

**Name of narrator:** Jerry “Bubba” Austin Jr (BA)

**Interviewer(s):** Amber Chuawat (AC) and Jamekia Collins (JC) with the permission of Jerry “Bubba” Austin and for the research project “Boat Stories”

**Primary Investigator:** Dr. Jennifer Sweeney Tookes, Georgia Southern University.

**Others present:** No other people were present.

**Date of Interview:** January 28, 2022

**Place:** Brunswick, Georgia

**Duration of the interview:** Fifty four minutes (54:00)

**Repository for the recording:** The audio recording will be uploaded to the website, Voices from the Fisheries (<https://voices.nmfs.noaa.gov/>)

**Context for the Interview:** Student interviewers sit down with Jerry “Bubba” Austin Jr., a local

**General Description of Contents:** Jerry “Bubba” Austin Jr. discusses his thoughts on the fishing industry and tells the history of some of the vessels he has worked on over the years. He also talks about what is has been like working with his family on some of the vessels he’s owned.

**00:00**

**BA:** So, you got a little questionnaire stuff to ask me?

**AC:** Yes.

**BA:** Okay

**AC:** I'll leave this here because I'm not sure if there's anywhere maybe. Wait right here. Yeah. Does that bother you?

**BA:** It ain't bother me none.

**AC:** Okay, I just want to make sure. Alright so, as a start we're gonna just have like a little briefing. So this is an interview with Jerry or Bubba Austin Jr. and the date is January 28, 2022. This interview is being conducted in Brunswick, Georgia it is a private research project and interview collection titled "Boat Stories" And the interviews are me Amber Chulawat and Jamekia, who's out of the room right now. So just to start, you do know that you have consented to being recorded in that sort of thing.

**BA:** That's fine, that's fine.

**AC:** Thank you so much. So to start out, could you just tell us about your current or most recent fishing vessel slash boat? And what of it what is its name and didn't have any other names before this?

**01:05**

**BA:** This is my third actual boat. I've actually been shrimping for about 40 years I've owned my own boats for since 1995. This is the third one the other two have sunk. The name of this boat is the "Captain Snapper". It's tied up right over here. The City Market dock over here, bought it from a fellow shrimper that used to shrimp named David Daniels. And his nickname is also Bubba Daniels. He named it after his son Snapper. And the honest reason I haven't never changed the name. I was gonna name it "The Last Time" because it was the last one I was gonna get. And but anyhow, it's still the "Captain Snapper". Like I said it was named after his son and he mentioned it one time if I ever decided to get out of it and sell out that he would like to have first auction at the boat. So that's really why I haven't changed the name, the name because the other ones are named one after my wife. It was the "Debra Anne". The second one I named after my dad, "Captain JW" And this one here, I was gonna name it like I told you "The Last Time", but I left the name the Snapper on it because it was his son. And if I do decide to get out of it,

whether he still won't sit back or not. But that's the reason I left the name Snapper on it. "Captain Snapper".

**AC:** You mentioned two other boats that you have that sunk. Can you tell me about those as well.?

**02:36**

**BA:** They both sunk right here at these docks right here. One of the last one the "Captain JW" a pylon broke at the dock and went through the bottom of my boat and sunk it. And the first one that I had was my big boat, the "Debra Anne", it was sitting at the dock right there where I'm tied up at right now. And the tide went out too low. And it was such a big boat and drew more water, it sits so hard on the ground that it broke the keel in it. And so therefore, it was a total loss for both of them. And that's why I said I've had a kind of a bad taste in my mouth. So that's why I was gonna name this last one "The last Time" because if something happens it or whether I get too old or just get tired of it. I was gonna name it "The Last Time" but I decided better because of my friend that I bought it from. And that's reason it's still named Captain Snapper. And I still own it. It's still over there.

**AC:** How long have you had this boat? And what? And so how long have you had these boats and for the previous ones? How long did you have them before they sunk?

**BA:** I had the "Debra Anne" I bought it. It was the first boat but dad helped me get it in 1995. And I can't remember the dates but I want to say five to six years. I want to say 2001, it's sunk at the dock and and I bought the "Captain JW" the name of it was the "Trader Boat". I bought it from my father in law. My wife's daddy. I bought it in 1998 and it sunk in 2012. That's the one the pylon went through. And then I've owned this one since 2013.

**AC:** And you said that your family has shrimped and so is your wife's family?

**04:26**

**BA:** Oh yeah. My wife's daddy. He used to own three boats. And my dad. That's what got me started. I hated shrimping and I used to get seasick. And we pulled crab traps and done baiting, pulling the bait net and catching shrimp for people. And my dad retired at early age. And he thought he wanted to become a shrimper. And so therefore when he bought the boat, he wanted his son to go out with him all the time. And I told him I just stayed seasick that I just hated it. He swore he wouldn't make me do it no more. But somehow another, I guess I got the shrimping blood in me. And between time I was probably 12 or 13. Either being on the deck of one or

running one or owning all three of the above. I've been doing it since I was 13. So, I've been doing it for about 45 years. And I've owned my own boat since 1995, the three I've owned. So, I actually, would that be 27 years I've owned my own. And before then I'd either run my dad's or either my father-in-law's boat. So that's pretty much about my shrimping career about 40 something years of it.

