

Name of Narrator(s): Bobbie Smith (BS)

Interviewer(s): Samantha Sheppard (SS) and Megan Bull (MB) recorded this interview with the permission of Bobbie Smith for the research project “Boat Stories.”

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

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Others Present: No other people were present.

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Place: McIntosh County, GA

Duration of Interview: Fifty-four minutes and fifty-four seconds (54:54)

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Context for the Interview: Student interviews sit down with Bobbie Smith, co-owner of Sapelo Shrimp Company.

General Description of Contents: Bobbie Smith discusses her role as co-owner of Sapelo Shrimp Company and how she shares knowledge on what it's like to be involved in the fishing community from a different perspective.

0:20

SS: This is an interview with Bobbie Smith on January 29, 2022. This interview is being conducted in Belleville, Georgia. It is part of the research project and interview collections titled Boat Stories. The interviewers are Sam Shepard and Megan Bull. And I'm sure Jamekia told you but if you don't want to answer anything or if you want to take a break, just let us know. We don't bite.

BS: Thank you.

SS: All right. So you are a co-owner of Sapelo Shrimp with Mr. Bill Harris, right? What has that experience been like for you?

BS: Being somebody that doesn't know anything about the fishing industry, Bill's got a wealth of knowledge that I can pull from at all time. I'm very lucky to be able to have that resource right there at my fingertips.

SS: So you rely on Bill alot for everything or..

BS: I rely on Bill for a lot of information. You know, like how we should park the boats, where we should park the boats? What do you think about these shrimp, product wise? Yes.

SS: You see a lot of boats come in and out.

BS: We do see a lot of boats come in and out at Sapelo Shrimp Company.

SS: How many a day do you think you see?

BS: This kind of an unusual answer to have because your shrimpin' season runs usually from May to the first part of July, because most of our boats are out of state boats and they travel from the East Coast. Some actually come from the West Coast over during that time period. Our downtime is usually July through September. It's spaced out, it's seasonal that they go the boats go wherever the shrimp are at.

SS: So during the busy season?

BS: Our busiest time of the year is May, the end of June, and the first part of July.

SS: And how many boats do you think you see around that time?

BS: It depends on the year and quantity of shrimp that are here. We can have as many as 10 or 12 at one time.

SS: What kind of changes do you see? Do you think the weather affects that or the shrimp?

3:01

BS: That's a good question. I asked myself quite regularly and I asked others as in Bill and Marty, I do think the weather has a lot to do with that. Like everything else, you know, growing up on a farm in Tatnall county, I realized now that this is farming the waters versus farming lands.

SS: Can you tell us about some of your experiences with fishermen's and their boats?

BS: They work very hard. You know, some of them go out the fresh boats, what we call the fresh boats, which are the ice boats. They go out you know, for anywhere from three to 17 days. Those guys have a hard job. They're on that boat, you know from that time with two or three other people. And then you have your freezer boats that go out usually 20 to 45 days, maybe sometimes even longer. And they're on the boat with these same people for that length of time. There's no getting off, there's no running up to the gas station, you got to take everything with you. Its a very demanding job, its a very hazardous job, its one that I think we as people don't really relate to how hard it is and what effort they have to put into it. Personally, I've never gone out on a shrimp boat. Do I plan on it? No. But I mean I see those guys and they come in and they're very tired. Very tired.

SS: Why don't you want to go and fish?

BS: Because personally I don't want to work that hard. To be truthful I'm also allergic, I'm also allergic to seafood, I cannot touch it.

SS: So is Miss Megan.

BS: So you can relate. I mean, not to say that you can't stand there look at it, and you know what you're looking at, you know if it's a good product or not a good product. And if you've got a question, our job at Sapelo Shrimp Company, which we do, and I'm assuming that all docks do is when the when the shrimp are offloaded off the boat, our job is to make sure there's a good quality product there, because someone is gonna be consuming it, and most likely is going to be a family member will get something off of it, or someone's family members definitely gonna get something off of it. So you want to make sure you've got the best product out there. If there's a question "Is this good?", you've got to elevate it to where it needs to be elevated to, you don't want a product to leave your dock. That's not something that will be fit for you or your family members to eat, then you have a shrimper graded, I'm not sure if y'all know about the sizes of shrimp. And you got to make sure that when the shrimp come off, you're actually the middleman you're you've got to look after the boat owner. And most the time in our cases, because of them

being from out of state most of the time, we do have some that are owner operators. Most time there's a captain that operates a boat, there's another owner that owns the boat, but you got to make sure that owner is getting treated fairly. Whether because you're selling, your only packing this property or Sapelo Shrimp Company, not all docks, every dock is different Sapelo Shrimp Company is only packing this product. So you got to make sure that you can find the best price for this boat, A for the owner, B for the crew. And then you make sure that the product you're sending out is a good product, that when it's going to that highest buyer. So you've got to take care of the boat and you got to take care of the person buying the shrimp. It's not just a one on one, you're kind of the middle person trying to mediate between the two. If that makes sense.

