

GEORGE WATKINS
Beekeeper – Apalachicola, FL

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Date: December 5, 2005 & March 22, 2006
Locations: ANERR Education Room– Apalachicola, FL
One of Mr. Watkins' Bee Yards – Near Sumatra, FL
Interviewer: Amy Evans
Length: 2 hours, 44 minutes
Project: Florida's Forgotten Coast

[Begin George Watkins]

0:00:00.3

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans on Monday, December 5th, 2005 in Apalachicola, Florida, and I'm at the Apalachicola National Estuarine Reserve—Research Reserve, ANERR, [it's] better known as, and I'm with George Watkins. And George, would you mind saying your name and your birth date for the record, please?

0:00:28.0

George Watkins: I'm George Watkins—two, two, fifty-eight [February 2, 1958] is my birthday.

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AE: And your family goes back some generations here in Apalach[icola], is that right?

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GW: Yeah, back to about the early nineteen—well, late 1800s I'd say.

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AE: How did—how did your family arrive here, do you know?

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GW: It's—the only part I know, I mean, I don't know about all of them, but I know my great-grandfather on my mother's side, who was George Marshall, his dad came about 1850, I think—came to the United States from Portugal and ran boats and fished and whatnot, raising the family all the way. And he came when he was like seventeen years old from Baltimore, Maryland; he worked his way all the way down [to Florida]. And I think he made it maybe as far as St. Augustine and then his kids came—started from there and worked down in Key West and then around as far up to here and to Pensacola, is as far west as—as our family, the Marshalls went was the Pensacola area and then just, you know—that's—. I don't know about the other—all of the parts. Some of our family came from, I think, from Italy, maybe, and one of them might have come from Germany and just at different times in the 1800s that I can recall, you know, some of them. So and then part of Georgia, I think, maybe and east of here from Carrabelle to Apalachicola.

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AE: So the ones who settled in this area, did they come because [Apalachicola] was like the third largest port on the Gulf way back in its heyday? Were they coming because it was a port, or were they coming to move cotton or—?

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GW: No, they were coming from port. They were coming—they were actually running sponge boats, I think, is what they said—running sponges from the Keys to Tarpon Springs and then from Tarpon Springs back and forth to here [Apalachicola].

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AE: Do you know much about those days and when they were getting sponges out of the bay?

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GW: Only what they told me. The—most of the sponges, they—they got some from here but not many. Most of them was on down in the clear water further south like Cedar Keys and Tarpon Springs; that's where the Greeks really developed the sponge market down there in Tarpon Springs. And they ran them here, I think, because it was a big port, and it probably took them up the river. And then, at the same time, they were exporting lumber out of here in a big way and cotton—you know, a big cotton and lumber port, yeah. So my great-grandfather came here and worked at the Cypress Lumber Company, which was in this area right here where we're at right now, where the boats are, and then he started building houses, and he raised his family up in—in Apalachicola. And some of his kids went as far west as Pensacol,a where they built some of these big houses around here out of cypress and pine. All I really know is what my grandfather, who I used to work with—Newman Marshall—told me and knew the history of the

family more, you know. And my grandmother said her dad—he was a fisherman, and they were the ones that was from Italy and they—they kind of liked fish all night and patched the nets all day and it was kind of—she said when she was young it was a rough—it was a rough life to be, you know, a rowboat fisherman around here fighting the crabs and catfish and all the stuff that was a hindrance, you know, to catching fish with a rowboat.

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AE: And were they not keeping crabs back then?

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GW: They kept them but they didn't really—if they were targeting fish, they didn't have time to stop and—and, you know, do anything with the crabs. They had other guys running the lines. They ran the lines for crabs. My dad was into that business, and they kind of like unloaded crabs. And the crab fishermen would go out and set these long lines out and use eels for bait—like chunks of eels—and they would run about every ten-foot on the line. They would pull the line up real slow and dip net them into the boat, and he said they would come in at the end of the—sometimes twice a day loaded with crabs, and they would pick them up—the meat, you know. They had the pickers [that were] hired to pick them, and they would put the—the crabmeat in barrels and ice it on—and then it went to New York on a train. And he said a lot of times it wouldn't never make it, like it was spoiled before it got there; that's what they told him, anyway.