**AC:** What's it like working with family?

**05:44**

**BA:** Not bad. It was tough working with my dad, because naturally, his side of the story was always son, I just do it, I holler at you, scream at you cause I don't want you to make the same dumb mistakes that I made. Little tough working with him at times. But overall, I always had a good relationship with my dad. He's kind of reckless working with tools and stuff around. But overall, it wasn't bad. And he got where he didn't like it. He just said it was too slow for him. And then that's when I started running it. And, and working for my father-in-law. It wasn't bad. My wife didn't like the idea of it, because she just says when things happen, you're the first to be blamed. They're gonna be rougher on you. But I've got along with them too. So, I'm pretty much get along with anybody. So, it wasn't it wasn't that bad.

**AC:** Do you have any memories working with them that you want to share?

**06:44**

**BA:** Working with my family? I got one with my dad, I will never forget. We'd be out there dragging and my cousin work with us. And we'd get on top of pilot house and run and do flips off the boat while the boat was dragging offshore. We'd tie rope on the side of the boat, would run and jump off the boat, do a flip, land in the water, and then swim to the side of the boat, while the boats draggin' out there and pull ourselves back upon the boat. And my mom used to always say, Son, y'all gonna mess right around and get hurt out there and I can't believe Jerry that you letting them kids do that. And one time he took the ice hatch cover off the back of the boat, we come up with his bright idea what was coming in and I said dad, let's hang a rope out the back of the boat will be like on a womp board back there pulling us and he was pulling us and pulling us. But then when the wheel water get going to fast, it sink the board and naturally throw us off. But it was fun. We would do some crazy things he had to because I didn't even like it at first and then like you say, hey, because it really is slow. Until you get to I guess you're the captain where you got to pay attention and try to find out where the shrimp are at and you make a

living at it where, hey, this was wonderful. I work for my dad making money. Hey, not a worry in the world lived at home. But when you start becoming a husband and trying to pay the bills, it's an older boat. Yeah, there's a lot a lot of stuff that's involved with owning a boat. Instead of running one goes anything it tears up, you responsible. And that's a big difference.

**08:21**

**AC:** Could you go more into detail about that? What was it like shifting to owning a boat?

**BA:** Well, naturally as anybody always thought it'd be kind of cool because I worked at the mills and got laid off from one cause it was having a rollback. I got laid off and I went to work at another one and it closed down and shut down. And I was like you know what, hey, way my lucks going, why not try to own my own boat? That'd be great work for myself, you know I get up when I want to, do what I want to this will be wonderful until the bills start rolling in or 'till something starts going wrong with the boat. And then you start thinking hey, I ain't got nobody to turn around and look to, it's all me now. I'm the ones got to fix this. I got to figure out how to make money and pay for this. That's, that's the main thing I see. I mean now I enjoy shrimping, but uh the ship out there has messed me up because that's where I've made my living at right there was a little area right there called Snag Alley and well naturally in 2019 that ships sunk out there so, I haven't done a bunch of shrimping the last three years I've kind of worked on the hill go to work at these mills. Hopefully this year they'll finish getting it all cleaned up and laid back and get back my little stomping ground there and go back to catching some shrimp because I'm my old, feet, knees and stuff or just get where they can't stand that concrete anymore, 12 hours a day, you know seven days a week that's that's how we have to deal with these shutdowns and I'm getting older. Even though I'm fixing to leave here in about two weeks, give it a whirl again but my old knees and feets they slowly telling me that hey, you better get back on that shrimp boat. Because we can't do this much longer. So that's kind of where we at with that.

**AC:** So you mentioned how in the past few years you have a trip into that boat sinking? Could you go more into detail about how that like changed the environment or your experience?

**BA:** What's that now? I didn't understand what you said.

**AC:** You mentioned how the when the boat sank, you started shrimping less. Could you explain like the differences you saw whenever you tried to go back?

**10:41**

**BA:** Well, there's not really no difference. Oh, yeah, it is because we're I fished that like I told you in the area "Snag Alley", a lot of people didn't know how to fish in there. Because the way the tide run the banks, and there was hangs in there. If you didn't know where they were at. You'd mess round and can tear up some stuff in a minute in there. So my theory always has been working in there was right there, the sound limit sign, that's where the shrimp are coming out of anyhow. So I felt like being I was on a smaller boat. I felt like I had a lot better of advantage of trying to get him when he was coming out of the sound. Me fishing in that little area right there versus going out there on the beach, where all the other shrimpers are at. So that's what hurt me more than anything because like I say a lot of people don't know how to fish that area right there. And that's why I've done most all my shrimping all my life right in there. So yeah, that's a big difference.