SS: So you mediate between the boat and the shrimper.

7:45

BS: Between well if that be the case is sometimes yes, that is the case between the boat and the buyer. The buyer see, because you know this person might be paying five cent more, and this person might be paying 10 cent more and then you got some over here this low balling on a quarter less. So your job or I say it as I see it at Sapelo Shrimp Company, we take a great deal of pride in not telling the shrimpers who to sell their shrimp to we let them choose if they don't have a buyer, I could say okay, so and so is paying this amount. And so and so is paying this amount, do you have a preference and 90% of the time, they will want to go with a higher price. Because we get our money by package and offloading a product, we're not packaging anything. We're sending it out to a processor. We're just the offload.

SS: Can we backtrack a little bit, what is your main job at Sapelo Shrimp Company? What are you responsible for over there? Checking the quality of the shrimp and then taking them off the boat?

BS: Well, I would say that Bill does a good bit of that if he's here. But if he's out shrimpin' then I have to kind of step up to the plate an' make sure and if I just walk by and see something in question, I talk to Bill about it, and then I notify the buyer or I'll tell the captain or whoever needs to be told at that time. But uh, take care of the paperwork to make sure that whatever poundage comes off that boat, those guys get paid for it correctly. A, B, the buyer gets what they're paying for.

SS: So you have to have really good relationships with the shrimpers and the buyers?

BS: Yes, because the shrimpers will decide, you know, it's like eating, it's like us if we want where you want to buy your gas, there's three gas stations. Which one do you want to buy at? So you got to you know, you got to have a good relationship. But not only just a relationship with the shrimpers where you can have one with the buyers. Because if you don't have that relationship, that they can trust their not gonna go to your dock to buy the shrimp. You've also got to have a good relationship with other the other docks. I personally think you need to have a really good working relationship with all docks. You all need to be on the same sheet of music.

SS: Can you talk about some of your relationships with the shrimpers?

BS: They give me a lot of feedback. I go to Marty, a lot Collins. Marty has a lot of information when he's out there on the water. I mean, I'll just call and say Hey, how's it going out there? They don't always enlighten you when they're catchin' shrimp and when they are not catchin' shrimp, but they'll tell you. It's kind of rough out here. It's calm. I'll just call it sometimes just to check to make sure the people in the boat are okay. Sometimes. This is, they all smoke. Not all of them, but I would say 75% of 'em smoke. So they'll call me say Hey, Bobbie, do you have a boat coming out this way? Can you send me some cigarettes? I mean, that sounds dumb. Are or we're outta coke so we're outta bread or we're outta eggs. And so we'll try to if we have one going out we'll send it out. Sometimes we'll have somebody that's going out in a speedboat, maybe meet 'em out the sound, they hand them their eggs or their cokes or whatever they're looking for at that time. We also take a great deal of pride at Sapelo Shrimp Company, I'm very big on this. It's very family oriented. I don't want to do anything illegal or immoral. I'm not saying that it doesn't happen. But it doesn't happen to me know it. If I do your on front and center and usually they caught I have a reputation of having an uber service that runs a blue light on top of it. Because if you brought your children down there or if you came down there. I would want you to feel safe. I will want you to not have to see something that's inappropriate going on. So those are just goals of mine. And Bill shares those same goals because when he brings his, oh some of it we have one captain, Brandon Wells, great young captain, awesome young captain. He has a wife and two beautiful girls and I want them to be safe when they feel safe. I don't want them exposed to worldly things. I mean, I can't control what they do on the boat. And you can only control about 85% of what goes on in the dock. But we have camera system set up Bill and Bill has three beautiful grandchildren that like to come down to the dock at a very young age and we like them to be safe welcome you know just to see what's going on this what they are every generation is

different it appears to me that we don't have the upcoming generation of fishermen that we had just a few years ago it's very hard sometimes to get deckhands.

SS: You see a lot of boats come in. Can you talk about the condition of the boats? Which types of boats seem to last longer?

BS: It's all maintenance. Maintenance, maintenance, maintenance, maintenance, maintenance. I retired from the government I actually worked for Department of Public Works we were in charge of taking care of buildings the grounds at Fort Stewart and Hunter so maintenance, maintenance, maintenance, maintenance and it's the same way with your car, your house, whatever it is the same way with a boat the ones that make sure when they come in that they change the oil they grease the things there's so many mechanical parts on those boats that got to have attention you got to make sure your cables and everything are in good shape its maintenance maintenance maintenance. That's what drives that.

14:31

SS: I'm assuming you have some questions.

MB: I do. Have you seen many weird boats come in or anything that stands out compared to the majority?

BS: Nah, they're all pretty much the same way. There's a couple, it's kind of like a car you see one that you kinda like a little better than the other one but overall they're all pretty much are basically the same. You have steel hulls, you have fiberglass boats, and you have wood boats and then you have wood boats that are fiberglassed over that I'm not really up on I can't really talk that because I don't understand that. I mean, ya know a steel but when I see it

MB: Do you see more of one type than the others?