He said they packed it good in what ice they had, but he said that a lot of times they would say it got too hot on the way in transport, and they had, you know—and just didn't make it so—.

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AE: So he wouldn't get paid?

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GW: They wouldn't get paid, but they didn't know—had no way to tell whether it was any good, you know, or whether it really happened or not. But he said about every third load it seemed like it got—they said it went bad but anyway. But they did have a big crab industry here, and that was before traps; that was just lining.

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AE: And that's—is that strictly what your grandfather did was crabs?

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GW: No, they've done everything. I mean this was my—my grandfather on my dad's side, which he—he mainly ran the operation like. He didn't go after the crabs; he just came—you know, him and his—I guess his brothers and cousins, they ran the crab cooking factory like, the

plant, you know, down here on the—on the waterfront on the river, and they actually unloaded the boats and processed the meat and, like I say, they're the ones that packed it on the trains in barrels and ran the operation. That's what he did.

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AE: So could good crabs be harvested all year round, or was there a particular season when you do it?

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GW: Yeah, you can harvest them, but in the wintertime, which I've done a little bit of crabs, too—twenty years ago—and it was—the wintertime gets real slow where the crabs don't crawl real active because, you know, everything slows down in the winter. So you'd catch just about half as many or less, and you don't run the traps but about twice a week, maybe three times a week. Where in the summertime, you run them every morning at daylight, you know, and you got a lot of—lot of little crabs and shrimp eating the bait, so it's real important to go every day and keep the, you know—harvest the crabs and put new bait in the traps, or you'll just be missing the season, you know. If you wait two days, you'll catch about a time-and-a-half of what you would if you ran them every day. So it's—wintertime it's—it's, you know—and they're not real fat in the wintertime, like the meat is kind of light because it's not real good. I mean, you know, there's not—very little bait in the bay in the wintertime, and everything goes to deeper water either, you know—kind of just goes in the ground. A lot of the shrimp go down in the ground

and don't come out until it warms back up. The water temperature changes a lot of stuff like that. Wintertime is the slow season, usually the deep-water season—you have to go out deep or even the shrimp boats will go to Key West a lot of times where it's warm.

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AE: I had somebody tell me yesterday—I feel like I'll probably get this wrong, but they've been getting good hauls of white shrimp here, lately.

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GW: Yeah, there has been good white shrimp. Our bay is a real good place for white shrimp. I mean it's—it's one of the few places in the United States that you can get pinks, brown shrimp, and white shrimp all in the same bay, you know, and it's been—it's seasonal, but we've had some laws to change a little bit and it keeps the big boats—what's really caused the shrimp to make a comeback is the big boats can't come in and catch the female momma shrimp—you know, the spawn shrimp—in the summertime like they used to. They used—they could drag inside the three mile line with these big nets and catch up all the—or a lot of the big spawning shrimp before they had time to spawn. Because they spawn like in April, May, and June or July. And now that they're—they put a limit on the size nets you can have in-shore and it took about ten years, but the white shrimp has made a major comeback.

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AE: Can you explain the difference between white, rock, pink, and brown [shrimp]?