**AC:** How did you learn how to shrimp in that area?

**11:46**

**BA:** Making mistakes and tearing up stuff. Pretty much. You know, I watch my cousin, him fishing in there and then I was like, Hey, he always catches shrimp in there. And you don't ever see that many boats in there. His theory was he would lie to you and say "watch out, there's hangs in here, you better be careful, you got to do this, you better do that" and you'd be a nervous wreck. And then once I figured out I kind of like bird dogged him, followed him around dragging his wheel water didn't care if I caught anything, just get the drag down. And once I got the drag down, I found out I wasn't gonna tear up then I started doing it and like anything else kind of like riding your bicycle, you started riding it, you fall down you rattle a bit further, fall down after while "hey I can ride it and I ain't falling down". And that's how I'd done it. And a lot of people didn't like messing around in there. Because the way the tide run because if you wasn't careful, you bog up or hang up in there and that wind blowing over there on that breaker, you mess around lose your boat, you know, in a minute. So there was some pros as well is the bad you know what I say? So it was one of those deals, you had to pay attention. And a lot of people always asked me well why did you want to fish in there? You always have to be on your P's and Q's watch what you do and like well, as I'm saying over and over again. A lot of people didn't know how to fish in there. I did and I mean anytime you got less competent- or is I tell everybody it's kind of like eating a piece of the pie well as long as you got less people eat

knowing that that means more you get the pie and that's how I made my living with a small boat there so that's how it all turned out to happen for me.

**13:35**

**AC:** So the boat that you currently have, what kind is it and what is like what do you like about it?

**BA:** Well, there we go with the pros and cons again there. What I like about it is, it is a smaller boat is 50-foot overall length, but it don't draw but four and a half or 52 inches of water so its shallow draft. The big boats can't get to me like up on the beach I can get up on the beach quick, the big boats have to wait till the water gets high enough so they can get up there. The bad points is about it, it don't have a lot of horsepower so therefore only can drag smaller nets for the big boats got more horsepower and draws more water, but can pull more webbing and anytime the more webbing you pull in the more shrimp you can catch a lot of time. But the reason I liked that small boat is before working in that little area that little circle right there what we call snag alley, it was easy to maneuver around get up on top of the banks stay away from the big boats but yet at the same time to turn around real quick and where a big boat takes you longer to turn around and all that stuff. The small boat'll just turn around and I call it a whipper snapper. [laughs]

**14:49**

**AC:** To go along with that question. When you think about like the future of commercial shrimping would you think more so boats like yours or those bigger boats?

**BA:** Well yeah, that ship if that ship ain't ruined that area right there where I drag, I still like to have a small boat but from all the rocks and the mess and stuff that's fell off of it. I know they gonna say they got it all cleaned up but I don't think I'll ever get to drag in there again. So that, so that question honestly I'm getting older but to be more sufficient and make money, you're gonna need a big boat. Well guess what, a big boat if you got a big boat then that means traveling, well I ain't wanting to, because you get a bigger boat that means you're gonna have to spend a lot of money and get a lot of money that means you got to stay gone well I'm 58 years old. I've been content if I was going to do something like that, I wanted to do it when I was in my 20s, not when I'm 58. And so I'm hoping that it'll come back around and I can fish my little hole and use my little boat because if not I'll probably end up selling out as bad as I hate to say that I have to find something else to do because I've done it so long and I'm getting older and that was my game plan the whole time is just get my house and stuff paid for, have less bills, getting the boat

paid for and hand me a little small boat. Something to play with to bring in some income. You ain't gonna get rich but yet you still make a living. Now has this ship ruined it for me? Time will tell, that's the only thing I can tell you there. Would I have bought a big boat? Way people trying to find help this time of day, no. Because then I'd have payments trying to find somebody that wants to travel up and down the coast and go work somewhere else and see I ain't never done a lot of traveling. All my shrimping has been right here right here in Brunswick, Georgia. Now don't get me wrong now, I have went six or eight times to South Carolina to make beach openings and I've went as far as Fernandina dragging but this little boat I got no more fuel in it holds and the ice hole and stuff is not equipped to go traveling. It's only got a water tank on the top that holds like 55 gallons of water, well you can only imagine one or two showers and we out of water! So that's what I was saying what a big boats they hold 1000s of gallons of water and 1000s gallons of fuel and so they are equipped for that to get in that rough weather and fish when my little boats not equipped for it. So just keeping my fingers crossed, hoping that once I get all the stuff cleaned up out there I'm hoping that I can still fish right in there. If not I have to try the beaches and some other areas but what you have to worry about going to drag other areas, the nets doors and the cables that we pull. You drag it around about \$10,000 worth of equipment behind you. Well it don't take but a couple mishaps and you don't know where you go when and where hangs and stuff are at. You go tear that stuff up. That right there put you out of business anyhow. So I ain't ever go say that I'm too old to learn new trick, but I'm kind of set in my ways. I hope I can stay right here and finish out my career shrimping and if not, just wasn't meant to be.

**AC:** You mentioned how you've been shrimping here your whole time. Could you like go maybe go into how you witnessed the shrimping industry in this area change?

