

Name of Narrator: Michael Vernon (MV)

Interviewer: Dr. Jennifer Sweeney Tookes (JST) with the permission of Michael Vernon for the research project “Boat Stories”

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

Others present: His pet dog was present during the interview.

Date of Interview: January 29, 2022

Location: Eulonia, Georgia

Duration of the interview: Forty three minutes and fourteen seconds (43:14)

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: Dr. Sweeney Tookes sits down with Michael Vernon and his pet dog for an interview to discuss his experience on fishing vessels in Georgia.

General Description of Contents: Michael Vernon discusses what it was like to work on one of the oldest boats in the county. He also details some rough weather experiences while working on fishing vessels. He then goes to outline what the future of the commercial fishing industry will look like.

JST: Yes. And I'm just going to confirm what we just talked about. This is an interview with Michael Vernon on January 29th of 2022, and this is being conducted in Eulonia, Georgia, um, in your home. And this is part of the research project in the interview collection titled Boat Stories. And I'm Jennifer Sweeney Tookes, conducting this interview. And we do have your little pet here in the room, so we might hear a little- a little doggy whining in the background as we go on. Um, but if you could just confirm that you're happy to do this, and you know, you- we can stop at any time.

00:29

MV: Yes, ma'am. I'm fine. Uh, whatever.

JST: Thank you. All right. So, you- you've been on more than one or two boats in your lifetime.

MV: Yes, ma'am.

JST: So I'm hoping you can tell me about your most recent vessel. Its name, and what other boats you were on before this.

MV: I'm captain and partner on the Miss Doris right now. Um, I've worked on probably, 10 or 12 other boats, Golden Phase, I worked on the longest. It's one of the oldest boats in this county. Uh, I worked with Marty Collins on the Lady Denise over there, in Key West. I've worked from North Carolina back and forth to, Key West on boats. But I run the Megan Elaine. Uh... Daddy's Girl... War Horse. I've been on quite a few boats.

1:29

JST: And you said right now, you're on the Miss Doris?

MV: Yes, ma'am.

JST: And how long-

MV: I've been on that for three years. I won the Blessing of the Fleet with it this past year with it. That's the picture of it, and I'm a grand marshal from the past year. I won first place with the boat parade and grand marshal part of it.

JST: That's great.

MV: This past year.

JST: Nice. Very nice. And then, um, you're the captain of the boat and-

MV: Yes, ma'am, and part owner.

JST: And part owner.

MV: Yes, ma'am.

JST: Okay. And before you were captain and part owner on the Miss Doris, who else ran that boat? And who did- who owned it?

MV: Uh, Chris Desheen out of uh, Dulac, Louisiana, is the one that owned it. He'd had cancer. I ain't got cancer. He had two boats. He had it, and it was named the Miss Opal, named after his wife. And he'd got the one named Miss Behaving. And um... he didn't want to get rid of the boat, but with his health issues and all, he decided to sell it. And me and Dennis Higgs went and got it, my partner. And Marty Collins. Me and Marty's the one that brought it back. It took us, six days and six nights, and 14 hours to get back. Straight running, never shut it off.

JST: Wow.

MV: Uh, three years ago.

JST: Three years ago. And what kind of boat is it?

MV: Uh, it's a 70 foot steel hull with a K19 Cummins in it. We pull 18 foot 40 doors and 4 50 foot nets. And draw about six and a- about five and a half, six foot of water. Shallow draft for here.

JST: So would you say it's similar to other boats that are operating in Georgia? Or very different?

MV: Nah, it ain't. Nah, it ain't- there's a few, uh, little steel hulls showing up like uh, this boat here. Uh, that might see some in Darien. Um, um... there was a boat in Brunswick right there. I can't think of the name of it, it was Stewart's boat. But Jack Corsely up yonder and Thunderbolt ..found a boat. He- he owns it now. But there's a few of them showing up around here, just body style. There's one in North Carolina called My Baby, but they all coming out of Louisiana. That's where they building them at over there- and this boat originally... was destroyed, from Hurricane Katrina. It was left in the middle of the highway tied up beside two other boats. And, Chris Desheen bought it from the government. And put her back together, and she was like brand new on the inside and all, and it just, a nice pretty boat.

