

Interviewer: So, we are in Boca Grande with Captain Sandy Melvin. And first I want to hear a little bit about your history in the fishing industry and what you currently fish for and what you've done in the past, how that's changed, and just a little bit about you on you and your experience in this area.

Sandy Melvin: Okay. I originally came to Boca Grande about 1982. I started as a full-time guide in 1987, so 30 plus years I've been guiding. I originally started out as snook, redfish speckled trout in the back country and then I picked into got into tarpon fishing. So those are the two main things I focus on are the back country shallow water stuff, snook, red fish, tarpon, and trout. So, basically what I do. I also own a retail store downtown, called Gasper Outfitters that I've had with my wife over 20 years.

Interviewer: Is that a clothing store?

Sandy Melvin: It's clothing mainly, yeah. We don't do fishing tackle. We do more of a resort wear and outdoor wear, that sort of thing. So yellow awning in town, if you get a chance to pop in there.

Interviewer: Cool. Yeah, hopefully we might have some time to check it out.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah, you'd like it. It's a great lady store.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Cool. It could be some fishing, some cooling here?

Sandy Melvin: We got really nice t-shirts and you know the performance shirts with the hoodies on and buffs and all those types of things just outdoor, we are basically.

Interviewer: Okay, cool. So, you've stayed mostly, you've been an ensure charter captain?

Sandy Melvin: For the most part within except for during trout season. I'm talking guy. I don't do. I generally don't fish out in the gulf, I am pretty much in the islands in the shallow grass flats, and then tarpon fishing and I specialize in Boca Grande pass, when I'm tarpon fishing.

Interviewer: So, one of the things that we'd like to do is map out especially where you experienced red tide. Is this a good chart for you? Is this kind of your area [00:02:00] here?

Sandy Melvin: Yeah, yeah. This is pretty much it. Pretty much where else I stay in.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I want to start with the first red tide that you remember and then just move forward from there kind of sequentially in time.

Sandy Melvin: Okay. Yeah, I've seen probably, I don't know, four or five booms over my last 30 years, at least. Some worse than others.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: And this past year was by far the longest boom that I've seen in 30 some years. But I didn't seem to. I mean, I saw quite a few dead fish, but not, I've seen dead fish at higher levels in other red tides seemed like to me, especially red fish and I didn't see as many red fish this year. Who knows that they may have come up but I've seen I remember one red tide probably 10 or 15 years ago, I can't remember how long it's been. There was a lot of big red fish out in the gulf that floated up on the beach and all I didn't see that this year. Not to say it didn't happen nor to me or whatever, but I didn't see it. Mostly what I saw this year were small fish, you know, the catfishing mullet and mohars and just pin fish, that sort of thing. I saw a few of the bigger fish that they are like, right at the very peak of it probably late June, early August when it was said it's worse. I did see a few tarpon that were dead and some gloat grouper. But not a ton of them. But we saw some, but...

Interviewer: Are you from this area?

Sandy Melvin: I'm from North Carolina originally, since 1982.

Interviewer: Okay. So, since you know since the 80s were there any red tides that you remember this area in the 80s that...?

Sandy Melvin: Oh, yeah. Probably mid-80s. I'm not good with remembering when but I remember, I originally worked at the Boca Grande Club, which was the food and beverage director of the Boca Grande Club [00:04:00] which was a private resort on the north end of the island. And they have a marina up there called the West used to be called Uncle Henry's or Boca Grande Club Marina at that time and when Uncle Henry's called Boca Grande Marina now and I can remember back in the mid-80s at some point. You know that whole Marina with the wind blowing those fish that did that fish up in there, it was pretty bad. It seems to me that most of the red tide I've seen around here is generally concentrated somewhere around little Gasper a little pass on the north side of the island seems to have attracted the red tide more so than here in Boca Grande pass in the southern side. I don't know why that is, but it just seems for my memories. Gasper Sound which is north of the causeway that driving out of Boca Grande.

Interviewer: That's this area right here, right?

Sandy Melvin: Correct. Let's see. Yeah, this area here. That's a little Gasper pass. So, this area here seems to always get hit whenever there is a red tide event for some reason. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. If you feel uncomfortable, you know, drawing where that area is and then.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. Just I would say, you know, just this general area here.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Sandy Melvin: It's always pretty tough. Then that last red tide seemed to make its way back into here in the Catfish Creek.

Interviewer: So let's use different, we have different colors and I want to use like a different color for each red tide that we are talking about. So, we have, you know, clear different areas. So you are saying this, this one here.

Sandy Melvin: This past year.

