

MARITIME & SEAFOOD INDUSTRY MUSEUM
AND
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

AN INTERVIEW WITH SONNY MORRISON
FOR THE
NOAA VOICES ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
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TRANSCRIPT BY
FANTASTIC TRANSCRIPTS

Stephanie Scull-DeArme y: This is an interview for the Maritime & Seafood Industry Museum and the University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Mr. Sonny Morrison, and it is taking place on Tuesday, May 4, 2010, in South Carolina on Mr. Morrison's end and in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, here on my end. I am the interviewer, Stephanie Scull-DeArme y. First, I'd like to thank you, Mr. Morrison, for taking time to talk with me today. I'll just get a little background information about you. So I'm going to ask you, for the record, could you state your name, please?

Sonny Morrison: Well, my name is H.W. Morrison, Jr., and I've been called Sonny all through the fishing industry for all my life, so I answer to that very well.

SSD: How do you spell it?

SM: S-O-N-N-Y-M-O-R-R-I-S-O-N.

SSD: When were you born, Mr. Morrison?

SM: In 1923.

SSD: Okay. And where were you born?

SM: I was born in a little town called McClellanville, South Carolina, about forty miles north of Charleston.

SSD: McClellanville, South Carolina.

SM: Yes. That was the center for Hurricane Hugo.

SSD: Wow. Did it get pretty messed up?

SM: Pretty well.

SSD: Yes. Well, let us just jump into these questions that the museum would like to have answered. I'm going to start with the questions for TED [turtle excluder device] inventors because I hear that you invented a turtle excluder device yourself. What were the challenges you faced when you first invented and developed a TED?

SM: Well, it started way back – you'd have to [have] been on a fishing trawler that was fishing. Bycatch was always a big problem, and, at times, it would just stop us from fishing completely. We had tried some crude things that didn't work very well, even before they even tried that – a friend of mine and myself. But they didn't work, but we were interested anyhow. So when the National Marine Fisheries [Service] [NMFS] and all passed the turtle excluder thing and gave us time, we began to realize that through the fisheries association and all, that if we wanted anything to work, some of the fishermen decided we better try to see what we could find that would work. I could give some more of the history for that later.

SSD: Okay. How did the early TED models compare to the later models?

SM: The early models were crude. I ran some tests for them one time and pulled the net one summer as a test, and they paid me for the shrimp loss, which was fifty percent. It was a mess, too. It had a barrier of large webbing in front of it.

SSD: A barrier?

SM: It was a disaster. But at least they were trying.

SSD: Who developed that TED that was the early model?

SM: I'm not sure, but I ran the test for the National Marine Fisheries with an observer onboard my trawler, and they paid me for the shrimp loss. We documented every drag that we made.

SSD: Mr. Morrison, how big was your boat when you did that test?

SM: I had a fifty-foot trawler, I believe it was.

SSD: Where were you shrimping?

SM: I was shrimping, at that time, out of McClellanville and along the South Carolina coast.

SSD: Would you consider yourself an inshore fisherman at that time?

SM: Well, all of the East Coast fishing is pretty well inshore.

SSD: How many nets did you pull?

SM: We pulled two.

SSD: And did you have those big NMFS TEDs on each net?

SM: No, we only had one on one side because we were running a test to see whether it was efficient or not.

SSD: Okay. So you were comparing what you caught in the net with the TED with what you caught in the net without the TED.

SM: That's right.

SSD: So how did it change, then, with the later models? Did they look a lot different from the one the NMFS gave you?

SM: Well, we tried a couple of things. We made some crude – I made a crude – what they call the George Jumper, the hard TED. I had one that worked fairly well, but it still caught more by – it still had more bycatch than we really wanted. It wasn't really efficient with that. Then, the National Marine Fisheries built one that was a big cage, and it was heavy. It would take two men to put it over the side when you were putting it out. So it would be a hundred and fifty pounds when you were hauling back and dumping the bag with that hanging up over your head and swinging. If something came loose, you could get your head knocked fully good. So none of the fishermen really liked it. One or two tested it, and I wasn't one of them. Several people did, and nobody really liked it. But they swore it was absolutely efficient, and the reports that we got from the fishermen were entirely different.

SSD: I see. So the fishermen – the experience they were having was that it was inefficient?

SM: Yes, that's right.

SSD: What was the bycatch that was the trouble in your net?

SM: Well, fish, crabs, conchs, turtles – if you catch two or three loggerheads that weigh two hundred and fifty, three hundred pounds apiece – and jellyballs, and there was a short, small stingray that we called a short-tailed bat. It had a very short tail and a small stinger, and we had about thirty or forty pounds. Sometimes in the fall of the year, they would fill a net completely, and you'd be a half a day even getting the net aboard the boat.

SSD: What happened if you got stung by a bat ray?

SM: [laughter] Well, it wasn't pleasant. We tried not to do that. Then, I guess you're familiar with horseshoe crabs.

SSD: Horseshoe crabs? Right. So that was another bycatch problem?

SM: Yes. Are you familiar with them? Have you seen them or anything?

SSD: I have. I grew up on the beach in Gulfport, and I used to see a lot of them when I was a kid. I don't see so many anymore.

SM: But can you imagine having two trawls that are absolutely full of them?

SSD: Good grief.

SM: I mean, I remember one time in South Carolina, I made a drag in the sound – thirty minutes – and it took me – we finally wound up with fourteen or fifteen baskets of twenty-six, thirty beautiful white shrimp out of it.

SSD: You did?

SM: But it took us five hours to get the nets aboard and dumped, and we dumped at least two-thirds of them out of the mouth of the net. Didn't even put them on deck.

SSD: Wow. Getting rid of the bycatch.

SM: Yes.

SSD: How big are those nets?

SM: Well, they can run anywhere from twenty-five to thirty feet to seventy to eighty feet in width.

SSD: What did you usually pull?

SM: Well, I usually pulled about forty, fifty-foot nets on the fifty-foot trawler, and then got a sixty-three-foot trawler, and we went up to about seventy, seventy-five-foot nets.

SSD: If you filled up a fifty-foot net with shrimp, how many shrimp would you have? How many pounds?

SM: [laughter] I don't know, but I've never had one full. But I've heard of people doing that, and I think about a third of a bag is about all that I've ever had – about the best that I ever had. We'd have twenty or thirty baskets.

SSD: How much does a basket weigh?

SM: Well, a basket would be about eighty pounds with the heads off. Take about two and a half baskets to make about [inaudible] a hundred pounds. And – but, you know, you could have fifteen hundred, two thousand pounds of shrimp, and boats have had more than that in a drag. You could have – the nylon bags now would hold up to four thousand pounds of shrimp.

SSD: Wow. Yes.

SM: So they could be right heavy.

SSD: Yes. You said it took two men to handle the NMFS big box TED?

SM: That's right.

SSD: Did you usually have a deckhand with you?

SM: Yes, ma'am. Either one or two. I never pulled one of those, and I don't know anybody that pulled them other than a few people did it on a test basis.

SSD: Okay. Now, had you been using a bycatch reduction device for the horseshoe crabs and the jellyballs before they had a regulation that you had to have a TED? Did you ever use it before that?

SM: Yeah, we tried before that. And – but it was mostly crude devices, and they didn't work very well. But after they started, I remembered reading one time about the Alaska fisheries. They have a very small shrimp up in Alaska, and they were almost as thick as krill, the little shrimp that whales feed on, but they were a hundred or more to a pound. They had so many fish, small fish, and various-size fish in them that you couldn't keep enough crew on the boat. The shrimp would rot before you could get them sorted out with the fish. Somebody up there got a wild idea, and they built two nets – a smaller net inside the shrimp trawl that was a larger-size webbing. I don't remember what they said it was. Then they took the tail of that and made a funnel out of the top of the net and funneled all the bycatch through and filtered the small shrimp into the shrimp trawl. Then when hauled back, all they had to do was shovel the shrimp up. They didn't have any bycatch.

