

**Name of Narrator:** Bill Harris (BH)

**Interviewer(s):** Megan Bull (MB) and Samantha Sheppard (SS) with the permission of Bill Harris and for the research project “Boat Stories”

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

**Transcriber:** Samantha Sheppard

**Others present:** No others were present.

**Date of Interview:** November 13, 2021

**Place:** Darien, Georgia

**Duration of the interview:** One hour, one minute and thirty-six seconds (1:01:36)

**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:** Interviewers sat down with Bill Harris, co-owner of Sapelo Shrimp Company.

**General Description of Contents:** Bill Harris speaks on his fishing vessels and his role at Sapelo Shrimp Company. He tells funny stories about his time on various fishing vessels throughout his career.

**MB:** Okay, so this is an interview with Bill Harris. On November 13, 2021, the interview is being conducted in Darien, Georgia. It's a part of the research project and interview collection titled boat stories the interviewers are Megan Bull, and Sam Sheppard. Just to reiterate a couple things, Jamekia already briefed you and got your informed consent. I just want to make sure that you still consent.

**BH:** I still consent.

0:31

**MB:** Okay, great. And just so you know, you can stop the interview or take a break anytime you would like, and you don't have to answer anything you don't want to.

**BH:** Okay

**MB:** Great. So the first question I have for you is, can you tell me about your most recent boat that you're on?

**BH:** I have, about two years ago, purchased a St. Augustine glass trawler and it's named the Brenda K. and had a lot o' work to do to it to get it ready to go fishing. And so made last fall with the boat and this spring with the boat through our roe shrimp season. I captain it. And that's been my last voyage out.

**MB:** Has it ever had any other names?

**BH:** It was the Lang's Pride out of St. Mary's, Georgia. Calvin Lang, a man that's been involved in the shrimp fishery here in Georgia forever had the boat built and uh, I was, Calvin had passed and his sons were left the boat and they wanted to sell it. So that's how I obtained the boat.

**MB:** How long have you been working on this boat?

**BH:** This particular boat, just a couple years. But I've had other boats and in the past I've had several other boats. I bought my first boat in 1989, but the Lang's Pride which is Brenda K now is my latest and I'd say it was a good years work to get her where she was mechanically sound enough to really make a go at it.

**MB:** What's your position on this?

**BH:** Well, I, when I go on the boat, I'm the captain, but also on a dock where we unload shrimp off other fishermen and buy and sell shrimp, sell ice, sell fuel. And that's generally where I'm at most of the time this day in time.

**MB:** Did anyone run this boat before you?

**BH:** Um, since I've had it I been the only captain, the Brenda K. I also have another boat, the Lady Suzy too that I'm doing a major refurbish on right now. So I had a young man running it and while I'm

proceeding with this refurbish and also working at the dock I've let this young man run my boat while I get the Lady Susy repaired and updated.

**MB:** Can you tell me any history on the Brenda K. ?

**BH:** Um not so much on the Brenda K. um you know because I just, just bought it really in the lifetime of a boat you know two years isn't much but it's a solid fiberglass hull which is they don't make them anymore and it's very desirable, there's nothing to rot. There's nothing to rust. They're just very structurally sound and and barrin' any kind of crazy accident its a lifetime hull, you know its

**MB:** What kind of boats are most of the ones that you work on?

4:06

**BH:** I've had a steel boat before. I've had two fiberglass boats and the boat, the other boat out now the Lady Susie II is a wood hull that's been fiberglass over. So I've pretty much been on every kind you can, there is out there.

**MB:** Has this boat been through anything substantial or anything that stands out over the years

**BH:** As far as what?

**MB:** Just anything that sticks out? Has it been through anything? Any struggles or major revamps maybe or anything?

**BH:** Um, well when I obtained to Brenda K, it had some transmission issues and I really struggled through that, getting to the root of the problem and eventually had to replace the transmission. We completely redid the inside o'the house to make the accommodations a lot better. We installed hydraulics on the boat to ought to, for steering and to run the winch which is superior to the old chain and sprocket days as most boats had you know before hydraulics really adapted to the shrimping.

**MB:** What other boats have you worked on?

**BH:** Oh my gosh. haha Too many to list but I have owned when I first got out of college I bought a 68 foot glass boat Captain Merit that was 1989 and I had her for about seven years I sold her in '96 and then I bought a big steel boat 85 foot steel boat and which was named after my daughter the Emily Lauren. And about that time I purchased another boat, The Lady Suzy II which I still have today.

