

Amanda: Okay. This is June 7th and we are in Sarasota I am Amanda Stults [*phonetics 00:00:05*].

Carla: Carla Gore.

Amanda: And we're with?

Kelly Kurtz: Kelly Kurtz.

Amanda: Okay Kelly Kurtz, so I want to ask you first to describe a little bit about how long you've in the Sarasota area and then about your charter fishing business?

Kelly Kurtz: Okay. Well, I was born and raised here, in 68 and I've been doing this for 10 years now.

Amanda: So, do you fish mostly inshore, offshore?

Kelly Kurtz: Mostly inshore a little bit of both really it just varies.

Amanda: How far offshore?

Kelly Kurtz: Up to nine months.

Amanda: And what kind of species do you target?

Kelly Kurtz: Well, inshore I target mangrove snapper, trout, pompanos, snook, you know, your basic species the occasional flounder you get.

Carla: So I want to talk about red tide from a historical perspective, so starting with the first red tide that you remember experiencing in this area and then I want to ask ton of questions about it what it looks like, what happened everything and then move on to the next red tide and then the next one after that?

Kelly Kurtz: Okay. Well, I was gone for about 20 -- 20 years. The first one I remember is 2004 I wasn't working on the water, but I remember you know, the smell on the dead fish floating up. I was fishing at the time, I just wasn't working on the water.

Carla: Okay. So, let's talk about 2004? How long did it last?

Kelly Kurtz: You know, I am not really sure because I wasn't working on the water. It's much different now last year was much different. I just remember some of my friends, my neighbors were parasailing so it really severely curtailed their business on animal rear in 2004. Other than that, I was fishing in Tampa Bay and it really didn't hit up there too bad at that point in 2004.

Carla: So you're mostly fishing up in Tampa Bay during that time?

Kelly Kurtz: At that time, yes. [00:02:00] At that time, I was travelling and you know, John boat in in 25 force power.

Amanda: And it was just sort of for fun like recreational fishing --

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, yeah, oh yeah.

Amanda: Okay, so -- so were you impacted at all by the 2004 red tide?

Kelly Kurtz: Knocked in.

Amanda: And you weren't really in this area of it?

Kelly Kurtz: No.

Amanda: Okay.

Kelly Kurtz: I wasn't fishing much in 2004 in Sarasota Bay I was Bishops Harbor, Miguel Bay up Terra Ceia places like that. I would travel there. So it really didn't affect me too much.

Amanda: And then what about after that, what's the next major event of red tide?

Kelly Kurtz: It was -- it was last year. It was --

Amanda: Last year?

Kelly Kurtz: I think it was August the second week in August that I was fishing in Sarasota Bay and it basically swept into the bay. We had it had stayed away it had stayed south and all of a sudden I think we got a -- we either had a -- a full or a new moon and we really had a real south wind and on the incomer and it came and then it was over and it was done fishing was done up until. I was here till Christmas there were -- it was spots of it still December you know, Christmas it kind of cleared up because the water temperatures cooled down a little bit and we were able to somewhat successful, but we just didn't realize how many fish we lost. I mean we have lost and perhaps there is nothing after the catch. There is a few snook, there is a few mangs that are coming back there is a zero trail. The pinfish just because of diversified trip if somebody wants and eat out [indiscernible] [00:03:42] mangrove snapper because that's a prolific species and they're easy to catch and a good table fare and we threw you know, take a nice elevens and twelves and then I would go over and maybe trout fish and go out of some grass flats and -- and I have fished [00:04:00] one of my favorite spots which is a Yacht Club and I could catch everything there and I mean tarpon --

juvenile tarpon, snook, pompano, flounder all the mangroves you would, all the juvenile gag groupers you can name it. I fish there, I fished there yesterday a lot by water. I could sit there for three hours and catch all the fish you wanted, there is nothing there.

Carla: Where -- where is the Yacht Club is that the one off Lido?

Kelly Kurtz: It is yesterday it was yep.

Carla: We own a kayak paddle boat business running nearby --

Kelly Kurtz: Okay. So you're the one running around the islands?

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Got you.

Carla: We see lot over there, but yeah I know the area.

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah, I would get right up next to that and I could sit two hours and catch you know, we catch 20 and 30 snapper and we threw them and only keep you know, somebody needs one or two fish for personal didn't hear anything and then --

Amanda: So that --

Kelly Kurtz: Go ahead.

Amanda: so that area, now you're -- are you catching stuff there, no?