**18:27**

**BA:** Well, the main things that I see has changed...I always made a good, a decent living around here. The one things I know Bryan don't always agree with me, but we tried to tell him, they used to drag the sounds here. That opened them up. By the time I got into it, I was 12-13 years old. They would least open the sounds four to five times, pick certain dates and open it up. That way you could drag the bottom and keep the grass and all that stuff. It's kind of like plowing your garden. If you're going to plant some food, we got to go get the weeds out of there first and then till it up, put your seeds and then let your stuff grow. We ain't drug our sounds in many years. And I think it's really hurting this industry. That's my belief. I really do. I've always said



hey, like I was just saying if you're going to plant a garden, you got to go till it and get the weeds up. Well that sounds getting full of grass and stuff from not being drug. And I agree that they need to put a net size on it or something. Or if they just let us drag our doors with tickler chains or barbed wire. Just get the trash up in there and clean the bottom up because see shrimp are bottom feeders. People don't realize that a lot of people don't know nothing about it. Like when the wind goes to change from one direction or the barometer changes, them shrimp just get right in the mud and bury up and all they got is the antenna sticking out of there. Well if you got grass and all this trash and stuff in there and that shrimp ain't got nowhere to bury up at, it ain't got nothing to eat. So therefore he's gonna move and go somewhere else different you know what I mean? And that's just my belief after being around so many years and, and a lot of my fellow fishermens, they believe the same thing. I mean, it ain't like we just done this for three or four years and that's what we think. I mean when you've been doing something for 40, 50 years and you used to do this for all these many years then all of a sudden you quit doing it for the last 20 years they going to say well, it's cause of the mills, the mills were here before I was ever born them guys caught shrimp and now the mills are still here and shrimp starting to slow down around here. I mean, we certain times we have good row shrimp seasons. And then hardly no brownies and might have a little bit of shrimp in the fall. And then some years we don't have so many row shrimp season and then we have a good fall. But we can't seem to put the whole thing together. A lot of them are saying it's global warming. Well hey it still gets hot around here from April to November, December, I don't- I ain't fallen for that. I don't think so. I really believe and I wish they would just try, just try one year. Just go out there and let us have nothing, nothing else, now let some smaller boats get out there with 25 - put a net size on it. So you know we pulled two 40 foot nets, two 50 foot nets. Let us open the sounds three or four days in one year. And then wait and see how they do the next year. Ain't that how you do surveys to find out if something's working? Like if you own a company and you say it was somehow another we're not doing production good enough. Well guess what? You got to sit down talk about it and try some things. If not, then you're gonna have a failing company. You know what I mean? So, you got to try things. And so, that's my suggestion, what I think we need to do. I think you need it. Well, there's three things I say we need to do. You need to put a not having 24 hours of dragging that they shouldn't let that stop making go 10-15 miles offshore. Let the bottom rest put a limited entry on it like they did North Carolina say I can't do I can't go buy a license to go to North

Carolina. They can come buy license here in fish our ground. Anybody in the world can go to DNR over and buy a license go out and start fishing. North Carolina you don't do that. If they do something like that, and open our sounds up just for limited boats that are net size and try I think you'll see it get a lot better for everything. The crabs, the sport fishermens, to shrimper, everything.

**23:05**

**AC:** Kind of go along with that. How much have you seen the community itself change over the past few years as well?

**BA:** Oh, is community since I was started in this industry, it's dramatic. This has been steady going down hill. There used to be, in this creek right here, there was 1,2,3 I think they had the Mary Ross park down there, we tied all the shrimp boats. We had City Market Dock. We had Knight's Seafood. We had Louis's at one time there was over 100 boats right down through here. What you see it that dock over there that's what's left. You tell me. In 40-45 years, it's went from over 100 boats just right in here or 50 60, 70 boats right here locally, till we got six boats over there. Six or seven boats, one of them is fixing to be ship canned. The guy passed away so they fixing to make a reef out of it. And there's just me., Johnny Bennett, Thurmond Kern, Andy Ross, Bubba Crum. And that's it. That's itm Lesley Jacobs that guy he is anchored in a river, forgot about that, we got about six or seven boats. You ought to be able to go out there and damn near sink the boat with shrimp. If we had any kind of shrimp season. That was one of my theories and game plans of well, hey, some of these older shrimpers sell out, pass on hey, I'll be right here. There won't be that many boats. I'll be able to have my little area and I'll be able to kill them shrimp. Boy, was I wrong. It's went the opposite way around. Less boats and less shrimp. We used to have over 100 boats out there dragging at times. Everybody making a living, you can't take six boats and hardly make a living out here now. What happened? The mills are still here. Less boats. Where's the shrimp? One thing, the one thing that we've done different is not drag the sounds. They don't want to hear that. But why not just why not even just try it? Just try it. It's kind of like if you ride a bicycle you keep falling down. What are you going to say, put training wheels back on it? Or are you gonna say I got to find out what I'm doing wrong or I'm never going to learn to ride a bicycle. Well, we know how to shrimp we've been doing it for many years and made a living at it. You can go look at the DNR, my records like I told you I never went and got rich. Made money, made money, made money. Worse years, I started having