**MB:** Do you mind if we reposition your microphone real quick?

**BH:** Sure.

**MB:** Thank you.

**BH:** Looks like it was pointed down. I had m'arm on it as well.

**MB:** If you want to put it on your collar we can [recorder beeping]

**BH:** Okay.

**MB:** Here, if you want me to do it I can

**BH:** I'll let you, yeah

**MB:** Don't mind me, Thank you.

**BH:** All right.

**MB:** So tell me more about other boats you've worked on.

6:58

**BH:** Um, as I was, I started shrimpin' while I was a young in high school as summer work. So I've worked for some old timey captains back in that day. I worked for Billy Epicoh on the Theodore Maria captain Osbourne Hudgins I've worked on several of his boats in the past and that was the, as far as a variety of boats that was mainly you know, when I was younger after I got out an on my own and I only operated the boats I owned.

**MB:** Can you tell me any funny stories about boating?

**BH:** Um, if I've got a funny story, I've got a little dog that has been with me on the boats for probably, she's 12 now. So for 12 years she's been with me and she thinks her job on the boat is to bark at the pelicans and keep the pelicans scared off the outrigger. And we were out on a trip right before Christmas one year and it was pretty dern cold. And I had a section cut out at the stern of the boat where there was no waist rail, and a pelican had jumped back there and so Dog you know, doing her duty went back to run the pelican off. And my crew member says Bill, Dog's gonna fall out the hole. That's her name, Dog. And I was like, you know, this dog knows this boat better than any of us she isn't about fall out the hole. Well, I turned my head and sure enough the Pelican had bit at her she does back and was going out of the hole. And I just panic because a shrimp boat when its dragin' the nets it's not going very fast. It's going about two and a half knots. But if you sit there and pause just a minute. You're 100 yards away just like that. So without thinking I went and grabbed the LifeRing [phone rings] and I bailed. I bailed right out overboard behind the dog. And the funny thing about this story and I can't describe it, but that dog was, Dog hates the water anyway, she doesn't like to swim don't like anything to do wit it. And so then you put her overboard and she's 10 miles offshore. But she had this look of sheer panic on her face. I mean she's back there strugglin a dog paddle with this and I grabbed that life ring and jumped overboard. And when I came outta the water, she had the most relaxed look came over her face. My

daddy's coming for me. Oh my daddy loves me. but that was, that one, you know, I'll remember that forever.

10:11

**MB:** Do you have any other remarkable stories from fishing or boating?

**BH:** Um, well, I got myself caught up in a hurricane one time ,that was we, it was the summer season, it was late in the summer, it was late August, and I'm not exactly sure what year this would be. But I would have to say probably 2000 or so. But we were up in Pamlico Sound working. And I had my steel hull then, The Emily Lauren. And I thought I was invincible because it's a big ol 85 foot steel boat. And I had flown home to visit family for the weekend. And flown back, and we'd been the shrimpin' had been very consistent. And we were hitting a good, not a killer week. But we were hitting a good check every week. And I just wanted to keep this momentum going. So I get back up to North Carolina get on the boat. And there's this hurricane coming. Hurricane Dennis. And actually, we had Dennis one. And then it passed through and came back an had Dennis two and then a week later we had Hurricane Fran. But I was like I'm on this 85 foot steel hull and the Pamlico Sound is an enclosed body of water. And this isn't a terrible storm. I was like, you know, I'm not gonna let this stop me. So here I go. We go barreling out there. And I was tired from traveling. We set out at about sundown on Sunday evening and started working. And I made one drag for about three or four hours and the weather was holding up pretty nice. It was supposed [phone rings] to hit, it was supposed to hit that night. So anyway, I go to bed, make the first drag, put a crew member at the wheel and go to bed. And, you know, just being really jetlag and all that was tired. And so he came, he was trying to let me get a good nap in and let me get some rest and time he woke me up an I come up to the wheel. It was on. I mean it was Hurricane conditions, it was bad rough. So immediately I try, get tryin' to make my way to the mouth of the river. I mean Pamlico Sound it's an enclosed body o'water, but I mean you can't, out there in the middle of it, you can't see land. And it didn't have the room to get these huge swells, but they were like twelve, fifteen foot seas and I mean about five foot apart, just [claps] getting pounded, pounded. And at one point one of the crew members got a call in to his wife and said kiss the baby for me cuz I ain't comin' back. Needless to say, the Coast Guard put an APB out for us and we eventually made our way and got into the river and got up to safe anchorage and we were all just beat and just, my nets were destroyed from just whipping around in the rigging more than anything. And I had the wind had drove the rain so hard it had gotten around the windows and tore up some electronics. So the next week the weather

broke, and everybody's out there killing the shrimp and I'm in there trying to fix everything I tore up. So I learned a pretty good lesson out of that one

