

**Name of Narrator:** Joseph Rauls (JR)

**Interviewer:** Yhambria Simmons (YS) and Kimberly Singley (KS) with the permission of Joseph Rauls for the research project “Boat Stories”

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

**Transcriber:** Yhambria Simmons

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

**Date of Interview:** November 12, 2021

**Place:** Brunswick, GA

**Duration of interview:** Thirty-nine minutes and five seconds (39:05)

**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 sit down with Joseph Rauls as he details his experiences on fishing vessels.

**General Description of Contents:** Joseph Rauls discusses the changes in fishing vessels he has experienced over the years. He also goes into detail about when he first started shrimping and the changes he has seen in relation to the water, prices, and crew.

**YS:** Alright. This is an interview with Joseph Rauls on November 12, 2021. The interview is being conducted in Brunswick Georgia it is part of the research project in our nav collection titled both stories. The interviewers are Yhambria Simmons, Kim Singley. Alright, Mr. Joseph, how did you start first start fishing?

00:30

**JR:** Oh my daddy bought a shrimp boat in 1969. Just come along, daddy. Being around daddy he was a shrimper and he always did his own thing, you know like entrepreneur. Shrimp, whatever you know to make a living and that's how I got around shrimping these docks right here years ago when all this was like brand new. Even the city dock down there, the big concrete dock further down, it was built for shrimp boats. Yes. Brunswick, Woodbine, St. Mary's, Fernandina, Darien all along the coasts were shrimp boats. You couldn't find a better living. It was nothing better. That's how it was and that's how I got started, shrimping make money.

**YS:** How would you describe it now?

01:30

**JR:** It's different it's changed a lot in order to make money now the smaller boats like we had they are kind of like going out nowadays it's the million dollar shrimp boats they have the million dollar shrimp boat you got to spend you, you know \$400 - \$500,000 to get a decent, what they call a decent boats now because in the years back the shrimp boats was ice boats. Now the modern boats are freezer boat, I-Q-F, and big power back then we pull what we call two rigs, they pull four rings now. Ya'll know but that kind of stuff? [laughter], Yes, [phone rings] Um like, years ago, we pull like two 50s or 55 foot nets. Nowadays the big boats will pull four 68 foot nets, you know half a million dollar boat.

**YS:** Can you tell us about your current fishing vessel and what is the name?

02:52

**JR:** My fishing vessel's name, Miss Bernadette named after my wife, is 65 feet long. I have twin engines. It has two motors, um I got two 855 Cummins, they are on like a 401 reduction gear here about 700 horsepower.

**YS:** And is the boat special to you anyway?

03:16

**JR:** There always are, just like a boat is like another wife, always need attention. It's always something to do with it to try to keep your boat up to keep it from going down. Things, you know even, even if you don't work a boat this year, you still have to pull that boat up on the dry dock and putting zinc on it making sure you don't get worms and stuff in it. Scrape the coolers and so that will keep the engines cool.

**YS:** Have you done like any like major structural changes lately to the boat?

03:55

**JR:** Well, like I say it's a old wooden boat, so we have to go in it and put wood, new wood in it you know to keep it supported. And you know you have to change your equipments, like years ago we used to navigate by landmarks stuff we used to look but now we got like we call them a wind plot. We got GPS and stuff on the boat and it draw lines. It's just like you driving in your car. We got all that kind of stuff and big time radars and a lot of modern equipment. Even the turtle excluders, back years ago we didn't have all that kind of stuff now that we got them and now they are modernizing those used to be the round ones now they got the square ones. And you know the DNR and the Coast Guard, they enforce it. They really make you keep on top of it. Just like Monday, Coast Guard was up there like a sheriff. No foreal they sit the big cutter offshore and then they got a medium size boat it rides around and look at the boats and I got a letter earlier this year, said if your boat was built before 2001, they want you to do a dockside inspection where the Coast Guard come in and inspect your boat before you take it out. So I did that and I did everything they wanted me to do and I got the inspection so they so when the cutter when the boat came round checking, he can run my boat name in the number and he said okay this boat been checked and inspected at the dock so they gone to the next boat and they out there too.

