

[Off the Record Conversation] [00:00:01 - 00:00:18]

Interviewer-1: Okay. So we're in Sarasota on Longboat Key with Jonnie Walker and this is Amanda Schultz and Carla and it is the 6th of June. So Jonnie if you could – I know we just talked, but if you could explain a little bit about your business and the charter industry, how long you've been in this area and everything

Jonnie Walker: All right. I've been chartering in the Sarasota base since 1974. I lived here since 1957. My parents had a bait shop on the Venice Jetty's in the 60s and 70s. And they're still working now at the Right Bay of '72, so still guiding and working mainly in Sarasota Bay and now the Gulf of *[indiscernible]* [00:01:08].

Interviewer-1: What type of – what species do you target, what's your main...

Jonnie Walker: Any species. I mean we – I was like help people who go after the fish to baiting. So I mean in the bay it's mostly trout red fish, but no flounder in the Gulf, its mackerel king fish, cobia, grouper, mangrove snapper fish and stuff like that.

Interviewer-1: So how often – do you fish more in the bay or in the gulf?

Jonnie Walker: It's probably 50/50. It varies. We've got some really good artificial reefs close to Sarasota side fish, a lot of those artificial reefs are very productive during certain times of the year, so.

Interviewer-1: And what makes the decision whether you fish in the bay or the gulf? Is that a client decision or is that...

Jonnie Walker: No, I mean most of the time they leave it up [00:02:00] to me, but it's usually seasonal. You know what's baiting at that time of the year and what's running the best.

Interviewer-1: Okay. So I want to talk about red tide overtime starting with the first one you remember and then just moving forward from there and talking about everything you remember about it from what it looks like, if there were fish kills or any other descriptive information?

Jonnie Walker: Right. Well, the first one I remember would have to be like in – it had to be in '57 or '58 when we first moved here, it was a pretty bad one. And that was our first time – we were from the water, we're from Long Island originally our family. So we're used to the water and everything. But this is the first time we had ever heard of anything like a red tide. And it was – we're very interested and want to know more about it and everything and tried to – my father was at the time just starting to get into the bait at the sea – he was running a commercial bay shrimper which catches shrimp on the bay and it almost put him out of business that year. So we want to learn as much as we could about it, so – but there was no science out there for it in those days.

Interviewer-1: What did you know like what did it look like? How did you know it was a red tide?

Jonnie Walker: Well, we don't know if we saw – because at that point in our lives, I don't think we even had a boat. We fish from the shore and everything. And it wasn't somebody seeing a red tide, but we saw a lot of dead fish, I mean *[indiscernible]* *[00:03:37]* of dead fish floating in against the beach and stuff like that, but never saw the water until like I was older and got a boat and got out in the water and saw red tides.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. Do you remember what kind of fish that you saw killed at that time?

Jonnie Walker: Look, I tell people that I – people will say when red tide start, *[00:04:00]* it's just killing catfish and cowfish and stuff like cat. You know those are the fishes that the pelicans and birds can't eat. So those are the ones you see wash up on the beach primarily are catfish and cowfish, the stuff like stingrays, things like that that the pelicans and the seagulls and stuff don't eat, because when they're dying, especially if they're spinning and stuff, pelicans will eat them readily. I mean so homarus and seagulls and everything else. So a lot of the smaller fishes are getting eat up right away. So the fish you see and a lot of fish that they see now are your bigger fish too like goliath grouper fish and stuff like that, because there is nothing out there that can eat those.

Interviewer-1: So your parents were running shrimp bait shop at the time?

Jonnie Walker: Well, no, in the early 50s my dad worked on a shrimp bait for another fellow and then in the early 60s, like '63 or '64 my parents bought a bait shop on the Venice Jetty's. And they ran that until 1972.

Interviewer-1: Do you remember what – how the bait shop, how that was affected by red tide?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. We had a really bad one in the – it was either '70 or '71 that really affected my parents business. I mean it does put them out of business and then primarily that's why they got rid of the business because of that end they were starting to develop that piece of land that they were on too. So they had to move.

Interviewer-1: Where was it? And if you could draw just...

Jonnie Walker: It was on the South Venice Jetty's. A few more and it will be better. It was on the South Venice Jetty's which are – is right here. If you do it, my hand shakes so bad.

Interviewer-1: Okay. Well just show me as I put...

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. Right on the point of that south point right there, yeah, that's right.

Interviewer-1: And then where was the [00:06:00] – this is the area where you saw the red tide?

Jonnie Walker: Yes. And we had friends that had boats at the time and went offshore and that was a year that there was a lot of grouper – it really affected the offshore fishing, a lot of grouper were floating out there in the gulf were dead.

Interviewer-1: Was this the same area back in '57 and '58 that you saw?

Jonnie Walker: No, '57, '58 we would come to Midnight Pass which is not here anymore which is right here, right there, it's been that – yeah. We lived on Phillippi Creek which is right here which wasn't affected, because there was not fresh water coming up. But there used to be a pass right here, it was called Midnight Pass and we would go down there and go fishing a lot from the beach and this is where saw a lot of the dead fish.

Interviewer-1: Okay.

Interviewer-2: So the red tide in the 70s, was it a lot of dead fish washing up as well or was it like just colored water?