BS: We probably see a good bit, we probably pack for more steel boats than we do any other because they're huge, your steel boats, not all, I mean I shouldn't say that as a, but most of our big bigger boats are steel hulls.

MB: Similar question. Do you know if you see more ice or freezer boats?

BS: In our case, we're very unique there again, we see more freezer boats but we do sell ice because I can't remember three or four years ago the ice plant over in Valona I don't know, and excuse me, Sea Gardens its right before you get into Valona, Andy had some health issues his equipment was getting old it was not feasible to bring it up so he comes to the docks says listen guys I'm going out of business you got to do something. So Bill stepped up to the plate and had

two ice machines put in and built a huge ice room so docks that don't have ice there's one other one that has a bigger ice machine and that be Boones over in Darien, but Valona has a small just, recently this summer got a smaller ice machine but they don't have enough they'll still send their boats over to us to get ice, Skinners send their boats over to get ice from us. So we sell a lot of ice.

17:04

SS: What kind of boats do you like the most? I'm sorry. Well we are on the subject

BS: I dunno. It's good question as far as packing. I dunno. I guess I just look at the personality on the boats.

SS: Do you have a favorite boat?

BS: That's not fair. But I think y'all know. And Bill has two boats. Bill has, in fact Bill is redoing the Lady Suzy now that I'm really looking forward to seeing that boat because he's doing it a little bit different than what it was before and I'm excited to see that he just last summer took the Brenda K and [alarm goes off] redid it. It is a beautiful boat.

MB: What kind of changes is he making in it?

BS: He's moving, there gunna, I can't give you all the correct name of the things but he calls it the house. He's moving it all the way forward to the front of the boat. It's gonna be a nice boat. I feel like it'd be very nice. He did a good job on redoing the Brenda K. He went there and ripped out everything and redid the flooring and redid the cabins and the bathroom. So it's kind of like a house I mean, you know you when you go out there I don't know if you ladies like the camp but it's like you know, you got your stove. You got your refrigerator. You got your own personal bed, you got a bathroom that you share with the other people on the boat. You got a table. Have you been on a boat? So you've toured about so you understand what I'm talking about? Have you toured the big steel hulls?

SS: No, I used to sleep on my family's boat just like that we would stay overnight on our boat. It was much smaller. It wasn't a shrimping boat it was in Massachusetts, but the house part I can relate to that.

BS: Okay. See you can relate to that.

MB: Is that placement of the house typical to see in shrimping boats? Or is that weird to have it there?

BS: I've never saw one there before. But you got to remember I'm very new to this. So I don't know the answer to that. It'll be the first one I saw.

SS: How long have you been working on this dock?

BS: Eight years, eight years. It was an old dock I'm sure Bill told y'all that it was an old dock that was falling down. It belonged to the family of the Ward's. And Mr. Ward passed away and there was several siblings. I'm really not sure what the deal was with that. I can't speak for that. But it was sold to a group of lawyers that were going to build condos there, permits got in the way, I'm really not sure what happened there and my husband and Bill decided they were going to invest in a shrimp dock. So that's where we're at today.

MB: Can I real quick just switch your microphone to the other side? Sorry.

[shuffling]

SS: Do you know or did they involve you at all and the decision to buy the dock?

BS: [laughter] Not really. No

SS: Do you know why they bought it?

BS: Well Bill? I don't know, Ben always had a desire to own. Ben loves to water. I'm glad they did. It's helped us. I personally think it's helped a lot of the shrimpers. I believe it's brought a lot of revenue into McIntosh County. But not only McIntosh County, into the state of Georgia, because I would say that we probably pack more shrimp than any other dock in the state of Georgia. I don't know where these boats would have gone prior. I would say they either went to Florida or South Carolina.

MB: Is that how you first got into this industry?

BS: Yes, yes. Yes. I retired and, from the government and had a shrimp dock I had to manage and with Bill's help.

MB: How long have you been doing this?

BS: Eight years.

MB: Eight years? Wow.

BS: It's been very adventurous. I've met a lot of great people. A lot of great people.

22:04

MB: Have you noticed changes in the people in the industry overtime?

BS: Yes. Even in the last eight years. It's very regulated. I see the pros and the cons of regulations. We're very fortunate to have Bryan, with UGA. We're very, very, very fortunate to

have Bryan, he's very much very pro trying to help the shrimpers. But he also understands the other side of the coin as well, as far as safety. Bryan came to me a couple years ago, and we talked about, he just threw this out there. What do you think? What do you think we could do? I said, Bryan, I think we need to teach our children that are in high school. College is not for everyone, I mean. So, but we need to teach our children when they're still, that they're safety, you got to put safety first, first and foremost, because it's a very, very dangerous business. You've also got to know that, how you got to take care of a product so it's sellable. I mean, every step of the way, it's a business transaction and you got to look at it that way. And you've got to ingrain that in those children. Working for the government, I work for DOD, so it's Department of Defense. So I realized in the military, that you come up through the ranks. So my children, one is a teacher, she started off as a pound grow, One is a nurse she started off as a CNA. If you learn at the very beginning, as you're going through each step, when you get to be a captain, you know what it was like to be on the deck? You know what you should do and what a person should know how to do if they don't you know how to teach them because you've already been there. I'm also very much of the mindset. That change is good. Not all change works. But sometimes it's beneficial, that we let someone try a new idea and if it don't work we'll figure out why it didn't work. Is there some way that we could work on improving that?