4:15

JST: Well, when's it built originally, then?

MV: Uh, 1984.

JST: And then-

MV: Uh, when it was built.

JST: Okay. But then it sounds like it was basically rebuilt-

MV: Yep, yeah.

JST:...whenever, 2005?

MV: Whenever Hurricane Katrina came through.

JST: Okay.

MV: It tore it up then.

JST: You said you've seen more boats like this one here in Georgia?

MV: No, they steady coming..That- they'd not replacing the boats around here. What boats have come, they made of fiberglass and steel hulls. There ain't no wood boats coming, uh really. And them big old slabs from everywhere. The boats like Marty's on and off... coming from over in Alabama and, y- just all over the place. They've taken over North Carolina's [inaudible 00:05:01], you get one of the biggest fleets you wanna look at. And...

JST: But a 70 foot steel hull, that's not a slab boat.

MV: Yeah. It's a slab. It-

JST: So yours is a slab, okay. Okay, it is a slab boat.

MV: Well, that's what they call steel hulls-

JST: Right. Right. Does it have to be a certain size steel hull to be a slab?

MV: Nah. Nah, I don't think so. Steel hull is steel hull. That's just what they call them, a slab.

JST: Okay.

MV: And I might be qualified as a small slab. [Laughs] But... I might not be as big as Marty. But I pull what Marty pulls. All but the door size. Cause he's the one who helped me rig my boat up when I got it here. I asked him, what I needed to get for that kind of power. I got, ungodly power in my boat.

JST: Mm-hmm. Okay. So, before you were on this Miss Doris, then. What- which of those boats you listed- you've been on a lot of boats.

MV: The Megan Elaine.

JST: Was that the one you were on the longest?

MV: Yep- no, uh I was on the Golden Phase the longest with Mike Flemmings . He retired now. Golden Phase.

JST: Haze?

MV: Phase. P-H-A-S-E. Phase.

6:09

JST: Oh! Thank you. And how long were you on that?

MV: Nine and a half years.

JST: Do you remember what years those were?

MV: Um... it had to be back when I was about... 17 or 18. I was run- I was, it was back then some time. Cause I've been running boats for the last, 15 years. It was a pretty good time ago, I couldn't tell you. '82, '83? I could remember- I've got some money. And 90, I remember. I got some money over there in my photo album, that we call Jawsmen. And I wrote on it. The date and the time that we caught it.

JST: (laughs) Okay. So, nine and a half years... starting around '82, '83. Okay. And then, you said you ran that with Mike?

MV: Flemmings.

JST: Flemmings. And was he the owner, or-

MV: Yes, ma'am.

JST: Okay. And you were the captain?

MV: No, he was. I was deck hand.

JST: Got it. Okay.

MV: Just like my parents, too. To today, really. When I need something, I call them, they help me. Not money wise or financial wise, nothing like that. But. If I need somebody I need to talk to, or... that- they my family. They, they just... they're part of my people.

JST: That's neat. That is neat. And then the Golden Phase, was that a wood boat? Or a-

MV: It was a wood boat, glassed over. And it was even- it was the oldest boat in this county.

JST: Really?

MV: And it sunk. This past year, right there in Bellville, but they got it back up. I don't know... it sat down on Old Yacht. And they were doing some work in the boat, and... and poked through the glass on the side of the boat and sunk it one night. And the boat's like 80, 82 years old. But it was mint condition. The- and... and it was just an accident that happens, during the night. But they got it back up- it took them a while. Darrell uh, Gale ended up getting it back up, I think.

JST: Mm-hmm You said it was 82 years old? When was that boat built?

MV: Aw, it was George Nelson. When they used to have the old oyster business there, Darius Clayger {?} I think it was, I don't know nothing about it, really. I just know of it. It was an oyster boat- one of the first boats here. Well they ended up... George Nelson had the boat. And then they ended up pushing it up into marsh grass. And then Mike Flemmings got it, and salvaged it back out, and put it back together. And, it was in immaculate condition. He even- it had its couple little downfalls from being so old, it couldn't take no beating on the bottom or nothing. As long as you kept it off the bottom and treated her with care. He made a good living with her for about... I think 34, 35, 37 years, something like that.