Interviewer: Not this past year, but this was in general.

Female Speaker: Just typical area.

Interviewer: This is a typical red tide area that you've seen that.

Sandy Melvin: Yes. I actually almost every red tide I can recall it seemed to be dead fish in that general area for some reason.

Interviewer: What species?

Sandy Melvin: It's mostly the smaller species, but you'll see some red fish and snook as well but [00:06:00] mostly just the pin fish and the mullet and the catfish. The catfish always is one of the first to go a little lizard fish, things like that.

Interviewer: Mm hmm. So that one that you remember in the mid-80s?

Sandy Melvin: Yeah and just generally area here the north side of the island that marina was talking about is basically right here.

Interviewer: Yeah. So that's a marina that you worked on?

Sandy Melvin: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. It's called Boca Grande Marina now. And it just always, it just collects it, you know, because the way the wind blows it in there and all the tides and it would collect those dead fish when there was a lot of dead fish around.

Interviewer: And that's before your charter?

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. Right about time I started right. When I left the rest-, I left the restaurant business in 87 and full time guidance since then. I was fishing all my spare time, but I didn't start full time till 87.

Interviewer: Mm hmm. So after 87 and when you were fishing full time, what was the next red tide? If you think back to, you know, 87. What was the?

Sandy Melvin: I'm not good with dates. I really couldn't tell you. But I don't recall in the 90s any major red tide. I mean, nothing, nothing that I recall. I mean, I'm sure there were some lighter booms and out there, because we do we have it all the time of here and there. But I don't recall anything. I remember in the mid-80s was the last worst one like this past time for me that I seem to recall.

Interviewer: Do you remember how long that red tide in the 80s, how long it lasted?

Sandy Melvin: Not really. But I would guess maybe it was a month. You know, I don't recall it being anywhere near like this last one, which lasted a year basically. When you say that there weren't major red tides in the 90s, but that there were red tides. We talk about like, what does we are like, so [00:08:00] a typical red tide in the 90s that wasn't these days?

Sandy Melvin: You would see the funky water and a few dead fish here and there and it would be a little irritable on your throat and all, but it was nothing. Nothing that was, you know, over the top, just horrible kind of thing. And then I remember, it's probably been about the last one we had was about 10 years ago, I guess. I'm just guessing because I remember that was a wintertime red tide. Because people around Christmas time were all coughing and carrying on, there was one in the winter time, some probably about 10 years ago, I'm just guessing. You guys can probably look it up. But I can't remember, I'm lucky I'm not really great on dates, I don't really pay attention.

Interviewer: That's fine. I mean, as close as you can remember, it's great and then also, if you think of you know, one that was bad, and you can remember, oh that was about the same time that this event happened and then you can get close, you would probably know.

Sandy Melvin: You know, I mean, the only thing I can say is, it seems to happen on the years after we've had a bit of a drought and then we have a major rain years, you know, when you have a hurricanes or tropical depressions or just lots of low pressure systems and you get tons of rain. Especially if there's been a couple of years of drought, then you have that big rain event year, then you can pretty much set your watch by that there's going to be 10 months after that it's coming. That's just been my guess and experience no scientific evidence, obviously but that's what my gut tells me that that's when it shows is 10 months or so after a really rainy spring and summer.

Interviewer: So these minor events, like the minor ones in the 90s, how long did they last?

Sandy Melvin: A month maybe. You know, in and out and then this course did moves around so much you know the wind will blow it one way and you won't even notice it, you may think it's gone but it just may be blowing away from where you are at and the wind switches and blows the back end you recognize us back still around, so I doubted ever [00:10:00], you know, in during those periods of time, it probably didn't leave. It just probably was out of my range of noticing it.

Interviewer: And for the minor events to where they'd be in this area or they...?

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. They'll come all the way. I mean, you get them. I would say the majority of them are all within 10 miles of the coast. In the Gulf side, 10 miles in and then most of the stuff I recall is on this north end of the harbor. I don't, I can't really think of any major stuff happening in this area in my 30 years.

Interviewer: So, nothing specific spatially here?

Sandy Melvin: No, I've seen it around the past and I've seen it down out off of this off of the scale pull out. So, you see it kind of out here in the harbor some.

Interviewer: Let's draw that too.

Sandy Melvin: Okay. So maybe, you know, this area here and then even though up into here.

Interviewer: And is this generally where you are fishing or is just?

Sandy Melvin: Yes. I'll pretty much fish from this point to this point to this point to picture triangle, so I, that's pretty draw that.

Interviewer: Yeah. Let just draw that I am back.

