she seriously needs to be sitting right here.

**00:00:46**

**SW:** If you'll just sort of square your shoulders toward Sara and the only rule of the game here is that you don't look at the cameras or me.

**00:00:57**

**MM:** Okay; looking at you?

**00:00:58**

**SW:** Looking just at Sara.

**00:00:59**

**SW:** And Kate is probably going to ask you some questions but you still answer—

**00:01:01**

**MM:** Okay; still answer your way? Okay.

**00:01:04**

**SW:** And I just wanted to get a level on your voice Mark so could you just tell me a little bit about what y'all had to eat last night at Mike's place?

**00:01:13**

**MM:** Fried trigger fish, lobster, clams—

**00:01:17**

**SW:** You had lobster?

**00:01:17**

**MM:** Yeah; clams, gumbo, smoked fish dip, yeah.

**00:01:27**

**SW:** Who made that?

**00:01:27**

**MM:** I think it was the chef from Peche, yeah he had some smoked tuna and did it which was pretty tasty.

**00:01:34**

**SW:** Cool. I just wanted to Ted Peter's Famous Smoked Fish in St. Petersburg, Florida for the first time.

00:01:38

**MM:** Oh really?

00:01:39

**SW:** And they had this smoked mullet dip and it seemed like everybody—nobody really came into eat. They just came in to pick up the smoked—the fish dip and then they would go home.

00:01:46

**MM:** Right and leave; yeah, yeah. Yeah; that’s—

00:01:50

**SW:** How do you feel about parting with your sunglasses?

00:01:53

**MM:** I can part—no problem.

00:01:56

**SW:** You want to put them with your folder?

00:01:57

**MM:** Yeah.

00:02:01

**SW:** All right; we are rolling over here. And let me just adjust one thing here; sorry. Okay; and let's make this official. [*Claps*]

**00:02:29**

**SW:** Okay; first question is really easy. I would love for you to just say hello and introduce yourself and tell me what you do Mark.

**00:02:38**

**MM:** Hello my name is Mark Marhefka. I own and run Abundant Seafood with my wife Kerry and fish on the fishing vessel Amy Marie. And we catch seafood from deepwater species for the town of Mount Pleasant and Charleston and distribute it to all the local chefs.

**00:02:59**

**SW:** Mark will you tell me where you're from?

**00:03:01**

**MM:** I'm originally from Jacksonville, Florida and my father was in the Air Force and we traveled all over the country. And so I've been in the Charleston area since 2000.

**00:03:13**

**SW:** So your father was in the Military?

**00:03:16**

**MM:** Correct.

00:03:17

**SW:** Where—where all did you guys move?

00:03:20

**MM:** As soon as I was born we moved to Japan, Okinawa and we were there for a little while, Kansas, Arkansas, Myrtle Beach; Myrtle Beach was the—the time when you sort of kind of got the love of wanting to go and be a commercial fisherman. And he—we would go down to the docks and watch the boats unload and so on and so forth. And he finally said when he was going to retire he was going to go and become a commercial fisherman. And of course during that time of year of when he retired the Federal government was endorsing commercial fishing for Veterans and so—and such and so it was—he became a commercial fisherman and I sort of followed in his footsteps.

00:03:59

**SW:** So you'd go out and watch the fishermen with him?

00:04:03

**MM:** Yeah; we would go and watch them unload at the docks down in Merrell's Inlet and Little River and it was a great you know—you know family kind of outing that we would go and do and everything and—and get excited about seeing all the big fish that would come off the boats.

00:04:18

**SW:** Can you talk about—can you kind of describe that scene for somebody like—what did you see like as a—as a child watching that with your dad?

**00:04:28**

**MM:** You know just seeing all the big fish, the different varieties of the fish, and you know hearing everybody's chatter about them and you know where they came from and how good a—you know day they had and—and everything. And just it was just—it was an interesting time to go and see that and not really you know knowing that much as a child and—and looking back in time you know is that these people were still nourishing their body with a public resource, you know which is pretty cool and that's what we're doing now.

**00:04:57**

**SW:** And can you talk a little bit about you know you mentioned that the government was endorsing fishing for Veterans. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

**00:05:07**

**MM:** Yeah; I think it's just—it was during the Vietnam Era when a lot of the Veterans were coming home and Soldiers were coming home and they were all looking for—for work to do. And—and the Federal government during that time were giving low interest on loans and stuff like that for them to go—and because a lot of the you know Soldiers were over there and seeing how you know how all the waters were flourished with seafood over there in Vietnam and such. And so they you know they came back over this way and you know and it was a—you know a pretty good fit for many of them. And you know and it's worked out, so yeah; it was sort of kind of neat.



**00:05:42**

You know when—when you're able to get into it like that—that was pretty cool.

**00:05:48**

**SW:** Excuse me real quick guys. I just need to adjust this.

**00:06:03**

**SW:** Could you talk a little bit about—I mean when you're telling me this it's kind of interesting to think that there was a time where the government was actually endorsing people to do it because now people—you're rare.