9:30

JST: Wow... wow. Do you know about what year it was that he salvaged it out of the marsh?

MV: Not really.

JST: Okay. And you said that-

MV: It was probably back in the '80s, when he probably did that.

JST: And he's still running it today?

MV: No, he sold it out to uh... a man named Don. That owns Benny's Red Barn over there on the island. I can't think of his last name, but he ended up buying his house and his boat and all. Down there in Bellville, where we tie up at. I can't think of Don's last name.

JST: Okay. Is he running it?

MV: No.

JST: What's he doing with it?

MV: He had some boys from North Carolina, running them. He ended up buying the Megan Elaine from Tom and Cathy Brown, too. And, it- they sunk it, too.

JST: Wait, he s- wait. He s- he sunk both of them?

MV: Both of them got sunk in the same year. The Coast Guard came out there, brought three pumps to one. At Sapelo Channel. And then the other one sunk at the dock, one night.

JST: Which one sunk in Sapelo Channel?

MV: The Megan Elaine.

JST: Okay.

MV: They're sitting at the dock down there now. Both of them sitting at the dock.

JST: Wow. Okay! So- he only ran them for, what, a year? Before he, he sank them both?

MV: No, they were running about two weeks.

JST: Did he have insurance on them?

MV: Nah. I don't know this man. All I know is he bought two shrimp boats, and... had a crew from... I don't even know the crew. All I know is, both boats sunk.

JST: ...Do you think they'll salvage them and run them?

11:40

MV: Uh... one of them, I know they're supposed to be putting back together, the Golden Phase. But the other one... she's pretty old. She uh come out of Cape Canaveral down there, the Megan Elaine.

JST: Okay.

MV: But, she's done been bolted back together, and... people gonna do what they can with it, but when they put it on the breaker out there in Sapelo Sound, they broke the horn around the stern, on each side of the rudder. Well, the boat- so we've narrowed it to Matthew at Valona down there, he don't even want to pull it. He's afraid it's gonna fall down around the carriage.

JST: Okay.

MV: And then that's gonna be a lot to get up there, but. I- I, I really can't tell you what they're doing with the boat. It's street committee talk is what I'm giving you.

JST: That's uh, some bad luck... how old is the Megan Elaine? Do you know when that one was built?

MV: Hmm... it was probably built back there in... 70's. I couldn't tell you when.

JST: Okay. So that one's a lot younger, then.

MV: Yeah. It's way younger than the Golden Phase. Golden Phase is the oldest boat in the county.

JST: Wow. Okay. So those are the- what years, about, were you on the Megan Elaine?

13:08

MV: Uh... I've been on the Miss Doris for the last three years, and I was on that... four or five years before that. I won the Blessing of the Fleet with her, too.

JST: Did you really? So you think you were on the Megan Elaine, then, from about... 2010?

MV: Probably something like that. Because- I started with them in 2013.

JST: Okay.

MV: Crabbing. And then I started- they went and got a boat. Which- I run another steel hull for him called the Sea Angels. For Tom and Miss Cathy Brown. And then, he sold that boat, and I went back shrimping with Teddy. And then I got on the Meg- I went back crabbing. Cause I always crabbled in the winter time.

JST: Okay.

MV: And then, they told me one day they had a boat that we need to go look at in Port Royal... uh, they had to be somewhere... I thought I had a plaque in here, uh- it had to be somewhere around '10, because I've been... on this boat for three years. This is my fourth year right here.

JST: Okay. On the Miss Doris.

MV: Yes, ma'am.

JST: All right. So you were- you were crabbing, and then you ran Sea Angels. You don't remember what years that was, though.

MV: From 2013-

JST: Oh.

MV: ...'til about '16.

JST: Okay. And then you went back to crabbing..

JST: And then...

MV: I started with them in 2013, crabbing.

JST: Okay.

MV: Cause I was working with Woody Moore in the Gulf, trying- catching little reds.

JST: Oh, okay.