SSD: Wow.

SM: So that's where my idea came from for the soft TED, and so I found some large fishnet webbing and went back and put a triangle in it ahead, and sewed it, and put it on a gradual incline up to the top of the net ahead of the bag and cut a hole there. Then all the bycatch all went out of that and the shrimp just filtered through this big webbing and went on back in the bag. That was the one that I used and was interested in.

SSD: So you made one and used it for your shrimping, and you got the idea from the nets in Alaska?

SM: Yes. I'd read a magazine about it years before, but I'd forgotten about it. I happened to remember it, and I never could find the magazine, so we just made our own from there. That's where that idea came from.

SSD: So you made one from memory.

SM: Well, yes. Trial and error. It worked beautifully.

SSD: Great. I was going to ask you something else about that. Did you make your own nets?

SM: Very few people did. I have made nets and experimented some with nets with net-makers. I've been friendly with Burbank Trawl Makers that were standard hardware in Fernandina, Florida, from back in the '70s. They were wonderful people. I talked to

them. They would make a trawl. They could build them so fast that you wouldn't believe it.

SSD: Really?

SM: Yes.

SSD: Were they the people you worked with to install the soft TED?

SM: Well, I knew three generations of them, and I'm still very good friends with the ones now, and they've gone out of the trawl business completely. Now they're building backstops for golf courses and baseball stadiums and stuff like that.

SSD: Maybe there's more of a demand for that than there are for shrimp nets, you think?

SM: I think so. Yes. But back in the 1970s, the first time I called Billy Burbank and asked him about building me a net, I called him on a Monday, and he told me that, yes, he could build a net. I said, "How long will it take?" He said, "Well, I've only got a hundred to build before yours." I said, "Oh, my God, it'll be at least a month, then." He said, "No, I'll have it for you Friday."

SSD: Wow. They were making a lot of nets.

SM: Oh, yes. But they were real good. They were shipping nets to Texas and South America and all over the world at that time.

SSD: Yes.

SM: They were wonderful people.

SSD: Are you doing anything with shrimping now, or are you just retired?

SM: Well, let's put it this way. Nobody sends you a check, so I quit.

SSD: [laughter] Are you making any nets or anything now?

SM: No. I've got arthritis. I'm eighty-six. I just make some cast nets and stuff. But I didn't make many trawl nets, but I did know how to.

SSD: Well, how do you think TEDs have affected the sea turtle population?

SM: They should have done it a whole lot of good. I hope so. I just saw an article in the paper two days ago, where the people were talking about them over in the Gulf, and they were telling me that TEDs now cost them eight-hundred dollars over there (a boat?).

SSD: What did they cost when you were using them?

SM: Very little.

SSD: Not eight-hundred dollars, huh?

SM: [laughter] Not quite. I wouldn't think so. Of course, everything has gone up by leaps and bounds since then.

SSD: Yes.

SM: I built a sixty-three-foot steel hull trawler in 1940, and I didn't have everything on it. It wasn't completely finished in the cabin and all that kind of stuff, but it was fishing for forty-thousand dollars.

SSD: Wow.

SM: I spent a good bit more on it after that, finishing the cabin and getting everything finished in electronics and so forth and so on. But today, I'd hate to have that boat built in a shipyard and try to make a living fishing with it; I can tell you that.

SSD: Today what, Mr. Morrison?

SM: I said, today I would hate to have that boat built in a shipyard and try to make a living shrimping.

SSD: Why is that? It would cost so much more.

SM: Well, the engine costs – everything on that boat has gone up – oh, twenty years ago, it had gone up ten times.

SSD: I guess fuel has also, hasn't it?

SM: Oh, yes. I filled it up one time with fuel when it was new, and I paid ten cents a gallon for fuel.

SSD: Goodness gracious. What does it cost now?

SM: [laughter] Over two dollars.

SSD: What have shrimp prices done over the years?

SM: They have actually gone down, and a lot of times, they're even hard to sell. There's almost nobody today in the United States that processes shrimp.

SSD: Goodness.

SM: There used to be a place – there was a big processing place in Jacksonville, one in Tampa, one in Savannah. There wasn't one in South Carolina, but they were scattered all over the Gulf from Bayou La Batre all the way to Brownsville. They tell me that those places are almost nonexistent now.

SSD: Wow. Yeah.

SM: I got friends, dealers here, and they said there wasn't but one place, I think, in Mississippi that was actually processing and packaging shrimp and freezing them and all.

SSD: So that would be your only place to sell it?

SM: Yes. I know there's got to be more somewhere. I imagine they used to have some places over in Mexico right across the river from Brownsville. They would send them over there. But I know they had other places in Louisiana and all, too.

SSD: Well, when the turtle excluder device was first being talked about and put on boats, what was your initial opinion of that turtle excluder device?

SM: Well, I didn't have any objections to it. I just didn't want to lose shrimp and all. But the main thing about it is, the National Marine Fisheries was supposed to manage it, and Congress gave them eight million dollars to develop one, and they developed that heavy net that we were talking about. They used to come around – we'd have meetings and all, and they'd come around to the associations and all. When they first started, they had a man that was from Houston that wore a cowboy hat and cowboy boots, and he was supposed to develop it. He was supposed to put it in production and produce it to sell it. I thought that was ridiculous because I didn't think that the government ought to develop something with our money and then turn it over to somebody else to manufacture something else. They said they wouldn't let anybody make one. But that changed after a while because they never did develop one that anybody would use. So that just kind of went by the boards. The soft TED, for some reason, we took it to the Cape [Canaveral], and out of all the people, I was on the board that went around the country and argued about the TEDs for a while. We'd go to New Orleans or Moss Point in Mississippi, or we went to Austin, Texas one time – flew us all out there. The soft TED was so simple and so inexpensive they couldn't believe it, and they never did believe it. In fact, they finally outlawed it.

SSD: Do you know why?

SM: Bureaucracy. They couldn't understand it, and they didn't know what to do with it or anything else. It's the only TED that passed at Cape Canaveral without catching a turtle.

SSD: It caught no turtles at all.

SM: No. The last drag that we made there was a thirty-minute drag, and the net with the turtle excluder in it came up, and there wasn't any shrimp in the area. Neither net caught a shrimp that I know of. But we were catching trash until you wouldn't believe it. They pulled the turtle excluder net in and dumped it on deck, and shoveled it, and there were some that we call blue runners. They're common along the Gulf and the Atlantic – little fish – big sardine. The turtle excluder net had about a half of a basket, about forty pounds in it. The other net, when we picked it up, the bag was completely full, and the net had at least two more bags full in that. They had heavy equipment, and they finally got the bag up and dumped that. It had three big turtles in it and a mound of trash that was high as your head and ten to twelve feet in diameter. Then there were two more big overheads that we could see in the net that we ran out of the mouth and at least twice that much bycatch that we dumped out of the mouth of the net that didn't come on deck.

SSD: That was the net without a TED?

SM: That was the test trawl without the TED.

SSD: Yes. The other one had the soft TED in it?

SM: You could have put – it had just about an apple basket – about an apple basket of fish in it. I think that's a pretty good record of getting rid of bycatch.

SSD: Yes. But they're no longer using the soft TEDs today, are they?

SM: Some of the boys told me that they were trying to bring it back, but I don't know. I've been to those meetings, and they were arguing about it and talking about whether it would be better to have a left-handed net maker sew one side of it and a right-handed net maker sew the other one. A man from the University of Georgia had never seen one, and I explained it to him, and we walked down on the boat and put one in.

SSD: Are you still there? Hello?

SM: Yes, ma'am.

SSD: You still there?

SM: Yes, ma'am.

SSD: All right.

SM: Can you hear me?

SSD: I thought I'd lost you for a minute there.

SM: I hope not.

SSD: I didn't hear you for a few minutes, but I can hear you now.

SM: Good.

SSD: Well, can you just describe for the record the first TED you used?