**MB:** Have you caught any really interesting? Anything?

14:12

**BH:** Um, I have caught several old ship anchors. One time I was off shore up at New Jersey way off shore and caught a driver's license. That one kind of freaked me out a little bit. I never followed through on it. I hope it was just a lost license. We catch golf balls, all kinds of beach gear that gets left on the beach. Sunglasses, flippers, beach chairs. I've caught an entire steel barge one time that I got up. It wasn't a big one. It was probably ten, fifteen foot wide and about twenty foot long. I got it up enough to cut it out of the net. But, that's about it. I've called plenty of hangs that I tore up nets on it. I didn't get to see what it was.

**MB:** Any interesting animals?

**BH:** Um nothing that really comes to mind. Nothing that really comes to mind.

**MB:** Have you had-

**BH:** Oh, I did one time. I'll take that back. One time I got a Mora Mora in my net, a sunfish. And I didn't know what it was. But have you ever seen that? It looks like a fish that is literally cut in half with his little fins. And they stay right about the surface of the water. And as my nets were coming up, I guess he was just at the right place at the right time. And I caught him and I was like, my God, what is this? It look'd prehistoric. And I was like, I need to carry this in and have this documented. But yeah, this might be the only one in the world so I released it. But I learned later. That's what it was, a sunfish. [coughs] Excuse me.

**MB:** Have you had any other close calls while you're out fishing?

**BH:** Um I mean, several times we've had breakdowns and, and stuff like that. But usually, you know, when you have a fisherman nearby, no matter what's going on when there's a fisherman that needs help you drop what you're doing. And I mean, been towed in several times due to engine problems, or ring a shaft in the boat, something like that.

**MB:** Can you tell me what the people are like in this industry?

**BH:** We have some characters, we have some characters. And at the end of the day, it's an industry that requires no education background at all. And it's an industry that if you're not afraid of some hard work, you can go make some good money. And so you do run across some characters. [laughter]

**MB:** Can you tell me about any of them?

**BH:** Oh, gosh. I don't really want to call any names. [laughter]

**MB:** How about your favorite memory from fishing?

17:46

**BH:** Oh, wow. Favorite memory. I don't know just I would say just going out and having a big catch when, most especially like the whole fleets that the dock calls it, there's no shrimp out there, no shrimp out there and you go out there and you just hit 'em and and load the boat and and that is one good, satisfying feeling. Just when you go on your premonitions and what you've learned from the water and go and and really lay into the shrimp that is one satisfying thing.

**MB:** How have you learned how to fish?

**BH:** Through a lot of screw ups, you know, this day and time, marine navigation is all computer based. And I mean, it's taken a lot of the skill out of it. I mean, back in the day when I first started you know, we didn't even have GPS. We didn't have near, I mean, the electronics th'are available today. So we did a lot of our fishing just by looking at bottom machines, you know, to figure out where the good bottom was using land features to, I mean, I know as long as the oak tree doesn't get on the dark woods back there on the beach, I'm fine. I mean that. So that took a lot more attention than it does today. Today you're [phone beeps] looking at a computer screen and it puts your boat. It's drift and set and it and everything is factored in for you. What I'm trying to say is it would make learning a lot easier today than what it did back in the day. But you screw up and tear a couple nets up and then rather than being inside sleeping all night. You're on deck all night fixin' nets and those are lessons that stick with you.

**MB:** Can you tell me more about how you've noticed fishing and the boats change over the years?

20:17

**BH:** Yeah, I would say more than anything it seems that this day, you know, back in the day used to be able to stay right here in Georgia and make a living in a year's time. And it seems like this day and time you just have to travel more. The guys are shrimpin' as far up as Virginia today. And traveling around into the Gulf during the off season. And it seems like you know, your more smaller family owned boats are kind o'er have been getting phased out. And it's larger, large steel boats that are company owned boats. Three Four boat fleets and all, seems like you see those more than the smaller owner operator boats this day in town.

**MB:** Have the boats changed a lot since you've started?

**BH:** Not so much. You know, there's been major improvements, as I said, as incorporating hydraulics on boats all these advances in navigation, mobile Direct TV antennas, you've got it. Yeah, it's a lot more

comfortable than what it used to be, central heat and air. But as far as that, the concepts the same your basic otter trawl and I mean, pretty much the bread and butter of catching a shrimp is the same. Like I said, it's just been a lot of advances into making boats more efficient and a heck of a lot more comfortable.