MV: And then I came here, and... started crabbing. And then they bought the shrimp boats. Then he sold it. Then I went back to crabbing again. And then I went to Key West with Marty. And I came home, he sold the crabbing outfit. And then, I ended up getting on the, this deal with Dennis Higgs right here, with the Miss Doris.

JST: Miss Doris. Do you remember what year, though, you were on the Megan Elaine then?

MV: Uh, five years, before, the last three. So it was the last four. Because this here's my fourth year.

JST: '19. So you got off the Megan Elaine at about 2019?

MV: Probably so.

JST: So maybe around '16 to '19? It's only about three years on the Megan Elaine?

MV: Yeah. Yeah.

JST: Okay. Okay... so, that- it looks like the... you were on all of them for about the same amount of time, weren't you? Except- no, except for the-

MV: Golden Phase. I worked on that just as long as I was young.

JST: Okay.

MV: I lived- uh, I lived on the boat.

JST: What was that like? For someone who doesn't have any idea?

MV: All I can tell you. As in the morning time, I mean- he was always on the job site. And if you didn't show up on time to go fishing, you always got something right in your car, and hauled butt. You got out of dodge in case they showed up- if you're going fishing, nine times out of ten, you're going before daylight. You're slow... man. But we went out a lot of times and made low water, had to turn around and come back. But we always caught the tide out, when it began out. And we always caught it after it turned and started back down, but... it's home, man. Nah, I- I don't know how to explain it. I live on a boat every day! I'm leaving in the morning all w- at eight o' clock.

JST: So for someone who's never been on a boat, someone who's never set foot on a shrimp boat. Where do you sleep? And how do you eat? Like what does that look like?

MV: Oh-I got my own bedroom. My crew got their own bedroom. We got cold and hot water. We got shower, toilet. We got central heat and air. Electric stove, full-sized refrigerator. Ain't no different on there than right here, in the living room right here. We've got everything. That- that's home. We live on that, and we stay clean. You go down there and look at her, she's clean. We don't live in no roaches and rats and all.

JST: Hmm. How long do you go out for?

MV: ...I usually don't want to make over four days. But right now, we have to drag the trips out a little bit longer because of the weather. Some days you've got to anchor up, it's too rough. But it's that time of the year. And... no more than eight or 10 days, right now. Nah, I ain't gonna be gone

no more than that. I got to catch them rock , and the iceboat. I'm not on no freezer boat, I sell fresh shrimp. I don't sell like IQF shrimp. I'm supplying to my- and everybody wants mine. (laughs) They want them too, but you don't know what you're gettin'. They put them in freezers and hold them and all. Mine's sold on the spot. And uh, the other markets might freeze them. But mine's just like they came out the water.

JST: So how many crew go out with you now on this boat?

MV: Three.

JST: Three? And who are they?

18:39

MV: Uh, it depends. I got Bruce Colley, my neighbor that's right over here. He's working with me right now, and I got a little fella named Justice Wiggins that works with me. He ain't been on a boat for about five or six months, but we done trained him up. We done and recruited him, he's a deck hand. And well that's what we need. It... there ain't no new captains coming, and there ain't no crew coming. And then I had a boy that's been working with me for the last seven years, Jim Bolin. But, we kind of parted ways right now, I just got two right now. But, during the season, I work three. And me.

JST: And the one you said you're training up, is he younger?

MV: Yeah, he's 21. Justin over here is 63. He- he done fought four different kind of cancers, had the whole side of head cut off... from surgeries and all, but. He's still the fastest and the best one I've got on the boat. (laughs) Yeah, he said when God calls him, he'll take his number, but... he said- 'til then, they said, when are you gonna retire? He says, I can't. He says I'm too broke to retire. (laughs)

JST: Wow. So what is it you like now about the Miss Doris? What's different about Miss Doris than the other boats you've been on? What do you like or dislike about being on that one?

MV: I really couldn't tell you- she's a nice boat.

JST: Yeah.

MV: And it's gonna be mine... one day. Not too much longer. But I don't... she's a nice boat. Works good, produces. Good power, good rigs and all on it. Comfortable... I don't see nothing no different, I- I made money on all of them.

JST: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

MV: It's just... some shallow drafters better than other ones, and I work in mud holes. I get up there close as I can to the beach, and- and this boat here is an in-shore or off-shore boat. I- I got fish in either one. I don't see much different than just the steel hull and a nice, pretty boat.