**00:06:13**

**MM:** Right; right.

**00:06:15**

**SW:** Do you ever think about that?

**00:06:16**

**MM:** Yeah; I do. I mean it's just—it seems like it's—you know it's turnabout. I mean here we are you know up against a lot of regulations and such because of you know over-fishing or fish stocks depleting for what reason it may be because they're long-live, slow-grow fish and you know we—you know we fished on them and it's time to go and sort of slow down a little bit so we continue to have you know a bio-mass that's going to go and sort of you know be there for—for a long time. And that's what we're trying to go and do.

00:06:45

But yeah; it's really interesting that you know—you know we've had many times that the—the government has stepped in. We had a trawling situation where in the mid-'80s, early to mid-'80s they were wanting to allow roller rig trawler rigs to go out there and harvest the same fish that we harvest now. And they—and that was endorsed by the federal government also. And there were small low-interest loans to go and do that and a lot of people made a lot of money very quickly. But they wiped out you know many, many year classes of fish at one time is what ended up happening. And these huge roller rigs were you know basically tires of you know like Volkswagens and they'd just roll across the bottom and they'd just mash out all the, you know—you know corals and everything else. And it's taken a long time to go and see some recovery. I mean here we are in 2015 and you know so it hasn't been that long really for a long-lived, slow-grow fish. And I remember seeing hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds of little teeny fish come out of the water that normally we wouldn't even have been able to harvest as of today. But they—you know and these are year classes that—and that's what a lot of the science is—is that if you don't see several year classes of the fish you know from the little ones to the big ones, and we may all go and say oh, we're seeing all these great big fish, but if you're not seeing the little fish there also that's not what's going to go and reproduce for us and go and build and be for us in the years to come. So it's important.

00:08:17

**SW:** How old were you when your dad started fishing?

00:08:21

**MM:** Um, I was probably sixteen I believe when he retired and he bought the first family boat. Yeah; yeah I remember you know working on the boat and getting it prepared and he knew absolutely nothing about it and hired another captain to go and help him run the boat and teach him how to do it. And you know eventually he you know purchased another boat and got rid of that one and got something fiberglass. It was an old wooden boat that we had—the first one, and so he ended up getting a fiberglass boat. And you know and he—I think it was like I was 17 years old, junior in high school, and he passed away on the family boat.

**00:09:00**

And my brother was with him and so he ran the boat after my dad passed away. And we, my brother and I worked a little bit after I graduated in '79 but we have different work ethics and so he went his way and I went my way. And you know and he still fishes out of North Carolina right now.

**00:09:18**

**SW:** And what's your—can you tell me your father's name for the record?

**00:09:20**

**MM:** Gerald Benjamin Marhefka; yeah.

**00:09:23**

**SW:** And your brother's name?

**00:09:25**

**MM:** Michael Anthony Marhefka; yeah.

00:09:28

**SW:** Okay and also your mother's name?

00:09:29

**MM:** Lucy Frances Marhefka; yeah.

00:09:34

**SW:** Could you—I know this is kind of maybe not an easy question but could you talk a little bit about you know just from being 16, 17 and watching what were the changes that you noticed?

Did you notice any changes in your father as he transitioned into becoming a fisherman from what his career was in the Military?

00:09:52

**MM:** You know it was interesting. I mean I think it was a perfect fit for him because he was you know sort of—had to take care of a lot of Military who are coming and going in—through his Barracks area and stuff, but it—it was—you know it was a peaceful time for him I believe, you know. And he really enjoyed it because—and I think that's where I get my work ethic from because he enjoyed you know making the boat just right and making it—making it the way he liked it. And you know it was—I don't know; it's hard to explain. I mean just there's a whole sense of being you know you're your own boss you know and he had worked for the Federal government for so many years, you know and then you're able to go and do your own thing and at your own pace. And you know knowing the harder you work the more you make kind of thing.

And—and we don't see that a lot anymore in our—in our, you know workforce. So but yeah; it was—it was a very interesting time.

**00:10:53**

**SW:** And you said he had a specific way he liked the boat. Can you kind of describe what that was?

**00:10:58**

**MM:** You know I think everybody has their own little special way of where certain things are and you know and that way on a boat is you know when—when—when it's dark, it's dark. It's—there's no outside lighting. You have your—your interior cabin lights and stuff so you should be able to make certain paces to certain places and be able to put your hands on things when you need to go and have them. And everything has a place. And you know and it's—it's very—you know it's different than just having things just strewn all over the place. And you know and it's—in an emergency situation you need to go and need to be able to you know be ready to act quickly and know where things are and know what needs to be done. And everybody needs to—you know you can bark out orders of where everybody is supposed to be and what they're supposed to be doing and stuff. So 'cause you never know; it's—the whole thing of being out there you know or you're scared, it's the fear of the unexpected, because you just never know if a hose clamp pops off and you have water coming in and you don't—all these different things or a rogue wave comes and you know nails you upside the cabin and busts out your wheelhouse and stuff.