Kelly Kurtz: Nothing. I fished there eight times. I fished it yesterday not a bite one and I am telling you I was catching tarpon everyday this long, snook you name it, it's gone. And I could go out on the grass flats and I could take a shrimp and I could in the spring time I could catch 15 to 20 trout, 16 to 19 inches really nice healthy fish last year and maybe keep one for person and release the rest safely and I fished the same spots many times just try just to see and you can put a shrimp on a core cutter and nothing touches it. There is no pinfish out there that would eat the legs off of it. Now the pinfish that were not existed are about that big now.

Amanda: Just like a couple of inches?

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah, instead of being like this.

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: And then having a plenty of trout there, mangrove snapper there as well, [00:06:00] but yeah it's kind of dead areas of dead zones new cast used to be extremely productive. I could go in there and catch snook and mangroves and Spanish mackerel and since a dredge new pass all that silty water it kind of mess that fish rear somewhat. There is a few fish big passes got some fish in it, but not very many because I am telling you I could -- I could burn through eight or ten dozen shrimp and in an hour and a half two hours fishing. As soon as it gets down there I think I've got shrimp you know, I mean three and four fish at a time boom, boom, boom and it's not like that now.

Amanda: So I want to try to map out the areas that you saw red tide or fish kills --

Kelly Kurtz: Sure.

Amanda: in the past year. So, I'm going to get this to you and then, just anywhere that you -
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Kelly Kurtz: Okay. This is Sarasota that's big pass that's new pass --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Okay. Well, I've seen this whole area this is -- this is where the Yacht Club is right here. This was all you know, when it came in, it came in right here and of course nobody could breathe and then my father and I off whoever were several captains a couple of days later in an airplane and all we saw was solid lines of dead fish flowing out, it was insane and then the whole bay. I wish I would have saved the pictures, I took so many pictures on my phone. The whole bay was modeled and discolored. It was all the way out in here different colors brown, red, all the way to Tampa we flew south to Venice. There is just dead fish everywhere.

Amanda: So let's like go ahead and circle that whole area from your experience what you saw?

Kelly Kurtz: Okay. All right. And I was seeing it okay there is Stickney [00:08:00] this all this area back in here. I mean I don't know I didn't really fish much of there, but see here is what happened. Once it swiped in the bay nobody could stay and be on the water you couldn't breathe anymore, so it shut us all down to Christmas really. But I can tell you what I saw this whole in June it was starting to come and I would drive -- I would drive five miles out and it was five miles out and then pretty soon it was seven miles out and then pretty soon it was nine miles out. And then I came back to fish in the bay and second week in August that's when it came in and then everything was over. So that's kind of your area that that I've seen oh, I've also recreationally on a bigger boat going out of Venice Pass this was all of the surface [indiscernible] [00:08:52] this was all just floating snook jacks you name it everything.

Carla: And when was that like do you remember which month of 2018?

Kelly Kurtz: That would have been September yeah, yeah. And you name it, it. It was just a dead zone rotten dead fish I mean everywhere. There was thousands of fish to see it from the aero you saw the silver shine or white --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: riding corpses and the whole bay you could look down and then even into September we rode offshore out of the north Sarasota and there was dead fish all along in here. And this was late September and the water color was discolored and of course we were 30-40 miles offshore to -- to catch fish, so that's about it. I mean it's -- it's going to take some years to recover.

Carla: Yeah. So when it first started, did you notice -- notice it because fish colors or water coloration or --

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, we could -- we could smell when you had a west wind okay --

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: so our water was clean and then [00:10:00] as I said I was sitting right here when it came in and it was thousands of dead fish and complete discolored water like a very clean water and a red water and then it just went when it was over sort of.

Carla: And what type of species what fish did it kill?

Kelly Kurtz: Snook I saw snook, I saw pinfish, pompano, I saw silver trout, I saw flounder, I saw red with speckled sea trout, I saw redfish, I saw tarpon, you name it.

Carla: Was there -- are there any species that aren't as affected by it or can --

Kelly Kurtz: I have no idea really. I don't know I don't I mean. It's hard to say.

Carla: What about -- sorry go ahead.

Kelly Kurtz: No, no go ahead?

Carla: What about turtles or marine mammals or any other species?

Kelly Kurtz: You know, what once it happened I -- once it did happen you know, of course we weren't on the water anymore we just gave up and you couldn't stay and be on the key you couldn't stay and be at the marina. I know they suffer they had to anything that's right

there you know, with a blow or -- or you know, manatees cover right up and open up their nostrils and turtles as well they are all in it, so I'd say everything suffered.