**YS:** So like how would you compare regulations back then to now like was it better back then?

06:02

**JR:** It was easier, much easier you know you gotta, way back then it was nothing like now it's like they're on top of you. Yes, big difference. Y'all never saw the Coast Guard, and back then way back then we used to drag what they call a sounds, y'all know what the sounds are used to allow for us to drag the sounds years ago but we can't drag the sounds anymore you got to go out and ocean. I talked to someone in DNR, and I said what are y'all gonna let us drag the sounds again? They say you can get off of your mind, it aint happening no more.

**YS:** How do you think commercial fishing is doing overall in Georgia and overall Georgia like have you seen changes in the water, weather or sea life?

07:02

**JR:** Yes. Yes. Its different sea life I used to see years ago I don't see anymore and it is, it's changed. I mean, I used to see you know like the blue crab. It used to be a brown specker crab about the size of blue crab. I don't see it anymore. It's a lot of different little things. Like I used to see we call him some kind of sea spider I don't see that stuff anymore. They're just different.

**YS:** So what do you understand about fishing vessels now that you didn't when you first started fishing?

07:47

**JR:** Well, a fishing vessel, see, it's changed so, I can say years ago we had wooden vessels they don't even build the old wooden vessels anymore, so you have to maintain it and then they started building the fiberglass vessel. So the old wooden vessel they fiberglass over the vessel over the wood and then they made something they called solid fiberglass but nowadays they build steel hulls and they are stronger, you know the maintenance is more expensive on the steel hull. But you gotta stronger hull and stuff for you know bad weather and stuff. And you know with the big winches, like I say these guys with these million dollar boats, half a million dollar boats, they pump them down with fuel and they throw them lines off they're not coming back until they run out of fuel or fill the hole. Little vessels don't run like that. Just like right now, I got a guy that he's going out with me he come from the West Coast and he's "oh man you got a dayboat!" Yes, like you go out maybe we go out and we go stay you know 2,3,4 nights they go out you know 30, 40, 50 days whatever it takes to pay for the fuel and fill the boat up, and they already know they ain't coming back. And some of those big boats they they carry different nets and rigs and stuff with them. So if they aren't catching like the regular white shrimp they say well we are run offshore and catch some rock shrimp or royal red, they gone. Because the million dollar boat,

it can't sit still, it's got to work it's gonna go from coast to coast. Just like right now they killing 'em in North Carolina talk to my buddy the other morning, see it's skippy right around here aint catching much. Y'all know about the old Golden Ray that sunk? The ship? It kind of messed up the ground a little bit, kinda its not catching, a lot nothing really right around Brunswick.

**YS:** Do you have any good or bad memories with your boat now?

10:17

**JR:** Yeah, when I get me a good lick when I have me a \$10,000 day or two yeah, thats good memories. [laughter] Bad memories when you ain't make no money, just like the last time when I went out earlier this week, I didn't make any money, it actually cost me some money. So that's why I tell you I'm leaving Georgia and going to Florida to try to get on down because the shrimps are moving south. Like all them shrimps coming from Virginia and North Carolina, the shrimp gone get off shore and they heading south. So I'm gonna try to hem off some of them.

**YS:** So would you say like, I guess Georgia waters for shrimp, it is not good. In this time period right now?

11:00

**JR:** It used to be used to catch some right out here, The Golden Ray kind of messed it up a little bit. North of here, it's been decent. You know, I guess depending on how far the oil spills and stuff traveled and the garbage in the water and stuff, you know, but you got to go north of here or south of here to try to catch you enough to make a living just like cuz fuel is fuel is \$3.15 cent a gallon. So if I burn 200 gallons or 250 gallons a day, do the math. So that's what, seven, \$800 or so right? So I gotta at least catch, you know, \$1800, \$2,000 worth a day to pay for the fuel and pay the crew. So if you ain't catching that much, you might as well tie it to the dock and do your maintenance.