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GW: Well, the rock shrimp stay offshore; it's just a little kind of a hard shell shrimp and they're—they're from ten miles on out, you know, mainly around ten to fifteen miles. And the pink shrimp is a shrimp that likes the coral and—and lime-rock bottom, mainly between here and Key West. You don't see too many of them out in Louisiana, where it's mud bottom and all. They're mainly sandy lime-rock bottom and finding—sometimes they'll be—when the bottom is real white that you catch them on—they'll be real pink and that's why they call them pink shrimp. But if they come up in our bay, where it's brown sand, they will be brown—brownish-red looking, and they're a real—they're a real good shrimp, you know—pink shrimp. They're just about strictly night shrimp. In the daytime, we don't hardly ever catch them unless we catch them moving—just by some accident or something, you know, but most of the time we always catch them at night. And then the brown shrimp is a summertime shrimp that don't—that don't come but once in the—about May and June and July and then you don't hardly ever see them again—the brown shrimp. They go offshore and lay their eggs way off—somewhere out to the west. We've never been able to find the momma or the spawning brown shrimp. And they go out, and then in February and March, the little tiny needle look—I guess about as big as a little needle—will start showing up in the marsh grasses and all. And then by May, they're big enough to catch, and they'll come out. And then the white shrimp, they kind of stay in—in on the—within three miles of the beach on the outside and lay their eggs and they come in with the tide as little

embryos, and they grow in the marshes, and when they hatch out they come out about July and August and mainly in the fall and winter. We'll have them—they're about the more dependable shrimp—the white shrimp—because we know there are going to be white shrimp, you know. They—they're like a local shrimp that stays here year-round, whereas the brownies, sometimes the eggs come in from way offshore, and we'll have a good brownie season, and sometimes they don't, and you won't hardly have any. They're not dependable. And—and but the pink shrimp are the same way; sometimes we'll have pink shrimp because we depend on their eggs to come from way offshore. Sometimes we have a season—mainly a springtime season of—of pinks and sometimes we don't; sometimes they'll last into the fall, like right now. There's some pinks in the bay right now at night, and they'll be there until it gets too cold. And once it gets cold they'll go in the ground, and they'll come back and they—they should be a little bit bigger. They don't grow a lot in the winter, but when they come out in, I'd say early February to—to start the spring run, they'll be—they'll be pretty good shrimp, and they'll come right back, you know—the pinks will. But the white shrimp is more—to me, is more of a dependable catching shrimp because you can catch them night and day sometimes, depending on if the water is muddy, you catch them in the daytime; if the water is real clear, they can see the nets coming, and they kind of hide from predators and all, so you won't catch very many of any kind of shrimp when the water is real clear. But they're—you know, they're about the best shrimp we've had as far as the taste and all, and they live on the leaves that come out of the river and the mud that comes down from Georgia.

The same—it's kind of the same thing that Georgia has—had the mud rivers going out on the East Coast around Brunswick and on up to the Carolina Coast. There's several—well, probably hundreds of streams, but a lot of rivers that come out, and it brings that clay mud out,

and they have a lot of white shrimp over there also. But our bay produces a lot of shrimp that people don't even hear about. A lot of them caught and sent off and, you know, I'm sure there's record of it, but I mean the average person don't even know it's going on, you know.

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AE: How long have you been shrimping?

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GW: About thirty-some years, probably. I started as a kid in high school in the [nineteen] seventies, and then there was plenty of shrimp then, let me tell you. And we got a fair price—not real good, but I mean it was fair but—like diesel fuel was thirty-cents a gallon, and gas was maybe cheaper than that, or maybe the diesel was a little cheaper than the gas. But I can remember when the gas was thirty-nine-cents a gallon, and they told us it was going to a dollar a gallon for our—you know, during our lifetime. **[Laughs]** And were all afraid. But yeah, we—we had a lot of shrimp in the [nineteen] seventies and eighties, too.

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AE: So, well then, let's back up for a minute because we haven't talked about your parents. What did they do for a living here?

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GW: Well my mother was kind of like a teacher; she taught a little bit, and she was interested in kids, like you know, at school, and she did the recreational program down here and was a housewife. And then my dad, he worked at the bank. After he ran seafood houses and all, he got an offer to work at the bank and he—he started at the Apalachicola State Bank and—and worked twenty-five years, probably, there and then retired.