**00:12:04**

You know I mean, you know or bare wire all of the sudden happens on the battery and all your electronics start melting and stuff, you know so it's just you know you're—you just can't go and sort of kind of call the guy and come fix it. You're offshore, you know the eight hour ride home and stuff, so you need to go and be able to you know make yourself you know ready to come back home kind of stuff; yeah.

**00:12:27**

**SW:** Is there—I wanted to ask you; I'm going to ask you about how you, you know went off on your own after you know leaving home and fishing but is there—I'm wondering if there's anything that your dad did specifically on his boat that may be something—it could be the boat or something he did or something that was you know unique to him as a fisherman that—that you still—that you still carry with you if it's a specific something you have on the boat or specific way you do something that reflects him in any way?

**00:12:58**

**MM:** Um, you know a lot of our family members who passed away have been spreading—their ashes have been cremated and spread at—at sea. And you know basically when I'm offshore that's my sanctuary. They're all there with me and there's nights out there that I can just you know—you look up to the stars and you know if you're having a tough day or whatever and you can just go and you know you can get real close, real quick, you know with the people who are around you and you know—. You know you ask you know hey am I doing the right thing? Or are we doing—is—is you know those—those deep questions that you ask, you know watch over me; it's—it's a tough night you know right now. It's getting rough you know and stuff.

**00:13:41**

So those kinds of things are you know you get close to your—you know your family members really quickly, you know so but—yeah.

**00:13:52**

**SW:** Can you think of a particular night where you like it was maybe a little unsettling or maybe just one of those nights where it was more intense that you can think of specifically where you asked that like look over me?

**00:14:09**

**MM:** Many years ago we—we had caught a very large shark early in the morning about 4:00 a.m. in the morning. It was slick, calm, pretty and it took us about four and a half hours to get this beast in the boat. I mean it was so big and because you know it—it weighed when we got to the dock, it finally weighed about 600 pounds dressed. That's no head, no tail, and no guts and stuff.

**00:14:34**

And on the way home it was getting ready to get rough that day and on the way home we—it started getting really bad. And we basically almost pitch-pulled the boat, and pitch-pull means where the—the nose went down and the stern flips over. And you know it was—it was a very intense time. And the whole crew, I had three other crew members on the boat at the time and we couldn't speak for about five minutes. And it's those times that you get really close in your—in your soul and just you know that you sort of—help me get home you know and you just—you know I always go through the whole thing. I look at the end-picture; what do we want the end-picture to be? And I want to be sitting on the couch you know in my home with my family and relaxing and—and everybody being safe and stuff. And so that's what we sort of kind

of—you know you just get on those you know focus you know points and—and then—. But—but definitely that was a—a very intense time.

**00:15:29**

We were on our way back in the Cape Fear River and the ships would come out of the river and get down into the swells and all we would see is their stacks and antennas. It was that—that big and I'm only a 39-foot boat. And so and we were just lucky that the current wasn't coming out of the river as the seas were going towards the river or else it would have been a really scary time getting into the—the inlet at that time, so—. Yeah; that was—that was one of many, one of many yeah.

**00:16:00**

**SW:** Mark why did you—what did you do; I mean when you left home? Did you go right into fishing?

**00:16:05**

**MM:** I worked at a—at a full service, service station when I was in high school and as my dad was running the boat with my brother and another captain he you know really didn't have any more room for me on the boat. So I had to go and fish with other fishermen who needed help. And that's where I sort of—it was in—I think it was the summer of when I was a junior, I think—no, I was actually a sophomore in high school and I took a Greyhound Bus from Jackson—I mean from Jacksonville up to Charleston. This is when the bus station was downtown; took a cab over the old bridge, didn't have enough money to—my money to pay the cab driver I had \$100 bill and we had to go to Alex's which was a 24-hour restaurant then in



Mount Pleasant to get him change, and then I basically had to stay on the docks until the boat arrived the next day. He was offshore; to go and get on that boat.

**00:17:03**

And it was in the heyday of the time of these waters up here when a lot of the Florida boats were coming up to this area and these waters were never really fished commercially. And so everybody was just you know it was just great; you know just so much fish to be had. And so I got to work on a—on a vessel for the summer there and it was—it was a great experience for me. I had gone out with one of the very best fishermen on the East Coast at that time out of Jacksonville and so I was—I was doing all those things and—and still going to school during the school year. And then when my father passed away my brother was running the boat. And then in '79 when I graduated, as soon as I turned my cap and gown on—gown in I was on the boat. I mean the boat was ready to go and we came up to North Carolina and started fishing out of the Wilmington area.

**00:18:00**

So you know I didn't—I jumped right in it you know with both feet. And you know it was—it's been great. You know it's some good memories. I've seen a lot of you know ebb and flow with management and you know and stuff and it's been pretty cool.