MB: You mentioned education sorry I'm backtracking a bit. Mr. Harris last time, said that there was a class going for,

SS: a program in McIntosh County, a program for boating.

BS: Yes. That's what the one I was talking about.

MB: Okay, perfect. Is that just for high schoolers, right?

BS: As far as I know. I'm not affiliated with McIntosh County Schools. My kids went to Liberty County or went to school in Liberty County and a little private school there. That my daughter now teaches at. I cannot really answer that question. But that is something Bryan and I talked about, and I thought it was a perfect thing. I'm very glad that Bryan was able to get the school system to buy off on that, I'm glad that Bryan still tries to bring that, you know.

MB: You think this is going to help the future?

25:49

BS: Most definitely. I think that, you know, it will, anytime that you can educate someone, you know, at the very beginning of something they're starting, something will stick with them. I

mean, she know that from your own experiences of life in general, but also with your own education.

SS: Have you seen any effects from having this program yet? Or you think that will take some time.

25:58

BS: I have not met anyone because most of our boats are out of state boats. So it will be the people that have grown up here that deal with mainly the local docks, like in Darien the that would be a question you would have to ask, I don't know, I would like to I would like in my heart to say yeah its helped, that somebody is gonna say, hey, you know, I remember them teaching this in school that we need to check this pulley to make sure that it's not loose on that, that swivel to make sure that still good because we're fixing to go out there and we don't want something to break to hit somebody in the head.

26:38

MB: Do you see stuff like that often?

BS: I don't, but I have. There was, it happened in North Carolina, it did not happen here. Thank God. It was a young man. He was 27, 28 got on a boat went out there and something broke and he lost his life. And he had actually got on the boat, his first time getting on this boat he had left home port was here. Or the last port of it was here and they went to North Carolina. It happened. I don't know if it was a couple of trips after they had left. They didn't happen here. It had happened a couple months later. So I'm assuming they had gone into other ports. But that's really has stuck with me. And that was one of the things that really made me talk to Bryan and to tell Bryan I really encourage them you know, I don't know I don't know if that could have been preventable. I do not know how, I mean you know things happen every day. I just I'm very big on safety because of my background.

SS: Sorry, you have such a close relationship with these shrimpers. Do you get nervous about, do you worry about things like that happening?

27:50

BS: Oh most definitely. I don't know if you ladies remember the Miss Debbie. It was the boat that capsized going to South Carolina for the opening, the last port it was here. The guys were there they said Bobbie, we're going but our alternator broke down and I said we're on an up to Napa get a new alternator which is right here Valona yeah and the, Gary came back was with the

captain, came back by the office he said I'm going to put alternator on I'll see ya in a few days. I said I'll see you before, I'll be down there in a little while, I'll see you before you get outta here, he said no you won't, because you don't know how quick I open our alternator on. That was the last words I have that boat captain. Yes that kind of sticks with you. Not that I could have done anything, um it was just it was weather related. So I mean it's just things is but um but I'm a I like people, one on one, I don't do crowds. You don't have to publish any of this and I'd rather you really not if you did anonymously because I just I don't want no fame and glory because these people work very hard. Like you ladies job got a tough job, you don't realize how job your tough, how tough your job is because you're gathering information that's going to help these people, does that make sense? I mean I don't, I don't need not to give somebody else, probably just you could put Sally Jane on there or Harry, or Fred, I mean I don't care. I don't need that glory. I mean I'm just wanting to share with you ladies. So y'all can because I'm assuming you're putting together a paper that's going to go up that's going to help, help the industry. That's the way I see it. Now I don't know how everybody else looks at it. Prices ramp is that something I would like to see, have a better price. I was just sick a couple weeks ago with chemo, I'm old, I could be your grandmother's, but I went to the grocery store because I remember my mom and my grandma saying oh you get bones I mean I'm not a cook by any stretch of the imagination. I mentioned that I was going to the store and I was gonna buy some beef bones because that was gonna make me some vegetable beef soup, thats what I had in my mind. I just knew if I bought that I went down there in the price of bones was 9.99 a pound. Now I realize that they're not paying the farmer 9.99 pound a pound because it's gone through many processors, but the price of shrimp is nothing compared to what the price of just bone was. I mean, we're not talking about a nice steak here, we're talking about bones!

30:50

MB: That was one of my questions is how has prices of shrimp changed since you've started this or since..

BS: I've not, so a large increase in price compared to everything else. There is a new buyer on the market. But they can only buy so many, and their prices seem to be a little bit better than other buyers at this time.