Jonnie Walker: It's very hard to tell there in Venice, because there is so much fresh water coming out of that. I was telling here earlier that it's – there is a whole bunch of escollars come out right here, the whole bunch of creeks and rivers and stuff, they come out. Venice doesn't have a big bay to speak up. So all those fresh water kept the red tide from coming in. And this is the reason that we theorized that a lot of snoek lived through the red tide, because they grew up in the fresh water and they know how to go up the creeks and rivers and stuff like that to get away from the red tide. I don't know if they know it, but this just happens. They're up in there when the red tide is here or something that doesn't affect them, because the fresh water coming out all the time will keep the red tide from going up there.

Interviewer-1: For this one on '57, '58 where you saw dead fish on the beach, do you know how long it lasted?

Jonnie Walker: No. I have no clue [00:08:00], because I mean it was – we went fishing a couple of times or went to go fishing, there is dead fish all over the place, I was 12 years old, 13 years old, so I was...

Interviewer-1: What about the one in the early 70s?

Jonnie Walker: I was out of town at the time. I was actually – yeah, out of town for about six months. And I remember my parents writing me a letter and telling me that it's really bad and...

Interviewer-1: Okay, but the bait shop was here?

Jonnie Walker: Right.

Interviewer-1: And it was that enough that it really drastically affected their business?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. I mean it killed their business for a while. And it's like anything else, like we were very lucky this last red tide that the predominant wind was coming out of the east and they kept most of the fish off the beaches. It was only a couple of instances where there was a week of bad fish on the beach, otherwise it would have been – if the wind would have been blowing out of the west the whole time we would have had dead fish on the beach all the time, because they were dying for months. We would have a surge come into the bay and it would kill a bunch of fish or storage in the gulf and most of the charter boats I talked to that go away offshore said that limit of it was about 20 miles.

Interviewer-1: Is this where...

Jonnie Walker: For the red tide.

Interviewer-1: For which one?

Jonnie Walker: That was the last year. I was here when it happened.

Interviewer-1: For last year, okay. I want to say – I want to – definitely want to talk about last year for sure.

Jonnie Walker: Right. But you want to talk about these earlier ones first?

Interviewer-1: Yeah. I want to keep it...

Jonnie Walker: See, I don't have the knowledge of that, because we didn't have the boats to go offshore. We didn't have a boat at that time or I didn't have a boat.

Interviewer-1: Did they have any options? Did your parents have any other like...

Jonnie Walker: Sold a lot of beer, yeah. But I mean in home, and like what happens when the red tide comes, the wind is blowing the wrong way, people aren't going to come to the beach because it stinks and you cough and choke. So they would not even come out to have beer, because we had sandwiches [00:10:00] and beer, we did boiled shrimp and we did all kinds of stuff out there and we have the client tell like that. But the primary business was bait and tackle.

Interviewer-1: Did they tell you how long this one lasted or do you remember?

Jonnie Walker: I can call my mom and find out.

Interviewer-1: Well...

Jonnie Walker: She'll tell me exact date, she'll tell me. She's got a memory a lot better than mine.

Interviewer-2: Is she still in Venice?

Jonnie Walker: No, she lives right behind me, so she is...

Interviewer-1: She is in Sarasota?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah.

**[PHONE CONVERSATION STARTS]**

Jonnie Walker: Hey, how are you? You are. I got some questions for you. I'm talking to some girls that or scientists that are doing studies about red tide and we were talking about the bad red tide that you had on the Venice Jetty's and what year that was? 1971 and how long did it last do you remember?

Female Speaker: From May.

Jonnie Walker: From May and September, okay. See, I told you girls. She is – she would know exactly what date it was and everything else.

Interviewer-1: Ended in September?

Jonnie Walker: Did we have another one too that – I kind of remember another one during that time we had the bait shop.

Female Speaker: *[Inaudible]* [00:11:44].

Jonnie Walker: Okay. But that was the one you remember?

Female Speaker: *[Inaudible]* [00:11:51].

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. And when we first moved here, I was telling – I remember when we moved here in *[indiscernible]* [00:11:56] '57, '58 they had a [00:12:00] bad one and it was on – because I remember going out or I passed or something and it was dead fish all over the place. Do you remember that? And it had to be when we're in that – yeah, we're in the trailer park then – that one.

Female Speaker: *[Inaudible]* [00:12:21].

Jonnie Walker: Right, yeah. That was the cannery – the coal mine they call it.

Interviewer-1: Do you remember what year?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah, '71. Okay, well, thank you. That's good and that's really good, thank you. All right mom, have a good day. See you, bye.

**[PHONE CONVERSATION ENDED]**

Jonnie Walker: I told you.

Interviewer-1: Yeah, I know.

Jonnie Walker: The call ended up, but she's got exact dates and months.

Interviewer-1: Yeah, I know. I might want to give her a call actually.

Jonnie Walker: But she would love it. She would talk to you and I...

Interviewer-1: Okay. I want to get her number too. I want to give her a call.

Jonnie Walker: One second. Her name is *Veera Walker [phonetic]* [00:13:18] and her number is 941-921-7205.

Interviewer-1: 921-72...

Jonnie Walker: 7205.

Interviewer-1: Okay. Right now, I just spent mostly talking to fishermen, but once we expanded – because I think we're going to start talking to some other folks too like people who're on the bay shop and the area and stuff like that.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah, especially in the 1960s and 70s.

Interviewer-1: Yeah.

Jonnie Walker: Not too many people around [00:14:00].

Interviewer-1: So I want to ask you what is the next red tide that you remember actually...

Jonnie Walker: Affecting me, yeah.

Interviewer-1: Yeah, that you saw in this area.