**00:18:15**

**SW:** So you mentioned that these waters hadn't really been fished before.

**00:18:20**

**MM:** Right.

00:18:20

**SW:** At the time; how come?

00:18:22

**MM:** It's just—I think it's just the—there wasn't a lot of commercial fishing going on here except for shrimping and maybe some inshore black sea bass fishing and stuff like that. The deep water fish people would go you know farther off to go and catch were more charter boats looking for you know wahoo and dolphin and you know marlins and stuff like that.

00:18:48

And you know just—I think once again it was that whole morphing of you know there was a whole seafood crowd on the Gulf of—you know Gulf side of Florida and the Gulf of Mexico and then there was a lot of them down in the you know Florida area. And they just started you know working their way up as they—you know and it's just sort of really kind of interesting how that all sort of you know came down you know in—in the early '80s and everything. And I just remember tons and tons of fish being caught you know.

00:19:20

I used to go and deliver fish in a truck from one of the largest fish companies on the East Coast in Southport which was American Fish Company. And I was on the road nonstop for three years delivering all over from you know Fulton Fish Market to dropping off fish at Hampton Roads, Virginia to be delivered to—to the Chicago market which I don't even believe there is a Chicago market anymore, down to Florida we were delivering fish and the Panhandle and you know I was just—I had a whole circuit that I did and I was just nonstop on the road and that was fun, so it was good times.

00:19:55

**SW:** And—and so now how has that changed?

00:20:00

**MM:** Greatly because now there's a huge deficit of fish that we don't have fish available and stuff and it's not so much that the fish aren't out there; it's that there's just—they've reduced what we're allowed to harvest by giving each fish a quota. And so what ends up happening is we can't go and harvest those fish except certain times of the year or the quotas get caught up or things like that. And so it's just we don't have that steady flow of fish. You know and—and that's in good—good reason; they're needing to sort of go and manage it that way so we continue to have fish for a long time, you know for many, many years to come. But it's—you know it's definitely changed.

00:20:44

You know and it changed the type of species we used to go after. I mean what we used to fish for were basically just American red snapper and now it's switched to becoming grouper and snapper once people realized that grouper was a great fish to eat. And now we're just eating about everything we can go and put our hands on in the ocean now and that's great because in an eco-based management system that's what we want to do. We don't want to just eat all the groupers or eat all the snappers. We want to have a little bit of all of it so it sort of balances out you know. It's a good way to do it.

00:21:15

**SW:** I'm wondering; I want to ask you about Abundant and how that you know 'cause there's been a long—you have a very long career, but because you've just mentioned that can you talk a

little bit about particularly here in Charleston and with Abundant how you approached—or how it works because I remember you talking about this and Kerry mentioning this when I was back here in September about how you know the fish that you—you actually are responsible or you're part of the reason why the chefs used different fish because before these were fish considered to be kind of like what you would call trash fish maybe.

00:21:55

**MM:** Right; right.

00:21:56

**SW:** Can you talk about the process of that with—with your work?

00:22:00

**MM:** Well yeah; I mean I realized you know being involved in fishery management for almost 18 years, helping the Federal government as an advisor and going to make—help them make the rules we live by, seeing certain species that were not utilized species by the chefs and under—and sort of like a perfect storm is the way it all came together is that we have some really amazing chefs in this town, you know who are embracing you know the freshness that I was bringing them and then being able to go and say you know what else are you catching out there? What else or me bringing in this product and saying here's a really nice fish; you know try this whether it be banded rudder fish or white grunt. I mean years ago trigger fish used to go and be the trash fish of the—of whatever, you know and—and now you can't catch enough you know trigger fish to go and supply everybody that wants trigger now.

00:22:53

You know there's other species out there that we're sort of kind of looking at. They're going to be a little bit harder to harvest. We may have to harvest them a different way. You know of course lion fish is one of those fish that we talked about, the invasive species that needs to go and be harvested but they don't really take a hook well. And you know just—just being able to go and try to you know get these guys to try something different and they understand that you know if we take really great care of it on the boat, and the fisherman doesn't call/cull it trash when they put it on the boat, they call/cull it you know money. This is money and if we take care of it we can make good money off of this. And there will be times where we may have to go and live off of this fish that doesn't really have as an impact like grouper or snappers do and we may have to live off of that fish for a little while until those are opened back up as the quotas get opened and closed. So that's sort of kind of what we you know sort of started looking into as far as you know getting you know Abundant Seafood to the chefs.

**00:23:58**

**SW:** Can you tell me how—how Abundant Seafood started?

**00:24:03**

**MM:** Oh basically reading between the lines as an advisor and—and the advisory panel for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council.

**00:24:12**

**SW:** And I'm going to have you back up Mark and say—because my questions are going to be cut out can you start by saying Abundant Seafood started—?