SM: The first TED that I used was probably the hard TED and very similar to what they're using now. The first one that my friend tried – he got a piece of big, heavy steel cable [inaudible] cable. It was big, and it was real stiff. He made a big circle and then put some four-inch webbing in it, sewed it in and put that in the bag and tilted it back a little bit, and put a hole in the bag above it to get rid of the jellyballs. He tried that because the jellyballs – you just couldn't work. He could work with that.

SSD: Yes. It got out enough of the jellyballs?

SM: Yes. It got rid of it. But he was only getting about half – when he got into a place where there weren't any jellyballs, and the other net was catching shrimp, the one with the hole in it, and the excluder wasn't catching but half.

SSD: Yes. So he was getting rid of jellyballs, but he was also losing half of his shrimp.

SM: Yeah. So I made one that was harder out of a half-inch steel pipe or three-inch steel pipe – half-inch, I think – and put the bars in it like I wanted. I put that in the net, and it did about the same thing, but a lot of the fish [inaudible] would go through. But smaller fish and stuff. I got some webbing and made what they would call today an accelerator that they've quit using and forced the shrimp down to hit the bars down low and then climb back up. I did manage to retain the shrimp, but I was still getting a lot of the small bycatch and all, but I did lose the big one.

SSD: Yes. Can you explain, for the record, how the accelerator worked?

SM: [laughter] Well, it was a piece of webbing. A bag is round – a hundred-and-fifty meshes around. I took a piece of bag webbing that was seventy-five meshes wide, which would be half of the bag. It was twenty meshes deep. At the seventy-five, I cut it back on a forty-five-degree [inaudible] on both sides and narrowed it down in the back. Then I sewed it in the bag halfway down the sides, and then on the way, it was [inaudible], but I just laced it down the side of the bag, right straight back. It just made a kind of shield and a funnel and forced everything – that just drifted down about halfway down the net, and it hit the bars down low. Then the shrimp and all would go through, and the big stuff would hit the bars and go up and go out of the hole. It worked fine. The one that they used was – they sewed it all the way around and cut a couple of gussets in it and made it smaller and all. They tried it that way, and they said it worked. I never did try one. But I know that later on, a friend of mine in the village was doing some work with the state, and he got permission to use the soft TED after they were trying to get rid of it on one side. He had to use the hard TED on the other. The hard TED that they were using didn't have the accelerator in it. I talked to the man that was running the boat, and he

was an experienced fisherman – a very good fisherman, too. He said the soft TED was catching [inaudible] catching exactly twice as many shrimp as the hard TED was – that the National Marine Fisheries approved. He also told me that the bycatch – that the hard TED was catching a lot more trash – small fish and stuff, you know, to go along with – but it was losing half of the shrimp. I told him I'd put an accelerator in there for him. I didn't know whether it was legal or not, but it was – "I'd do it my way." He said, "I can't afford this" I put it in for him, and the next time I saw him, he was smiling. He told me that the hard TED was catching exactly – his side was catching exactly the same number of shrimp, but it was still catching over three times as much trash.

SSD: Well, maybe there's just no way to ever get rid of all the trash.

SM: No. But the funny thing is, they started off, and after ten or twelve years, they grumbled about the soft TEDs, so they outlawed it on the East Coast. At the opening of the shrimp season, they kept records. They had records for ten years or more of the turtle strandings. Well, guess what?

SSD: What?

SM: When they opened the season and outlawed the soft TEDs on the East Coast, thirty days later, they got the reports back, and turtle strandings had gone up thirty percent.

SSD: Oh, dear.

SM: But they said it wasn't practical and wouldn't work.

SSD: They never changed their minds after that?

SM: They never did.

SSD: Well, Mr. Morrison, what was your opinion of the TEDs requirement when it was first enacted?

SM: Well, I don't know. I'm somewhat of a conservationist. I don't try to get rid of animals and all of any kind just to get rid of them. I certainly didn't like to have to pick turtles up and throw them over the side either because you started picking up three-hundred-pound turtles, two people, and throwing them over the side, somebody's going to get a back hurt. To get rid of the turtles suited me, but to get rid of the bycatch – at times, the bycatch would be so bad when we didn't have them until you just have to quit fishing because you couldn't get the shrimp out of the trash. The shrimp would rot – be sunburned and rot before you could get them out.

SSD: Goodness.

SM: So, that wasn't fun, either.

SSD: Right.

SM: To have money on the deck and not enough crew to pick them up.

SSD: Yes. That really sounds frustrating.

SM: So I was always in favor of getting rid of the bycatch.

SSD: Sure.

SM: I never [inaudible] a turtle. I've got alligators in my front yard, a hundred feet from the house – ten, twelve-foot ones, too.

SSD: Do you?

SM: Yes.

SSD: Well, are they dangerous to you?

SM: No. They don't bother me, and I don't bother them. I've had dogs there for twenty years and never lost a dog, either.

SSD: To the alligator.

SM: No.

SSD: Do you live on the water?

SM: Not in Charleston, but I do have a home up near McClellanville. I can actually see the ocean from my house.

SSD: Well, which home has the alligators?

SM: The one up in McClellanville.

SSD: Where you can see the water.

SM: Yes. We've got a freshwater duck pond up, everything there. The intercoastal waterway is about half a mile from the house. There's a little island out there that's got a bunch of trees on it, and it hides people there. I may cut the trees down, so I could see the boats. I tell them I've seen one.

SSD: [laughter] You've seen boats about as much as you want to, haven't you?

SM: I think so.

SSD: Yes. The trees sound prettier to me, plus they make the air for us to breathe.

SM: Yes.

SSD: But those alligators sound scary.

SM: Yes. But in all of my time fooling with it – there was a gentleman who's dead now, Dave Harrington, who was with the University of Georgia in Brunswick. He used to work with the National Marine Fisheries a lot. The representative that was working through the state of Texas was a fine young man, and I met some wonderful people in – you know where Gulfport is?

SSD: I grew up in Gulfport.

SM: Well, about ten miles east of Gulfport, there's a little village that was there right on the beach, and the I-10 was right next to it, and we stayed there for a week or ten days. Five miles towards Mobile from there, the state had a fisheries department there.

SSD: Was that Pascagoula?

SM: I believe it is. We stayed there and visited with the fishermen there and were trying to talk to them, but that was before they had enforced the TED rules, and you could talk to fishermen. We tried to talk to them and tell them that if you wait until they order it, then you're going to get exactly what they order. If you want to do any testing, you can do it on your own now, and then you'll know a whole lot more. But the fishermen weren't really interested in that.

SSD: Why do you think they weren't?

SM: They thought for a while they could barricade and close Galveston. One time, they had protests, tried to close the port of Galveston over there.

SSD: The fishermen who did not want to use the TEDs?

SM: Yes. They thought it was ridiculous.

SSD: Yes. Well, Mr. Morrison, were you aware pretty early on that the writing was on the wall? Did you figure we are going to have to put these in our nets?

SM: Yes, certainly. But that wasn't the problem. The problem was that I was always curious, and I wanted to know, and some of my friends did – we wanted to know what was going on. If you just wait for somebody to tell you that you got to do this exactly like they say [to] do it, and you don't know how much it's going to cost you or how much it is costing you, you're just in bad shape.

SSD: It's a little too late then, isn't it?

SM: Sure is.

SSD: You were smart to think that way.

SM: Yeah. I put trawls, and I put the soft TEDs in boats for friends of mine. One friend of mine had one put in by a man, and he made a mess out of it. That was the first time he'd ever tried to do it – a net maker down in Buford. I went there and looked at it. My friend was handy with repair work and stuff on nets and the [inaudible]. So we stretched it out, and we didn't like the way it looked, so we cut it out and put it in the way it was supposed to be.

SSD: Did it work?

SM: Trimmed it up and put it in. It had a bunch of excess webbing in it, and it was just forming a huge bag back in there. It was just filling up with jellyballs, seaweed, turtles, and anything that went in the net went in that and stopped if it couldn't go through.