Jonnie Walker: Because you know there was a time I worked for the phone company for almost eight and a half, nine years, something like that. I was in another town doing stuff all over the United States. So I wasn't affected by the red tide. And the next red tide that

I remember had to be in the 80s. We had a really, really bad red tide and it was as bad or almost as bad as this one we just had. And I remember going up to North Sarasota Bay and seeing just stingrays, just this – covered the bottom. I mean just dead stingrays and stuff there were.

Interviewer-1: Let's talk about...

Jonnie Walker: And that was the – that will be at the Longbar which is right here. There is a shallow area that goes out of the bay. They call it Longbar and this is all grass slides up in here and this is very key, it's right here, right?

Interviewer-1: Well, it's like the *[inaudible]* [00:15:20] segue down there. So this is like really *[overlapping conversation]* [00:15:24].

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. This is almost a great thing.

Interviewer-1: Like by Robinson Preserve that area?

Jonnie Walker: No, this is *Sister Key* *[phonetic]* [00:15:30] is right here, right? I can't see it.

Interviewer-2: Sister Key, yeah.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah, okay. There is a big grass slide that comes all the way down here with this Longbar right here. Now the rest of the bay is pretty much with grass, it's deep except for the edges. There is one area grass off here. You should have a chart with grass on it there, but that – I just remember that [00:16:00] being so bad that I thought guys – and that was year – it killed all the welts and *[indiscernible]* [00:16:05], it killed all the clams and that whole area up there was so nasty for months afterwards because of the clams that had died down below and just kept on robbing. When you drop there, you can see little oil droplets come to the surface and just its stonked up for the longest time.

Interviewer-1: Would you say this area?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. It was the whole bay. It was not another one of those whole bay areas, but I just remember that part of the bay being so bad.

Interviewer-2: Do you remember like which months that was – had hit?

Jonnie Walker: I can't remember. There was one that was a February one that was really bad. It started in February which is – usually you'll think of the red tides coming in September or August, September that time of the year and I don't remember if that was the one that was in...

Interviewer-2: In the 80s?

Jonnie Walker: In February or not. But there was one that – but it didn't last long. This is really an intense one, but it didn't last very long. It was maybe a couple of weeks or month at the most, but it was done, it was over with and stuff started coming back really quick. So it didn't kill everything in the bay, so they filled up – there was fish that filled the baits real quickly. This one has been just so devastating because it was so long and so bad this last one – I keep on going by. I know you don't want to talk about that, right?

Interviewer-1: No, I know and it's hard, but I – for this 80s one, you said it was the whole bay?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. It affected at times the whole bay, but it was – just did not last that long.

Interviewer-1: And was it – are there any areas of the bay that like weren't affected or that were...

Jonnie Walker: Usually [00:18:00] it doesn't affect from this bridge south, because it's very, very restricted. You've got Phillippi Creek coming in here with the pumps...

Interviewer-1: Over here?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. From this bridge right here, that's what you call the North Bridge and this is the South Bridge right here. I can't find it. Where is the South Bridge? South Bridge, right there, that's the South Bridge.

Interviewer-1: So there won't be red tide on this area?

Jonnie Walker: There wouldn't because you have Phillippi Creek dumping tons of water out – fresh water all the time and keeping this part of the bay. And even when we had this last red tide, it took a long time for it to get back down to there. And now on an incoming tide, it would start to get in there and then it would come out. You'd see a fish dying and stuff from [indiscernible] [00:18:50] and you'd go down to the next and you could catch fish. And that's what helps a bay. If you've got good rivers and creeks coming into it and that's what helped Tampa Bay which was so much. You've got the Hillsborough River, you got the Manatee River really helped, because the guides – most of the guides that are doing in-shore fishing are running all the way up to the Manatee River to fish now, because they can catch drought and red fish and snoek up there still, because the river – I think the river kept that part of the bay clean and the fish ran up the river too.

Interviewer-1: So in the 80s for that one and do you remember if it was like early 80s or mid 80s or...

Jonnie Walker: No.

Interviewer-1: But this area was clean the whole time, you can always fish down here?



Jonnie Walker: Right.

Interviewer-1: Yeah?

Jonnie Walker: Yep.

Interviewer-1: And then in other areas, this area is usually clean, but...

Jonnie Walker: Yes. And that – usually, and then like I said this last one where we had this year – this last year was the one that – because we’ve got too much flow coming in, especially here in Sarasota [00:20:00] because you’ve got big pass and new pass right here close together. So you – if there is any red tide that’s going to come in and the same with *Lambo Pass* [phonetic] [00:20:09] which is right here. Yeah, so – no, that’s [inaudible] [00:20:15], I’m sorry. It’s hard to see. Here is Lambo Pass right there, yeah. So yeah, if you’ve got all these passes, it’s going to have all those red tide pushing in here.

Interviewer-1: Do you remember in the 80s if the red tide was also out here as well or not?

Jonnie Walker: Yes, it was.

Interviewer-1: Do you remember how far it went out or...

Jonnie Walker: I can remember it’s not quite – because that year we had a bunch of – no, it was another one in the 90s. Then we had that one in ‘98 was another real bourbon I think was ‘98, ‘99, something like that.

Interviewer-2: I was not here then.

Jonnie Walker: But then we had another one in ‘08 or ‘09. We had that one – that was the last one we had before we had this big one.

Interviewer-1: Okay. So we’ll talk about those next. But in the 80s?