'18 which was a bad year, disaster year for around here. But '19, '20, '21 The ship's been out in my way. I mean, I can harp on it all day long. But that's where I made a living. I mean, I just went round and around and around and around you like you'd think my God, how long can you keep doing this? Every day? Around and around and around? That's what I did. That's where I drug at. And now, I will say I mean I can't say what I would have done the last three years because I ain't get the fish in there. I mean, couldn't fish in there, the ships been out there they've been cutting it up, you know, so I don't know. Like I say I'm hoping to find out something this year is to see if I can drag in there. I'm nervous. I'm probably gonna put some old junky nets out because I think I'm going to go in there and hang up right from the get go. I don't think they'll ever get all that cleaned up in there. Never. I mean, as they said it was one of the worst disasters more than the Valdez was history as far as a cleanup. I'm sure some of it was due to the COVID You know, one time I heard that just heard this some of the guys out there it was all doing the work get everything set up started catching COVID, so they had to stop it and had to wait about a month. Some of them got well or got the shots or whatever they were going to do you know what I mean? But uh now they finally got it hauled off and now they out there pulling the pylons up and they still got a crane here I guess it's gonna dig on the bottom of the bucket and try to make sure they got it cleaned up but I don't see them ever. I really don't see us ever fishing in there again. I hope I'm wrong. But I really don't.

**27:43**

**AC:** To circle back towards the career aspect and you being in it for so many years. Could you tell me about the people that you've worked with throughout the years?

**BA:** Yeah a couple of my kinfolks. My uncle, his nickname was Grump. He worked with me for years, my cousin Lonnie he worked with me. I didn't have a lot of strikers. I guess I'd done good enough not bragging on myself, but I'd done good enough I was easy to get along with. I had probably six strikers in my 40 years. I might rotate them but I had a Ben McDow Jr., I had Grump, Lonnie, John McClain, a guy named David Cornwell and I think that's all of them. Most of them each year is when it got time that they never mess with me that much when row shrimp season because I had smaller boats and therefore didn't do as good as the big boats that offshore but once they open them beaches, that's when my little area open up and like I say a lot of people didn't know how to drag it so therefore I wasn't worried about a lot of competition. So that's why I drug at and I done my best catch some throughout the summer months between the beach and

the alley but I really done my best from the end of August all the way up to December that's when I made my money every year that's when me and my wife really, it we always say if you don't get them baby in September, October, November we go have a terrible year. Good Lord blessed me every year somehow another I get him right there I guess I can't say I got lucky because when you do something long enough I guess I can say got kind of good at it right there in that area. Because you can't be lucky for that many years. The way I look at it while they say you get lucky once you start doing it twice starts to become a trend. Three times you getting good at it. So yep. In Georgia, had some good guys work for me that, that that's what made it easy for me is when you don't have to pay one and he quits, and then worry about "I want to go shrimping tomorrow and can't find nobody". I mean, don't get me wrong, I've had some time, but some of them had a little too much to drink or party too much and didn't show up. But on the most behalf I've had some good guys to work for me, really did. I was very fortunate when it comes to that. And they like working with me and I enjoyed working with them. Like I tell him I don't, I ain't got much to say I sit up here, try to pay attention what I'm doing. Because if I ain't catching no shrimp, they neither one of us making no money. So when you go out there and ain't a place to go play because you can get hurt in a second when you got that many moving parts and something got that much power pulling on something. So you better be paying attention what you're doing out there. Some take it more serious than others. But that's the way I did well, soon as I throw the ropes off at the dock, it become a job then once we put the ropes back on the dock. Now we can have a good time.

### **31:07**

**AC:** Speaking of good times, do you have any memories with any of your past workers or just any other memories that you want to share?

**BA:** Nothing really stands out other than you know, when you did hit them big drags. And that could have been with different ones. My cousin's a couple times as he got away from it got his own little business of cutting grass and this and that. But a lot of times my striker wanted off on the weekends. And he would go with me on the weekends. And it was just funny a few times. We, I mean, we really popped em' when I say that 20, 30 baskets on one drag. And some of my biggest drags I'll come with my cousin and we'd always laugh about it. Well, you striker worked all week long and I made more in a two hour drag than he did for the whole week. And I was like, well, that's the only thing that's crazy about this business, is you go through the same steps.

Whether you catch 2 pounds, 200 pounds, or 2000 pounds, you got to throw the ropes off, let the outriggers down, pull the net on in the outrigger and set over and do the drag. You just hope to the good Lord you was in 'em. Because I mean you go out there and pull, you're trying to get and have one shrimp, a blank catch nothing and tear up or take up and got a boatload of them. And naturally, we always hope for that one, the boat load but seem like they only come few far and between. But I guess I'd have to be some of the best moments that I, that I would look back on it. Thank you. Yeah, look at that, I know we was gonna get them today that makes you feel good. Because how many times did you go out there and just it's okay, two or three baskets. I mean, we paid for the fuel, made a little bit of money. But hey, today we got em' and that's what makes it all worthwhile for me. And that's what I always told my wife I said, you know, the one thing I like about shrimping is where if you go to work, you make 10, \$15 an hour, do 40 hours or if you're any good with math, you can figure your paycheck and you about know about what you're gonna make. With shrimping I went out there in a week is made as much up to \$10,000 in five days. I went out there and went shrimping for five days and come home and didn't make nothing and went in the hole because I tore nets up or broke a rope or something broke on the boat. So you never knew. As always, we got that chance, we got that chance. And that's what I like. I guess the the unknowns, its the unknowns of whether we can catch anything or not make you grow some gray hair. Where you know if you went to work, making \$600 this week, as long as I gotta put my 40 hours in, I come home. You got me \$400 where out there. Hmm..we didn't make nothing babe or, Hey, look at that we're gonna have a Merry Christmas here this year. That's how I guess that's what I looked back, like more than I did about anything.