Amanda: Where there any do you think it changed any fish distribution or spawning habits or --

Kelly Kurtz: They would have had to --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah it would have had to because I can tell you from my own personal I could fish okay so we leave Stickney leave Stickney and I could catch all the fish I wanted in Big Bass I could catch all the fish I wanted here. I could fish the grass flats right there, I could fish the grass flats up here and here and you know, I had 15 or 20 different spots that would catch a good amount of fish and they're not there. I'm fishing everywhere that tried here, tried there [00:12:00] and there is a few fish there.

Amanda: So you're moving around a lot?

Kelly Kurtz: I have to yeah, you always find newer spots, but it's just very disappointing like I said I would buy eight to ten dozen shrimp per trip and I was bringing back six, seven dozen each trip why because I couldn't find anything to bite the hook.

Carla: Were you still going out on trips?

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, yeah, oh yeah.

Carla: People are still calling and willing to go?

Kelly Kurtz: Sure. Yeah. Now January and February there was there was some mangs back in the back that for some reason the red tide kind of put right there you know, and there was all kinds of snapper let's see where at Stickney right in here.

Carla: So, let's circle that one and we'll use a different color for area the area that was clear that you could fish in?

Kelly Kurtz: This was Christmas.

Carla: Okay.

Kelly Kurtz: It wasn't clear it wasn't clear at all in September it was black water right okay so once it cleared out it was fine. Somehow these fish I don't know where they went or where they stayed because they weren't some of them weren't small fish.

Amanda: Right.

Kelly Kurtz: That was Christmas, but other than that, I mean it's -- it's tough. The problem was --

Carla: What could you catch here?

Kelly Kurtz: That was snapper -- mangrove snapper the problem was every other charter captain that was coming from new pass everybody was down here.

Amanda: They heard the -- weren't fish were down there?

Kelly Kurtz: Sure.

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah absolutely. And pretty soon they'd beat up and most of this most of them are small. Now they're growing they're getting to be some different sized ones they're just not everywhere like they used to be you know, so --

Amanda: So how did this past red tide how did this affect your business?

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, it shut it down. I guarantee you, I lost thousands of dollars for sure [00:14:00]. Probably 10000 easily.

Amanda: So, did you work during that time between the --

Kelly Kurtz: I did a little. I helped some friends that were some handy man work painting and little bit of construction, but you know, it's pretty disappointing really. And then Christmas came we went back to work and you know, the water had cleared up, you could breathe but it was -- it was really disturbing because there just wasn't anything to work with.

Carla: Why do you think this one area that you could fish here?

Kelly Kurtz: I have no idea. I really don't -- it's rocky it's 12 -- it's 12 foot deep in there and there is a rocky ledge and the fish were just right on the edge of the ledge you know.

Amanda: And then since you, you know, you've been Sarasota since 68, were there any other red tide --

Kelly Kurtz: I just don't remember it as a child --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: my dad remembers some in the 50s, but you know, I don't know.

Amanda: Nothing like last year?

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, no. Even 2004 wasn't anything like this last year it's just -- just catastrophic.

Amanda: Do you remember if 2004 if they environment took as long to recover --

Kelly Kurtz: No.

Amanda: after?

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, no. We had -- we had fish. No like remember the freeze of 2010 --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: that was catastrophic too and it took several years to recover, but it didn't wipe everything out. It didn't wipe the pinfish out you know, we had a lot more to work with.

Amanda: Are there any clues or indicators before a red tide or anyway that you can know it's coming?

Kelly Kurtz: No. I mean we just knew it was coming because see it started south and it started early. We were lucky to get June and July and for our work schedule and it just kept moving you know, and then pretty soon it wasn't bad I said oh no you know, it's out there and I was driving through it and I was actually coughing and I had some respiratory issues because [00:16:00] I was working through it all the time.

[off mike conversation]

Kelly Kurtz: But yeah I did have some respiratory -- because I was driving through everyday and I was driving through dead fish rotting fish and I developed a cough you know --

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: eventually it went away, but once you got off the water, but --

Amanda: So it wasn't anything that like stayed with you like -

Kelly Kurtz: About a month.

Amanda: That you had a cough for a month?

Kelly Kurtz: Yes, yeah. Because you know, we were exposed to it all the time. You could smell it --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: We were breathing it you know, everyday.

Amanda: What are some of the things like if you wanted to stay on the water during the red tide, like are there -- is there anyway to stay in the fishery or you have to change --

Kelly Kurtz: I am not going to do it.

Amanda: industries?

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah, I would have it absolutely.

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: I am not going to I mean it's -- it's disappointing these people are used to what I used to do and then when I tell them what happened most of them understand but I am telling and I can fish everyday you know.