SSD: Well, did you get it fixed?

SM: Oh, yes. We just cut it down and got it where it was nice and tight and worked on back up. Picked everything out of the hole. Shoot, next time I saw him, he was just smiling. He said he was catching just as many shrimp and one-tenth the trash.

SSD: Fabulous.

SM: His crew was tickled to death. I put one in for my son one time, and he had two crew members. They dumped one on one side and one on the other, and at the end of five days, the one that didn't have the TED on his side, he walked up to me [inaudible] said, "Captain, after this, you let me hold the wheel, and you go back there and cull. Either that or put one of them soft TEDs in my side. My buddy's cleaning his deck up in twenty minutes, and it's taking me an hour and a half."

SSD: Wow. That's a big difference.

SM: Yes, and they were catching the same amount of shrimp. Oh, well.

SSD: Mr. Morrison, did your opinion of TEDs change over time?

SM: Not really. It's a bureaucratic process. I saw things wrong with the hard TEDs that they were approving that were absolutely ridiculous, but you couldn't talk to them. If I mentioned it, they'd tell me we tried to get the soft TEDs straight. We haven't got time to talk about that.

SSD: They were trying to get the soft TEDs straight?

SM: Yeah. They were trying to figure out why it didn't work.

SSD: Well, how do you think TEDs have affected the shrimp industry?

SM: Well, probably good. I have worked in Texas, and I was shocked when I went over there. I went over and worked part of one summer and came back home.

SSD: What shocked you?

SM: What stopped me?

SSD: You said you were shocked. What was shocking?

SM: Well, I was shocked by the bycatch.

SSD: Really? What was shocking about the bycatch?

SM: Well, for God's sake, it was the same thing that shocked me on the East Coast. We'd pick up a trawl or – we worked out of Freeport for a while, and we'd pick up a net. I'd look at the net, and there were juvenile red snapper in there sometimes by the hundreds. There was nothing they could do but die. That was just before I think we went to the TEDs.

SSD: Do you remember about what year that was?

SM: It would have been the early '70s or mid-'70s.

SSD: Now, why would it be a bad thing to have hundreds of juvenile red snappers in your nets?

SM: Well, they're commercially viable fish, and they catch them. But, I mean, we actually had more fish and crabs and stuff like that in the nets there than I ever saw on the East Coast, on a consistent basis. A lot of them were commercially viable, but you couldn't – if you caught fish, you couldn't unload them. You couldn't sell them.

SSD: You couldn't?

SM: If you had good flounder and snapper and stuff that were big enough to be commercially good fish, you worked three or four days and go in, and if you had any fish, you could give them to the boys that worked in the fish house. But the fish house wouldn't buy any.

SSD: Why wouldn't they?

SM: I don't know, but they just didn't buy fish.

SSD: Well, when you were a shrimper, did you keep fish like that to eat on the boat?

SM: Yes. You could keep them to eat on the boat, but, up on the East Coast, before we started with TEDs, I mean, very often we sold thirty or forty boxes of fish a week – three or four hundred dollars' worth.

SSD: So on the East Coast, you could sell them, but when you worked in Texas, you could not sell them.

SM: No, nobody would even buy them.

SSD: Well, after you started pulling a TED on the East Coast, did you find that you didn't have those fish to sell anymore?

SM: That's right. Very seldom did you ever see a flounder unless it was a real small one? The whiting and other commercial fish just went.

SSD: Did that make a big difference in the amount of money you were making?

SM: No, but it made a lot of difference in the amount of work that the boys back on the stern had to do culling – picking the shrimp up – because they didn't have to go through a big mound of trash every couple of hours to – the shrimp were a lot cleaner, and it was a lot easier to handle.

SSD: It made the sorting easier.

SM: Oh, yes.

SSD: Now, why would the shrimp be cleaner just because you were pulling a TED?

SM: Well, I say cleaner – there just wasn't the amount. If you get rid of ninety percent of the fish and stuff, the shrimp are a whole lot thicker in the pile. You don't have to rake as much stuff out of the way to get to the shrimp and move fish to pick them up all the time.

SSD: So did the shrimp get less damage on them?

SM: Yes, less damage, too.

SSD: Yes. So, in some ways, it was good to have a TED.

SM: It was wonderful. The first year my son had them, he put two in. He went down to Fernandina, Florida in the late fall to fish down there and came up one morning and went up on the beach – the big island just on the Georgia side of the inlet – and there were nine boats that came out that morning right with him. They all set out and dropped a try net. He dropped a try net and pulled it five minutes and pulled it up. He said it took two of

them to pull the try net alongside, and it had about three bushels of jellyballs in it. He said that he and his [inaudible] finally got it aboard, and they pulled it out and looked, and there were thirty big, beautiful shrimp – 21/25s in there.

SSD: Just 30?

SM: Yes, but that was in five minutes in a little test trawl.

SSD: Oh, in five minutes. So that was good, then.

SM: That was pretty good. That was pretty good. He said he just grinned and turned around because that was a good try. He looked at the other eight boats, and eight boats were all hauling back. He said six of them got the regular rigs and left and went somewhere else in less than an hour. Two of them were after 12:00 o'clock, and this was just at daylight when they set out. They were after 12:00 o'clock before they got their bags and all on deck and left.

SSD: Now, Mr. Morrison, for somebody who might be listening to this and they don't know what a try net is, can you tell us for the record what a try net is?

SM: It's a miniature shrimp trawl.

SSD: What's the purpose?

SM: It's on a separate hoist, and you can run it at very short intervals and tell whether there's any shrimp there or not. It also gives you an indication, most of the time, of the amount of trash that's there.

SSD: So, in a way, you're testing the water to see what you're catching.

SM: Yes. A lot of time, you'll know before you finish the drag about how much shrimp you're going to have when you haul back.

SSD: Is there ever anybody who puts a TED in their tri net?

SM: It would be kind of hard, although, at times, when the jellyballs were so bad, we've cut a hole further up and then cut it down to where you could at least pull it back on board. But it's a very small net.

SSD: It's not a requirement to have a TED in it.

SM: Well, they finally made a requirement that those trawls could not be over twelve feet in width across the top line. So that made them pretty small. Of course, you pull them ten minutes, fifteen minutes, or something like that. If you pull them much longer than that, if you find shrimp, you don't know to turn around. You don't know exactly where you caught them, so you make short tries.

SSD: Well, let's talk a little bit about your days as a shrimper. I see where you've written in on the questions that I sent you – I got your reply where you'd written some of the answers. You said you were a member of the South Carolina Shrimpers Association?

SM: That's correct.

SSD: Can you tell us, for the record, for somebody who might be listening to this, what the South Carolina Shrimpers Association is and why they came to be?

SM: Well, we formed it – the state of South Carolina started – their fisheries department became fully bureaucratic to start with. Most of the time, we had to try to keep them under control. It was usually begging them to do something that – they let boats fish inland waters and all a lot. It was kind of illegal, but the fine was ten dollars, and they let you keep your catch. We kept working on them. The fine today would be five hundred or maybe thirty days in jail, and then you have to buy your boat back from – the confiscate the catch that's on it and the boat. You have to negotiate to get your boat back. So that's pretty well done away with the illegal shrimping inside.

SSD: Do you remember about what year the fine was ten dollars?

SM: Oh, back in the '50s or '60s.

SSD: Not so long ago.

SM: No. I can remember that.

SSD: How did you become involved as a leader?

SM: Well, I really was more of a follower. After I got the soft TED going, I met my friend Dave Harrington at the University of Georgia. He used to come to some of our meetings and mingle with the Georgia fisheries and South Carolina. He'd come up and talk to us and all. After I developed the TED and all, he and I got to be real good friends. It just went from there, and I more or less followed, but I did work with him and had friends all up and down the whole coast. We talked, and we tried to get things better for the fishermen if possible and to keep them from doing foolish things. They didn't mind doing that, either. But on the East Coast and South Carolina, one thing we've got is a bait season where you can put up poles for bait and use a cast net. Well, that is ridiculous.