Sandy Melvin: Okay. This is what I would fish. That's my, that's pretty much my triangle efficient.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sandy Melvin: I know venture out south there sometimes, but pretty much daily. I'm out here and I'm a very busy guy. I mean, I'll probably do 250 trips a year.

Interviewer: Wow.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. So, I mean, due to a day today, like today I have to or tomorrow I have to, so I'm doing two half-days a day. So I'm out there a lot. The thing I'm noticing from this past boom is there there's a black, slimy kind of moss that I'm not sure what it's called. I actually thought I might see yesterday I brought some of it in with me. But I don't have any with me now [00:12:00]. You know, what, now it knows get to wouldn't be in that boat. Anyway it's in a scrolling over the turtle grass and covering up turtle grass and I can see the turtle grass is stressed because it's not getting the sunlight and it's not clear and it's trying to flush itself out. You can go in the back country now and high tides and it's up floating and not some mucky kind of, it's not this what we call rolling moss, which is a kind of a spider web looking brown moss, I don't know, whatever they called. But this is more of a hairy kind of fiber, black ugly muck kind of thing and it's sticking to the to the turtle grass and it's just not flushing out. It's flushing some I can see it getting a little better week by week, but it's still around and it mostly in the same area up here where the majority of the red tide was from Catfish Creek north seems to be the worst of it. I wouldn't call bait on the southern side of the harbor yesterday. We are just, we are not seeing it on the south side of the harbor. But we are seeing that flood you know, it's picking it up and getting the winds pushing it around, and it's flowing in and out. So, I'm sure it's out in the Gulf. I can probably look around the marina here and find what I'm talking about.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sandy Melvin: If there's some around in here.

Interviewer: Well, we can either find it or even send me a picture of it.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah.

Interviewer: Because you have the number, I called you and that's my cell phone number. So you can just text me if you show that.

Sandy Melvin: Okay. Yeah, you need to see that because that's definitely something that's not normal and it showed up after, the this and it seems to be in the worst area where the red tide was up around that causeway bridge back to pullout point, basically.

Interviewer: When did you notice that for the first time?

Sandy Melvin: Probably, right this Thanksgiving, roughly. So right after the red tide pretty much went away that stuff showed.

Interviewer: Let's draw the [00:14:00] where were you saw that? Anywhere you saw that.

Sandy Melvin: You mean, different color or something on that matter?

Interviewer: Yeah, let's take the orange.

Sandy Melvin: Okay. Yeah, I would say that stuff is pretty much all in that right there.

Interviewer: And is it patchy or...?

Sandy Melvin: It's pumps up, when it is in on low tide, it seems like it hooks the bottom and it'll grab the grasses or the bottom and so it's not bad on the lower tide, you can't see it on the surface. But as the tide gets up, if the tide gets up two-and-a-half feet or so, it almost like it lifts it up and breaks it up in the wind or boat traffic or whatever picks it up, and it floats up and it just in little globules all over the place. So, what time are you leaving today?

Interviewer: We are actually staying all day today.

Sandy Melvin: You are going to be here till 5:30?

Interviewer: We are talking, we are going to meet Van Hubbard at 4:00 and then we are talking to another person.

Sandy Melvin: Honestly, I can bring some of the back when I come in from my trip for sure. I am mean, through a piece I thought big chunk of it in my logo yesterday just to pat it just to see, I maybe we'll find some of it around here. But I will look in a minute, but...

Interviewer: Okay. We'll figure it out we have time.

Sandy Melvin: Either way, you should look at that because it's definitely something that seems to have appeared in the area where the red tide was the worst. And I don't know if anybody else talked about that because it's definitely it's, and I see it's not like this is the only time I've ever seen it. I've seen it before, but I've never. I mean, it's noticeable that it's worse this year than it has been in years past.

Interviewer: Do you besides, you know, you say you think it might be choking out the turtle grass. Are there any other...?

Sandy Melvin: Now it doesn't seem to be bothering the fish or anything like that. It's just kind of aggravating for us as fishermen because it gets on your line and you know, you can't work your baits through it. It just knots up on everything. But it doesn't seem to really affect the fish. Although I would say that the fish don't like it. I mean, they are not in the areas [00:16:00]. I have a couple of flats that typically in the late winter, early spring, I catch a lot of fish and they just weren't there this year. And there is a lot of that on those flats. And the water quality is fine. I mean, I catch a few there but it's not like it should be and so I think the water quality is fine. I just think it's hurting that turtle grass. It's covering up that turtle grass, which is the natural grass on the flats. And I'm sure it's blocking the sun from getting to it, so you can just tell it's thinner and it's not as healthy as, as thick as it should be. Turtle grass is pretty resilient though it'll come back

pretty quick and I keep thinking it's going to kind of flush itself out with all these tides but it's a slow process. It's not it's not as clear and as well as quickly as I thought it might.