**KS:** Was it cheaper to run a boat back then?

12:07

**JR:** It was much cheaper. Okay. Back in the days, I just say that I just put fuel on a day \$3.15 a gallon back in the day. So my daddy and them was shrimping, fuel be like 50 cents a gallon. And I remember my daddy getting \$5 a pound for his shrimp back then. It's like you got to evolve. That's what I'm telling

you about the big million dollar boats. They aint coming back, they, when they leave the dock, they 20 \$30,000 in the hole. So they're not coming back till they make that money and a profit. Because a lot of big boats, they do what they call 50,50, they don't pay off the top for some of the smaller boats. They try to keep the expensive down and they pay off the top, like a third go to the crew. The big boats say this is how we're going to do it. We're going to do 50,50 after all the expenses. So, say for instance you're on a big boat right? And you leave the dock and you got all your groceries and fuel and everything and you 25,000 in the hole. So meaning you don't make any money until you make the 25,000 to cover the expenses, then you start making money. With the smaller boats in say, you go out and we caught say \$1,000 worth today right? They not worry about how much expenses was the crew get a third of that \$1,000. Not on some of those big boats, you got to make that money up first.

**YS:** And then what was your role on the Bernadette boat?

13:58

**JR:** I'm the owner and when I started off, I was the stirker, like working. But I have learned to run it myself because when I bought it I was working for Georgia Power. It's like it would was just in my blood just like Daddy brought us up on the boat so I always wanted my own boats, I bought the boat and I had guys running it for me as I work but I'm like retired now so I run it myself.

**YS:** So like as a fisherman so, has this lifestyle, is it natural to you or having grown to like it?

14:38

**JR:** I've just always loved it, it's a challenge. Okay, this is how captain's look at it. It's competitive. Some captains say you may have a bigger, better, stronger boat than me, but I'mma out fish you. I know more than you. Really. And that's how I look at, it is like I'll show you. And now they got it where - y'all buddies right? You catch some you might call her on the phone and say hey, this where I'm at, I'm catching a few. I'll call you, me and you ain't buddies, man I'm just driving, I ain't doing nothing though [laughter] I'm telling yall for real its life, okay. It's like okay, say you caught 5,6,7 \$8,000 worth today right? If you tell me , I might even tell my buddy he tell his buddy so now everybody around you they done soaked them up, now they gone but if you don't tell nobody but your buddy she aint gone tell nobody's so now y'all, y'all catch'em.

**YS:** So what are some recommendations you have for the future of commercial fishing?

16:08

**JR:** You gonna have to go big. I know one of my buddies said they going to put the little shrimpers out of business, because the big boat say they got a million dollar boat, right? They from Alabama, Mississippi, Texas, North Carolina, Virginia, right? They traveled, okay. They pulled in at this dock right. I've seen them do this. They unload, this dock don't get their shrimp. They got a tractor trailer pull up. They paid a dock a little fee for the shrimp to come through their dock. They put them on a tractor trailer and they may take them up New York somewhere, see they got a better connection on every thing where the little man has to come here and unload them at dock and get this little dock price where the big wheels who got the money, they get their fuel cheaper because they gonna back up a tractor trailer they ain't fin to buy this. They got money and that's how they do it. So it's like you're gonna have to get into this game if you gonna to stay in it and you're gonna have to do I-Q-F shrimp, freezer shrimp. Because I'm thinking now, Imma stay in this business I'm buy me a freezer boat it's just, if you okay, I'll show you something. Years ago, you bought a car right? And the car got, say 15 miles to the gallon. That's bad fuel mileage now. You want your car to get what 30 and 35, it's the same thing with these big boats with these big power engines. They don't even burn the fuel like some of the old engines and get better power. Efficiency that's the name of the game. Keep the old way down.