**MB:** Can you think of any boats you've worked on that really stood out to you?

**BH:** Um, well, the Lady Suzie II is, she was built in '71. It's a 50 year old wooden boat. But that boat has been some kind of good for me. I mean, she's probably paid herself over three or four times. And you know, you kind of, you do get feelings for boats that really treat you good. And that kind of went into a lot of my decision on doing this refurbish on this boat is just that, you know, she's been so good you can't just scrap her.

**MB:** How did you get into fishing originally? Like, was there something specific?

23:03

**BH:** It was all about a dollar bill is what got me into shrimpin'. Where I was raised. It's a farming and fishing community. And up in Pamlico County, North Carolina. And I used my summertime jobs working on potato farms. And back those days minimum wage was \$3.35 an hour. And I'll never forget, you know, we'd be so pumped up when you get a 90 hour weekend. You busted a \$300 check. I mean, we thought we were rich. And one year they, too much rain or something they had to plow the potatoes under and couldn't harvest them. So I was a half of summer with no work. And I happened to be on the docks one day and this guy said, yeah, the guys on this shrimp boat here made \$700 [phone dings] this week, and I've never heard that kind of money in my life. And I said, Well, where do I sign up? And so that's what initially enticed me just as a kid. On the summer time off, you know, that was just more money than I could fathom and then once I got out there, I just fell in love with it. That's just all I wanted to do.

**MB:** So there was no one specific who really influenced you to start this?

**BH:** No, no, I'm a first generation fisherman.

**MB:** What's that, like being the first generation of fishermen?

**BH:** Ah, well, it surprises people because most folks in, you know, or they're just we're born into it, and that's all they know. And, I just chose it because I love it. And I just had one daughter, but I've got a grandson coming along that's three now and I'm gon' take him out there and if he loves it I mean it's not the type thing I would ever force on him. But if he loves it I would encourage him to choose it as a career because we have no new blood coming in in this industry I mean it's unbelievable and shrimpin'



has never been better. I mean some attribute it to global warming I don't know what it is but we produce more shrimp now than ever, I mean, if you got the work ethic and the drive and you want it you can go out there and make yourself a good living, dern good living.

**MB:** So what do you think this industry is going to be like in the future?

**BH:** Gosh, I don't know. I don't know what the future is going to bring. I mean, the majority of the people [phone ding] working on these boats, captains and crews are 45 years old and up there's, like I say, just doesn't seem like there's the kids coming up with a work ethic, 'course when we were comin' up there was no internet I mean you couldn't sit on the internet typin' atta computer and make a good living. I mean the people that had money were the people that worked the hardest and saved and put up and that was the more successful people and now I guess with all these clean jobs or where you never break a sweat or never get dirty I guess that appeals more to kids this time I don't know just doesn't seem to me that the work ethic is there like it used to be.

**MB:** Can you tell me about your experiences and positions over the years of your fishing career?

26:58

**BH:** Well as I've said, you know once I decided I was going to do it, do this for livin' right out immediately I bought known, m'own boats so just mainly captain and manager and business manager. Takes a lot of management with these boats or you might be catching good shrimp and thinking you're making all the money well you better set it back because there's always expenses coming I mean you you're one drag away from shaft ringin' and losing a \$10,000 propeller and a \$15,000 dry dock bill I mean, you know, you've it takes a lot of management.

**MB:** What was it like for you pretty much always being a captain?

**BH:** A lot of responsibility on your shoulders because when you've got a crew working for you know their families are dependin' on you going out there producin' and dependent on you to have that boat functional where no problems it can go and make a successful trip with no problems. And I mean, that's a lot of pressure. You know, when you have people, families dependin' on that boat to produce. I would say that more than anything.

**MB:** Can you expand more on what it's like being in charge of the crew?

**BH:** Your decision, you have to, it's safety first, you know, before anything because you're dealing with a lot of weight, a lot of it's overhead and you're responsible to keep everything in tip top shape, where nothing can break somebody get hurt, and then your decisions at sea. You have to think about safety first. You have safety o'the crew first, and safety of the boat second. And after that catch a lot of shrimp.

**MB:** It sounds like you were captain at a young age compared to others.

**BH:** Yeah.

**MB:** What was that like?

29:28

**BH:** Well, I tell ya, the first year I got my boat. I went out there and I guess it was just beginner's luck. I was tearing all these old guys up and I'm like, this is it? This is easy. And that beginner's luck wore off and I had my share of tough lessons, you know, tearing up nets and making stupid moves and you know, all the old shrimpers are dragging right here and catchin' shrimp. That over there's got to be better. Of course, it's bottom, you can't drag and you know, put your nets down an' there tore up. And so you've just got to learn for yourself a lot of tough lessons.