Interviewer: So for these minor events that you say what happened back in the 90s, how does that impact your fishing in here?

Sandy Melvin: You know, it's, it makes it tougher obviously. This year though, this is like I said the worst red tide I've seen. I actually had a really good year in the back country catching big trout. But we are not catching a lot of small trout. Okay, I mean, I've caught up. I caught tons of I mean when I say big trout for us some 23 to 30 inches trout which are big trout. I know you guys know how to keep all climactic pictures of all my clients but just to let you scroll through some of them. And this is recently, these are, these may catch a nice big red fish. Some red fish. Red fishing has definitely taken a beating from this red tide. We are not seeing the number of red fish that we normally see besides of the trout I've been catching.

Interviewer: Wow.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. I mean, these are [00:18:00] the quality of the trout, 20 inches up is a big trout and I caught a ton of them this year. But to catch a 13-inch trout to 15-inch trout. Not seen a lot of those.

Interviewer: So when you say back country do you just mean back up in this area/

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. All of these islands and shallow water grass flats and here Yeah, that's what we would call it typically call it back country anywhere from these islands back and all these islands all the way this is Turtle Bay. This is Bull Bay, Winds Creek, Catfish Creek. That's what we would call the Boca Grande back country.

Interviewer: And the red tide doesn't get into that it doesn't go back then?

Sandy Melvin: It didn't. It didn't get back in there as bad this year. I mean, I think that's why a lot of the bigger things the snook and the trout, it seemed to have gotten bad in catfish creek, which is this creek where we are here. This area here where I got the arrow that creek seem to got to have been affected pretty good. But once you got that outer island right there, that's right here. That's the one that I'm telling you a lot of that stuffs on that black moss, whatever it is that the flat got affected and it's an outside before you get to the inner coastal waterway deep water flat is the first outside flat, it's got a lot of crap on it, although a lot of that black mossy stuff on it. But it didn't seem to affect, I mean, I caught some big snook in September and October which there was still red tide around but as soon as I would get back in the islands of ways I could catch them from the outer most flats and out into the inner coastal waterway seem to be affected the most. For whatever reason it didn't seem to get way back in the islands and I think that's where a lot of those snook, the bigger snook went and the bigger trout [00:20:00], probably they're the little trout stared out in the potholes. Generally, typically you'll catch the

smaller trout in big schools you anchor up on one pot or bucket of shrimp and catch 25, 13 to 16-inch trout. But the bigger ones are more isolated, they roam around back there like a like a snook or a redfish they don't, they are not in schools like the little ones are. And I typically I fish with top water lowers artificial baits which means I'm covering more water scattered around I'm not fishing, I'm not anchored up and fishing live bait and spots. I'm typically drifting across the whole flat and picking them off, you know one here one there, they're never in the same place twice kind of thing. Because they're roaming around individually. Those are how you catch those bigger ones and I caught a lot of big ones. But the big trout act more like a big snooker red fish.

Interviewer: So does red tide you said it's usually you know, in these areas here with the blue areas for the minor red tides and kind of this red area where it always says, so is it ever and this in the back country? Does it ever get up in here?

Sandy Melvin: You know, it doesn't seem to I can't really remember it getting way back in the islands. It pretty much stays on the outer flats.

Interviewer: Let's draw the area that's not where you don't see it.

Sandy Melvin: Let's see, I would say like that, you know, way back.

Interviewer: So since we are fishing inshore, you are pretty much always able to go to these areas?

Sandy Melvin: Oh yeah, I have a boat that runs in six inches of water, so I go in all tides.

Interviewer: So, you don't, did you, other than that, are there any other ways that you have to change or adopt to a red tide besides going into the back country [00:22:00]?

Sandy Melvin: Well, this is these are February pictures. You know I can see I was catching a lot of trout.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: And let me see, the other ones. What was the month December I think was the month I call it a bunch of really big trout.

Female Speaker: That was December of 2018?

Sandy Melvin: Yes. February, let me see where it goes, yeah. Now that's those are some of the trout, these are like bigger ones that we, here is one other like that was almost 30 inches, you know that's a really big trout. There's another one, you know, there's 25 or so. Yeah, we don't use don't catch many trout like that in the state of Florida much less you know, in red tide year, but, whatever reason I caught the big trout this year, but not a lot of them. And not hardly any really small ones. Just didn't catch a lot of small

ones. If you call it a trout this year, it was 15 inches or better. You know, just don't catch many of those small trout.