JST: Hmm. Tell me the funniest thing that's ever happened on this boat. What are some adventures y'all have had?

MV: Uh, we've been on some adventures, but they wasn't funny.

JST: (laughs) Ooh, tell me about those.

MV: The adventures?

JST: Yeah.

21:16

MV: Well... one day we left out of St. Augustine's last year, and we made it right there off of Matanzas... and uh, it was supposed to blow. Everybody started running different directions, hunting for cover. Well we had already dropped our anchor. And we thought that everything was fine, there wasn't- the two boats left, Marty called me that morning. And told me he said, Vern, I said, yeah, you better get out that weather. Well by then, we was already taking them over the bough. They was coming over, crashing on the deck, rolling around, all on and off, and Jimbo talking about captain, we already here. We might as well just stay here. Well, two storms come at it together. One came from inshore and one comes from off-shore. And uh... we started pulling anchor and it broke the pin off the front of the anchor, shoot- slammed it in the window. So I dove in the floor. I thought it done bust the windshield out the boat. Anchor went out to the end of the out rigger. And I finally had them big old seas, got the boat turned back around, and we got the rope back to the anchor chute. Got the chain and a rope wrapped around it, and we got it up. And we rode for seven hours, at 19 to 24 foot seas to New Smyrna. Because it was too rough to go from Matanzas, Florida, back to St. Augustine buoy. So we took the closest route- we took, from Matanzas, to New Smyrna. When we got to New Smyrna, it was blowing so hard and rough, and it was dark and raining... we turned around, and headed back, toward the buoy- all she did was turn. And I remember one of my crew members standing over here, holding the monitor to the computer, and the other one was hol- and we was going up that channel on, uh sea hit us... I don't know if you ever watched the movie The Perfect Storm? But this wall of water, all we could see. Was a wall of water coming at us, and I- if I'm lying, the good Lord take me for

this right here. My crew man told me, he says, Vern, y'all hold on. It done tore the stove and all this from the wall, throwed it up against the back door. The boat captain's chair was going out the wheel house. And it picked us up... and I thought the boat completely rolled over. And it threw us over on our breaker, and when it did, some reason God had our bough pointed, he had a plan for us. He had our bough pointed back towards them jetties off of New Smyrna. And we came back out by them buoys and landed in the calm. The roughest weather that you could ever went in there, we had a rope that come from the door to the, side of the boat. It had caved in that weather. 900-foot anchor rope, or 600-foot uh anchor rope, had went out the uh gutter hole. Chad, my other crew man, had found it. And he got the rope back in the scuttle hole. We got in there and picked up our stabilizers, after. We tried- people was all over the deck, patio, nine o' clock at night. We trying to drop our anchor, our out rigger went over to the sail boat. Captain dragged him, was past the door- we tried 10 or 12 times to get that anchor to hold, it wouldn't. And the Coast Guard station was right here. And I told my crew, and I remember to the day, marker 16. If I ever move from the state of Georgia, I'm moving to New Smyrna, Florida, cause that's where God saved my life at. And... we tied to that marker pole, four days. We couldn't get back out that channel- and some nice people? We turned them loose. I told uh my crew, I said I'll tell you right now. The Coast Guard can come around here, they can do what they got to. They can take me to jail. They can lock me up. All I want to do is go home right now. I didn't eat for four days.

JST: Oh my gosh.

MV: We went up there and this man was in his house, and he had a radio and he called us on the radio. And he- we pulled up in this little gutter. I've seen on the computer chart where it had some water going up in there, but I didn't know how far it went. And we went up there to the end of that slough, and found that water, where it ran out. And we dropped our anchor. And the man and his son came over there in the boat, in the rain and the cold, came to us. We gave him a tour of the boat, they talked to him. That evening, him and his wife came back. She baked us brownies and all kinds of stuff. And in the next morning when we left out of there, they was all standing on that hill waving at us. We came out of New Smyrna and brought her straight to Georgia.

JST: Oh my gosh!

MV: And that's the honest to God truth. I wouldn't be able to tell it to you, if it wasn't true.