Amanda: And then when do you think this area I mean you talked a little bit about which fish are back and which ones aren't how long do you think before it's completely back to normal that it's completely --

Kelly Kurtz: You know, what I wish I knew how fast fish grew right now there is a ton of bait in the water really good looking bait, so whatever is here has a lot of food to eat and the mangroves are real fat and their bellies are fat and there's some nice because they're gorging on these -- these bait fish. The snook seemed to be most of the snook I am catching are small like 16 to 18 to 20 inches not the -- the big ones. I don't know. I mean we need some seed somebody needs to grow some trout, grow some redfish, grow some snook, I hope most of them are doing their part. [00:18:00]

Carla: Do you feel like trout was the hardest hit?

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah. Sure, but they're just not there --

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: and I am telling you I could catch 20 of them with ease and release you know, keep one for person to save the species --

Carla: Right. Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: So they would breed because spring time they breed and mother nature just wiped about. I've seen pictures of guys with little trout like that big I saw it I mean that's nothing you know, I don't -- I don't keep 15 instead I have 16.

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: You know, and nothing over 20.

Amanda: What do you think causes red tide?

Kelly Kurtz: I have no idea. I would say maybe some runoff from Okeechobee I mean that's just a uneducated guess. I would take you a sugar with what they're doing down there. That's probably what all started when they dumped the lake, so I know it's a natural organism, but I think all the sewage that you're flushing everywhere you can smell it where was I -- I could smell sewage. Oh, I was up at the Yacht Club I could smell it. I said, you smell that at the Yacht Club [*indiscernible*] [00:19:13] that's sewage.

Carla: Are there -- do you have suggestions for management changes or something that can be done to health of fishermen during red tide or -- or maybe prevent a red tide or anything like that?

Kelly Kurtz: Well, we banned fertilizers on the rainy months of the year. They need to get a handle on all of their -- their sewage discharge because they are -- they are dumping there is no doubt they're dumping. That doesn't help our water quality issues. Something needs to be done about the -- the fertilizers and the pesticides and the runoff. I mean let's face it, this places ever -- ever to go up you know, you figure every condo with [00:20:00] every toilet flushing during spring break. These 1970 systems cannot -- they can't handle, so they panic when they get a storm and then they dump it. And they're allowed to dump a certain amount probably 100 thousand gallons St. Pete does it, Clearwater, Tampa, Longboat, Lido, Siesta.

Amanda: Do you have any suggestions for ways to make monitoring or forecasting of red tides better in some way in which that could be changed?

Kelly Kurtz: I have no idea I am not a scientist you know.

Carla: Well, what are things that you look for like if you're thinking when you start to feel like red tide might be coming are you looking, are you hearing from other fishermen or you --

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, yeah, yeah --

Carla: people are offshore and they can see it out there that way?

Kelly Kurtz: or people that see it or smell it. I heard there were some down a little bit off of Fort Myers maybe it was missed information I don't know. You know, but they did dump a little bit off the lake --

Carla: They did?

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah, they did. You know, if we get another one this year it's going to be devastating.

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Because you have no idea how many fish I used to catch. Maybe that easy --

Amanda: Do you think -- do you think it was you know, if we had another one next year, what will that do to the environment?

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, boy! It can't sustain it you know, the water is clean and clear right now. It's beautiful which still have any fish there.

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Where there was many different species offshore you picture you want to see what I am seeing you know, like this. I just had to take pictures of this. And check out that. You know, what that is?

Amanda: No.

Kelly Kurtz: That's a sea bass.

Amanda: Wow, wow!

Kelly Kurtz: Look how tiny.

Carla: And it's so tiny.

Amanda: So little.

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, yeah.

Carla: I thought a snook that has that line.

Kelly Kurtz: No, that's -- that's a sea bass and they only get about 10 12 minutes. Just check this out. [00:22:00] you know what is? That's a mangrove snapper --

Carla: Snapper, yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: And he ate a bait bigger than he was. Yeah, that was pretty cool. I caught a goliath.

Amanda: Oh, wow!

Carla: How cool?

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah.

Carla: Kind of little too.

Kelly Kurtz: It was, you know, I should have killed them really that's when it needs to go --

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah, because they are terrible, but others are few snook I mean there are some fish out there, there's -- I've caught some small black drum it's just it just don't have the diversity you know.

Amanda: How would another red tide affect your business?

Kelly Kurtz: It'd probably put us, it would -- I'd have to get another occupation. It doesn't mean I wouldn't go back to fishing, but it would -- it would severely curtail you know, what I would do I would have an income I'd have to something.