Interviewer: So when you, you know you had to kind of go into this back country instead of saying and the rest of your fishing area. Does that mean during the red tide, are you able to fish for trout and all?

Sandy Melvin: No, well, you know, I was tarponing fishing last year I caught 158 tarpon and between the 15<sup>th</sup> of April and 10<sup>th</sup> of June.

Interviewer: Wow.

Sandy Melvin: And then when the red tide came in, they ran off the pass and go.

Interviewer: Okay. So they didn't leave they got out of there/

Sandy Melvin: They just took off. Yeah, they took off. So, I don't think the tarpon worse affected them. I mean, we were in an unusual situation here Boca Grande passes, you know, big corporate nightclub.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: They come in from all over, everywhere, congregate, form their mating school. Yo, hey, hey, trying to talk this girl and go with me wherever whatever [00:24:00]. That's what, that's the way I look at my Boca Grande pass, so they all congregate there, I got a steady flow of food.

Interviewer: Where is that on here?

Sandy Melvin: Boca Grande passes, right here.

Interviewer: Right here, so that's a big tarpon area.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. That's where the thousands of tarpon and they'll come on.

Interviewer: Do you say you still say inside right here though?

Sandy Melvin: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sandy Melvin: Well, I'm pretty much fish right there on the very southern tip of the island. There's big deep hole there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: And I will show you to give you an idea. I'll show you a picture of last April. My depth finder last April was.

Interviewer: So, your clients who want to go tarpon fishing?

Sandy Melvin: Here is my depth finder.

Interviewer: Oh, wow.

Sandy Melvin: It's, I don't know what mode I had in my phone. When you come down off the yellow line is the bottom, so you drop down from a shallower into everything above that yellow line is tarpon.

Interviewer: Wow.

Sandy Melvin: Okay. So that's 15 feet thick of tarpon and are probably 100 yards wide by a quarter of a mile long, 15 feet thick. So, you guys take your guess but 10,000 tarpon.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: That's what comes into Boca Grande pass, now this was, what's the date on this? April 26, 2018.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: So you know, next couple of weeks or so this this year, it's going to be a little later because we've got all these cool fronts coming through and we anticipate the tarpon would show up like this again, any day really soon as this weather settles down, because I don't think it really affected the tarpon because I think they just took off.

Interviewer: So for your, your clients say either want to do back country or they want to go get tarpon during the red tide you can't get tarpon, so are those are the same clients coming with you to the back country?

Sandy Melvin: No, no. I pretty much had to cancel. I cancel a lot of trips either when I go back country fish until generally April 15 and then I switch over and strictly [00:26:00] tarpon because I'm just these two boats two different sets of tackle to, you know, it's just too much trouble. So, generally I'll just switch over. Most years I usually try to wait till May 1<sup>st</sup> even though I could tarpon fish earlier in the season because you just, I have so many people coming in that I have a lot of kids and families that sort of thing. And tarpon are inconsistent early in the seasons. I can always go in the back country no matter what the wind does and I mean I can catch fish back there on pretty much any day. So, so it's just from an economic standpoint of being a guide you want to make live and you have to go fishing, so you don't want to be canceled all the time. So pretty much stay with the back country fishing and then at the tarpon here in my back

country clients want to go tarpon fishing, I can maybe take them tarpon fishing but if I'm hard having schedule tarpon fish, it's usually sometimes it's four or five people my small, my boat for back country I only 2, so I can't switch them over to back country. I can go from two and go to tarpon fishing but I can't go to tarpon fishing in the back country unless it is they're only willing to take two people so.

Interviewer: So with, you know, this past year the red tide was bad enough that it kept you from tarpon fishing you to stay back.

Sandy Melvin: I lost about \$20,000 probably my income and basically a month, the season and I'll just round it off to 20 could who knows because if the fishing had stayed good, people will keep going.

Interviewer: Right.

Sandy Melvin: But roughly mid-June through mid-July is what I lost. I don't talk typically tarpon fish much after the middle of July even though there are generally tarpon here and the guys that were here did continue to get tarpons up in the harbor, the fish that left Boca Grande pass a lot of them took off and went out in the Gulf and went on to wherever tarpon go but a lot of the tarpon did go up the harbor went up in the piece whoever [00:28:00] Niagara River and the guys that continued fishing up there through August and September which is a typical late summer area that tarpon and fish they continue to be able to go get catching. I just pretty much I'm fishing almost every day from before Thanksgiving until after the Fourth of July, I take a couple months off. So, for me personally I just don't fish that much that time of the year September, October, or August, September I don't fish at all.

