

Interviewer: Can you tell me about some changes, whether positive or negative, that you've seen over the years

Tommy Brown: The negative part as far as the the shrimping is going, we are experiencing black gill and no one seems to know what is causing it. There are lots of studies that have been done and there's lots of theories about where its coming from. My theory is that there is a lot of chemicals and fertilizers and stuff that is going into the sound and we are not aloud to drag in the sounds so you can't turn that up and over and get it out. There's lots of people that want to say "oh you're destroying the.." well you're not destroying anything because they used to have it open and if you look around at other states that have their sounds open and they are actually fishing and crabbing, everything is a whole lot better. Because they turn that ground up and it washes into the ocean, mother nature will heal herself if she's got a little bit of help sometimes. Mostly she can do it on her own but if we destroy it so bad then, you know, something has to happen, you can go back out and try to help it. The crabbers have seen a decrease in their catch and there has been a decline until this year, well actually last year, and I serve on the blue crab committee and now we've seen a tick for it, it's going back the other way. This peeler season has been probably one of the best I've seen in ten years. There's a lot of peelers and good healthy crabs, saw a lot of sponge crab, which is a female crabs it all the eggs on them, which we do not keep, but I've seem more of those this year the couple of times I've been out on the crab boat. I couldn't believe the amount that we have. Everybody wanted to complain about the cold weather we had but, maybe it was a reset. I hope it was a reset. Maybe it can kill the black gill, don't know where that's coming from anyways. I wish they would let us do something. I've got shrimpers that, you have the group of sports fisherman, and they say "oh no leave the sound alone", you know, don't let them go in there and drag but, I've got people that would go out without our nets on and just set the, you know, leave the nets at the house and just set the doors down just to turn it up. Churn that mud up and get it out. I don't know if that will help, nobody knows but, right now we aren't doing anything. We are waiting for another study to come out to see what it is. We still don't know what it is or where it came from. You know just God, I guess.

Interviewer: Can you tell us about some of your favorite memories of your experiences in the industry?

Tommy Brown: Favorite? Favorite. It's just, i don't know about favorite because it's just, this is the greatest place to be in the world everyday. Some of the favorite times, you know, when I've been on the boat or the crab boat, when I was running that, was just being out there and seeing that sun come up every morning. Seeing it break over the ocean and it's just like this huge red ball. I mean it's just gorgeous. You can't take a picture of it and explain it to anybody, you know they just got to see it. It's just so peaceful, you know, to be out there. There are some scary times. I've been out there in a crab boat, when I was running that, and i had three more traps to pull and i was looking up to the land and i saw this cloud coming and I thought, "You know that's not bad. I'll be to the dock before that get here." So I pulled another trap and looked up and saw

it was getting pretty close but I only had two more traps to pull so I'll pull those. Well I pulled my last trap and it was on top of me and all the sudden I couldn't see the front of the boat. And the rain was coming down so hard and I was standing there at the center console and the boat was half full of water, I mean I was standing in about a foot of water and it was a 22 foot boat and it should've gone down, I don't know why it didn't go down and so I knew about where the marsh was, I couldn't see the marsh but, I thought "aw God just let me get to the marsh, at least they can find me over there" (everyone laughs) and I got over next to the marsh and ran 25 feet and I popped out on the other side and it was gorgeous, it wasn't but like 15 minutes but, that was pretty scary.

Interviewer: What has been the most rewarding parts of your career?

Tommy Brown: Ah, I can't tell you that. (everyone laughs)

Interviewer: As a crabber with this or even running the marina.

Tommy Brown: I really enjoyed running the marina because there were so many people that I knew and I made so many new friends. There was always a story to tell about the stuff people did. One day there was a guy that pulled in and there was a boat on a wrecker and pulled under my lift and I said "what do you want?" and he said "I want you to get this boat off this wrecker. I'm going fishing" The trailer tires blew out up the road and the wrecker came to get him. I said "well why didn't they bring the trailer?" and he said "nah, I told them to get the boat!" (laughing) we got that and then we some folks out of Atlanta and they were going offshore fishing and they wanted the coordinates to get back to the marina and so I gave them those coordinates but when you go straight out and you take a right then you go to Grey's Reef. and so they punched in the coordinates before they got out to take the right and so when they started back in, it was dark and they ran up on Black Beard Island, I mean about like 20 foot up on the beach. So then the feds were calling me and saying "hey, you got to come get this boat off of here" and I said "I don't own that boat, I don't have to do anything about that boat. I'll try to get it off but I can't do anything about it until the morning." so we go over there the next day and did eventually get it off. One of the guys that was on the boat, that owned the boat, we took him over there and he said "I'm not getting in that water" I asked why not and he said "you ought to see them sharks i was catching last night, I'm not getting in that water." I said " Either you are gonna get in that water or we are going to throw you in the water" and i know that Jesus was the only one to walk on water but he almost walked on water before he got in (laughter). But he went. Then, one day was had a lady who put her boat up on the trailer and her husband said to flush to motor out, it had the little air muff things on the bottom of it to flush to motor out. So she had that and she pulled it over there and this was her first time and we were kind of helping her and making sure she was alright. I said "well, Susan, we're gonna put the air muffs on her. I want you to crank the engine up so we can slush it." She said "I can't do that" and I said "why not?" She said "It will jump up in the back of the truck" I said "It's not in the water. It can't jump anywhere! It's not going anywhere." She was afraid when she put it in gear on the trailer that it was going to go, which obviously it wasn't. Then we had a public ramp right up from the marina, that someone put in. They got there and it was about 300 yards from the marina and they ran up and told us

something was wrong with this boat. It won't move. I just won't go. I told him to pull up into the slip and we'll pick it up and see what makes your motor do something. When we picked it up, it still had the trailer attached to it! (laughter) I said "I think we have a problem here." He had to get it off the trailer. Anyways, there's hundreds of thousands of those stories.

Interviewer: So you said that you used to be a crabber, do you have anything that you would want someone who had never been on a boat or seen how this industry works, do you have anything that you wish that they knew?

Tommy Brown: I wish they knew how hard these guys work to make a living. I wish they knew how valuable that living is to them and how much those guys love it. There's no way to really convey that, I mean, I had no idea when I came down what it meant to people. I know one guy, he's like 85 years old, and still goes crabbing everyday. Everyday of his life. I don't care whether it's raining, I don't care what the weather is. He goes and sometimes when there's no any crabs. I asked him "why do you go out there" He said "well if I can make \$50 a day then that's \$50 a day." I said "well if that \$50 a day then I guess that's right" I said " at your age why don't you just quit?" He said "I just love it. I love to be on the water everyday" and he could have actually married very very very wealthy right here in this county and the lady that he was going with at the time said "well you're going to have to give up the crab boat." He said "no I'm not." and he didn't and they didn't get married. I wonder if he ever looks back on it. He still loves it, I mean, He told me when he was 90 he would take off for a while and go hunting for a couple of years and then come back and maybe go crabbing again.