Carla: What could you do if you wanted to stay in the fishery what could you do differently?

Kelly Kurtz: I don't know. I might have to purchase a larger boat and work offshore because that's not a fact. It was not affected like you know, I mean look at these this is May --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Okay. So you got snapper, pompano, and sheepshead that's just diversification.

Carla: Right.

Kelly Kurtz: You're not hitting anything else and that's a day before --

Amanda: Yeah.

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: a couple of trout, a couple of mangs, you see what I was able to do is fish 15 different spots and diversify --

Amanda: Right.

Kelly Kurtz: change things up, but I don't know keep your fingers crossed. I just hope that mobile will grow some trout I mean grow them up to be about that big and start releasing them and keep the -- keep the seasons closed for three years, two three years at least you know and let them repopulate because boy it was easy it was thick last year. In the last five years 10 years of fishing it's just been phenomenal. It's been awesome, so --

Amanda: So what about any other environmental changes or other types of algae or anything [00:24:00] else you experienced in this area?

Kelly Kurtz: I just I couldn't tell you really you know, I am not a scientist.

Carla: Well, I mean it's just you know, green algae's are differences and seagrass are anything like that?

Kelly Kurtz: You know, what during that time period there were differences in seagrass that I did see.

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: You know and just a bay I wish I would get the pictures because it was theirs there was green, brown and red and I can show you a video of what the water look like if you're interested.

Carla: Yeah.

Amanda: When you're saying green, brown and red that's the water color or --

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah, when we're flying in the airplane you could see different patches of it.

Amanda: Okay. Oh, right ,right. Oh, yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Let's see when was this? This was September and it's right at the marina right out here at Stickney Bridge and you can see the color of water and a bull shark swam up to the pier.

Carla: Oh, wow!

Kelly Kurtz: See that water is black almost.

Amanda: Yeah, it's really dark.

Kelly Kurtz: And for some reason there is a bull shark in there probably eating dead fish.

Amanda: Oh, wow! Where was this?

Kelly Kurtz: At the marina right here.

Amanda: At the marina.

Kelly Kurtz: And so see the color of the water?

Amanda: Yeah. It's dark.

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: So, it was worth. I think the shark that's a big shark and to be in there that's odd. It's very odd, so he must have been chewing on all the dead rotten fish, yeah.

Amanda: I think we covered a lot. And especially about this last one, is there anything else that you wanted to add --

Kelly Kurtz: No, other than you know, let's hope our politicians will figure out or the scientists how to stop this and not allow to happen like it did because we can't afford it, I can't afford it you know.

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: I am sure you can't afford it.

Carla: No, that's a big hard --

Kelly Kurtz: Yeah, yeah. It's terrible you know, [00:26:00] but I hope like I said MOT start growing some fish. They were doing it about 2001, 2002, 2003 at Port Manatee they were releasing redbfish and snook.

Amanda: Did they stop doing it or --

Kelly Kurtz: They stopped doing it. Some -- there was section in 2008 --

Carla: Okay.

Kelly Kurtz: because I can remember throwing a cast net and catching little snook and little reds that big --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: and then you know, I don't -- I don't keep redfish anyways I don't like to kill them. I don't allow my customers to kill them if possible, but yeah there was lots of --

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: it's kind of hard to kind of hard to find a redfish now. I mean there a few around, but not like they're -- not like it was.

Amanda: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Cool.

Amanda: Do you have any more questions Carla?

Carla: I think we covered everything I am trying to think if there is something.

Amanda: Okay. That's it for --

Carla: When -- when you were saying about going offshore, like is a way to come back like you know, continue fishing would that mean getting federal permits and fishing really far offshore?

Kelly Kurtz: You'd have to --

Carla: And that's a huge expense?

Kelly Kurtz: Because there is yes it is --

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: I'll figure the boat and then the 15 to 20 thousand dollar permit there is a little bit of fishing here, but they are all small you know.

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Winter time you can -- you can hit up fish pretty well --

Amanda: Right.

Kelly Kurtz: Five to seven miles or even coming out of spring, but the warmer the waters gets the further out they go, so --

Carla: And nine miles is still pretty warm like in the summer?

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, yeah.

Carla: Yeah.

Kelly Kurtz: Oh, yeah. Those fishermen.

Carla: Yeah.

Amanda: Okay.

Kelly Kurtz: Cool.

Amanda: Yeah, thank you for your time today.

Kelly Kurtz: Thank you.

Amanda: And then I have a –

[cross talk]

Amanda: I have a form for you to sign too, so just your name up on the top and then a signature at the bottom.