**MB:** Did you have anyone to teach you anything? Or was it really just you?

**BH:** Well, my first captain, when I started shrimpin' kind of mentored me a lot and took a lot of extra time, taught me how to sew net, he knew I was interested, you know, and when somebody young shows some interest, he really, really taught me a lot on the navigation aspect, like I say, on the day to day sewing nets, maintaining engines, and kind of put me a step ahead of a lot, you know.

**MB:** What was he like? How much did that affect you, do you think over your career?

**BH:** Well, actually he's over giving an interview. [chuckles] I just, I saw that, what his hard work had paid off for him. He was very successful. And it can be contributed nothing to dedication and hard work. And I admired that and wanted the same

**MB:** Did you and him ever have any really, really interesting times fishing?

**BH:** Yeah, one time. His name's Jimmy Moore, by the way. And actually we are in partners together on the Brenda K. We have partnered back cause my first boat he sold to me and he financed this boat to me. So he got me into shrimping. And when he did that he had retired for years and years and years. And he's since lost his wife and just got some time on his hands and just looking for something you know, so I said, Jimmy, let's go get a boat together. And he loves it. I mean, he brought me into shrimpin' and I put him out of shrimpin'. And now I've brought him back into shrimpin'. But one year he owned the Captain Merritt, which is the first boat that I bought from, my first boat and the boat I bought from him. And that boat was named after his father, Meritt Moore. And he was very well thought of man in the industry. So there was no thoughts about changing the name of the boat. The ship remained the Captain Merritt. But he was from Southport, North Carolina, and they had dredged the inlet there. And the dredging company, they have a designated dump site where you're supposed to take all the dredge

spoils. And in these spoils are huge stumps and trees and the guy that was driving the tugboat rather than going to the designated dump site, got outside the channel and just turned it loose right there. Well the followin' spring. All the shrimpers came out to go to work, you know, on their home grounds and they were tearing up nets. I mean, they were having a terrible time because all this stumps and all had been dumped there. And Jimmy lobbied the local marine fisheries and told them about this major problem. And so anyway, they had the dredge company come back and charter three or four shrimp boats to go catch stumps. So for about three months we caught stumps. I thought that was a pretty funny thing. D'y'all have a good day today you know like shrimp Yeah, whoa, man we caught 'bout seven or eight trees.

**MB:** Wow, that's really fun. What are some other problems you've run into fishing?

34:33

**BH:** Up in North Carolina right now there's a lot of environmentalists that just see shrimp boats as just death machines. Oh my gosh, they're catching all these species of animals and and you know there's been such advances also, you know, in our gears that we pull now we pull turtle shooters, we pull fish eyes. So the amount of bycatch we catch is very low. I mean, and it's a sustainable fishery. Well up in North Carolina, for example, there's a group trying to shut the whole Pamlico Sound down that we have fished forever. And it's my belief and belief of others that trawling the bottom actually benefits the bottom and makes it more productive. And as a matter of fact, North Carolina produces a hell of a lot of shrimp. And I feel like the reason is that the shrimp boats are inside that sound. And working that bottom. I mean, otherwise, it just grows up grasses over and just becomes dead bottom and doesn't produce anything. So I mean, that's one thing going on. And it's increasingly trying to take our bottom away from us that we've fished forever.

**MB:** How has your gear changed over the year?

**BH:** Well, back in the day, you pulled a net and a bag and that's it. So anything you came across, you caught it and back in those days, there were some turtles getting drowned. But through the years, Turtle excluders are in all nets and so anything that won't fit through a two inch bar is getting ejected from your net, and then once you get in the bag, we have fin fish excluders, fish eyes, so what fish get in there, a majority of them get out through the excluders. And they've gotten very good at it, that it doesn't cost you much shrimp, not much of your catch, but yet eliminating what you need to. But you know, there's another thought with that is that there's no pleasin' these people that are dead set, there like the CCA or there's some big money groups that are just out after trying to kill shrimp. You know, you show him a

drag of nothing but clean shrimp, I mean, not the first fish. Yeah, well, that's because you've already killed all the fish. And then if you happen to get a drag that might have some bycatch in it, look at her look, I mean, there's no appeasing these people. And I know it's sustainable. And it's not hurting anything, because I'm dragging the same ground now that I did 30 years ago, and the life is abundant, if not more, you know what I'm saying? Although it is seasonal, and you know, some years you have more shrimp than others, some years, you might have more fish than others, but I know it's a sustainable industry that's not causing any kind of damage. And I guarantee if they shut Pamlico Sound down, as they're trying they'll quit producing the shrimp up there that they used to, because we were used to, we were allowed to drag portions of our sounds here in Georgia, up till I think about '89 or so. And it just seemed like we produce way more shrimp and what we do now.