**YS:** Okay, what has your boat been through the years?

**JR:** Where has it been?

**YS:** Yeah, well what has it been through.

18:24

**JR:** Oh the years its been everywhere! [Laughter] South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Florida. I mean, the old man had it before me. He said with them boat payments he had to let her go, you got to go. His wife come to Texas and seen him and see that's how it is right now with the big boats like I told you they gone, they gone go. Say for instance they catching them around the Cape, down in Florida you get on the telephone right they killing 'em in North Carolina right now, boy they mashing them. So he talk to his buddy man we had seventy basket drag yesterday cuz I talked to some of the guys. What do you got some all big million, big steaming they gettin' there. And see the climate and stuff has changed. They have start catching shrimp up round Virginia now where years and years there wasn't any. The

temperature, the water temperature and stuff is warmer. They've been killing 'em around Virginia. It's changing and you got to have the big boat the big high dollar boat to do it. Now you got some, you got some guys that this is all they ever done their whole life. So they knew, they know how to get in these little holes what we call 'em little holes, little shatter places where the big boats cant get to 'em, now those guys do good. It's like I'll show you, they can't get to me. Because on low water, say some of these smaller boats draw five foot of water, six foot of water. You know what I mean draw. It takes that for it to float, where some of these big boats take 10 and 12 foot of water to draw, to float so he can't come in there. so thats how it goes.

**YS:** And have you been impacted with the sharks?

20:30

**JR:** Oh, girl, everybody. [Laughter] That's a joke. See these people who make these rules? They aren't out there. Sharks are not in extinct. I, this what I tell people sharks are so bad. Don't you go to the beach and get in the water. No, that's real. Do not go to the beach on this East Coast and get in the water. Don't say I didn't tell y'all. It's awful. You can work one day, it's better now because the water temperature done dropped a little bit, but this summer you drag that day you work on your nets all night, or you work a couple of days and you got to go in and work on nets or change your nets out. Okay. You drop you drop your anchor that evening dark 30, right. And you coiling up and you raking your trash and stuff on board, hundreds of 'em. Oh there's a shark [CHUMP! CHUMP!] on top of the water. No, really. No. Im talking bout foreal. Okay, I throw my hook to catch my lazy line and they hitting it [BOOM! BOOM!] they just everywhere, fall in that water. Go out there on a beach and get ate up. So I've been watching them fools on the news, right? Say oh, they had a shark bite, Im thinking Yeah, it's not that surprising by now. That's how bad the sharks are, and then I saw a guy in Fernadina last year a little shark hunter, they start back letting them hunt a few of them, catch a few of them cuz they're awful and he had to go out three times in the same day. He was telling me something about the quota, how they do it he can only bring so many at a time but they're awful you got out there on that beach if you wanna, You`ll be crazy. [Laughter]

**KS:** So do you have any funny memories on your boat? Or any funny stories of your boat?

22:46



**JR:** Well, you know depending on what you call funny. [laughter] Horror stories. Well, you know you out there on the water and you can see the ocean and the sky and the moon and the sun. It's beautiful out there given sometimes you can see the sun actually come up it seems like it comes up out of the water. Beautiful. Like I've been in the Navy and I used to really didn't believe there was um flying fish, there is. [Laughter] There is, you've, I've seen it for myself. Yeah, there are flying fish out there.

**KS:** Have you ever caught one?

23:52

**JR:** No, never caught one but I seen em. You caught one? You catch some, some stuff come up in that net now.

**KS:** What's been your most interesting catch?

24:04

**JR:** I seen some creatures [laughter]. I don't know the name of 'em different little creatures you see. Now, I seen a little small um seahorse before. You know what I'm talking about, you seen that? No, She from the city she aint seen nothing, where you from?

**KS:** I'm from Savannah.

**JR:** See yeah, you from the coast. She up there in Atlanta you aint seen nothing have you.

**YS:** Um, Only since yesterday. [Laughter]

**JR:** You eat blue crabs?

**YS:** Actually never tried it. [laughter]

24:43

**JR:** You plan on going to college and stuff and leaving Atlanta right. You got to see the world. You are missing so much. This is what you got to do. You got to make you some money and you got to see some different areas of the world, its just so much out there to see. I mean I started to say go in the military just to see, but I was in the Navy for four years. But it pays off, but the military really does in the end its beneficiary and when I got out I thought every 18 year old, finish high school I used to think it should of been mandatory to do two years in the military. You needed structure, discipline, that'll take you a long way.