SSD: Why is it ridiculous?

SM: Well, they have a sixty-day season, and you can catch 40 pounds of shrimp a day – two people in a boat. A sixty-day season and forty pounds a day is twenty-four-hundreds pounds of shrimp. There's no damn two families that God ever created who could eat twenty-four-hundred pounds of shrimp in a year. So it's gone commercial. We found

out and raised sand about it, and they caught two fellows from Florida up in South Carolina with a pickup truck – with two pickup trucks and boats. They spent two days and were going back to Florida with the shrimp. So they caught them and carried them to the fish house and [inaudible] them. Shrimp were fairly high then. They were catching big shrimp. When they [inaudible] them, they found those people had caught those shrimp with cast nets, and they [inaudible] and sold commercially thirty-thousand dollars' worth of shrimp.

SSD: Wow.

SM: You can't keep shrimp in an outboard motorboat for more than two days. There were two of them.

SSD: Do you think that was part of what brought about the change in the [inaudible]?

SM: Yes. But then they decided that they could charge license fees for baiting, and so they just opened it for baiting. They were selling thousands of licenses.

SSD: Yes. What does the license cost?

SM: The licenses cost – I think it's fifty dollars now and a hundred-and-fifty for out of state.

SSD: That's pretty steep.

SM: Yes.

SSD: But if you can make thirty-thousand dollars.

SM: Some of them would make more than that in a year. There was a boy in Charleston who told me that before they got into all of that that he had a set of poles, and on nights, he'd put a portable phone in his pocket and run across the river from where the tugs were docked on the shore right across the river with his cast net. He could be back on the boat in three minutes.

SSD: Three minutes?

SM: He said he sold fifty-thousand dollars' worth one season.

SSD: Wow. Do you know if there's any kind of bycatch when you're catching shrimp like that?

SM: Not very much. If you're baiting shrimp and really catching them, it's almost – there might be a few small fish in there or something, minnows and stuff, but it's almost pure, clear shrimp.

SSD: Now, how do you bait shrimp? What do you use?

SM: You use clay and fishmeal.

SSD: Wow.

SM: Those boys that were coming up from Florida were using these little portable gasoline cement mixers. You know, one-bag mixers?

SSD: Yes.

SM: They'd have one of those to mix the bait and fishmeal stuff with.

SSD: Goodness.

SM: But they were doing it commercially.

SSD: Yeah. It sounds like it.

SM: I've seen them down in Buford County, down there, working at night, and it's below freezing. They work until two or three o'clock in the morning, baiting shrimp, and you can't tell me you're doing that for recreation.

SSD: Do you catch the shrimp better at night? Is that why they're doing it at night?

SM: Yes. You can catch them in the daytime or the night, but a lot of it was done at night. I've had more boys tell me – I've done a little of it – where they were, they did better. They tell me that they catch eight-hundred to a thousand pounds of shrimp with an outboard motorboat one night.

SSD: Do you think that they were wholesaling those shrimp or –

SM: Sure they were.

SSD: Yes. You don't think they would have tried to sell themselves retail?

SM: Well, those boys had trawlers. They'd just hang in the trawler there when they caught what they thought was the limit. They'd just go to the trawler and dump it down the hole and put ice on it. So you couldn't very well say anything much about it. It was their boat. They could go over there and make off if they wanted to.

SSD: That's right.

SM: If there wasn't anybody looking, they could dump a cooler or two down in the hole, and that would be it. But they'd catch more that way than they could working the ocean all day.

SSD: That is really amazing. Very interesting. Well, Mr. Morrison, thinking back to when you were a member of the South Carolina Shrimpers Association, how did that group – how did the South Carolina Shrimpers Association perceive TEDs?

SM: Well, we were like everybody else. We were divided about it. But I saw some of the hard-nosed – the boys that were the hardest fishermen in the world – when we got the soft TED to work, a boy in McClellanville – he was as hard a fisherman as anybody I've ever seen, and he never wanted to quit. He'd trawl day or night, around the clock or anything else. He always produced a lot of shrimp and made a lot of money. But when we started talking about it, I managed to put one in one of – he came to me and asked me, and I put one in one of his trawls before it was necessary. He tested it, and he wouldn't go down the beach in the fall of the year when the trash really got the worst. He wouldn't go to Florida in the fall of the year and Georgia or work in South Carolina without. So that shows you something.

SSD: Yes. Well, on your paper, you wrote, some saw the TED as a necessary evil, and some saw it as a blessing because it got rid of bycatch.

SM: The ones we had – to get rid of the bycatch was the biggest blessing for us. When you can keep ninety-eight to a hundred percent of your catch and don't have to handle and push a thousand pounds of trash around every two hours – oh, that's a wonderful feeling.

SSD: Sure. Yes. Well, that covers all of the questions that the museum wanted to have answered. If you have time, the university would like to know a little bit about where you grew up and what that was like.

SM: [laughter] Well, would you like to go back to the age of the dinosaurs?

SSD: [laughter] Yes, for just a little while.

SM: Well, McClellanville is a very small little village. The Santee River's about ten miles north of there, and it was a rice-producing area back in the 1700s and 1800s and all up until the Civil War. After the war, the people pretty well lost – well, most of them lost their property because they couldn't pay taxes on it. A few of the families moved to McClellanville. At that time, there weren't – the little village was there. There weren't but about two families there. It just was a tiny little village, and it was on the superhighway from Miami to New York and Washington and on up to Boston, but in those days, that was a dirt road.

SSD: Dirt.

SM: Yes, ma'am. Some of it still is.

SSD: How about that?

SM: But I doubt if you would realize it, but in South Carolina, there were almost no paved roads. Highway 17, for instance, north and south, and 301 and all of them, the pavement started back in the early '30s. Up until then, the rivers – most of them, if you got to a river, you had to ferry.

SSD: No bridges.

SM: Yes. If there was a bridge there, it was a wooden bridge. In fact, it was 1929 before they got a bridge across the river going in Charleston.

SSD: 1949, after the war?

SM: No, 1929.

SSD: '29, okay.

SM: Yes. They built a Cooper River bridge there across the Cooper River, and up until then, they had a ferry. Up until that time, and even up until the roads were paved in the '30s, our main transportation for the forty miles to Charleston with produce or to haul lumber or if you have groceries or anything else, we had one to two freight boats that went once a week.

SSD: Freight boats.

SM: Yes. And they were reasonably shallow draft boats about sixty feet long and kind of wide.

SSD: Now, what does that mean, shallow draft?

SM: They would draw probably four to five feet of water – not over five feet of water.

SSD: So only five feet of water was all it took for them to float and not run aground?

SM: That's right. Everything that we had came that way.

SSD: Came on the water.

SM: On the water. If you went to Charleston, other than that, you rode a horse or a buggy or something like that. I mean, I was born in '23, and I can remember that the roads were dirt all the way to Savannah, and Georgetown is twenty-one miles north of McClellanville, and I didn't go there until I was twelve years old because there were so many – you had to cross the Santee River on two ferries, and there was a rice field back across the middle. If you drove a Model-T Ford across that, you had to hire somebody with a team of mules to go with you in case you slipped off.

SSD: Goodness gracious.

SM: So we went by water if we went to Georgetown. They finally built a bridge there in the '30s and then gradually paved the roads. But there weren't any paved streets in Charleston.

SSD: Now, on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi, they used to put oyster shells on the roads. Did you ever see anything like that when you were growing up?

SM: Yes, ma'am. We had an oyster factory in McClellanville. I spent a lot of time in my grandfather's house, and I could hear the colored people singing, opening the oysters, and see the oyster piles and all – shell piles and all. Played on it barefooted.

SSD: Goodness gracious. It didn't cut your feet up?

SM: No.

SSD: How big was the oyster pile?