Jonnie Walker: Right. It was – got as bad offshore. I can remember they were still fishing offshore, so most of it came into the bay. I wish I had better dates for you.

Interviewer-1: That’s okay.

Jonnie Walker: I’m sure you can look up and see exactly when those dates are. I believe there’s got to be records over somewhere, but – and like we’re talking about, I wish I would have kept – I keep a regular log everyday of what I catch and everything and where I catch it. I wish usually when the red tide starts, I’ll just put red tide and – but anything else, I wish I had – and I will from [00:22:00] now on.

Interviewer-2: Like very bad red tide.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. The day the wind was black...

Interviewer-2: The tide *[overlapping conversation]* [00:22:03]...

Jonnie Walker: And when you got the sea breezes changing, you got – in the morning you got easterly winds in the morning blowing on fish one way in the bay and then you'll have a westerly winds in the afternoon blowing the other way. So you have – I remember during this one which was unusual, I would go fishing and find the fish eating where there was dead fish floating everywhere, because those fish – the dead fish had come up, it takes three days for them to float to the surface once they started to gas up and rock. So – and the wind blowing from somewhere else and bloom over there. So you could go a place and catch fish and people were just – all of the dead fish here and said, yeah, but it doesn't have anything to do with the fish we're catching, because those fish died three days ago.

Interviewer-1: Is there any way for you to tell when a red tide occurs? If – you said kind of this one in the 80s like it was on the bottom and it was killing the clams. Is there a different or a certain way to tell if a red tide has got into the bottom or if it's – and then just on the surface or...

Jonnie Walker: Red tide is probably like any other plankton, it lays on the bottom at night. It settles to the bottom, during the day time it swims up to the surface where the sun comes up to feet, because it likes the sunlight. I mean that's what any plankton, because I mean we have more plankton blooms and just red tide out here. I mean we have huge ras blooms you will see this time of the year. My grandson just experienced one the other day which he had never seen it before. He said all, it's massive brown out there and it looks like that we'll find granules in it almost. And you can see the *phala* *[phonetic]* [00:23:56] and it's actually a grass [00:24:00] bloom from the sea grass. And it will float to the surface. And during that night it will go down and during the – when the sun comes up, it will go up again. So you will see that and people confuse that with red tide. And it smells too. It has a smell to it. But it's a different type of smell, it's more of an organic smell, but...

Interviewer-1: For the red tides 80s, you said it was really intense but it didn't last very long?

Jonnie Walker: It didn't last very long.

Interviewer-1: Do you know how long approximately?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah, probably a month or so. I can't remember if that was the one that was during the summer time. I think it was probably end of the summer time. The one that came in February had to be that one in '98 or something.

Interviewer-1: How does *[indiscernible]* [00:24:48] starts when it's smell whole day like this and back in 80s how did that affect your fishing?

Jonnie Walker: Bad and then you fish mostly during the passes, because pelagic fish, the migrating fish will come up and – after the red tide is gone will start catching the ladyfish and stuff like that which at least keep the customers busy I mean like right now we're catching a lot of mackerel which are migrating which thank goodness, because there is nothing in the bay to catch except gar or snoek and red fish around, but they're getting sort of sore mouth, because everybody is catching the same snoek over and over and over again, because you're releasing them, but I see guys and I watch the other guys and I got into a spot and I'll see a guy pulling out of a spot I was going to go to next and we're just playing leapfrog catching these same fish over and over again, yeah.

Interviewer-1: Does that – how does that affect your business? I mean are you – the people who come...

Jonnie Walker: Most people were understanding and I tell people right straight up. I mean during the – hype of the red tide I tell people nothing, I said go [00:26:00] – I said *[indiscernible]* [00:26:01] where their family is, we got all family does go to this coast and they were so happy. They called me – texted me back and said that was so glad that you told us to go to this coast where we heard it's really bad, I said yeah, it was bad.

Interviewer-2: We had to do the same thing with our battle plan business like no, we don't want to take you out and to *[overlapping conversation]* [00:26:19] to keep that.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. And you worry about the health of people too. I mean since we got *rooster fish* *[phonetic]* [00:26:24] everywhere and I said not nice.

Interviewer-1: Have you ever had to do that before with red tides in the past, have you ever called people and told them not to?

Jonnie Walker: No, the slap was the first time I've ever done that. Other ones, I've always been so chopped up that there is always some place where you could catch fish. So the – probably the '09 one and this last one were the ones where I didn't take people out or people didn't go out even because they knew it was here.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. What – as far as health impacts go, did the health impacts ever keep you from going out in the water or...

Jonnie Walker: It's kept me out of the beach. I have a hobby of metal detecting and it was days to where I went to the beach and I had to turn around and leave. You can't go to the beach, because if it's little rough and the wind is blowing out of the west, it's going to blow that stuff up and you'll be choking. I've had days here where I've come across the beach and you could – you get choked here.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. Like you can get out of the car and then it's just very first – oh no.

Jonnie Walker: There is – when I – you'll be fishing and a boat will go by and he aerates the water and a mess that – and all of a sudden you'll choke them [00:28:00]. So I've had – I have been in the bay, but not so bad in the bay that you had to quit.

Interviewer-1: Do you ever have any knowledge of that a red tide is coming? Like can you ever – are there any clues or indicator?