MB: Have you noticed changes in catch sizes?

31:40

BS: Yes, last year was not a very big season at all. What do I attribute that to? I have no clue. I mean.

SS: What do you think the biggest complaint of fishermen that you hear is, the biggest struggles that they face?

BS: Okay, just right now they're paying \$3 around for fuel up at \$3 a gallon for diesel fuel. Last year, this time, price fuel was about higher price. Price of shrimp is the same. You cannot continue, you got to make money because if you don't make money, you're going backwards.

MB: Has there been many quality control changes?

32:54

BS: No. I guess some you've got some you've got some bigger buyers. They want to know the, you know, they want to know a lot of information as far as where, you know, the government requires we fill out a report when the boat comes in or where they finished at, how long they nets were in the water, that type thing and I do see some buyers are requesting that information now as well where some are not. Which is, I'm not saying a bad thing. Because, you know, it's you know, we hear in the news all the time that you know just this has nothing to do with shrimp, but with lettuce, you know, when there was it outbreak of lettuce. I mean, they had to trace it back down. And I see that becoming stronger and stronger. I don't think the fishermen going like that because they take that personally but it's not a personal thing, its to help everybody. I'm only, I'm on the outside looking in. So I'm probably you know, does that make sense? I mean I wish I had better answers to give you ladies. I'm just giving you things that I see. That may be totally off base. And I'm sure that a lot of the shrimpers have done this their whole life don't see the things I do and maybe my things that I'm seeing are just totally useless. But you know you've that you can only do so much and you can only regulate them so much for them to do their job. I realized that as well.

MB: Have you noticed changes in the buyers?

BS: As in?

35:03

MB: What they're looking for or maybe what they're buying for anything that you might notice.

BS: I do see some of the buyers are wanting quality control, which is a good thing. Not all, some buyers will pay the same price for all this shrimp, they'll send them somewhere and have stuff to

them with I don't know what they do I guess maybe grind em up in cat food, I don't have a clue. I have no, I don't know that part of the market

SS: Did COVID affect your company at all?

BS: No.

SS: So kept running the whole time?

BS: Yes. We were very lucky. I mean we've, you know you if somebody wants to go shrimp, we've got to be able to pack them. We're very family, Bill and I do most of the work or either some of our kids will come help so we don't we don't employ people. You know, just maybe a day laborer here or there but for the most part we do pretty much, so it didn't affect us is because when you own your own business you just have to make things happen.

SS: Do your children shrimp at all that?

BS: No.

MB: That was my questions actually, would you want your children in this business?

36:53

BS: That's a very good question. I don't know, that's something I've never really thought about it so, it's a very demanding, very hard work. It's like if you know, it's it's very hard to get good dependable people. If it wasn't for that, yeah, sure. I think it's it's, can you imagine if we didn't have shrimpers, we'd have to eat import. I'm all about fresh, you know? Unchemicaled.

SS: Do you guys process anything besides shrimp?

BS: We don't actually have a process we just pack.

SS: Yes, shrimpers.

38:03

BS: If they have, back if we have bycatch? You know if they bring in bycatch and people won't fish, we'll just get them off and for the locals. But no. Only shrimp.

MB: Have you? How many women have you noticed at the docks working in the industry?

38:26

BS: My children? Oh, we have girls. I've only saw just a very few. Off the top of my head, I can only think of maybe three or four but they were affiliated with. There's only one it was not affiliated with someone on the boat. Either being a girlfriend or wife not saying they couldn't do it. I just don't see a lot of that.

SS: Do you want to or think there should be more women in the industry?

39:16

BS: Never really thought about that. I don't have a personal preference. I mean, if a woman can pull her weight and do the same thing as a man I don't see why not. But don't think that you're going, I don't think she should go out there and think you're going to have an easy job because it's not an easy job. It's very labor intensive, this is very manual labor. My thoughts. There you're, going on about this, I don't know. But from what I see it's very heavy, hard work. Very labor intensive. That will be an individual preference of what you wanted to do I mean, its like digging stomps.

MB: Have you noticed..we sort of talked about it already but have you noticed that danger change over time? See anything dangerous in the business?

40:16

BS:I don't have an answer to that I don't have any, for our history I think that um, I'm sure throughout the years I've come up with better systems I would like to believe that but to answer that, I don't know. I don't know the answer to that.

MB: Have you seen many injuries come onto the dock?

BS: No, not really. No, not really. But I can see I can see all kind of hazards, I can see all kinds of hazards everywhere.

MB: Do you know a lot of the boats personally?

41:07

BS: As in? Explain to me what you're asking.

MB: As in either the captain, the crew, or the boat itself you just recognize the name over and over?