JST: Wow. When did that-

MV: That happened last year.

JST: Oh my gosh...

MV: God had a plan for us. Me and Jimbo and Chad. We was in some weather this morning right there in Brunswick.

JST: Hmm.

MV: It took us three and a half hours just to go from Jekyll to Bruns- uh, St. Simons Island.

Taking them over about... we woke up in it.

JST: Wow.

MV: I'm fairly well fishermen that's why I don't go up there to Virginia and all. They fish well up there that- that ain't my bag. That ain't my bag. I ain't gone fishing for stuff like that. I wish them well. I wish all the best.

JST: (laughs). Oh my. So that is quite an adventure. Was that the scariest, time you've ever had? On the water?

MV: Well, and that time we had at Fripp.

JST: What happened then?

27:30

MV: Nah, it was right here... one day, we right here in McQueens... and uh, I can't wa- watching some weather come from up here off of Richmond Hill. There wasn't, like five of us. Two Vietnamese boats, and me and Mike Flemmings, and Ken Strickland on Sapelo Lady. We watched this weather. I was on Ricky Skinner's boat, the War Horse. And that storm come... and it was blowing so hard, it felt like it was sucking the pilot house off. I've seen it lightning. Joey Pittman was standing right behind me, Roy Drake was back there in the galley. And I've seen a strick of lightning not like- and hit my antenna, it was on top of my mast pole. That fire came down and hit the roof of that boat. And it was like- (sound effect). It blew the wattage out of the generator. It made the engine drop a valve. It blew up everything inside the boat. It melted everything... we had- I finally got my crew, I said boys, I don't want to do this, - I'm talking about it raining, blowing, crazy. But, we had nothing to tell us where we was, where them other boats was- so the best thing to do, is let's take up, and just eye the wind to it. We ended up all the way up the there, St. Captiva up yonder. Before we came out them- we come running, riding

back by. Mike Flemmings' stepped out the door, and I pointed up. They're like that to the antenna down. We ain't have nothing. It blew everything up.

JST: Wow.

MV: Other than that, I've had a few occasions of scary stuff, but. Lightning and New Smyrna. I had enough of that.

JST: Take the cake, huh?

MV: Yeah, and I've been fishing since I was 13.

JST: Wow.

MV: And I've seen some crazy stuff out there. Now let me tell you something, you don't play with Mother Nature. She's a woman of her own. And when she gets ready to do what she's got to do, she don't tell you. She ain't telling you. She just gonna do it. And that's the thing like now, from Savannah, Altamaha, which one. Wind. And from Altamaha to Fernadina, it's another wind. And then from Fernadina to St. Augustine is another wind, because the way the island chains. So. You better listen to the weather this time of the year, cause it's way worse than-

JST: Is it more unpredictable?

MV: Yeah.

JST: In the winter, you think?

MV: And it goes around in a circle.

MV: It don't-

JST: Mm-hmm. So when you think back to those boats you've been on, and the very first boat you were ever on. And then all the way up now to the, to Miss Doris. What have you seen change about these boats, about these vessels? What's different?

MV: They're dying. There ain't very many of them coming back.

30:26

MV: Shrimping industry falling. We're a dying breed. When one boat goes down, that's it. You've seen boats coming around, you see boats all out there, but they ain't from here.

JST: Where are they from?

MV: From everywhere. Wherever they can float from. If they got a motor and they're able to go and they Coast Guard approved, they come from everywhere from... just all over the world.

Alabama, Louisiana, Texas. Uh, North Carolina, South Carolina. Florida. We ain'r the only ones

with a few boats, but. Everything that's showing up, is 85 to 100 foot, or bigger. Ships. Ships- and that, they ain't very many little boats no more, like us. And I consider myself, 70 foot. Pretty good size boat. But, I'm nothing like Marty and them. I- I look like a little minor up beside them. (laughs) But, I hold my own.

JST: Sounds like it. When you think about your whole life fishing, and you think about things like you were saying, the weather. Or the water, or what- what sorts of sea life you see. Have you seen that change over your life?

MV: Oh, yeah.

JST: Yeah? How so?