Jonnie Walker: We all say what we can. When it starts raining in the left, we start worrying, because – and we're hoping that these new fertilizer laws and stuff like that will help that. I know that still up in the air where more scientists now what makes it do what it does, but I think it's a lot to do with too much fertilizer, too much run off. And then they will come back with that history of it and they'll say oh, red tide has been around since the 1700s. The first explorers saw that and everything else. Yeah, but you don't – we've always had especially in the [indiscernible] [00:28:57] hub area you've got the piece where the Myakka River. The Myakka River area which runs all through the phosphate areas and it runs – drains the swabs, all those nutrients come down, go out in the summer times, especially in August, September when it rains a lot. So yeah, I think it does and we're just thinking of it worse and worse, because we're putting more fertilizer and nutrients than ever.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. So I want to move forward and talk about the one in the late 90s, you said it was like around '98.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. And I can't remember a lot about that one. I think that may have been the one that came like in February or something. There was one that came late and everybody said oh well, this will go right away or no, it didn't. It lasted a long, long time, but it wasn't killing a lot of fish. I can remember, my wife and I talking about it just not too long ago that one and it had [00:30:00] lasted a long time, it lasted for months. But it didn't kill everything. It didn't – it wasn't as intense as this last one we had.

Interviewer-1: Do you remember if it was – that the water was colder in February like the water would have been probably colder...

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. It was colder in February. I mean and that was what was so different about it. I don't know what the weather was that year and everything.

Interviewer-1: When you say it lasted for months, how long like over...

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. It was like over six months or something. It was a big, long one.

Interviewer-1: And you said it didn't kill a lot, but what did it kill?

Jonnie Walker: Well, the things like I'll say the catfish first, because the birds aren't eating them, but yeah it killed mostly bottom figures. So it seems to kill bottom figures quicker like mullet, because the mullet was down there in that mud and when those red tides starts to go down to the bottom and they're sucking them up, they're sucking them up, yeah. Fish that are fast and swim foot, but it's very hard to tell. You got some fish with swim bladders and some fish that don't, you know that. A fish that as a swim bladder and he dies, he is going to float to the surface right away, you're going to see him within a day or two. And he is – you'd say all those trout, there is red fish, there is snoek in there, mullet and everything else. But the macro one, the blue fish, blue runners, jacks, pompano, the stuff that don't have a swim bladder, the fish that swim all the time, they just go to the bottom of the dock and they never come up, you never see them up on the beach, but they're dead.

I mean I've seen them – we had a bad freeze here in – god, I don't remember, 80 something, I think I've had a real bad phase and it killed a lot of [00:32:00] snoek, jacks, pompano and stuff like that and the only reason we knew it because it was cold too. The water was real clear in the winter time and you could see them laying on the bottom and I help mote pick up like 50 snoek out of one little tiny lagoon they were laying on the bottom, because they want to pull them all up and check, because they were doing a – they were raising snoek at bed time and putting them into bay and want to – does see if any of them where ones that they had tagged. So they want to get them all up.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. For that late 90s, we'll just call it the '98 red tide, where was that spatially?

Jonnie Walker: It was – like I say it wasn't that bad, but – and it was – it seem to be more up around the Buttonwood area, up in this area which is a very still area, very enclosed area, it's Buttonwood Harbor and everything.

Interviewer-1: This whole thing?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah and...

Interviewer-1: Offshore too like this whole area or just...

Jonnie Walker: No, just in the bait, yeah. But the fish that were dying up there were floating all over the bait and that was the one that I was talking about where I could go a place where there was that fish playing on – floating on the surface, they could still catch fish.

Interviewer-1: Was it still that '98, when was it still also the same area? Was it still the whole bay?

Jonnie Walker: Well, I don't think it did affect the whole bay that.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. You thought mostly here?

Jonnie Walker: Right. And it – and I can remember once or twice there was some fish floated up over by New Pass and stuff like cat, but they could have come from anywhere in the bay, because that was the one – and we've had little red tides in between. All these – these are just major red tides I'm talking about, because there has been little red tides where you could smell it and you could maybe see it and [00:34:00] maybe have a few dead fish, but then it was gone. You had a weather thing came along, a storm came along or something and broke it up. But we're always saying gosh, we figure the hurricane to break it up and – because we – and I don't know if it's just a fallacy where we hope that would break it up and get it going.

Interviewer-1: But this one was – this is one of the major ones, right, because it lasted for six months?

Jonnie Walker: It was – it lasted a long time, but it didn't kill a lot of fish.

Interviewer-1: It didn't kill a lot? And did it stay in that area or did it go offshore too?

Jonnie Walker: I don't know. I mean it was very hard to tell, because I mean I couldn't smell it. But you would see – like I say, you would see the fish floating in different parts of the bay, but it could have been still just dying from up here.

Interviewer-2: Were you fishing offshore then too or is it only in the bay?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. Usually not in February and stuff, I'm not fishing offshore, maybe on March we start to see the cobia and mackerel come up to the bay, off the gulf, but I have been – I was just fishing in the bay.

Interviewer-1: So you said it didn't kill a lot of fish?

Jonnie Walker: Right.

Interviewer-1: How did – was it still just a *[inaudible]* [00:35:13] on your charter fishing, on your business?

Jonnie Walker: It was at that time. I mean I can remember I was fishing during that red tide, because I could always find fish.

Interviewer-1: So you could fish through it?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: But what...

Jonnie Walker: What affects your business more than anything else is the reporting of it.

Interviewer-1: Yeah, and the perception of it.