BS: Yes. I'm very I, I take a great deal of pride I take them in as a family. There again like I told you I consider Sapelo Shrimp Company very family oriented, each one of boats to come in I can adopt them as a family and no matter if they're in North Carolina, if they're in Florida, or wherever they may be they can be in Alabama if they call me, they need something if it's something that's, that I feel like it's something they really need I'm gonna do everything to help them do it because that's just and I want to be known for that. Not as in loan money or anything but you know if you then be Hey Bobbie up don't have such a such a paper on the boat do and I try to keep a copy of everything because it's just the kinda person I am yeah, I've got it, I'll fax it to you, who you want me to fax it to, that type thing if that's what, you know. As long as it's

illegal - as long as it's legal and moral I'm all about it. But I don't I'm not into anything illegal or anything immoral.

MB: Do you have any boat names that you remember over time? And what might be your favorite?

42:34

BS: Lady, Lady Denise, she was actually named for the lady that she had her husband owned it and Denise just passed away about three years ago from alzheimers. I'm sure Marty told you that. The Forgiven and The Redemption, those are sister boats to the Lady Denise, the Lady Suzie, of course belongs to Bill. The Brenda K which belongs to Bill. Kinsley Grace, great young captain. He's about 28 years old. He is so sweet. He's got a wonderful family, just an awesome, wonderful captain. We had the Lady Samria out of North Carolina from Engelhardt. It has a sister, sister boats that I haven't seen this sister boat come down yet which is the Little Sammy. They've got Wonder Woman, which is another beautiful boat the sister about them. We have the falter boats which is Christina Anne and which is Captain Joseph Belmar is Papa's Girl. Lily can't think of Lily something, Perseverance. We, there I could just go on and on with the boat names.

SS: I'm sorry. Have you seen the history of a boat change? We've seen them go through different owners and different names.

44:02

BS: Um..not really, I'm so new, I have I do know that there is a very much of a process of that when you do change ownerships and change boat names. Yes.

SS: Do you help with that process?

BS: Pardon me?

SS: Do you help with that process?

44:18

BS: Do I help with that process? If they come to me I do whatever I can to help them with. If I you know I'll, I'll search and research and do what I can to help them.

MB: Do you know the names of the captains of some of those boats like the Kinsley Grace or?

44:40

BS: Kinsley Grace is Brandon Wells.

MB: Brandon..Wells

BS: Brandon. B-R-A-N-D-O-N.

MB: Lady Samara...

BS: Leon Gibbs.

MB: Little Sammy...

BS: That is just changed. I do believe Vernon, and I can't think of Vernon's last name right now.

MB: It's okay. The Wonder Woman?

45:08

BS: That is just changed as well because you always have captain changes.

MB: And it kept the same name?

BS: Okay, same owner, different captain. Sammy Williams owns the Lady Samara, Wonder Woman and the Little Sammy.

SS: Leon Gibbs owns all three.

45:37

BS: No Sammy Williams. He's from Engelhardt, North Carolina. Swan Quarter, excuse me. The boat is docked at Engelhardt but he lives in Swan Quarter. Brandon Wells is the owner, operator. Lily Bell and Perseverance and Christina Anne is owned by Chris Fulcher. And he is in slap me, Oriental, North Carolina. Chris Fulcher owns it.

SS: The Lily...

46:33

BS: Yes. Marty's boat is owned by Gerald Miller. He's from Southport, Florida. He owns uh, Lady Denise, Forgiven, and The Redemption.

SS: So when the captain of the boat isn't the owner, do they pay out the owner? Part of what they get?

BS: Very good question. The way it works at Sapelo Shrimp Company, each each boat is different. Each boat pays different. The falter boats, they handle their own pay. The boats, Marty's boats, The Lady Denise, Forgiven, and Redemption, they're paid on a percentage. Well, each boats paid on a percentage. The captain gets a captain share. The crew gets a share. The captain gets just another percentage above what the crew gets and owner of the boat besides that.

SS: Do you get a percentage?

47:53

BS: No. We only get paid, Sapelo Shrimp Company gets paid a packing per pound. And we sell fuel and we get paid so much to pump the fuel across the dock. Of course we have to store it in tanks.

SS: Does the packing fee change with time?

BS: The packing fee has been the same forever and always from what I understand. I do see that going up. Right now we get ten cent and if you pack over 300 boxes, 15 If it's anything under, that's all freezer boats. Fresh shrimp is 25 cent a pound and that is decided by the dock. The dock sets the prices.

SS: So your your docks keeps the same prices. Do other docks change?

BS: No I don't think so. Some do change some from what I understand. I don't know this for a fact. But from what I understand some charge like a nickel more if they got the heads off because you lose weight but I don't know that for a fact.

SS: I don't know if it was like gas prices where it's different every day, that's good.

MB: You know, do you know many superstitions?

BS: No, no, they have one but I'm not I don't I don't really play into that a whole lot.

MB: Do you notice that a lot of uh, shrimpers believe in those superstitions?

BS: I can't answer that either. I don't know the answer to that.

SS: Do you have any really great memories working on the dock?

BS: Met a lot of great people. I see a lot of things, share my faith.

SS: Do you have a favorite story you can share with us?