MV: Yeah, I've seen skates disappear. I've seen croakers disappear. I've seen catfish disappear. Um... there's a bunch of different uh, sea creatures that ain't around now. Uh, right now, we outta be seeing blue crabs out there. Out there, five or six miles right now. But, I ain't seen a crab yet this winter, out there. And usually around the dump buoys and St. Catherine's buoys, all the way to Fernadina before that water gets up there to 45, 50 foot. Them crabs go up there and fall off the edge of them ridges. But there ain't no crabs out there. Um, I don't know if they inside, it don't sound like it. It sounds like they buried up. But, out of the blue, they could pop up and go to killing them. If- if it was called catching, everybody would be doing it. It's called fishing. Commercial fishing. (laughs) But there are things disappearing. Uh... I try to save all the trout, flounder, bass. Cause I like to fish. And, if I dump them out on deck, that's the first thing I do. I pick them up, throw them back overboard. Yeah, we throw a bunch of fish back over, that the hungry people out there can eat. But they don't want us to have them on the boat. They already dead. But... when you start paying a hundred dollars a fish, for a ticket. For a one-inch, undersized flounder... everything ain't alive when you take up. Croaker. Uh, a croaker is. But we used to catch croakers that weighed a pound or two. Now, you catch things that ain't six, eight inches. And look like they pregnant when they're born. Their bellies be so full of eggs, and they won't be six inches.

JST: Hmm.

MV: But you don't never see no big croakers. Other people might see them. But fogies, you see them very few fogies, but you do see fogies. But...

JST: Why do you think that all of them-

MV: I mean, I don't miss the catfish being gone. They hurt. They poke you, they hurt. Stingrays, I don't see if there's a shortage on them. I don't see any shortage on no horseshoe crab. We- sometimes, I got a shooter on my tri net out right now, but. We was pulling on it last week, and then that 12 foot trinet that they'd be 45, 50 horseshoe crabs in that trinet and that's all you can do without tearing your tri-net in half, on em.

JST: Those are heavy!

MV: Yeah, we put a shooter in to shoot them.

JST: Mm-hmm. Why do you think those other fish are gone? What do you think is causing that?

MV: I- I don't have a clue. I'm not environmentalist. Tell you the truth, I could not tell you. Not in being smart about the situation, that they all claim, that we get black gill. Black gill only shows up in September, in August, September. And... I watched it this past year, everybody talking about black gill got so bad this year. It showed up and was gone. Then it showed up just a little bit, and it was really gone. I fished most of the year. Hard. In and out- we was killing the shrimp this year. We killed them for the last three years, some of us. And uh... about the time, June, July, when the brownies show up, it killed all of them. It pretty well killed all of them, if you were pushing them overboard, you was killing them too. I made my crew pick them up. Well we ain't on a catch and release program, cause the sharks was already got us bad enough.

35:44

MV: They- they brutalized us. If- if I see anything go, I would put them back in business. A shark fisherman. I don't know so much about the nets, but... that Golden Phase, we long-lined it for sharks, and we done good with it, and there's other boats that long-lined. I put that behind, those back into sharking. They getting ridiculous. I tell you what you gonna take- if you gonna take something, uh the other person? Grand youngin' to get bit or something? Because I got videos here on this telephone right here, of them. That's ridiculous. But...

JST: Wow.

MV: I didn't- I didn't see many of the roe shrimp ever get black gill than it did this year. Just mainly the brownie- and the first of the white shrimp. Usually, August, September's our best year of them for fall crop. And it did get half of some of them. And now everybody's predicting that we ain't got no shrimp this year. Well, you ain't gonna know until this year gets started. They all got their th- I don't listen to them. They start that crap about no shrimp, and the price on this, and

the price on that. Price on fuel- I, I got two options. I got a power button, and a volume button. I cut it off. This is my job, my living for- I ain't got time to hear you with your drama. I'm here to do this. If you don't feel like being here, bye.

JST: (laughs) So what do you enjoy, about shrimping?

MV: Everything.

JST: Yeah? Tell me.

MV: Everything. Oh, oh... but scrapping. I don't like scrap. Other than that, I like shrimp. I love it. I just... it's what I choose to do.