**YS:** Does it help you with your I guess job as fishing as well? The military has that-

25:39

**JR:** Yes. The military teaches you a lot of things nowadays. You don't get from school. And nowadays they don't let the parents do so much to students the kids. Y'all spoiled, y'all don't even know it. See? You spoiled too, how old are?

**KS:** I'm 25.

**JR:** Oh, you got a little bit on you huh, you know some of a few things. You're 17,18?

**YS:** 22. I guess Could you tell us like the largest investment you had to make on your boat?

26:22

**JR:** I had to glass it, remember I told you that old wooden boat I pulled it up on the dry dock right here for a month and it cost me like 35,000 to, to glass over the old wooden hole to keep it make it stronger. I did it right there. And it was 35,000. Last year I rebuilt the engine that was about 12, 15,000.

**KS:** When was when was the last time you did maintenance on your boat?

26:54

**JR:** Last, I'm doing maintenance, I had it on the dry dock in Darien, Valona down there 'bout two months ago, like when I pull it out of the water and put the zinc on it and paint it, paint that anti-fouling paint, \$150 A gallon. [laughter] Yes.

**YS:** Has the pandemic impacted like your maintenance on your boat as well?

27:28

**JR:** Yes. Well, even in getting help like last year when the virus first came around and everybody was afraid and this and that I didn't fish the row shrimp last year because I'd have underlying conditions like high blood pressure, sugar and stuff so it's all under control, but I didn't know how it would be if I would of got the virus so I didn't go on the like the row shrimp comes in like April, May and June those months

you make money you know you make you 10, 15,000 per week you know in those when the row shrimp is running. But I didn't go because of the pandemic and I was like nah. So now you know people getting shots and we're a little more careful we know a little bit more about it so, I say well I'll try it. But last year, oh no I was like I aint killing me [laughter]. And see I know people who died from it, y'all know anybody who died from it personally know? I know people who died from it, oh y'all dont know nobody. Well I guess y'all young folks was fighting it pretty good. Ive seen some people who get it and they was dead in a week. I know a guy, that he was my first cousin he was 33, 34. Killed him.

**YS:** Have you has it I guess have you seen other fishermen impacted by it as well?

29:15

**JR:** Yes. Because it was hard to find help. Couldn't find any help. Especially guys who know how to do it like my buddy, oh chump. Couple of years ago he took two greenhorns out with him I said chump, and I can see you go with one green horn but two. And then they got a net in the wheel, right here around St.Simons a couple of years, maybe three years ago. They got a net in the wheel. He dropped the anchor, told the boys to watch the anchor they don't know what the anchor dragging or what the Anchor dragging he got the boat on the beach sunk it right out here about three years ago, right round St. Simons. Got it up on the bank and then when the wave [BOOM! BOOM!] bust it, pushed a keel up in it, where now a steel hull would take it that solid fiberglass boat would take it. See, even when it comes to the insurance. The insurance companies say they won't insure these older boats, they'll give you a little um, it's like a liability insurance on it if it sank they'll help clean up the you know the little mess whatever it cost I think they said they give you \$30,000 for like a cleanup now. When you buy these newer boats you can buy insurance on them the banks more willing to finance them. So like you take my boat I pay for my boat myself out of my pocket out of my retirement money.

**KS:** So your boat does not have insurance on it because it's older, Right?

31:19

**JR:** Right. But now like I say the guy told me he was sell me I'm like the \$30,000 clean up money. But you think a lot of these boats around here don't have insurance. Like I say those big million dollar boats and those type boats they get insurance and stuff.

**KS:** Have you ever almost sank your boat?

31:41

**JR:** Uhh them boys had it on the bank before, had a leak in it, cost me \$7,000 to like repair it. Took it pretty good, but a lot of older boats won't take it. My old boat is pretty decent shape for a older boat its pretty you know like I say because it can pass the inspections and stuff and now the boys telling me the Coast Guard they condemn some of the older boats they, yes! When the Coast Guard come to do that inspection and stuff if that old boat is like going down too far, they condemn it you have to tear it up no it won't they won't let it go out at sea.