**00:24:18**

**MM:** Okay; well Abundant Seafood started as a way of minimizing the amount of layers that we have available you know that—that we have to go through for getting our fish from Point A to Point B. And the Point B is the chef; Point A is myself, okay and every—every person that touches the fish puts a little bit of something else on it, whether it be you know breakdown the integrity of the fish because of how they handle it, or—and/or also the money that gets added to it also by the time it gets to—. So when we started Abundant Seafood we needed to go and learn to make more with less. And because the Fishery Management understanding part of that as being an advisor, I was watching what was going on and saying this fish is going to go and be reduced. We can't go and keep that all the time. We need to go and—so it's just sort of playing the game of having—what do we need to go and do to change? We can't do business as usual anymore. It's time to go and sort of kind of switch it up a little bit. And we're constantly having to switch it all the time. And I know farmers are the same way, too whether their crops or—whatever they're doing, but I mean we—we're the master jugglers you know of trying to go and figure out what we're going to go and be able to do and what angle we can go and hit things at.

**00:25:35**

And that sort of segways back into our whole CSF situation that we have with Abundant Seafood also.

**00:25:41**

**SW:** Can you talk about that—?

**00:25:44**

**MM:** Yeah; the CSF is one of those things that Kerry and I sort of kind of you know started thinking about when one was being developed in North Carolina and we—you know Kerry was watching it. I was watching it. And you know we run our CSF a little bit different than a lot of others. We are individuals who are actually going after the—the fish, as to where a lot of other CSFs are more like a co-op kind of situation where they're distributing from many different fishermen. And we go and catch it; we bring it in. We call our customers or send them emails and let them know it's time to come pick up fresh fish and they get the best that they can go and get.

**00:26:24**

And in this town it was just perfect the way everything was working with you know during the recession we had, you know everybody wanted to keep their money close to home and keep tight and they wanted to go and eat fresh local product and keep everything local. And of course most of our CSF customers are foodies and they go out to the restaurants that we go and we supply seafood to and it all really works well together because they'll go and eat something at one restaurant that they may not have ever seen before and then I'll have it a pickup and they're like oh I had that there. I want to go and try some of that now or vice-versa. I've had this amberjack at Mark's and I love it. When I go to this restaurant I'm going to go and try it there because I'm sure it's going to be done well also.

**00:27:08**

So you know it's—it's been great; it really has but it's—it has its challenges you know and the challenge is managing the customer. That's the biggest challenge you know.

**00:27:20**

**SW:** What do you mean by that?

00:27:21

**MM:** Managing the customer, making sure they get their emails, making sure they're getting you know their poundage that they're—that they need. You know it just frustrates me when I have a customer saying I'm not getting my emails. I had to have my neighbor tell me you know who is a member also that it's time to go and get pickup and so it's you know we need to go and sort of step up our technology a little bit and try to figure out how—'cause at this point right now we're close to 300 customers that we have to go and sort of kind of reach out to. And a lot of the local you know email servers don't like having to send that many emails out to one—one particular group at a time. [*Laughs*]

00:28:02

**SW:** Overload.

00:28:02

**MM:** Yeah; overload. [*Laughs*]

00:28:06

**SW:** Well I wanted to step back just for a second. Do you want to—do you have any questions?

00:28:10

**Kate Medley:** Your favorite fish to eat and how do you prepare it?

00:28:12



**MM:** Oh my gosh; that's so hard, so hard. I can't.

**00:28:18**

**KM:** Answer to Sara.

**00:28:18**

**MM:** Sara okay; [*Laughs*] my favorite fish to eat I can't say that. They're all my favorite. I mean they really, really are in their own special way whether it be a raw application with a banded rudder fish and tasting the creaminess of the—of the flesh and how good it is to you know trying little Tunney and doing it in a ahi poke in a raw way. Grouper, certain groupers you know I love in—in different ways as far as—I could eat fish seven days a week, bottom line. So I can't go and say there's one particular fish that I like.

**00:28:56**

Trigger fish has always been a favorite of mine. It can be done so many different ways and it's just you know it has that very unique flavor. It takes to the grill really well. You know so yeah; one particular fish I can't nail it down to that. They're all my favorite. [*Laughs*]

**00:29:14**

**SW:** Spoken like a true fishermen.

**00:29:17**

**KM:** Spoken like a true father.

**00:29:20**

**SW:** Well I wanted to take a step back for a second Mark and just can you talk a little bit, you know you talked about being around—in North Carolina like Southport and Wilmington area, how did you branch out—or can you talk a little bit about the process of getting to your—like having your own boat and doing your thing as opposed to working for other people?

**00:29:40**

**MM:** Okay; all right. Well during the time that my brother and I were on the boat, the family boat when—after I got off you know, graduated and we came up to North Carolina, worked with him for a little while and I didn't really feel like we were hitting it as hard as we should and getting offshore and whatnot because he didn't want to go and have to go offshore as much. And I wanted to run the boat a little bit and that worked somewhat but not as much. And so I decided to branch out and try things my own way.

**00:30:12**

We—I moved to actually I think I was working at American Fish Company first. I quit my brother and went to work there and worked for—there for three years. And then it just sort of kind of—it seemed like there was less fish that were being harvested and there was—I was not being so much on the road anymore. And I had to do more you know around the dock—dock work and stuff. And I'm like okay this isn't really what I want to do.