38:55

**MB:** So, do you think that it's improved over the years because of all of this?

**BH:** Yes, I definitely feel like overall, there's way more shrimp to catch now. I mean, back when I was coming up, like let's say my first boat for example, I used to think that if I could catch an average 250 pounds of tails a day. That was kind of my quota. So if I could do that I would have 1000 pounds in four days. 2000 pounds in eight days, and stay another day or two to try to get 25 an' man you had a good trip. And this day in time if you don't have three, four-hundred pounds on a drag you better get the hell away from that desert, get ta where some shrimp are. It's just your standards and what you look to catch just so much more this day in time. And of course expenses are too so you got to stay on 'em, that's for sure. Stay in the best of it.

**MB:** How much harder or easier do you think it is to shrimp these days because of technology changes and gear changes?

**BH:** Well I think as I've discussed earlier I think the catching the shrimp and navigating the boat and stayin' in the proper is a lot easier but the work on decks da same. It's hard work, it's hard work

**MB:** You mentioned earlier how your first boat, you kept the name of it. Have you named any boats?

**BH:** I have, I have the second boat I bought it from some Vietnamese people and I bought it was the Kim Hung was the name of it and I actually left it that name for about a year or so because I didn't want to put my daughter's name on until I had it, had the boat looking good an' all that, but I renamed it the Emily Lauren.

41:02

**MB:** Are there any other boats you name?

**BH:** Nope, that's it. Except for this one that Jimmy and I just bought, the Brenda K. I named it after my mom. And I asked Jimmy if we could name it the Captain Merritt from the first boat I bought from him and named after his dad and he didn't want any part of that. He said no. You don't put the same name on another boat. That was an ol' tellin' of his or an ol' superstition or whatever so we named it after my mom, the Brenda K.

**MB:** Has he taught you a lot of superstitions about fishing and boats?

**BH:** Um yeah, you get, you learn some superstitions one of his big ones was not to leave out on Friday there's a lot of fishermen that, that is a no no but that one it doesn't resonate too strong with me because I've left out on Friday and had some good trips before I've left out on Friday and had some bad trips before and that's what you blame it on, I should have never left on Friday but there's some of the old timers that you do not whistle on the boat. They say that calls the wind up. Now that'll , oh my gosh, it'll make some o'em old timers mad. One I believe in is you don't turn a hatch upside down. Oh my gosh, if I got any guys messing with the hatch or any kind of hatch to go into the ice hole to the lazarette to the engine room, make sure you don't turn that hatch upside down. I think that's just terrible luck.

**MB:** Do you have any questions Sam?

**SS:** I do. You talked about getting rid of a boat. Could you describe what it's like to say goodbye to a boat? When do you decide to do that?

43:04

**BH:** I can't imagine but there has been several shrimp boats that, you know, the hay day of building boats were in the 70s and there's no wood boats being built so that puts your wood boats that are existing, 50/60 years old here now and like in this case on the Lady Susie II, I was just gonna initially put a new house on it and refurbish it and while I was doing that I wanted to pull the fuel tanks out because they've been down there and in that engine room for 50 years and some of them were had rusted up and were unusable and the four that I was using needed to be really inspected cleaned up, painted and you know repaired if needed and when I did that the bogus double plank, you've got your keel, your ribs, it's got outside planking well it's also planked on the inside also for strength and once I pulled the tanks out those boards were in bad shape. So I pulled those boards off and then the ribs needed some doctoring up an' some sistering up so it get to a point that is it economical feasible. I mean and me myself in this example probably being hard headed and for love of this boat I'm probably spendin' more money and it might be better served to just scrap the boat and and go get another one but if I was 30 years old I would

you know I'd go get one of these big ol' steel boats and tear out after 'em but for my needs I'm gonna see this project through and it'll last me my career for sure.

**MB:** What's the best kind of boat do you think?

**BH:** Well I think a solid glass boats steel boats are tough and, but they require a lot of maintenance I mean you it takes sandblasting it takes painting. Solid glass there's nothing to rot there's nothing to rust. What you have is there forever so that's my preferred, I would not consider buying a wood boat and I don't think pretty much anybody this day and time would.

**MB:** What's one of the most important things in keeping up your boat?

**BH:** Painting your yearly maintenance, painting just so you know once a bad spot occurs let's say on a fiberglass boat, refiberglass, if a small problem is neglected it turns into a big problem because obviously boats catch a lot of weather not so much the saltwater kind of helps preserve but the sun and rain and and if it's neglected and general maintenance as far as painting and cleaning and goes a long way in towards the life of a boat.