**34:18**

**AC:** So, do you have any other like, you mentioned how you worked with a lot with family and you kind of touched on that topic about spending time with your family on your boat. Do you think that was like better than working with people who weren't related to?

**BA:** No, I wouldn't say that, you know? You know, that's the one thing I guess I like about working at the mills because I'm traveling on the road and you're always meeting somebody new. Naturally you meet some that you don't get along with too good but like I tell you I pretty much get along with anybody. As a matter of fact, they always call me, what do they call me? Cheerful? They call me something, always say I've got a smile on my face. They said, I don't see how in the world, what all you been through with your wife, and her being sick and need

surgeries, how you can walk around is like everything's going perfect for you. And I was like, Well, I guess the good Lord blessed me with that. Because you know, you can sit around and say, cry about spilt milk and what coulda happen? Yeah, could it be better? Sure. I love to see her cheerful, not had to have that car wreck and what else she's been through. But then again, I could have lost her that day when the car wreck happened. So I've always just learned to be appreciative of, hey, they always say take something good out of something bad. And that's what I tried to do. I mean like you say know what I like to have plenty of money where I didn't have to go to work, go do what I won't do that be the number one answer. But if you got to go, I just try to laugh. Hey, we might get them today we might get them today you got to go out there with a positive attitude where if you go out there, and winds blow we probably can catch. That might be the scenarios. Boy, I look at it. I found my way out there. Yeah winds blowing, we probably ain't going to catch nothing. That might be the scenario. The way I look at it, I found my way out there and if I don't see them, I know my way back to the docks so. That's the way you got to look at it, you know, and that's the way I've always tried to look at life period. I mean, hey, we all here for a short time. Whether you live here 60, 70 years, or whether you lived here 10 or 15 years, hey, try to do the best with life, make the best of it and go on. Because all you got to do if you think you got it bad look right around the curve. Somebody that just is bad or not worse than you do. So that's always been my philosophy. Just keep a smile on your face and keep plugging good things to come out of it.

### **36:50**

**AC:** To kind of go along with that, what now do you know about fishing vessels that you didn't know when you first started?

**BA:** What did I know about fishing vessels that that I didn't know when I started? That they cost a lot of money. A BOAT, you can put that on your writing. You know what it stands for? Break out another thousand. There ain't nothing cheap about a shrimp boat. Nothing. And that's why I was just talking about how you go through the same things whether you catch two pounds, 200 pounds or 2000 pounds. That's the one thing I mean, I always knew, I said, man I like to learn to drive that rascal. Well I accomplished that. And then but just being around them. I've learned that there ain't nothing cheap about them at all, and any and everything on that boat is gonna cost you big money. And that's why I say with shrimping you can't afford to go out there and mess around and have too many weeks where you ain't catching. Or it don't take- Ray Charles can see if you

start Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, and you ain't catching nothing. You might want to take a day or two off. I understand each day's a different day and the day you don't go is the day they catch them. But you can't afford to just go out there day after day after day and thinking "Oh, sooner or later we'll get them". After you done it a little bit you know about when there should have been something there, the tides or there ain't nothing on low water, so I'm going to try on high water. Or today this winds blowing other day that wind wasn't. But yeah, you got to mess around and tear up a net and try it three or four days you don't catch nothing, you got 1000, \$1,500 in the hole with a fuel, ice, and oil. And so yeah, it didn't take long to learn that you messing with a boat, you better be paying attention and try to have as many mishaps as you possibly can. I mean, I'm sorry, some things are just out of control. You don't know if there's a log on the bottom floating by or a tree or something washing out of the water you know, you can't see stuff like that. But when you see something that looks like it's about to break, you might want to try to fix it whether you got the money or not because normally when that breaks, it's gonna tear something up right along with it then there you go, money. You'll mess around, one mishap and you'll work the rest of the year trying to pay back what you tore up.

**39:30**

**AC:** You mentioned about fixing things do you go in and do you try to fix things yourself?

**BA:** I try to fix a lot. I do a lot of maintenance on my own boat. I mean when I go on the railway to pressure washing to painting. I can wield. A lot of times if I had a welder, I could do something but a lot of times if you ain't got the hood, the welding machine now that you pay for things like that, but a lot of my fiber glassing stuff, I do a lot of hands on maintenance man myself. And things I don't know like with wiring stuff I try to work it out with my buddies and give him some shrimp or something he'll come down and do some wiring for me or whatever but he on the most behalf last these last of these mohicans left right here pretty much have to work on their boats yourself. You can afford to pay somebody, I mean some things you have to but a lot of it we do it by ourself.