**00:30:37**

So I decided to go and look into getting my own boat and—and trying that. And—and so I found some folks who were willing to go and sort of take the risk with me, you know and take the boat and owner-finance it for me and get involved with that. And you know did pretty good for a little while and then you know sort of got derailed from fishing a little bit and went back to work on land at a place called Trigon Engineering up in Greensboro doing soil compacting

testing for buildings. And I mean that was from the water to that and I'm like—it took me two weeks and I was like I am done playing in the dirt you know. **[Laughs]** I got to get back to the ocean.

**00:31:22**

So—so we went back down there and immediately started searching for another boat to run. And I found the boat that I'm on now in 1988 is when I purchased that boat and this year is actually its 30-year anniversary. It was built in 1985 and—and so and I've been on that boat ever since. And you know it's just—it's been a really great boat, super sea boat; we did a—some additions to it and added a heavy keel to it so it would go and be a little more stable and during hurricane seasons and during—when we had a bunch of hurricanes we would—I had it set up to where if I needed to sit on the keel during the hurricane season we could sit on it. But I've had that boat ever since and it's—it's a good boat.

**00:32:11**

**SW:** And who is it named after?

**00:32:12**

**MM:** Amy Marie is from my—

**00:32:16**

**SW:** Can you start that again; sorry?

**00:32:18**

**SW:** Sorry about that.

00:32:18

**MM:** The Amy Marie is named after my stepdaughter from a previous relationship, yeah, yeah during that time.

00:32:25

**SW:** Um—

00:32:27

**MM:** And it's not—one of the things about boats is you're not supposed to change the name of the boat in midstream if you own it because it's bad luck. So the reason why I haven't changed it and plus you know I was her dad, so—.

00:32:40

**SW:** How are we doing on time?

00:32:43

**KM:** You're a little over 30 minutes.

00:32:46

**SW:** Okay; I want to know how you—if you could tell a story if you could—well you mentioned Kerry but could you—could you introduce Kerry, like who is Kerry?

00:32:55

**MM:** Okay; my wife Kerry, she's amazing. She's—she's my rock. She keeps—she—she keeps me grounded for sure. I met Kerry during a Council Meeting many years ago. She worked for the Fishery; she worked as a Fishery Biologist for the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council. And she was someone who was doing policy, making the laws that I had to go and live by. And I ended up going and having a couple times where I had to go and come up to her about some public hearings and stuff where we were talking about red porgy I think at the time, which is pink snapper in the community. And you know I just basically told her she didn't know what she was talking about and you know and so from then on just like she was like hell bent that she knew what she was talking about. And so we constantly were working on you know trying to go and get those numbers right for the—for the pink snapper and everything. And she was also the head of the marine protected areas at the time and I came in to sort of kind of as a commercial fisherman to sort of show where we should go and put these marine protected areas offshore and stuff.

**00:34:18**

And you know and so yeah it's been—you know since you know we—we just you know what in 2000, I think 2001 or something we got married and you know and—and it's been—been good ever since you know. I mean like I say, she's just—she's amazing you know. I don't know what to say. *[Laughs]*

**00:34:40**

**SW:** When you first met her was it—did you know you were going to ask her out or was it just the process of getting to know her through the roles that you both had?

**00:34:50**

**MM:** It's—I didn't really know that I was going to go and ask her out. I was in another relationship at the time and we were just working—because I was an advisor on the Advisory Panel and she was working there. And I knew nothing about and didn't have any thoughts whatsoever about becoming you know ever involved or whatever. But—and it just got to the point where you know I was going through a bad time in my life and when eventually we ended up you know—you know seeing each other and [*Siren*] you know got married. And you know it was just sort of kind of like a perfect storm again you know; it's like with sleeping with the enemy because she was the one who was making all the—the rules I had to go and live by and you know and here I was having to go and you know deal with all the—the policy and stuff.

**00:35:35**

And I think after several years it got to the point where she you know there was so much conflict with what was going on in—in her department that she couldn't go and do a lot of the work that she needed to do because she was—became married to a fisherman. And so she had to step back and it was pretty hard for her because they were talking about all these drastic cuts that they were going to be doing to me and stuff, and she would have to sit in those meetings and such and—and be able to go and you know come back out and come home. And it was like you know oh my gosh; they're going to do this to you and they're going to do that. And I'm like it's okay; we'll make it work. It's going to be all right. We'll—we'll jiggle it around. We'll figure her out you know. I mean so and that's basically what we've done you know as far as starting Abundant Seafood and doing CSF and what's our next step from here? You know where are we going from here is our—our always what's going to happen now kind of thing?

**00:36:32**

**SW:** Can you talk—I wanted to you ask this; how did you end up in Charleston?

**00:36:36**

**MM:** Um, when I was fishing out of Southport for many years for about 20, we would go and travel all over the place. We'd leave out of Southport and either go up to Morehead City or—or Okracoke and fish that way and go in and offload and then come back to home base.