50:12

BS: [Laughter] Yes, the happiest day of my life is the day when Marty comes in [Laughter] But the happiest, and I have two happy days: the day Marty comes in and unloads because we're gonna make money that day and the day Marty leaves is the happiest too 'cause I don't have to put up with him for a few days and I know he's coming back with more shrimp to pack. And I'll say that about Michael Vernon. [Laughs]

SS: Michael Vernon as well.

BS: Yes, the Miss Doris. He packs, he's a fresh boat. I believe Jennifer's over there talking to him right now.

MB: Do you notice if many of the workers are in this sort of generationally?

51:03

BS: I don't know because I don't know, I don't know, you know I I don't have prior knowledge and because they come in from all parts of the wherever.

SS: I think- Do you see like father/sons working?

BS: Some. Some.

SS: Do you have any understanding of fishing vessels that you didn't understand when you first started?

BS: Yes, everything that I do know was more than what I knew before I came. I didn't understand nothing about a fishing vessel, so I had no clue how they work. I didn't realize that there's nets for this shrimp and there's nets for that shrimp, I can't look in the nets and say there's a brown net, there's a white net there's a sound net, they got different nets for different things.

SS: Have you heard any complaints about litter or sharks or anything?

BS: Sharks are very big issue for our shrimpers. I do see that because when they come in, their nets will be full of holes 'specially in the spring. They have huge holes, I mean. Have I seen a shark come in? No. [Laughter]

52:44

SS: Is there any weather that you know, no one's going out that day?

BS: Northeastern, when they're real heavy they're not going out when there's hurricanes they're not going out.

SS: Have you seen anyone go out and weather that you don't want them to go out in? Or you don't think is safe?

53:07

BS: I just scared to death, please. No I did, don't I think they're all pretty much level headed in that because they know their safety. I mean you know you're thinking about your own personal life. They're thinking you know, you got to think and a good captain and I would say most of our captains are good, would first of all you got to know when you go out there, you're taking your own life but you've got three or four other people on that boat that you're responsible for if you're a captain. Captain has a lot of a lot of responsibility more than what most people realize.

SS: Has your dock been through any hard times or really good times?

54:12

BS: We have slow seasons. When we don't have a lot of, when there's not a lot of shrimp, you know you still got to make those payments you just just like in your personal life.

MB: What do you think the future might look like?

BS: I'm concerned. I don't know that we're gonna have the labor. That's gonna be a big issue, unless we're able to start pulling like the farmers.

MB: Why do you think there's less labor?

BS: I don't have an answer to that, I don't think other than I'm going to have own opinion, but that's not something you probably want to share.

MB: You can share if you want, you don't have to.

55:25

BS: People don't have the work, our people as a whole don't have work ethic that they had 20 years ago, that's what I see. And but I see that in every industry not just the shrimping industry, regulations has a lot to do with everything but I understand we got to have those regulations because some are good, some should be in place, some I think it gets a little bit too far. But there again, that's an opinion.

SS: Do you have any recommendations for the future of fishing? Or dock life?

BS: I wish, I wished I did I mean, I wish I knew enough that I could share that so it could help someone I mean, I hope that someone does. Hope someone's got enough hindsight but also enough foresight. I think what y'all are doing is awesome. I'm not sure how long this program has been going on of you're trying to get information to try to help, I think I think knowledge to educate people is a wonderful thing.

MB: Do you notice what retirement is like for a fisher?

BS: You don't see a lot of that.

MB: Do you see any?

57:11

BS: No. I'm gonna guess there are some, but I haven't been in it long enough to see you know, to see anyone to actually retire. I mean, I've heard stories but usually well, I will tell you I didn't know that person so I can't speak because I didn't know. But it's there tell me when you get it in your blood it stays there forever.

MB: Are you happy that you joined the industry?

BS: Yes, I think so. I really, I know that it was part of God's plan for my life.

MB: Do you think you'll retire from it?

58:01

BS: I think when I leave, I'll be still sitting down at Sapelo. I back, my wishes were to be just dumped off the end of it. I enjoy what I do. I mean yes, we all have our days, do I really have to go down there, it's cold, it's too early but yes it's overall yes I do. I enjoy it. I enjoy meeting different people from different walks of life. Some people you only meet once and some people you'll see all the time. But I want to help people, I don't want to harm people.

SS: What do you want to communicate and educate to people about shrimping?

BS: It's hard, its dangerous and when you sit down you eat that plate of seafood, it just didn't miraculously just appear there. It's gone through many steps to be able to get from the from the table, I meant from the water to the table.

SS: I know we talked to Bill about sustainable shrimping, he said he's a sustainable shrimper. Do you see that with a lot of people that you work with?

BS: Yeah.

SS: How would you personally just define sustainability?

59:34

BS: It has been their livelihood. That's how they sustain their way of life. I mean, they know nothing else, they have nothing else.

SS: When you worked in the government, your husband was shrimping?

BS: No. My, my husband also will he worked for the government for 23 years. And he resigned to and we had our own construction company.

SS: So you didn't have...