Interviewer: So, back in the 90s when there were these minor red tide events where those bad enough that you were unable to go tarpon fishing?

Sandy Melvin: I don't recall any red tide affecting the tarpon like it did this past year. This past year the red tide came and went coming through in and out Boca Grande pass. I don't remember the other tarpon events getting in the past so much. Little guess purple pass, yes. Southern in Boca Grand pass no, I don't recall that.

Interviewer: So that's this little one?

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. This is little guess is little guest Burleigh pass. Yeah, this was Boca Grande pass.

Interviewer: And this is where you always see red tide?

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. Seems like I always see it up in that general part. This, this area up here and if you look this you got a real narrow little pass up some pass which is up in Inglewood but that's the only pass between here and all the way up here. So this is, this whole stress doesn't get a lot of current flow as a where a lot of places would and I think

that's partly the reason they just not getting the flushing action that you get when you are down this way. So you come from Boca Grande pass and you got Red Fish pass, you got [indiscernible] [00:29:36] pass, all these areas down south from south of Boca Grande has a pretty good current flow. So I just I think it's it doesn't get stag-, was as stagnant.

Interviewer: Yeah. So with let's draw where you experience where you saw the last 2018, 2019 red tide and that area?

Sandy Melvin: That's pretty much this red stretch [00:30:00]. That's that was this one.

Interviewer: This is where you also you saw the black moss?

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. Most of the black moss was on these outer flats right here. Yeah, pretty much this this whole red area is where that black moss is. It more on the shallower stuff. You know it's not out in the deeper stuff obviously, it's all over the shallow. You find turtle grass within this circle here, you are going to see that black moss.

Interviewer: Okay, and then the 2018 red tide, that's the same, your whole fishing area aside from this blue?

Sandy Melvin: Pretty much yeah, this blue was not bad at all.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sandy Melvin: Everywhere else, you've pretty much had red tide.

Interviewer: Okay. So what about you know, we've heard that red tide will get people coughs and it affects your throat.

Sandy Melvin: It's certainly affected me. I've had a cough for a year.

Interviewer: You still have a cough?

Sandy Melvin: I do, I still it's in and my doctor, I've had my I've had chest x-rays and all that because it was really bad last spring. But I also had some bad flu bug and then it went into that red tide and I think that got in my lungs. So, I had a lot of, and I've never had lung issues. I mean, I've always been a very healthy guy. But I still have a cough and it's I think it's been a bad allergy year too, though. So, so right now, he has me taking a Claritin every day for 30 days. It seems to help. Because I think there's bad allergy out there as well. But I know that that red tide was a vacuum, and I saw it affect a lot of people. I mean, that stuff's nasty. If you have lung issues, I mean, especially when this past year when it was there was a higher, who was a high concentration of red tide this past year and when that wind kicked up and blew it up and got an airborne it was nasty.

Interviewer: Did it ever keep you from going out on a trip?

Sandy Melvin: No [00:32:00].

Interviewer: Do you think it ever had an effect people that were coming out with you?

Sandy Melvin: Oh yeah, always absolutely stick caused a lot of people to cancel trips.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah, it crushed my retail businesses. The retail business was way off from the red tide because people didn't travel. You can back this you can talk to the, I would talk to the Gasper Island Bridge Authority and see if they'll give you the numbers on.

Female Speaker: Good idea.

Sandy Melvin: On that, well, I have a client that one of my friends is on the board and I don't think they're just as public knowledge on the numbers. But the number of people who came out on the island was off as much as 50% some months on the cash totals. So like if you are a resident of the island, you get, you can get a card, it's kind of like a debit card every time you come and go, you just show your card and it just debit snippet. But if you are just visiting like you guys did, I'm sure you paid the \$6 total, right?

Interviewer: Mm hmm.

Sandy Melvin: Well, that's how you measure the day trippers are people who are coming to the beach or just coming out for the day, you don't really worry about the people had the cards that's not going to really change that much. The number of cash paid tolls was down as much as 50% over several other like August, September, October, just and more. So, I don't know, I don't have the exact numbers. But I know he told me was as much as 50%.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: And those worst of the month, you know, when it really kicked in August, September, October right there. We had it, you know, around a little bit of both for a year, but it just the worst, those worst three months seem to be those late summer, early fall.

Interviewer: So when you know when your business on land that's down and the charters down, because both of them are very, you know, reliant on tourism.