**00:36:51**

Or, we'd leave the opposite direction and go fish off and go down to Jacksonville or Georgia or places like that. And Charleston was always a great fit because of the timing that it took from Southport to Charleston plus there was a place to offload your product here. The infrastructure that we have in our industry is slowly or very quickly disappearing and so where do we offload our product and stuff? So we don't have that ability to go and do that you know that much anymore. I'm not constrained here but I like to come back here because I—my markets are here.

**00:37:23**

But as far as coming back to Charleston, we have—I've been involved in fishery management, I've been involved in a lot of research work with the Department of Natural Resources and so this was the hub for the natural—the Department of Natural Resources. And so it was—it was a perfect fit. I was close to here, close to where the South Atlantic Council was based. And so I wanted to go and do as much of that you know—you know research stuff that we've been doing and stuff. And you know we're right now looking at speckled and Warsaw grouper, spawning season sites as far as closing some of these areas for these species and stuff that are endangered so to speak.

**00:38:06**

**SW:** I think that's interesting how you're involved in that and you're a fisherman because I feel as though when—before I even went out to do interviews with fishermen and oyster women and crabbers, everybody said well, the access is going to be tricky 'cause people are very skeptical about regulations and government and—and their work. And I think Kerry told me this on the phone when I first talked to her about you kind of—like you're involved in all this but you're also fishing, too. Can you talk about how—and think about this while the ambulance is going by but how [*Siren*]  
—how those two roles are for you? Do you feel like they're one in the same or—  
?

00:38:43

**MM:** They're—they're—they're a great marriage. I mean really; I mean fishery management and fisherman should go and be onboard I mean right in the very forefront of any of it because we spend most of our lives out in the ocean. Prior to 2000, when I moved here, I was spending 265 days a year out in the ocean. There's not very many scientists that spend their—that amount of time out there. So we're able to go and see things and see trends that most scientists may not go and see.

00:39:10

We're able to go and see spawning happen at certain times when they seem to think that spawning may be happening because our oceans are ever-changing as far as climates and everything else that goes along with it. The fishermen are the ones who are—should be their eyes and the problem is—is everybody is like fishermen lie all the time.

00:39:30



So I mean—so but we’re trying our hardest to go and get them the very best you know fishery dependent data that we can go and get for them, you know. You know managing the stocks, I mean and so it’s important; it really is.

**00:39:45**

**SW:** How are we on time?

**00:39:47**

**KM:** You’re at almost at 40 minutes.

**00:39:50**

**SW:** Okay; I want to ask you one more question Mark.

**00:39:53**

**MM:** Okay.

**00:39:53**

**SW:** But I want to change the cards I think ‘cause that gives us about two minutes right ‘cause they’re 42?

**00:40:01**

**KM:** You’ll have four minutes.

**00:40:03**

**SW:** Okay; we'll see if—. I wanted to know what are the—what are the biggest challenges of your work?

**00:40:11**

**MM:** The biggest—

**00:40:12**

**SW:** What is the biggest challenge?

**00:40:13**

**MM:** The biggest challenge right now is weather. The weather has just changed so much. I remember years ago back in the early—you know late '90s we would not have to stop for weather. Now we're having huge blocks of weather come in that just slow us down. And—and I can get into some really deep stuff here about fishery management but from North Carolina, Virginia Border to Key West is where we're—where our area is that's managed. And so what ends up happening is a lot of the fishermen who are up in North Carolina that don't have good weather will not be able to go and fish on a stock that is for all of us. And so weather is really a huge factor right now. Florida may not have the weather that we have here in Charleston so those boats can keep on going out and catching that—that stock as to where we're not able to go after it.

**00:41:01**

So what—and the other—you know it's just—it's very, very—you know weather is—you know it's not—it's not imports, you know really don't bother me because there's a huge demand for our fresh local product. So it—it's—it's—I think weather is going to be the biggest

right now, weather and lack of you know what we're allowed to catch, the allowable catch limit is—is huge.

**00:41:28**

**SW:** Is that dropping?

**00:41:30**

**MM:** Well in our area it's very unique because our fish are also allocated to a recreational sector and a commercial sector. So one of them is—is a big piece of pie but a certain portion of it goes to the recreational and a certain portion of it goes to the commercial. And as the demographics of our community change here on the coastal community there's more recreational people, there's more voice, there's more money on their end; there's less commercial fishermen that are around. And so what ends up happening is we lose our voice, okay. But the problem is—is that we should have a much larger voice, louder voice because we are the public. We are fishing for the public and they are fishing for their own supposedly supposed to be sport and recreation. And they're just getting bigger and bigger and wanting more and more and we're getting less and less. So who is going to go and be able to eat that public resource?

**00:42:22**

Okay; so and that's where we come in as commercial fishermen to go and sort of help those folks and the restaurants and the CSF people so they don't have to go and spend hundreds and thousands of dollars to go out on a little boat or buy their own boat to go catch what is a public resource.