SM: It was several hundred feet long, at least a hundred feet wide, and probably ten, fifteen feet high.

SSD: Well, what kind of games would you all play on the oyster piles?

SM: Well, you know, when they were putting the shell out, they would put planks up there to roll wheelbarrows, and it was the way they moved the shells in those days. We'd use those kinds of little piles where they were.

SSD: Where the boards were?

SM: Yes. But we didn't play actually on the rougher part of the oyster shells. But there was a salt creek not more than fifty feet from my grandfather's front porch, and when we were there, the kids then were worse than Huckleberry Finn.

SSD: [laughter] How were you worse than Huckleberry Finn?

SM: Well, I'll give you an example. When I was four years old, I had learned to play along the edge of the creek. Not only that, but in the summertime, I'd wade out in the water by myself and hang on the side of a little boat or something there – water waist-deep, kick and splash and I taught myself to swim.

SSD: When you were four years old.

SM: Yes. That was without much supervision, either.

SSD: You're lucky you didn't drown.

SM: [laughter] I was good.

SSD: Were you careful? Do you remember, even when you were that young, that you were careful in the water?

SM: Oh, yeah. Well, I just played along the yard, along the edge of the creek there. That creek would go dry at low water, and we'd walk down – in a year or two, we'd walk up and down there at low tide and catch crabs in the holes and stuff.

SSD: Could you eat the crabs that you caught?

SM: Certainly.

SSD: Yes?

SM: [laughter] We'd eat anything that didn't bite us back.

SSD: [laughter] How did you carry them?

SM: In a bucket.

SSD: Did you just catch them by hand? How did you catch them?

SM: We'd use a stick or a rig. Sometimes they'd be in a little puddle. I got where I could walk up, and sometimes they'd be bedded down in the sand like a flounder. You'd reach down and put your finger right between his eyes and catch the back fins and pick the crab right up.

SSD: So you'd hold him down when you put your finger between his eyes so he couldn't get away, and then you'd just get his little back feet and pick him up where he couldn't get you with his claws.

SM: That's right.

SSD: Did you ever have to clean them when you took them home?

SM: Well, we'd pick and eat them, but I didn't try to help pick too many other stuff, but when we boiled them, I could certainly eat my share of them.

SSD: Who boiled them? Did your grandmother boil them up for you?

SM: Well, no, she was kind of an invalid. My grandfather had a colored lady that came in the morning and stayed all day.

SSD: How did she boil them? Did she have a pot that she made a fire under? Or how did she do that?

SM: Well, that was before you could electrocute stuff. She had a fire in a good wood stove and good big pots. She'd just put a pot on the stove with water and boil a reasonable amount. She'd put a pot that would hold a dozen crabs at a time.

SSD: How many of you were eating them?

SM: Not too many. Just the family, usually.

SSD: So were there other children besides you?

SM: Well, the rest came along later. I had two sisters and a brother. My brother was about nine years younger than me, and the sisters are in between.

SSD: Now you said that that was a salt creek, Mr. Morrison? Could you drink the water that came through the creek, or was it too salty?

SM: No. You couldn't drink it. It was salty, just like the creek in Biloxi or the ocean.

SSD: So, where did you get your water?

SM: We had a well. They had finally developed wells in that village. We only had to go about thirty feet to get down in the limestone rock, and you could get a fairly good layer of drinking water, and it was safe to drink. But before that, people used to use dug wells. I'll tell you a real good one. There's a man in the village, one of the (Cumby?) family, and they've been there since back in the 1600s, and they were raised out from the village and what's national forest there now. That was before they knew what to do with wells and all. They had little patches to farm and livestock and barns and all that around the house, and they used dug wells, down just to the water table. That water wasn't fit to drink. Well, Gus told me that when he was twelve years old, he sobered up.

SSD: He sobered up? He'd been drinking alcohol instead of water.

SM: Yes, because the water was shallow water, just a hole in the ground down the six or eight feet to the water table. That's surface water going in there. The animal [inaudible] wasn't far from the house – horses, mules, cows, and everything else there, and chickens in the yard and everything. So the water wasn't very good to drink. So his daddy had learned how to make whiskey, so he put a bucket on the table – wooden bucket – and a gold dipper, and everybody was drinking moonshine whiskey. He said he realized he'd been drunk all his life [laughter] and said he quit. He was over eighty years old when he was telling me that. He said, "I haven't had a drink since."

SSD: He got enough of it when he was a little boy.

SM: Yes. That's about all they had to drink was [inaudible].

SSD: Yes. Well, it sounds like you grew up during the depression.

SM: Oh, yes.

SSD: What was that like? Was there anything different about that than the rest of your life?

SM: Well, no. We did without a lot of things, but we lived out in the country, and actually, it wasn't bad because it was a farming community, and we'd learned how to put – family and all put things up and harvested. If we harvested vegetables – had beans in the summertime. We'd let some dry and have dried beans. We always had some cured bacon and ham and pork and some sausage and stuff. They always had fifty to a hundred chickens – all the eggs you could get, use, and a milk cow and all the milk we could drink, all the butter we wanted. On the farm, we had corn, so we had grits and cornmeal. Actually, we fared fairly good. I think we actually ate better then than you do now.

SSD: Because it was so fresh in your garden?

SM: Yes. It was fresh, and it was good, and the meat wasn't force-fed and overly fat. The chickens today are fat. Ours didn't have the excess fat and all that the chickens have today.

SSD: Yes. I guess there weren't any feedlots then.

SM: No.

SSD: So you didn't get overcrowding. Did you ever have to give your livestock any hormones or antibiotics when you were growing up?

SM: There weren't any hormones or antibiotics in those days.

SSD: Right. Sometimes that's not good for people to eat it in meat.

SM: No, it's not.

SSD: So it was more healthy, actually for you to be eating, I guess, the beef that grew close by you.

SM: Oh, yes. But, you see, we didn't have any electricity. I was in the fourth grade when we finally got a little bit of electricity. So we didn't even have light bills and stuff like that. Of course, we didn't have refrigeration, either.

SSD: How did you keep things preserved if you didn't have refrigeration?

SM: Well, in the little village there, the butcher would kill a cow or a hog on Friday, and he'd cut it up on Saturday and divide it among his customers. More or less, if you had come in and let him know, you could get your favorite cut of meat or a roast or something. But ordinarily, he would more or less divide it up. You'd get some steaks and this, that, and other. But by Tuesday, you'd have to have it all eaten, including the stew beef. The only way you could keep that was to boil it to a – if it stayed too long in the summertime, you'd just have to throw it away. But if you would reheat it a couple of times a day, it would last a couple of days.

SSD: Did you all ever have blocks of ice where you could keep things a little cold?

SM: No. The only ice we ever had came on the freight boat, and they only brought a block for the village picnic in July. We went out to the beach on the boats, and we'd have two big galvanized tubs, and one would have iced tea, and one would have –

SSD: I'll bet it was lemonade.

SM: – lemonade. That's the only ice we ever had.

SSD: Goodness. How did you keep your butter from spoiling?

SM: Usually, out on the back porch in a shady spot.

SSD: You would find a cool spot for it?

SM: Yeah. In a screened safe or what they called a pie safe – just screen wire around it.

SSD: So the screen wire kept the flies off, but it let it stay cool?

SM: Yeah. Let the breeze through.

SSD: Yes.

SM: The shady side of the house. And fresh vegetables were put in jars and cans.

SSD: Were they vacuum-sealed, or did they use wax? Do you remember?

SM: Most of them were vacuum-sealed that I knew of, and my grandmother had a canning machine, and we had a sealer for that that worked pretty good. But we always had some of the best food in the world. I wish I could get some of it now.

SSD: I know what you mean. My grandmother cooked like that. She had a cow, I remember when I was a little girl, and she had the chickens in the yard.

SM: Yeah. Well, I was the dumbest little boy you ever knew.

SSD: Why do you say that?

SM: Well, when I was six years old, I had to learn how to milk the cow. Guess who milked the cow until he was eighteen?