**AC:** Where'd you learn how to do it by yourself?

**BA:** Just being around them asking questions and some of it's just Well, like I say I'm a halfway mechanic I call myself just go tackle it start digging at it and asking questions and a lot of times if you've been around it enough there's some things you just don't know by then like something tears up inside of my motor I have to call a mechanic but like an alternator or batteries or things

like that I can change that stuff myself. Have do some glasswork, carpenter work, rigging up some sometimes you just got to do it yourself and just is I always told them you got to become, a become a MacGyver, you got to figure it out and put your hands on it and try to fix it yourself. A lot of times sometimes it might not be perfect, but good enough to get you by to you can get somebody to do it right you know what I mean? So that's how this industry pretty much works.

**41:29**

**AC:** To kind of go back to the beginning, what kind of boats were your previous boats, the ones that sunk?

**BA:** All my boats are wooden, but been glassed over, every one of them. The boat I got now is wood, wood, fiberglass, two or three layers of fiberglass over it, "JW" and the "Deborah Anne" now it was a wooden one that me and my dad had started we done had it three quarters of the way fiber glassed, until it sunk and that's what happened the part that we didn't have glass on the back it sits so hard aground at the dock that it broke the horn tabor, the keel in the back of it and sunk it.

**AC:** Did you and your dad work on a bunch of boats together?

**BA:** What's that?

**AC:** Did you and your dad like, work on a bunch of boats together?

**BA:** Oh, well we only had my dad started off with the "Ella D", it was a smaller boat and I helped him on it but I was too young to really I mean, I helped him grind and I was more of his gopher the and go get this go get that, but now when he bought the "Daisy H" oh yeah, I helped him plentiful. Sanding on it, we sea flexed it, glassed the whole top of it, chipping, grinding, painting. You name it, we done it and that's the same thing I do on mine now. They, oh yeah. That's how you learn, you asked me how did you learn that? Well you really don't know until you start messing with them then a little here a little experience there and next thing you know not that you're perfect but you done had, you kind of done know from working on previous boats how to work on your own boat.

**43:12**

**AC:** You mentioned how some of your best memories are when you like made a big like money?

**BA:** Oh yeah, the big drag!

**AC:** Do you have any like specific examples of this?



**BA:** Right there in Snag Alley, my little hole like I tell you that my striker worked with me for years, he always any get where a lot of times on the weekends he'd want to take off to be at home with his wife and play around with his kids and whatever. And I get my cousin and like I told you I won't never forget it was on a Friday afternoon. We went out there and I told him I said I just got that feeling today they go to be there and he's like I hope you write because I want to put some part, new parts on my car and this and that. And we went out there and we're the only boat there. I said we ain't gone set over yet we'll just wait let that tide get down lower and then we'll set 'em out. We set 'em out, pulled the trinet, and it made a little short tri we pulled they would just hang in there. I said, don't even pull it no more. We ain't got to pull it no more. I done two circles, picked up we had 31 baskets. That was about a \$5,000 two hour drag. Ching Ching! That's when you love it. But I've also went out there and made some of them drags they look like Forrest Gump, like oh my god we got up this morning for that? That's got to take the good with the bad. So yeah, no, like you say if it was a that's why they call it shrimping and not catching. Because if it was just catching everybody be doing it. But like you say hey, it's been fun. Been fun. I just wish it'd get a little bit better. And maybe one of my interviews over maybe I can talk Bryan in openness sale, pushing for it. I'm telling you to work it will.

**45:11**

**AC:** To continue on with the memories. Do you remember you have any like funny memories? The funniest one that you've ever had?

**BA:** Like I say, I guess I'd have to say when my cousin was young, dumb, running, doing flips off the pilot house, go off the end of the outrigger and do flips and catching that rope. I mean, man, I mean like all it would've took was you to hit your head on something. And I'm not joking. You would have drowned out there. I mean, how stupid was that? But we did. We was young and dumb. We thought it was fun. We was having a good time. Like I say my dad pulling us behind the shrimp boat on that, ice hatch cover back there. All it took ya was your arm get hung up in the rope or something and pull you underwater. I mean, that boat for you can just slow down and get up and drown in a bit and it would've been drowned ya. But just doing crazy little things like that. Naturally, would I do it now? No. But at the time, like I say, I was young and dumb. We were thought we was having fun. And we were, so it's all good.

**AC:** I think that covers most of the questions that we have. Okay. Do you have anything else you just want to share with us?