46:52

**MB:** You talked earlier about going on trips. What is that like?

**BH:** It all depends on how you're doing when shrimp's good you're making plenty money moral's usually a heck of a lot better and da days go by a lot quicker but ice boats you know, you have two different types of boats you have boats that blow bulk ice on 'em that ice the shrimp as you catch them you can only hold those shrimp about seven days. So that's not too big of a deal. Now the freezer boats you quick freeze those shrimp and you have frozen hold you can stay out hold that product 40/50 days now that so I'm not ready to sign up for that 'bout 20 days would be my max and the shrimp have to be running pretty good keep me out there that long

**MB:** So what's the longest trip you've been on?

**BH:** I've done like 25 days a few times. But that was plenty. You're ready to get the heck away from those guys. And see a different face for a while you know?

**MB:** What's it like staying with those same crew members for that long?

**BH:** Well generally you know we're all out there working as a team to obtain the same goal so generally it's all good man. And as I said before morale catching Good trip making money sure helps morale but if it's slow fishing and you know you're having problems guys get ready throw in the towel sometimes. but all in all, you know, the guys that do this, you know, they understand, you know, to be successful, we got to work together and do what it takes to have a good trip

49:13

**SS:** You talked a lot about finding a lot of not fish in the water, some litter. Do you think that's a problem? Has it increased over the years?

**BH:** You know what one thing I've noticed 10 years ago, you would see literally I'd say three or four deflated helium balloons on top of water every day. And I mean turtles mistake this for food and they can eat it and it can kill a turtle. And but that is one thing I have noticed over the past few years that a lot of that maybe there's some awareness being brought up about that. But yeah, I mean you see some trash out there and what we catch off the bottom we save and bring to the dock and dispose of. But you know as far as like the plastics in the ocean that you hear about these islands of trash out in the ocean and we don't see that near shore so much.

**SS:** You also said that you're a sustainable fisher, could you give us your definition of sustainability?

**BH:** Well, if what my definition is if shrimping vessels were killing the bottom and destroying stock that can't, that's on a steady decline, it would be an unsustainable fishery, but what my definition is now, as I've been into this 30 years, I'm seeing more and more levels of shrimp, I'm seeing more and more levels of sea life. So that's what I'd define as sustainability, that this industry is not hurting any kind of stocks out there.

**SS:** Back to the beginning of our interview, you mentioned that you went to college?

**BH:** I did.

**SS:** Were you fishing in college? What was your major?

**BH:** Well, that's a funny story in itself. As I said, I was a first generation fisherman and my parents kind of, you know, their parents expected them to go to college and get a degree and my parents expected me and I was like, I'm not interested in that life. I want you know, I already had this guy offering to finance his boat, I was ready to go fishing. And they said, no, we expect you to go to college. So I ended up majoring in psychology. And I fussed my way through the whole four years. I'm like, this is such a waste of time. They're killing the shrimp out there. We could be making money, we can be making boat payments, son, those shrimp will be there when you're graduated. You need to stay focused and I don't know what their thoughts were about that an' maybe they felt like once I got into it, shrimpin', I wouldn't be in you know, as far as making a career out of it and it would be a back up plan for me but proved 'em wrong on that one.

**SS:** You have a daughter? Yes. Did she go to college? Did you want her to fish? Was she not interested?

**BH:** No. She was not interested. She wasn't interested in the fishin' so much. Now she went with me all the time as a child and loved it but once she got 13 and an' she got out there and she couldn't get cell service on her phone. It kind of discouraged her from that point.

53:08

**SS:** Do you think that there's a gender difference between fishing or is that just your daughter just wasn't interested?

**BH:** She just, it just wasn't her thing we have seen some female shrimp fishermen and captains as well through the years not too many captains but we've had like several boats that have come in and unloaded my shrimp at my dock that had a female crew.

**SS:** Do you own a dock around here?

**BH:** I'm right here, right next door at Sapelo Shrimp Company

**SS:** And you mentioned that you own two boats right now.

**BH:** That's right.

**SS:** Is that a normal thing that you see a lot or is that

**BH:** You see that some I mean you either got your owner operators that pretty much own one boat or you know you there's not too much in between seems like you got your owner operators and you got maybe guys fleet managers that own four or five boats so I'm kind of in between I guess [laughter]

**SS:** Do you have any more questions?

**MB:** So do you mainly fish here right now?

**BH:** Yes, while I had this one boat and won't be ready to fish for a while, you know until we get done with this renovation. So my main job now is managing the dock Sapelo Shrimp Company, but I serve as a relief Captain if there's a good run o' shrimp coming out you know going on and my guys come in off the trip and they want four or five days off. Yeah, I'll jump on the boat and go keep the boat working till they're ready to go back.