1:00:19

BS: Nothing, nothing, nothing. I grew up on a farm. Do you want to talk about tobacco and onions, we could talk that now. But it's the same, is the same principle. You're either farming the land or you're farming the waters. You're on a tractor or you're on a boat. It's just a different way of and most people don't relate to it like that, but I've been very fortunate to be able to see to be in having the history of growing up on a farm, and then having this now and seeing, its just, this the same thing. It's just long, hard hours.

MB: Do you think there's a difference in the way that fishing is seen versus the way that it is?

BS: It's hard question. I don't know. I really don't know the answer to that.

MB: Have your thoughts on the fishing industry has changed since you've joined it?

1:01:29

BS: Never really thought about it. I don't eat shrimp so don't do anything else with any other shrimp. So I don't know. I mean, it's it's a lot harder than I thought it would be I guess. I mean, I just assumed that boat went out there and they just let them things down and they just miraculously popped up their, and I mean. You got to shovel them things. You've got to pick them things. I mean, they don't just do that on their own. I mean stuff I've never thought about. I mean, really. Come like you, ask a first grader, so where you getting milk at? The grocery store! I mean it's the same with me, where do you get shrimp? The grocery store! I mean, don't they just don't miraculously appear there but I've never really thought about it

SS: Do you think there's a difference in the regulations of fishing versus farming?

1:02:26

BS: I don't know the answer to that. I've been out of the farming for 40 years. I can only remember as a child, as a child it was hard. Definitely wanted to go to school. Wanted to get away from that life!

SS: I guess I was just wondering if there was maybe more regulations in the ocean than the land and so they can't really see the bottom of the ocean or where they can see the ground.

BS: Not knowing what the regulations are as far as farming goes, from what I see with the ocean yes, I personally think that it's a little over regulated. And I'll give you an example of what I'm saying, why I'm saying that is when you catch your bycatch, I think all the bycatch should be brought in. I mean, but then on the other side of that coin is you know, it's caught it's of course died before it's got sent back into the ocean, but I guess it's feeding the animals out there so I guess it's a catch 22. Do, I don't know you could study it all day long and I don't know what the answer to that would be either. I'm also of the belief that nature takes care of itself if we leave it alone. I don't, I mean if you want to upset me throw a bottle out there in that river or a piece of trash I mean, I really upsets me.

SS: Do fishermen complain about litter as well in the ocean?

1:04:06

BS: Some do, some don't give a happy flip. It depends on the person, in like any anything.

SS: Will you tell me the funniest story that you've ever heard happen on a boat? I know I keep asking! I love the stories.

BS: They've got some, believe me. I can't even think of one right now, it's uh - eyes without being on the boat t I don't know, because I don't know. I can't even think of anything right now. They've told me they tell you so much, believe me they'll tell you everything. You really need to talk to shrimpers, actual shrimpers, not just people that and I don't know how you could do that other than maybe during the springtime. Come down to the dock, just interview that would be I believe Jennifer and I cannot think of the other lady's name. I believe they did that one year. He gets a really good stories here. Probably stories you don't even know.

SS: I was wondering if they tell you stories they wouldn't maybe tell us.

1:05:21

BS: They have no shame in their game and no secrets. So I can't, yeah I just well, I don't know if Marty told y'all this, I'll tell y'all this. This was, this was funny to me and it was really true. And it's really sad in more ways than one because it's dear to my heart. But uh, Marty has a guy that works on the boat with him from El Salvador, Joe. Well, they're up in North Carolina and the Coast Guard decide they're going to board and do whatever you know the Coast Guard the Coast Guard dues are. Well Joe apparently had the same name, same name as another Joe that was wanted for whatever. So they were about to take Joe to jail. Now Joe is lily white as they come A) because Joe is not gone spend any money. B) because Joe is not wanting to to have that green card snatched, because he likes to go to El Salvador and spend half the year and the other half here making money for his family. They interrogated that poor guy, a little tiny guy too, for four hours, now that was hilarious to me. And then they had to apologize to Joe but you know, you could say oh I'm sorry, so and so, you won't, if you're not the person that's been new, just drugged through the mud. That, that was hilarious to me. But it can happen to any of us but being out there and being, and not being [laughs] it's just you know what I'm saying? That was funny. I mean, I could just see Joe's eyes and they got 'em in handcuffs, just you know, they'd have to turn the gallows because fishermen aren't known to be the most noblest people if you, oh y'all already know that. But everybody's gonna have something to do in life. Believe me, if I could straighten 'em out I would.

SS: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

BS: I just wish you ladies the best of luck, I just hope that y'all could enlighten, get stories some of these other I because I know nothing about it I mean. Well, I mean I don't, I don't I'm not the

type person that needs you to say well Bobbie did this or Bobbie did that, because in some people a lot of people, as y'all very well know. So I just say remain anonymous. If there's really good stuff, if there's any bad stuff you can say yes Bobbie did this, Bobbie did that, that's fine.. But these these guys deserve all the credit. I'm just here, I'm just a tool I guess.