37:40

JST: So for someone who's never been on a shrimp boat, tell- tell me. What is it you love?

MV: Oh, I don't know. They got to pick it out. I love it all. I- I don't, I don't know... what to say. What would they... It ain't cut out for everybody. You got to go get out there and try it. Oh, and y'all gotta easy job. Well, you think what you want to. You start working around the clock. Start working in weather every day and every night. Going through deck pools of fish, what's so fun about that? Nothing. But when you catch and clean shrimp and everybody's asking, its like deadliest catch! You see how them boys act when they ain't catching nothing? We the same way. No sooner than they got a trapper out here in the trap pool, they all have to go to- we all the same way. (laughs) We all drama freaks. I- and the shrimpers return. Dead as the world, as the world turns. I don't know what to say about that part. They have to pick their own, enjoyment out of it. I enjoy all of it but the roughness, and the scrapping. I don't like scrapping. Like we doing right now? Dragging five hours. Or all day long, one drag. Hoping that you get a box and a half, two boxes. But with the price like it is right now? You ain't breaking off no limbs, but I bet you I got my uh check made in seven days. Ain't nobody gonna hand you nothing. You gonna work for what you get. I don't want nobody handing me nothing no how. It seems like when somebody hands somebody something, they disrespect them. When you got to work for it, you think about it a little more. I- well I had to work for this! I can't afford to take- nah, I can't give you nothing! I, I ain't crazy. I'm just a fisherman. I have a hamster. I even got a ham- my buddy, Pat Brannen, he brought me a wheel to the boat the other day. A hamster wheel. He said, here, this is for your hamster. I got it sitting right beside my carrier in my boat, right there on the dash. He said, this is

for when that brain starts spinning up there. He said, you take him out and let him get in that wheel over there and spin it out.

40:15

JST: (laughing) I thought you meant you had a real hamster!

MV: No- I do in my head!

JST: Okay. (laughs).

MV: Running my brain.

JST: So what are any last thoughts? What else should we know about boats in Georgia, about shrimp boats in Georgia?

MV: We don't need no more.

JST: Ah, okay.

MV: That way I ain't got to drag around none of them. (laughing) Somebody else wants to come, so be it. That morning, we get up, look at there and try to figure out who's lights that- I sure wish they'd leave! Like, I- how many times out there they'd be 12, 15, 18, 20 boats in one area. One little area! Now, two boats show up... be all mad. Like, hey! And whoever watches this video and listens to this, they gonna say- that boy is stupid. He's correct, though. I'm correct. Greed? It ain't greed. It's just that you don't- you've got a few that you've picked to work with. Fishermen's a liar. They gonna lie to each other. But they absolutely gonna tell each other, I'm telling you the truth. But don't tell nobody! Go to the dock here, and go- oh, I got a certain amount of shrimp on the boat. Now unloading, ain't got half that. That's cause they melded. Shrimpers lie. We all lie.

JST: Not today. It's been nothing but the truth, right?

MV: Today.

JST: Okay.

MV: That's cuz you asked questions. I, I ain't gonna lie about this.

JST: (laughs) Thank you so much, Mr. Vernon, for talking to us again. This has been wonderful.

MV: Hey, it ain't no problem. I- I... they say I'm an idiot anyhow. And I'm gonna tell you, this is the last thing I'm gonna say about this.

JST: Hmm?

MV: I'm not gonna die, one of these persons that couldn't never catch nothing. Oh, he couldn't do this, he couldn't do that, cause I've heard that all my life about different captains- I'm gonna

die a legend. They gonna remember me when I'm gone, and they gonna miss me. I might not miss myself, but they gonna miss me. [Laughs] They gonna say, hey, where Vern at? I got two buddies right now, Pat Brannen and Grobey {?} Simpson. They'll tell you right now, Vern, you make our day. I don't know if you gonna start in the morning, or in the middle of the day, or that evening. He said but, I pulled it out of him. I might be grouchy, and ugly, at times. Sounds like this time of year. This crabbing ain't pulled me. You got to have patience right now. It'll all work out, but...

JST: Well, thank you. I would miss you.

MV: Huh?

43:09

JST: I said I would miss you. Thank you. Thank you so much.