**00:42:40**

So that is sort of kind of what we do. That's—that's another huge challenge is you're starting to split all that stuff up and each time they do a stock assessment or something like that on the fish they'll go and add a little more over here and not add that much over here. And it ends up where it keeps on getting lopsided and the more it gets lopsided the less voice we have. And then what are we going to go and have you know to go and eat, you know so—because they're seeing that there's more money involved or more money generated from recreational sale than there is the commercial sale to the restaurants and those people, so you know—.

**00:43:18**

It's a challenge.

**00:43:20**

**SW:** I just—I actually have one more question for you Mark; is that okay?

**00:43:23**

**MM:** Yeah; I'm fine.

**00:43:24**

**SW:** But I'm going to change the card—

**00:43:26**

**KM:** Well let me ask you. It says at the bottom that we have eight minutes left.

**00:43:30**

**SW:** Oh yeah; we'll be fine. I was—this is the number that I was keeping—yeah.

00:43:36

**KM:** Okay; all right. Go forward then.

00:43:38

**SW:** Okay; you know this is a lot from talking to Kerry on the phone, you know you have a family and you're a fisherman. Can you talk about the—the challenges of having a family and this being your career, being a fisherman, those two roles?

00:43:56

**MM:** It's tough. Being a fisherman and having a family is—it's one of the toughest things anybody can do. And it—and it's tough on—on Kerry, on my wife. And it's tough on the kids. You know but there's some major joy that comes with it when you come home and your kids just jump up from whatever they're doing and they're screaming and hollering and they're wrapping their arms around you until they smell you and they're realizing that oh you stink daddy but oh I love you, you know. **[Laughs]** And I'm like you know and so I mean it's just—it's a great feeling you know.

00:44:28

But it's—it's very challenging. You miss out on kids being sick; you miss out on school plays; you miss out on you know—god I can only tell you so many things that I've missed out with Kerry being pregnant and just I mean on and on and just all those little things that you miss because you're gone. I mean we're not in and out each day and we have to pick and choose when you know—because of the weather, we can't just go and say all right well I'm going to go to work or I'm going to take the weekend off. You know your weekend is when you come home.

That’s your weekend. And so you know it could be you know now we’re to the point where we can go and sort of kind of block off some time. Okay; we’re going to take a week off and that’s just the way it is. We’re going to take that week off and you know—so but we work like 24/7 to go until we get up to that week. And then it’s like—I’m like right now wishing, I can't wait until our vacation, spring break; I can't wait you know because **[Laughs]**—. But—but it’s—it’s really hard. You miss a lot. You know you’re seeing kids—your kids grow up and they’re getting taller and taller and I’m like oh my gosh; you’re almost up to my shoulder now you know and stuff. And I mean just you know soccer games and just you know sitting around the table and eating dinner every night, you know; I mean I miss that you know. And I mean you know checking in with your family every night and making sure everything is good and stuff.

**00:45:48**

So I mean you know but it’s what I do for a living though you know.

**00:45:54**

**KM:** What do you love most about what you do for a living?

**00:45:58**

**MM:** I think people—making people happy you know; I think that’s you know—enjoying me bridging that gap for them for that public resource is really sort of kind of my driving mission, you know is that this belongs to you. Let me go get it for you. It belongs to you just as much as it does the guy out in Kansas, you know. He should go and be able to go and enjoy it also. And it’s just you know opening the eyes of people about commercial fishermen that we’re not out there just you know taking every fish out of the ocean and we don’t use nets on our boat. We’re not all equal. We’re not all—when you say commercial fishermen, you immediately go and think of a

net, you know. Well we don't use nets. We use hooks. And there's two at a time and we drop it straight down and we bring it back up.

**00:46:49**

And that's how we harvest our fish in our fishery. You know so you know I—I really enjoy seeing little kids that I've had in our CSF with their parents watching those kids get born and growing up and being four, five years old and saying I want to eat Captain Mark's fish. That's just like a homerun in a bad day. I mean it's just like I got it you know and you know so—'cause so many—and turning the older people who have had been turned on bad fish and say oh I hate fish, I can't stand it, and they eat something really fresh and they know and they're like oh my gosh. I didn't realize that's what I was missing, you know. Those are the things that I like to you know drive through and you know having chefs go and say I want your fish; I want your fish, you know and the need, yeah, yeah it's fun.

**00:47:42**

**SW:** I'm just going to have you just to make sure that everything was working on all levels, will you introduce yourself again Mark?

**00:47:49**

**MM:** Okay; I'm Mark Marhefka. I own the fishing boat Amy Marie and Abundant Seafood with my wife Kerry.

**00:47:58**

**SW:** Perfect.

00:48:00

**SW:** I think we're good.

00:48:00

**MM:** Good?

00:48:01

**SW:** Mark do you want to say anything else?

00:48:03

**MM:** No. [*Laughs*]

00:48:05

**SW:** Thank you so much.

00:48:09

**MM:** No. [*Laughs*]

00:48:10

**KM:** You did a great job.

00:48:10

**MM:** All right.

00:48:11



**SW:** Yeah; thank you so much for—.

**00:48:12**

**[End Mark Marhefka Interview]**