SSD: You did.

SM: [laughter] You got that right.

SSD: [laughter] Did you like it?

SM: Well, it beat not having fresh milk; I can tell you that because I sure love my milk.

SSD: Yes. Did you get up with the dawn and work until it was dark and then go to bed?

SM: Yes. Sure did.

SSD: That's what you have to do when you don't have much electricity.

SM: We had kerosene lamps, anyhow.

SSD: You did?

SM: Yes.

SSD: Did you fish when you were a child so that you could have the fish to eat? I know you said you crabbed some.

SM: Oh, yeah. Well, by the time I was eight years old, I had a couple of cousins a couple of years older than I was. They had a rowboat, and we'd go fishing. We didn't have any (noise?) on the back of the boat, but we had a good pair of oars. Our equipment was to carry a handline with a couple of hooks apiece, a cast net to catch a little bit of bait with, and we'd go and stay in the creek half a day, and very seldom were we even carrying a jar of water with us.

SSD: Now, what is a handline?

SM: Instead of a rod and reel, we just had a little ball of cord, and we'd wrap it on a stick, and the fishing had a sinker worked on the end of it and two hooks.

SSD: Were the hooks far apart?

SM: Well, they were about a foot apart.

SSD: Did you have a cork on it?

SM: No. You had to let it go to the bottom; we'd bottom fish.

SSD: Did you just drop it, and the sinkers took it to the bottom?

SM: Yes. We'd drop it, or sometimes we might throw it a little way, thirty or forty feet or something, up on towards the bank or something.

SSD: What did you use for bait?

SM: We used shrimp or little pieces of fish.

SSD: So you could catch shrimp in that salt creek with your cast net.

SM: Oh, yes. It was about seven miles out to the ocean, and sometimes we'd go – [inaudible] start with, we could go a mile. Of course, we'd go two. The time they told us we could go two, we'd go four or five. So, we had favorite fishing spots.

SSD: Did anybody ever get caught up in a current and get washed out to the ocean?

SM: No. We usually worked our way out and tried to time it so that we had the water going out, the ocean, when we were on our way out, and then we'd have the tide with us when we were coming back.

SSD: So it helped you in both directions?

SM: Yes.

SSD: What did you catch? What kind of fish?

SM: We'd catch whiting and croaker, and that was the biggest catch we had.

SSD: How big were those fish?

SM: A one-pound croaker was a fairly good-size fish. I guess weighing would be about a pound. Occasionally, we'd catch a trout. They would be about the same size – pound, pound and a half.

SSD: How were they prepared when they were cooked? How did you eat them?

SM: They were scaled, gutted, and fried.

SSD: Were they battered?

SM: Yeah. Usually, a little bit of cornmeal or something like that on them. Salt and pepper and cornmeal.

SSD: Who had to clean them?

SM: Well, when I came up, it was against the rules to give your mama a fish that wasn't clean.

SSD: [laughter] That's a good rule. So you cleaned a lot of fish when you were growing up.

SM: Oh, yeah. We cleaned some.

SSD: Did you all ever cast the net for shrimp and then just eat the shrimp?

SM: Oh, yes. Yes, that was half of it. If we found the shrimp good and thick, we'd catch more shrimp than we were going to use for bait and enough to feed the family, and then we'd quit and go fishing for a little while and then come on home.

SSD: Well, how were the shrimp prepared to eat?

SM: Well, we'd boil them, fry them, put them in a shrimp pie or shrimp fritters. If they were small shrimp, sometimes they would put – made up in a little ball and put it in a bell pepper and baked.

SSD: Wow. You stuffed a bell pepper with them.

SM: Oh, yeah.

SSD: Did anybody ever make gumbo?

SM: Oh, man. Shrimp gumbo?

SSD: Yes.

SM: Yes. We didn't put quite as much spice in it as some of the Cajuns, but it was still edible, I can promise you.

SSD: How do you make a shrimp pie?

SM: It's got a little milk, a little eggs, little breadcrumbs, and salt and pepper, butter.

SSD: Does it have a crust?

SM: No. It's almost like a little casserole.

SSD: I see. Okay.

SM: Bread or cracker crumbs and shrimp and a little butter and salt and pepper and a little milk.

SSD: You baked it.

SM: Then just put in a pie and baked. Actually, we called it pie. We used to do the same thing with oysters, but it's more of a casserole.

SSD: Did you guys actually tong the oysters from the beds?

SM: Well, up in this area, it's a little cooler, and we have very few bottom-set oysters. Our water is saltier, and it takes brackish water for oysters to bottom-set.

SSD: I see. So, where did you get oysters for your oyster pie?

SM: Well, they're far. They grew along the shore from – we have about a five or six-foot rise and fall at the tide and the shoreline slopes. The majority of them grow from the low water mark-up to the high-water mark along the shore. A few fall down and get in the other water, below the water or get thrown down or whatever – or washed down. But most of them are where you can pick them up on the shore.

SSD: So when the tide goes out, are they exposed?

SM: Yes. When the tide goes out, they're exposed.

SSD: I never knew that. That's very interesting.

SM: Yes. But our creeks and the estuary along our coast are pretty saline. The inlets are close together, and we do have around some of the freshwater rivers and all down in the mouth of them, some areas, if they get brackish enough in the spring to bottom-set oysters, but not a whole lot.

SSD: Yes. Well, why did you choose your career in shrimping, Mr. Morrison?

SM: [laughter] That's a good story. My father had a construction company. They had a logging business and farming, and they went into construction work by the time that I was in diapers. I loved that and being around the boats and all and loved to go on the boat and work on it, and watch it, and see what was going on. I just followed the construction work, but construction work during the depression was spotty. Sometimes they wouldn't have any work at all for as much as a year at a time.

SSD: Wow.

SM: It wasn't a continuous thing until I got back home from the Navy, and even then, it wasn't all that continuous. If there was any chance, I worked construction work with my father, and worked on the boats and around them in the creeks and learned about boats.

Then they started a little bit of shrimping around the village, and I got interested in that. If there wasn't any construction work going on, I'd get on a shrimp boat and work.

SSD: So you would hire on as a hand?

SM: Yes. By the time I was eighteen or so, I could run a boat. It didn't take long. So most of the time, I worked construction work, but if there wasn't any, if there was any shrimping going on, I'd find a boat to run or go on one or something – anything to make a few dollars. So I got to really like it. When I got forty, I thought I was kind of settled in with the company, and my father told me one day, "Son." I told him I thought I needed to get into construction with him full-time and was talking with him. So he told me I was too dumb for construction work, so I quit and went fishing. Then I had a good thirty years.

SSD: Yes. Fishing was the right fit, then.

SM: Yes. It worked out pretty good. But my brother and his son still got the company and run it.

SSD: Wow. How old is your son?

SM: My son is slightly over sixty. But not my son – my brother and his son.

SSD: Oh, your brother and his son.

SM: Yes. He gave the company to my brother two years after he told me I wasn't qualified.

SSD: So they still have the construction company.

SM: Yes. But we never fell out. We were always good friends.

SSD: Well, good. So it sounds like you wanted to shrimp more than construct anyway.

SM: Yes. So in 1962, I'd been down in the Gulf in the winter, and he told me that. In 1962, I went down and worked in the winter in Key West and made friends that had a friend down there, and he had a boat for sale. I had an automobile, and his daughter wanted a car, so I traded him the car as down payment and started shrimping.

SSD: You were shrimping down in Key West?

SM: No. I was running a boat down there for somebody, and we made arrangements to get the boat. He came back up in the Carolinas in the summer and brought his boats back up here, so when he brought it back up, I made arrangements to get it in July when our season opened. So it was already up here when I got it.

SSD: Okay. So when does shrimping season close off the Carolina coast?

SM: The shrimp pretty well closes, usually sometime in December. Occasionally, now they work on into January, one or two boats. But there aren't many boats left.