**BA:** No, not really. I mean, like I say, I pretty much touched all the bases. I've told you my goods and bads. What I liked about it, what I don't like about it. And this ship, like I say I can't harp enough on it. Because it's made me go out on the road and leave my family to try to make some money where I could have been probably maybe catching some shrimp here. And I wouldn't have to go so I could be home. Cause like I say, my wife ain't in the best of health. It's not like she's about to die or nothing like that, I don't want you to think like that. But she used it, she needs my help a lot of time with her leg and back and stuff. And when you on the road, well, that's the hardest thing for me, once I get around that curve, I can't see the house, then I'm focused on what I gotta do. But you know, when you, when you say I'm 800 miles from home, hell, if she was to fall and get hurt ain't like I can run around the corner and help her. I mean, she'd have to call my dad, call my neighbor or call somebody to help her. You know that and I hate that part. And like I say, I just hope they get all this mess up cleaned up out here. And where I can drag it and hopefully go back to catching shrimp versus well, probably won't ever get to drag there no more, now I've got the, I guess drag on the beach and try there. And like I told you, you can't just when I think I'll go drag over there. What if you go to and catch your hang and tear your stuff up. You do that two or three times. It don't take long, and you out of business. Or if you like me, I'm a poor man. I've been, I've been blessed. And I got food on the table. But it ain't like I got a thick wallet. And don't worry about it, hey, we'll get it, we'll overcome it. You can't overcome them five, six, eight, thousand dollar mistakes, two or three of them, and they'll put you right out of business. And like I say, and like I say I kind of pretty much touch the things I like, when I was younger. I can tell you I really hated it. I stayed seasick. And then just I guess once I got to where I didn't, and even now, even now I've been doing it for forty something years. When I first get ready to start back shrimping . I try to go out there on a calm day. Because sometimes on a rough day, I catch myself feeling nauseated, I don't go get seasick, but I'm feel nauseating. Like I'm going to throw up and you know, and then once I get that first time or two in me, it'd be rough as crap. It don't bother me. I'm just used to it. Don't think about it. But like I say when I first start, maybe it's a mental thing. I keep thinking boy, hope I don't get that feeling. I think I'm getting that feeling. I think I will get sick, you start doing that you will get sick, because that's what seasick is mainly it's a mental thing. I know they give you these patches and this and that. It's just get your mind off it. Because if you sit there start looking at that water [makes dizzy sounds] and there's all that motor, you hear it doing that, oh, I think I'm sick. I

think then you'll be seasick. So but yeah, I guess that and getting to work with my family and this and that and working for myself always I kind of liked that part. I can tell you how good and bads. I mean as long as you're catching some shrimp and working for yourself and paying the bills who don't want to work for themselves? But I was also smart enough to know that if I ain't making no money at it, you better be going to look for a job. We got to get some income coming around here. And this year you ain't catching nothing. We're gonna have to wait the next year and try it again. Because we got to go have some money goes as you know, Georgia Power, Walmart groceries. You can't go get an "I owe you" next year, okay, so my bring you some money. I'm sorry. It's just the way it works. So I guess that's all I can pretty much tell you about my Bubba Gump shrimping career.

**AC:** I have one more question.

**BA:** Yes ma'am?

**50:41**

**AC:** What do you like, When do you think the turning point from hating it to wanting to do it for a career occurred? When you decided?

**BA:** Really, I really don't know. That, that, that be a tough one for me to really answer. Way I've always looked at it and the way I look at it now, I guess as long as I can make enough money to keep the bills paid. I mean, naturally, I want to catch enough that I don't even have to work in the what we call the wintertime of the year because that's when you want to do your maintenance and get your boat chipped and painted and put on the railway and cleaned up. So you'll be ready for the next season. And but I've had good years that I did have enough money could take the whole winter off to work on it and I've had the years that I've had to go soon as shrimping was over, going to look for a job and get a job making some money because I only had 1000, \$2,000 saved in my checking account. And as you know, that's not a very a lot of money. So you know, right then and there that you best be looking for some work. We didn't have as good a year as we did last year, or the year previous to that so but I mean, I've always been just always told myself I was gonna have to work I've never been afraid of work. So therefore, hey, as long as I can not get behind and make a living and not have a bunch of repairs to do to the boat. Then that was a win season for me, even though I still have to go work in the wintertime as long as I didn't have to spend a lot of money on my boat, but yet just do the pretty lipstick and paint it and fix it up. I considered that a good year, I made my boat payments. Hey, we made a living. We paid the bills

around the house. And hey, maybe next year is a little bit better. As I told you a shrimp and there ain't no guarantees for nothing. And so I can't really answer that question. Oh, it was 1997 and man I popped them and that was a change in my career- No, I've had good years and bad years, so you know, you kind of know with this industry that when you making some money you bet don't just cause you had good weeks or good months, you better leave that put up. I mean go buy yourself something buy your groceries, but don't just go on vacations cause right around the corner something could break and when I told you break out another thousand, normally something big happened, nets and stuff three or four thousand fo new set of doors, 2500, railway bill 3000 I mean nothing. Never, no 50 \$6, \$200 No, it's big stuff. And so just 'cause you made it you better put some up and that's what it taught me to be a more of a wise person. Hey, just cause you made five, \$6,000 this week that's good. Next week you might not make nothing so you might want to make sure you got enough money to keep day and that's where I always am with my life I want to try to work like this not up down, up down you know that I can't stand that I tried to have, hey if I made \$100,000 would you spend what we need and as I save some calls next year, you might even catch \$1,000 worth of shrimp. You might have everything to go wrong so it's made, it's made me a lot wiser person. You ready to buy you one? [Laughs] Well, you're welcome and thank y'all I've enjoyed talking with you. Hopefully I was a little help and uh maybe y'all can talk Bryan in. Let's try to open it up. Just try it. Try it. I know he ain't gonna wanna hear that.