**MB:** Where have you fished?

**BH:** I have fished from Texas to New York. [laughter] Literally.

**MB:** Where do you think you've had the best luck fishing?

**BH:** I would say Georgia all in all. I love the work here, I love the coast and it's good fishing it's beautiful. And so Georgia and like the fall o' the year that our fall shrimp start migrating down Florida and just work 'em right on down as far as Cocoa Beach.



**SS:** Do you have any questions for us?

**BH:** I don't think so. Hope I did. All right.

**MB:** Great. I think that's about all the questions that we have.

56:01

**BH:** Okay. All right. Sorry about my phone going off. I thought I had it. Silence.

**MB:** Thank you so much for coming out.

**SS:** We appreciate it.

**BH:** Well, I appreciate y'all. We appreciate the interest in the industry. It's certainly a different way of life to make a living. It's a lot of commitment, you know. I've missed more birthdays, Thanksgivings.

**SS:** You don't look like a grandfather by the way. I'm very surprised.

**BH:** Yeah, I've got 3

**SS:** Oh my god. I thought you said you had 3 year old.

**BH:** Yeah, I've got seven, three and one.

**MB:** Oh, wow. That's awesome.

**BH:** And he loves that dock right now. We goin' ta granddad's dock? Goin' to granddad's dock, [giggles] that's really a lot. It's keeping me hanging around just see if might like it.

**SS:** Are you still recording? Do you want to see more young fishermen?

**BH:** Yes, yes, definitely do and actually, here in McIntosh County, they have started a vocational program teaching kids skills that would help them be ready to go to work in the commercial fishing industry. And where I came from North Carolina, they had that same program in my high school, also. I never took any of those classes 'cause at that point, I didn't really see myself endin' up here. But I think it's great. I mean, there's truly with fewer and fewer people coming into this and we still have the boats that need to go. It's truly a way to make a fair living.

**SS:** How young does that start?

**MB:** Yeah.

**BH:** Well, I started about 14, I expect this day in time, you'd need to be, you know, 17 or 18 or so before you would be taken out? Probably but yeah, I was happy to see that locally that they would teach the kids some skills that are required. I mean, college isn't for everybody and sitting behind a computer screen isn't for everybody and you go out there one time and you know, out there you watch every sunrise, every sunset it's beautiful. And you fall in love with that sea. You don't want to do anything else.

**MB:** Do you think that these classes are going to influence a lot of younger people?

**BH:** I hope so. I hope so. I think the program has been going a couple years now. So maybe it's too early to see, you know, locally right here in this county. And actually, McIntosh county is probably the biggest or most number of full time fishermen probably in the state. I mean, Brunswick, there's not much left in Brunswick anymore. And Savannah either as far as number of boats, you know. So I think it's great that maybe they can learn a way to make a living and stay right here in their home county. You know.

**MB:** Absolutely. That's really, that's really cool. I didn't know they had that program here.

**BH:** Yeah, yeah. It's spearheaded by a local fishermen's son who's been on the water his entire life, so he's got a lot to offer these kids. An' a Georgia Southern grad also.

**MB:** That's awesome

59:50

**SS:** Is that welcome to outsiders?

**BH:** I think it's only offered in the McIntosh County High School. Seniors

**SS:** Oh its a high school program

**BH:** I think they also work, they've done some work with the University of Georgia extension as far as getting the kids out on the Georgia Bulldog and getting them a little bit o' sea time.

**MB:** So they don't offer anything for younger kids?

**BH:** No, no, not too much.

**MB:** Oh that's too bad.

**SS:** But, you take your grandson out?

**BH:** I definitely will. I definitely will.

**SS:** Oh, he hasn't gone yet?

**BH:** No, he had'nt gone yet. He's a handful. I wouldn't be able to shrimp. I'd be worried about where he's at all the time. [chuckles] But at some point I will for sure

**MB:** If your grandson does have interests, do you think that you will be able to take him out on your boat for many years to come?

1:01:01

**BH:** Yeah, I would go back fishing full time just to make sure he's top notch. Well, I enjoyed it, y'all.

**MB:** We did too. Thank you

**BH:** Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all very much.

**MB:** Well that's it.

**BH:** All right.

**MB:** That's all we got for you.

**BH:** All right, good, good, I passed, I passed

**SS:** I think we want to do some photos outside if that's alright with you.