Jonnie Walker: And the perception and coming up on the beach. When it floats into somebody's canal or floats up on their beach then they – you hear about it and they pick patriots. And it always makes me so mad when they – and I work for one of the news stations. I have a little fishing show at there and I get so mad at it, because they'll have red tide, somebody will say, well there is some red tide in the water [00:36:00] and they will show a picture of the beach literally with dead fish from five years ago or six years ago or 10 years ago and we've got red tide on the beach again. Come on guys, we can have red tide and it doesn't affect that much. I mean it doesn't affect the business, it doesn't affect the fishing that much.

Interviewer-1: So you would still kind of describe the impact of this as...

Jonnie Walker: Minimal.

Interviewer-1: Minimal?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: Right. Even though it lasted a long time?

Jonnie Walker: Right and we have one...

Interviewer-1: But then it didn't like...

Jonnie Walker: I'm trying to think, because we had a really bad one in – I think it was '09, we had that, '08 or '09 we had another bad one and it was almost as bad as one we just had, but it didn't last very long either. It's just very – I mean couple of months. And the fish seem to come back right away from that, because it didn't affect Tampa – it didn't go up to Tampa, it didn't affect anything south. So I think the fish come – fill that void. And it was that one, it was just like this one too. We had a phenomenal shrimping and crabbing season after that, because it kills a lot of pen fish, the – pen fish is your main little predator fish. I mean they eat everything when it's little. So it eats all the little baby shrimp, eats all little baby crabs. So you have a red tide that kills them all off and that next year in the spring, you'll have a phenomenal shrimp and crab. I mean we went out two weeks ago and with my grandkids and great grandkids that are out in the boat with nets and we started hanging it up in the past and we got almost a 5 gallon bucket full of shrimps and they were like this.

Interviewer-1: Wow.

Interviewer-2: Wow.

Jonnie Walker: And a bunch [00:38:00] of probably another bucket full of blue crabs.

Interviewer-2: And you're trolling fish or like how do you...

Jonnie Walker: No, you just anchor up and just wait from the flop. We had – there was a good moon tide like we had a couple of weeks ago and have a good flowing tide out at night and then sometimes we'll go out and wait on the grass lights too with the headlight [overlapping conversation] [00:38:18]. You see the little eyes glowing, yeah.

Interviewer-2: Interesting one that.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. It was fun. It's a lot of fun. And we ate shrimp for two or three days afterwards. So it was great.

Interviewer-1: For the 2008 and 2009 and we'll talk about that one, where was it affected?

Jonnie Walker: It affected the whole area.

Interviewer-1: And when you say the whole area...

Jonnie Walker: The whole Sarasota Bay area that I fish. I don't know about that. It killed schools of red fish offshore I remember going out in the gulf about five or six miles and seeing just a cloud, I mean just – I was telling her, it looks like popcorn floating on the water, just – and that feels there were big red fish, they were like this just killed the whole nursing schools and those are the breeders, those big offshore red fish. Red fish primarily stay in the bay until they're about 30 inches and then they go offshore, get to big schools and they stay on the gulf and they spun out there too, so.

Interviewer-1: Do you know if it was – if the red tide in 2008 even went out further than five to six miles or was that just where you were fishing?

Jonnie Walker: Its – I don't think it went too much further than that, because when the guys are doing bottom fishing, they were still doing good. But there was fish floating out there sometimes, because they grew at the offshore.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. And then was it the same in this area kind of being [00:40:00] with a lot of...

Jonnie Walker: Yeah, it always does. It always usually stays stain. I mean we're still catching snoek and red fish down in here where we're not in the rest of the bay, because they still haven't moved out, because there is no food from here. I mean they're starting to get food out there now and they're starting to come up a little bit. I mean I caught some snoek and red fish right in here last week, but mainly they've stayed down there whether it still was some bait and stuff from deep. That's the main thing too. But I have pet tarp in that, I've had here for the last seven years, eight years and they come – they know when I come in everyday and I hand feed them and everything and they left just before July or just – yeah, just when that started. And see, we didn't get the red tide up



here until July. They headed south of us for three to four months before we got it, down in Naples, Fort Myers and then we got it right after the close of July and they left and I haven't seen them since. Now I hope that they went somewhere and got away from it and they've decided to stay there because there is food there now, but it may have killed them, I don't know.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. It's too bad.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah, that was.

Interviewer-1: So aside from being able to still catch some fish in this area, are there any other ways that you adopt or any other ways that you can kind of still keep your business going when there is red tide that's as bad as 2008?

Jonnie Walker: Maybe a sizing career or something and that's about it.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. Have you started doing this?

Jonnie Walker: No, I mean I have done that, but not very much. But it's very hard and except that after the red tide leaves then we have the pelagic fish. I mean I can remember during that [00:42:00] 2008 and 2009 one, we would call each other on the radio and say man, I've found some ladyfish. Now ladyfish usually have pen, try to get away from them. We don't want ladyfish. It's just a pain in the neck. We want the better fish, but we would call each other and say I found some ladyfish and it will be near the passes, because they're coming up, they're migrating all the time. I think they migrate all the time. They're always moving, right.

Interviewer-1: So you were excited about ladyfish and it was something that hatch like something...

Jonnie Walker: That's what I – and I mean – and I would – you tell people – I mean I tell people till this date I don't know, I still *[inaudible]* [00:42:34] be able to catch what you want, but we'll catch some fish and we'll have some action in. And these mackerel will be saving our butt.

Interviewer-1: And so you said this 2008, 2009 red tide was almost as bad as the one we have last year?