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AE: What—what were your parents' names?

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GW: Joyce and Richard Watkins—Joyce Marshall and Richard Watkins.

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AE: And so did your father, did he grew up in the seafood industry and work at the fish houses and whatever?

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GW: Basically, he did because his dad—that's what his dad had been in, you know, into most of his life.

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AE: So what all had he worked before he went into banking?

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GW: Well he—he worked in the mullet—sometimes in the mullet, you know, unloading. He—he never was much of a—of a boat fisherman. As—as well as—he worked in the seafood house, and he worked in an oyster house once and—and he—he went away to the Coast Guard for a term—however many years they stayed—three or four years. And, you know, where they did—the boats went to Key West and got enough of the water, you know. He was in the [area of] rescue, and they sent them out—they didn't ever send them out in good weather. It would always be bad—bad like a hurricane coming, and they would send them out on maybe a 160-foot vessel, which isn't very good to go out [in that kind of weather]. And he said several times they got hurricane force winds and forty-foot seas, going after an old broke down boat down around Mexico or somewhere, and they'd have to go all the way to Mexico and tow the banana boat back or shrimp boat.

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AE: So when he went into the banking business, was he looking to make a better living, or was he tired of working off the bay or what?

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GW: No, he was just looking to make a better living. He got an offer—something he hadn't tried yet, you know and he took it.

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AE: Was he already working there when you were born or when did that—?

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GW: I think he was; I think he was already working there.

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AE: So how did you get to working on the—on the bay?

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GW: They—when I was a kid, every weekend, took me fishing with nets and all, and that's what my grandfather did on my mother's side for, you know—he was the one—his descendents came from Portugal, and they were fishermen, that's all. And the main thing the Portuguese did. And he brought that blood with him, and he was into boats and fishing. And when he had off-time—he was mainly into house building and construction and concrete work. He loved to do concrete work better than anything. The hardest work there was, he picked it to do, you know, and I had to work with him on up 'til he passed away. I was still working with him. He lived to be about ninety-some [years old] and—but anyway, they took me as a kid every weekend fishing with nets, and it was like commercial fishing but it was—they didn't have to do it. You know, they went when they wanted to, and they raised me up and—and then they, you know, put me in a boat when I was about eight years old. Got my own boat—a little boat and all, and then they wondered why I wanted to be a fisherman, you know. And I just never had interest in any kind of office job or anything. I liked to produce—or produce and I was just born with food producing. It's messed me up, really, all my life. It took my college degree away, it took my career, job, anything that I've had has been messed up by the—mainly being, we live on the water and not, you know, up north where there's farms, you know. I went—you know, the food that we produce is on the water, and that's all I really am satisfied doing.

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AE: So when you say it messed up college for you and all that did, how do you mean?

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GW: Well I had a choice when I got *out of high school*. *My dad said, Do you want to go to college? Are you ready?* And he wanted me to go for it and be like an architect or something because I had it in my family blood to be a builder. And he said, *Well don't be the builder; that's too hard of work. Go ahead and be an architect or a designer*. And I said, *Okay*. And a few years went by, and I got into—slightly into the shrimping business and started going out on some of these boats in the summertime and got my own little boat and made good money in high school. And I just told him, I said, *I just don't believe I want to go to college, you know. I just don't believe I'm—I want to go*. And he said, *Well try to anyway*. And—and when it came down to it, I said, *I believe I want to get me a boat, you know, and go shrimping and be a shrimper*. I said, *Plenty of money is being made up here, and it will last forever*. So he helped me—put his house on the line to get a loan to get a big boat, and I took it and ran with it and did good, you know. And then when I—I got another [boat], and then it just ended up, you know, just kind of just taking that rout, you know. And I stayed in it for a while—about ten years, and then as I got married and started having kids I decided I'd, you know, get off the water for a while. A friend wanted to buy my boat, so I sold out to a friend, but then I never could get away from it; I've always gone back and scalloped and shrimped and then I got into—after I got off out of the big shrimping boat industry, I got into the—into the crabs. That's the first thing I went into, flounders and crabs—spearing flounders at night and crabs. And then after I got out of that, I got into soft-shell crabs, which was a little bit of the same thing as crabbing. It was kind of a hard thing to do, but you know, it was—it was good money in that—hard work, though. And then I got into the gill net business and stayed in that for about ten years until they banned the nets; they banned our gill nets. I mainly went for Pompano because that was big money fishing, and it was something