SSD: Well, what do you do for the rest of the year if you're shrimping from July until December?

SM: Well, like I used to tell people, I'd take the first half of the year vacation, and I'd go fishing. [inaudible]

SSD: That sounds like a nice life.

SM: Yes. Well, if you believe it, you could, but we always found something else to do.

SSD: Did you?

SM: Yes.

SSD: Some other work?

SM: Well, either that or something that we could do. You know, if we had work, I spent some winters building a trawler. I spent a few building a house for myself.

SSD: How about that? You built your house. Yeah.

SM: Yes. I designed and built a sixty-three-foot steel hull, and then I built one for my son a couple of years later.

SSD: Wow.

SM: Hello?

SSD: Yes, I'm still here.

SM: I wanted one that would work out of a shallow inlet, so the only way I could get what I wanted was to build it myself. I could have bought a boat from the Gulf that drew seven feet of water, and that don't work so good in a six-foot inlet.

SSD: Yes. You'll run aground, won't you?

SM: [laughter] Yeah.

SSD: Yes.

SM: So I wanted one that drew six feet, so I designed and built it, and it worked that way.

SSD: Well, that's fabulous. So did your son become a shrimper also?

SM: Yes. He did for a while. Before that, he'd gotten in an automobile wreck, and after he'd been shrimping about five years, he developed a seizure that's caused by – I don't know exactly what it is, but you completely pass out – a kind of epileptic seizure. He had to quit shrimping.

SSD: Yes. That's not such a good thing to happen to you on a boat.

SM: No. You'd fall overboard, and that'd be the end. So he quit. Now he's running a dry-cleaning business down in Florida. But he sold his boat, and I think he got out of it at a good time.

SSD: It's getting harder to make a living shrimping, isn't it?

SM: It sure is.

SSD: What are some of the reasons for that?

SM: Well, the economy, and when we started – when I first started way back, we didn't get but about ten, twelve cents a pound for shrimp, and they didn't want anything but beautiful shrimp. But we only had one market, and that was New York, and they're buying them and using them for hors d'oeuvres in barrooms to go along with the beer. That's where most of our shrimp went. They finally developed a market, and the fishermen got some of the money. But the middle people have decided that they have to have all the money now, so the fisherman gets the tail end of it.

SSD: Yes. The shrimpers get paid the least.

SM: Yes. My wife's complaining about how long I'm talking to you.

SSD: Uh-oh.

SM: [laughter]

SSD: Do you need to get off and go somewhere?

SM: No. The funny thing is, she likes to talk on the telephone a long time, and I don't. About two minutes is usually more than I want to talk.

SSD: [laughter] Well, time goes by real fast on these interviews. It all adds up more quickly than you think it seems like it's passing. Well, Mr. Morrison, if you could think back to one of your best days on the shrimp boat, could you just describe it for the record

and paint a picture of what that day looks like? What happened when you got up? What did you do?

SM: Well, one day stands out in my mind, and it was just before Christmas. The shrimp were getting small, and my brother said that he'd like to have some shrimp to put in his freezer, and that was on a Friday. I told him, "Well, let's go tomorrow." So we went out. We decided on it. That morning, we got up and got to the dock about five o'clock. In December, that's a good long time before daylight, even. So we left and started to go shrimping. It had turned cold during the night. When we got to the dock, it was freezing, and the hoses on the dock – water hoses and all – some of them had a little drip. It's running down the dock, just frozen on the wood.

SSD: I see.

SM: So anyhow, we cranked up and left and had coffee. About daylight, we got in the ocean, and the wind had switched around to the northwest, and we were going to fish fairly close to the beach. It started to blow a living gale about forty miles an hour. We were only about half a mile to a mile off-shore. So we didn't get any amount of sea, but the water – you know how the water gets kind of foamy and breakers?

SSD: Yes.

SM: Well, you could look over the side, and that's the way the water looked. It was just little ripples on the water, and the wind started up, and it looked like it was covered with foam.

SSD: Wow.

SM: We found shrimp, and we made four short drags. We had about twenty-some boxes of those tiny shrimp. That wasn't a bad day.

SSD: How long did it take you to get those?

SM: Well, we were back by dark that night, just before it got dark. The first two drags, we finally managed to get them in the hole. The other two had a bunch of little, tiny – they were like little sardine fish. They were about the size of the shrimp, and you just couldn't cull them out; they were so thick, mixed up. So we just shoveled them in the hole and put a little ice on them. The last two drags we left on deck and just shoveled them up on the heading tables that evening. The shrimp were piled up. The deck was almost twenty feet wide, and the shrimp were piled up almost shoulder-high in a big pile.

SSD: Wow.

SM: So we had a good day. But when we got back to the dock that evening, the water and all was still frozen on the dock.

SSD: Right. Yes. It hadn't melted all day.

SM: No. We had a pretty good day.

SSD: Did the shrimp freeze because of the cold weather? Did they freeze when they were on the sorting table?

SM: Well, we covered them. They were under a building, you know, and we covered them with canvas and tarpaulins, and they didn't freeze. They were all right. They were just kind of (inaudible) down.

SSD: Yes, exactly. Yes. Just naturally. Well, Mr. Morrison, what kinds of turtles have you seen in the Gulf of Mexico? Well, you're not in the Gulf of Mexico. So let's say off the coast of South Carolina?

SM: Well, I've seen very few leatherbacks, one or two Kemp's ridleys, and I've seen a couple of loggerheads, couple of thousand, anyhow.

SSD: Wow.

SM: A lot of times in the summertime, dragging, we'd have one turtle. Most of the time, we'd have one to three turtles every drag. That's just more than anybody wants to handle. I tell you, it was a relief when we didn't have to handle them either.

SSD: Well, that's great. So it worked out well for the turtles and for the shrimpers.

SM: Yes.

SSD: Why do you think sea turtles are important?

SM: Well, I don't really know, but I know most things were put on this earth for a purpose, and I'm not sure what all of them are, but you probably never had a cake made with turtle eggs, either.

SSD: I have never had one that I know of.

SM: Yes. Well, my mother used to say the turtle eggs make the best cake that anybody ever put in their mouth, and she was about right, too. The eggs were good to eat. The turtle meat is good to eat, too.

SSD: When you were growing up, did you have a lot of turtle to eat and turtle eggs?

SM: Well, we didn't eat many turtles, but we used to eat a few eggs, and mother used to make cakes with them. We didn't try to see how many eggs we could get, but some of the people did it almost commercially.

SSD: Yes. I guess the problem that would arise from that is that you'll have fewer and fewer turtles, and then eventually, there won't be any eggs or turtles.

SM: Yes. That's right. But their habitat is disappearing for them, too.

SSD: What's causing that?

SM: Well, development along the beaches, and our beaches up here along this coast where I am, a lot of the beaches are eroding, and they just don't have the habitat. There's several miles of beach that have just completely disappeared.

SSD: Is there anything that can be done to stop that kind of erosion?

SM: Not a thing in the world.

SSD: Nothing like a bulkhead or planting seagrass?

SM: No. Planting seagrass or anything else. But it's just like the Mississippi Delta, out on the edge of it. It's there, but the ocean is going where it wants to go.

SSD: It's constantly changing, the land, isn't it? Well, is there anything else you'd like to put on the record that we have not talked about?

SM: I think we've about covered it.

SSD: [laughter] Okay.

SM: I got a little book I might send you [inaudible] your address.

SSD: Okay. I would love to have you do that. You want me to tell you the address?

SM: No, I got it.

SSD: Okay. Great. What is the name of your book?

SM: *Saltwater in My Blood*.

SSD: Oh, that's wonderful. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Morrison. I'm going to send you a copy of this interview on a CD, which should play on a CD player or a computer, so you'll have that, and hopefully, your children and any grandchildren will be able to listen to it in the years to come.

SM: Yeah. Might put that up for my great-grand.

SSD: Okay. Thank you so much.

SM: You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Molly Graham 7/7/2021