Jonnie Walker: Right. But it wasn't quite as bad. I mean it didn't last as long either.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. How long was the 2018 red tide? How long was it actually in the Sarasota area?

Jonnie Walker: Well, it started in July and didn't leave here until – it was after Christmas. So it's end of December I guess, end of January or it was like a fishily over.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. In what other ways besides the duration, what other ways was it different from the 2008, what made it worse?

Jonnie Walker: It was just so much of it. It covered such a wide area. I mean it was like from Naples to Tampa Bay I mean and it even got past of Tampa Bay and went up – you had somewhat in St. Pete in that area too. I mean I think it went as far as Johns Pass or something a couple of times just for a short [00:44:00] duration.

Interviewer-1: So if you were to draw the spatial impact of the 2018 red tide?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah, it would take the whole coast.

Interviewer-1: It will just be the whole coast? Do you know how far out or how far out your fishing?

Jonnie Walker: No. And I think it varied – according to currents and stuff like that. You know how the currents come down the Gulf of Mexico, they come down way offshore, 100 miles offshore, the gulf's stream is out here flowing this way. And what it does, it creates Eddy's like this and these Eddy's move as they come along the coast like this. So if you hit this side of the Eddy and I mean I'm talking about the big white area that you hit this or the Eddy, it's pulling good clean water in. This one is pulling water off the shore and going out. So I mean it's all occurring what side of the Eddy you're on and now it's – it's not traveling like in the day, it's trying to take a month for this Eddy to move down the coast like this. And we'll have times out here where the water is murky look and then as looking and then you'll have crystal, crystal clear water and you're going to see the bottom of the 50 feet of water and it will be like that for a couple of weeks and then it will start getting murky again, because it's pulling the plankton and everything else. That offshore water that's way out deeper is clear than that in-shore water.

Interviewer-2: Does the Gulf Stream move more inland and...

Jonnie Walker: Yes in the summer time.

Interviewer-1: And like it was last year, was it closer, have you another year...

Jonnie Walker: I don't know. That's just something you'd have to – and I'm sure Nova has records of that, what, where it is and what it was doing then. But I don't know. I mean I know that in the summer time it usually comes in closer, the Gulf Stream. But usually it's 50, 75 miles out and it will come as close as maybe 30 miles or something like that. And you can – when you run out, you can see the difference.

Interviewer-1: You can see the break red?

Jonnie Walker: Yeah [00:46:00], pretty.

Interviewer-1: I bet.

Jonnie Walker: You know that Gulf Stream, it's blue, dark blue.

Interviewer-1: I was thinking like maybe if the Gulf Stream was further offshore last year then maybe there is Eddy is more circulating properly and like that.

Jonnie Walker: It could have been, I don't know.

Interviewer-1: But they look into.

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. I mean that's – it's like what I say about the fertilizer and everything else. I mean it – all it could, it didn't have to be right and they just been – and it seems like every 10 years we have a bad one. I don't know if that's true, but it will be neat to see the records and like I say, but she'll keep the records.

Interviewer-1: Do you think there is any reason why the 2018 red tide was worse than ones you experienced previously?

Jonnie Walker: Well, you know what, everybody – and you know a lot of it had to do with media. I think it was worse because of that business wise. And maybe even the scope of it. I think more people look for it. There were other times that as long as you weren't leaving on the beach and dead fish going on your yard, nobody cared. And that's – I've had that out of two from people. I had like – we're having a meeting about trying to clean up everything and he says these people don't care about the red tides as long as they got a pretty view when they look out of their window and that's true. I mean a lot of them don't. They don't care if there is fish out there or anything. I do.

[Off the Record Conversation] [00:47:41 - 00:48:03]

Interviewer-1: So are there any other – are there any kind of like forecasting that you think would help in anyways?

Jonnie Walker: I think lots of rain has something to do there, because its pushing the nutrients out, getting a lot of fresh water off the land out there whether it's natural nutrients or fertilizer nutrients or anything else.

Interviewer-1: And then if we had another one red tide that lasted for the same period of time, if we had another one this year, how will that impact your business?

Jonnie Walker: It kills. Yeah, I don't think I could take too many of these real close together. I'd say *[indiscernible]* [00:48:47]. I'm getting too older to have a worry I mean.

Interviewer-1: And you said overall there is like a bad one, it seems like there is a bad one every 10 years, has it always been like that? Or do you think...

Jonnie Walker: It just seems like it. I mean especially in the last 30, 40 – 30 years that I know of, it's like every 10 years.

Interviewer-1: I was wondering about what you had said earlier about how after the red tide then the next year you would have like a phenomenal shrimping and crabbing season?

Jonnie Walker: Right.

Interviewer-1: Where there other things that happen the next year like was there a less red tide or you know what I mean like...

Jonnie Walker: I don't if there is – I just don't remember – I don't remember red tides back-to-back. Like I can remember little spotty red tides in between, but nothing tough like this.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. I was talking to my friend last night who was a charter captain in Anna Maria and he was like oh yeah, the red tides are on its way and I'm like no, please don't say it, like it just can't...

Jonnie Walker: Yeah. Well, so they reported the other day, because everybody is reporting now. There were some background levels [00:50:00] off of Lambo Pass or something like that, so it was like news item. Background levels are tired of it. There is always background levels, there is always that.

Interviewer-1: As far as you talked about the one and like 2008, 2009, how long did it take the area to recover after that? You said it lasted a couple of months and then how long until everything was back to normal and back to...