**KS:** How old is your boat?

32:25

**JR:** My boat is built 1972

**KS:** Wow.

32:30

**JR:** But you got to understand back then the lumber was better than nowadays lumber. And then its what they call Carolina built. Okay, desco built the boats the ribs and stuff was two by four because they had to go like this, so they had to be able to bend, to heat them, and dry them in there pump them in there however on the knuckle boats the Carolina built boats, they use a bigger timber and then it goes so far and then they boat it, boats down to another timber so you can use timber say my boat is that thick the timbers where some of older boats was built by two by fours, its not timber and the wood. A lot of them old boats are built out of Cyprus and stuff so that's you know good wood. Matter of fact there's an old boat to the dock right here miss um.. what's the name of that old boat right there its old old old old old, [laughter].Its right here to the dock I can't think of a name of it, Miss Bernice y'all talk to them? Oh she old, she been here a while.

**KS:** Do you see yourself buying a new boat?

34:01

**JR:** I'm sure thinking about it.

**KS:** You want a steel boat or fiberglass?

34:06

**JR:** Well the fiberglass boats are old too. But the hull is strong, and there less maintenance than the steel hull. But if you buy older fiberglass boat, you're going to have to like redo it, because you really buying it for the hull. Now some of the guys have already redone the old fiberglass hull. So when you buy that boat, you got yourself something like 68 fiberglass hull or 75 foot fiberglass hull, you got yourself something then. Especially if had been redone. Oh, done took that old V-12 out it and put a K-19 Cummins in it. Where the ole V-12 Detroit 365 horses, burning 20 gallons an hour or so you get this new motor 640 horses for 15 gallons a hour. So you got to you bought the hull and you got to redo it where you got the old chain steering they put hydraulic steering on it, where the old power take off on the winches and stuff you put on you put hydraulic winch, you update it you just want the hull.

**KS:** Does it take I guess if you buy a newer boat does it take more or less crew members to run it?

35:39

**JR:** The same amount of crew members. Now some of the big boats have three people in the back, when they catching, get them out to heat or catching a lot of trash with it they have three people on the back where you know normally you can get away with two but some of the big boats have three on the back plus the captain and they do what they call, when they find them they clock them they don't shut them off. you hear them that morning [ sound effect of a horn] you hear them in the middle of night [sound effect of a horn]. [laughter] Y'all think Im crazy. [Laughter]

**YS:** As for the last question, do you have any advice for future fishermen in Georgia, I guess for the current times now?

36:31

**JR:** Yes. We need to look out for ourselves. Just like, we need to get together and the people who making all the decisions about the shrimping industry, we need to get together and give them an input of exactly what is going on because they make the decisions from the office. We need some representation for us, because like I say, you take people they go to school right, and they learned what the books say you know what the books say but what do the water and what the ocean out here saying? We out there we see and it's talking to us because we're out there but they went to school they know what that book say. The book is a guideline, you know. Out there is the real thing. So we need some representation.

They kind of, they kind of looking at this last year when the COVID stuff they kind of start looking at us and seeing how much of a loss we have you know as far as our growth and stuff and they tried to make your hole, try to help you a little bit because of the COVID and different stuff going on. So they did do that. Yeah, so they paying attention to us a little bit. But you take 'round, say this channel here coming in here. Its marked because of the ships and stuff coming in, deep water. You get around on Fernandina St. Mary's, its marked too because the ships are the sub basin coming in. You get around Darien, and they dont have that marked worth of crap and it's building up, the ground change when when high tides and storms and stuff. The banks shift. Places we used to be able to drag and work you can't drag and work there is banked in, filled in. So they need to look out for us a little bit more. We need representation for somebody to tell them, we 'shole do honey.

**YS:** Thank you, Mr. Joesph.

**KS:** Thank you but before you leave, we do have this little worksheet. We just want to know more about your boats and the boat you've been on. So I started.