Sandy Melvin: It's been crazy, though, because retail was way down. Tarpon fishing was very good, up until the 15<sup>th</sup> of June. So roughly mid-June, and then it for me [00:34:00] fishing Boca Grande pass, then it fell off the face of the earth, I basically had to cancel everything 100% of charters that I had for the last month of the season. But as

things started getting better, late September, early November, by Thanksgiving, it was gone. So, by early November, you know, things were the water quality was good, there's nobody cough, and everything's getting back to normal. I've been busy in hell, you know, and I would have thought it would have affected my business this year, as far as the charter business goes, and the retail is picked back up fairly substantially, too. It's not that gangbusters but help part of that to Amazon and you know, the younger generations not shopping like the older generation has in years past has been my experience. So, you know, you are, you are not very old, you are 25, 30 right in that range. So, you've shop online, I'm sure a lot or have things delivered and all that. But my generation never did that. We walked in the store and shopped. And the older people still like to go in and touch and feel and buy it. But the younger kids, the springbreak kids and all that that are here, they don't really shop. So it's hard, my point was it's hard to say when you talk retail numbers being off, what effect the red tide had as opposed to just the fact that retail in general is just tougher now than it was 10 years ago.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: So, I don't know. You know, you have to just factor it all in, but certainly you can be sure that if 50% of the number of people didn't show up on the island, they are not there to shop. You know, if they are just not here, they are not here.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: They are to going to shop. So, it definitely had some effect on the retail side of stuff and the traffic, I'm sure for the restaurants and all those. you know, it's a killer for the economy really tight. It's a killer for the economy. And I also [00:36:00] been a professional bash fisherman for 30 years. I fished all over the country. I fish like Okeechobee quite a bit and I know all my friends on Lake Okeechobee are frustrated because people who don't understand the red tide issues are quick to think that Okeechobee has something to do with these red tide issues, and I don't think it's Okeechobee at all. I mean, I think there's a possibility that some of the algae that comes out of Lake Okeechobee, these discharges might help further along, but I don't think so. Because my understanding of the currents is that water that comes out of the Coosachi river, once it enters the Gulf, the currents takes it to south, it doesn't work its way back up this high. Now that's my understanding of it. Somebody some hydrologist can verify that or not, but and the water quality on Lake Okeechobee when that algae bloom is going on, the fish are there, the fish, it doesn't affect the fish. We caught the heck out of the fish somewhere over in Lake Okeechobee when all the tournament's numbers are up and all that. But it does get that algae bloom it turns out water green and then they're discharging it east and west. It's not healthy, but that I think it's a separate issue from red tide myself.

Interviewer: What do you think, you know, this past year, you said it's the worst red tide that you've seen lasted the longest? What reasons or theories you have about why it was so bad?

Sandy Melvin: Well, I think what really kicked it off was we had a little red tide around and then in the early April or so or maybe it was March, we had a very early season tropical depression last year that went up the coast. I don't remember what it was called. But it went right up the coast and it was late spring. You guys can look at that up too. We get a ton of rain. We had a ton of rain in late spring, and we had a fairly dry winter up to that point and then we got a ton of rain for about a week. And then, you know, right after we had that ton of rain, they did [00:38:00], the weather just went bang, early summer, same we had bright sunny days, very little wind and the water temperatures just shot up. For over about a two-week period that water temperature just went crazy and I think you didn't have much wind, you didn't have a lot of current flows on nip tides, the same period of time I'm talking about right after that, all that rain flushed all everything into the water, then you had nip tides, where you know, there's not a lot of current flow, it's not the full moon or the new moon, it's just the quarter moons where the tide flow is not great and it's bright sunny days and just hot. It's like a soup and I think it just exploded and you are a biologist and now you might have sure you know what I'm talking about. Same to me, that's what happened and then once it got foothold and started growing and expanding, we just never had any real weather over the summer to move it out and break it apart or do anything like that. And then, you know, just get it ran its course, you know. Just and then once it finally ran its course and we started getting a few cold fronts in the early fall and some wind and got a little cooler temperature and all it slowly but surely dissipated. And I think it was just kind of a perfect storm of you know, too many pesticides, too much fertilizers and phosphorates and all getting flushed in quickly, and then the perfect storm of weather and heat and no wind and not a lot of tide that let it take hold, get a foothold and it just took off.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, when, you know, when red tide pushes you into this back-country area, how was the fishing? Is the fishing different from how it usually is or the fishing impacted?

Sandy Melvin: None. It's been pretty standard back there.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: Yeah. Once you get back in the islands, it's pretty standard. I don't think it really reached back there. I never really saw a lot of out and see any dead fish back on the backup. The dead fish I saw were the outer flats [00:40:00] closest to the inner coastal in the deeper water.