Jonnie Walker: It seem to be quicker than this one. This one has taken a long time.

Interviewer-1: Has it recovered yet and what has recovered?

Jonnie Walker: I mean what is recovered? I mean the red tide is gone, but we're not going to have any mature red fish from trout. It take trout maybe three years to reach maturity, red fish 12 years. So I mean it's going to be hard on our business for a while. I mean there'll be a bunch of juveniles out this year and this fall the big little trout like this, but that's it. There won't be any material ones for another year and a half, two years. That's the tough thing.

Interviewer-2: Do most of your charters want to take king fish or they mostly *[overlapping conversation]* [00:51:29]...

Jonnie Walker: Not anymore. My charters have got to a point where they know that they're more fishing for fun. If they can get a meal out of it, that's fine. Years ago just

before they make coolers and want to fill the cooler off which we still to be able to do, but you can't do that anymore anyway.

Interviewer-2: Yeah. Catch limits and everything.

Jonnie Walker: I mean – yeah, I mean we used to go, I'd catch 20 to 30 red fish and they were all like this, keep them all.

Interviewer-2: Yeah, because mostly like the catching really is [00:52:00]...

Jonnie Walker: Yeah.

Interviewer-1: Have you ever thought of like when you can't fish in the bay, when red tide is really bad in the bay, what's keeping you from fishing in other areas and trying to find other areas offshore like what hindrances are there?

Jonnie Walker: Well, I mean the size of my boat. I mean I'm not just equipped to go offshore with that all the time. I've got boats of 23 foot, but I mean I can't go offshore, I want a 12 or anything. So it kind of limits me. I used to have bass boat and I did bass tournaments too. So I would take people bass fishing and stuff like that sometimes, but other than there is nothing I can do. I mean I can't move my boat. My boat is not on a trailer. It sits right here on the dock. It – I fish out of here and that's it.

Interviewer-1: Are there any species you think aren't affected by red tide that survives or...

Jonnie Walker: No. There is no species that isn't affected by red tide. I mean it – like I say, I've seen it where it called plants, cods and if it's killing them that's killing everything.

Interviewer-1: You said sometimes there are like what you noticed with the shrimp is that it would kill off their predators and the shrimp would start doing really good?

Jonnie Walker: So you'd think about when a fish or a shrimp or something lays eggs, they'd lay 10,000 eggs, okay? Normally, three or four of those will grow up to be good sized shrimp, because everything else is eating it. So if there is no predators, there is a chance that all 10,000 of those eggs are going to grow up and I think that helps even with the fish too, because the fish that do span like span this year, because right now the pen fish have come back into the bay phenomenally, they're all over the place. So now that the pen fish are back you're not going to see that. But [00:54:00] hopefully these fish have grown up enough that it won't get eat by something else.

Interviewer-1: Is there anything else that you would wanted to add about red tide or any other environmental changes that you've noticed or..

Jonnie Walker: Well, I think the environmental changes are huge and that's all was due to development and everything. I mean we got all these gulf courses pumping fertilizer, we've got all these putting – everybody have to have their perfect green lawn and it's just not good for the bay. When – back in the 70s the City of Sarasota went from a very weak septic system, sewer system that pumped about 5 million gallons a day into the bay which made the bay very murky all the time. Once they've fixed that and made tertiary and pumped all of it east of – to gulf courses and stuff like that, the bay cleared up and we have the *[indiscernible]* *[00:54:58]* that we have 80% more grass than we did back in the 70s. But – and that has really helped the fishing in the well after the bay. But now we have all those nutrients that are coming in, so it's almost – it's getting bad again and that red tide still has a lot of grass to it. They're lot of grass. You've really heard it. So – and hopefully it can revive itself.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. How long do you think if you had to take us before things are back to normal from the *[indiscernible]* *[00:55:33]* last year?

Jonnie Walker: Normal, four years or so. I mean back to where we can fish, maybe two or three years. I mean to catch the fish we used to catch, but it's not going to come back to normal for a long while.

Interviewer-1: And have any of the red tides in the past, have they ever taken a couple of years to recover?

Jonnie Walker: I don't see – I can't remember it taking that long.

Interviewer-1: Yeah *[00:56:00]*.

Interviewer-2: So I'm curious like – when your business like come back to normal? Do you feel like it already has people, tourists are coming back where you're still...

Jonnie Walker: No, it's still...

Interviewer-2: People are still scared away?

Jonnie Walker: Still scared away. Not so much scared away from here, but don't want to go out, because they know that fishing is bad. And I tell people...

*[Off the Record Conversation]* *[00:56:25 - 00:56:32]*

Interviewer-1: Did you have any other questions?

Interviewer-2: No, I don't.

Jonnie Walker: Okay. Well, feel free to call me.

Interviewer-2: Okay.

Jonnie Walker: All right. It's my pleasure.

Interviewer-2: Thank you Jonnie. I might give your mom a call.

Jonnie Walker: Okay, no problem.

Interviewer-1: I have a *[overlapping conversation]* [00:56:46]. Yeah, so just your name and your...

Jonnie Walker: I'll let you fill it out. I'll just sign it.

Interviewer-1: Yeah. Just name up here and then sign at the bottom.

Jonnie Walker: Okay. I'll let you fill my name.

Interviewer-1: Okay, thanks.

Jonnie Walker: Because like I say, my handwriting is so bad. Okay, that's a...