Interviewer: Do you think it impacted any species distribution or spawning aggregations?

Sandy Melvin: It seems to have affected red fish the most. From what I've gathered from the number of red fish I'm seeing, they seem to be stressed the most on this, and the speckled trout I'd say because I'm not seeing the little ones. I mean, you know, catch those big ones, but I'm not seeing the local ones. Snook seem to have not been as affected by them. I mean, there's plenty, there's a ton of two-pound snook everywhere

and you know, you can catch these little juvenile teenagers, you can catch them to 20 pounds, this doesn't seem to that bother the snooks as much. And I don't know, I guess maybe since it was the summer months, they weren't, they were out in the Gulf, the really big ones are way out in the Gulf and the smaller ones are up in the harbor. Typically, that time of year anyway, so I think they pretty much avoided the worst of the red tide.

Interviewer: Since this red tide has ended has this area, the rest of your fishing area hasn't recovered yet as far as fishing outside of the back country?

Sandy Melvin: It's getting better. It's getting better but I'm still concerned about that mud grass, you know that the mud grass is still keeping those the areas that should be getting better from showing their potential. Okay, that that grass is, is definitely keeping the fish or I want to say it's a moss of some kind, but it's definitely having an effect the fish, well, I mean, I am catching fish around it, they don't like it, you can tell that. They're not there and the numbers that they should be and you can go up another quarter of a mile in where it's not around and not as prominent and you can catch them regularly. So, they are not enjoying that moss. I don't think it's hurting them. My bigger concern on the moss is not on what it's doing to the fish, but what it's doing to the habitat. I think it's hurting the turtle grass by keeping that sunlight off that turtle grass.

Interviewer: So for, you know, these minor events [00:42:00] in the 90s, was there a recovery time after? Like, was there...?

Sandy Melvin: I don't recall anything crazy, you know, I mean, I think it's the fishing here and the environment here. It's pretty resilient. It bounces back pretty quick.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: Like matter of the fact, you know, two months ago, we didn't see hardly any little pin fish.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: You know, quarter size 50-cent size little tiny pin fish. Now you are starting to see them everywhere. They are coming in, I would bet you within six months, you'll have all those many pin fishes we had this time last year. You know, so it, but it takes a couple of breeding cycles to get them going, you know.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Female Speaker: Sandy, you people are here.

Sandy Melvin: Okay, I'll be right on top. Thank you.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, what about in between 90s or the 2000s, were there any major red tides?

Sandy Melvin: There was one 10 years or so ago.

Interviewer: Okay.

Sandy Melvin: If I remember, I can't remember exactly when it was. But you know, and it didn't seem to last it was nothing like this one. There was some dead fish around and it seemed I remember it was around Christmas time because there was a lot of people here on the holidays that were hacking and coughing around. So, I am sure you can find that info out somewhere.

Interviewer: Okay. And then are there any management changes or forecasting teams? Is there anything that that you would suggest that would help fishers like yourself survive a really bad red tide?

Sandy Melvin: You know, I don't know that. It's anything that, for me it's either going to happen or it's not. The issue has to come from the development side of the state. I mean, it's pretty obvious to me that, that not having proper septic systems, or not having proper water treatment facilities. Because when, you know, the Gulf is not as big as it used to be. Let's put it that way.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: You know, used to be big enough to where when the Mississippi flooded all that farmland up north and all the water come down the Mississippi [00:44:00] and you know, used to be a fraction of the water came from Okeechobee to the west, now comes to the west, and it's bringing all that phosphate and fertilizer runoff and that sort of thing. And the Gulf is it can flush itself pretty well. But it can't, it's just there's times where hits overload and we saw an overload in 2018. So, long term solution is going to have to be getting on some kind of water quality or water or treatment plants and making sure that we just do a better job of you know, fertilizing and controlling the phosphates in the water. That's bottom line is you can't, red tide won't grow without the field to go.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: You know you pour gasoline on a fire it's going to go. There's going to always be enough in the water where you're going to have red tide runs but it's to have what we had this past year, you know, you just we just threw fuel on the fire is what we did.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Sandy Melvin: And I think that that tropical depression last year will keep it off. Okay.

Interviewer: Is there anything else that you wanted to add or any, Sky, did you have any questions?

Sky: No. I think [indiscernible] [00:45:09].

Sandy Melvin: No, I guess that's pretty much it. Just hope we don't say it again for a while, you know it was one of those things.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, we have a consent form. If it's alright with you. Please share this information in the interview with people online.

Sandy Melvin: Absolutely....