that they didn't—very many people wanted to fool with them down here, you know. It's kind of hard; it was a little bit hard but exciting. When you made a catch, it was usually big and that was pretty good—pretty good money catching them. And then after that I got into—I got back into—now—what I'm doing now. I'm trying to get back into shrimp because the shrimp is about the best thing going right now, you know—something [I'm] able to do and work at the same time. You know, have a boat that's—you have to—the way it is now, you have to have a boat that is paid for. I don't see anybody getting out of school and getting a boat and being able to pay for it like we once did. But if you could get a boat and—and worked on it and paid for the loan, and by the time you get it ready to go and not owe a lot of money on it—of course, we used to have to carry insurance on the boats, but now there's no way you could afford insurance on a boat, you know, the way the shrimp prices is kind of down because of the imports. But you'd have to have a boat kind of ready to go and paid for and be able to tie it up and do something else like have a job or do something else and—and then go when the shrimp is good.

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AE: That's what—pretty much why you're doing what you're doing now here, working at the Research Reserve and making honey, which we'll get to, but I'm still—?

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GW: I've worked here for about ten years—going on ten years—and it's not a career service job. I could probably get a career service job, but it wouldn't be here; it would be with the forestry, or

it would be with the shellfish over here. It would be something that—that would be more restrictive, you know. We're—we're fire burners or firefighters now, but only on our land. We [the ANERR] own maybe 3,000 acres in one tract and hundreds of acres in another tract, and then we've got Little St. George [Island], 3,000 or 2,800 acres as all part of the research reserve lands—DEP Lands—CAMA Lands they call it, Coastal Aquatic Managed Areas. And we're headquartered out of Tallahassee, and we're only firefighters and burn our own property. Like the State Forest Service, they'll go and they'll get contracted out to burn St. Joe Paper Timber Company's land or—just different timbered lands. Or if they get a wildfire, they have to go anywhere in the State. I mean, if it's an emergency, they can be taken away from anything they're doing and go fight a wildfire that could last weeks. Usually that don't happen unless there's an extreme drought, but we're trained firefighters and burners but we only do it our—on our own land, and I kind of like that. We do a lot of tractor work, and we do a lot burning, but here lately, for the past year, two of us has been pulled away, and we've been working on Little St. George on the docks and stuff that got tore up during the Hurricane Ivan. We had just got through from working doing the docks from Hurricane Ivan when Dennis hit and tore it all—most of it back up. So we've got about another month to take—take that, you know—that job and get that job done, and then we've got another big dock, an old historic Coast Guard dock over there, and we don't know who is going to fix that—whether we're going to get to do it in-house or whether it's going to be contracted out, but it's going to be a big job. It's going to last a year so—or more. It depends on how intense they want to go.

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AE: So what's your title here, if you have one?

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GW: My title is a Park Service Specialist. It's kind of like we're part of the—we were—used to be part of the State Park Service, but I think they—they branched away, and I don't know, but we might be branched back—part of us might be part of the State Park Service, and that's about our—our title is—Park Service Specialist, you know, which is kind of like a—a Park Ranger that's upgraded right under a Manager, maybe, kind of like running small operations.

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AE: When you started here, was there an opening that you applied for, or were you just kind of pulled into it because you were interested?

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GW: Well, actually I—when I first got hired here, I got hired to—as like two days a month to take care of the—the beehive and the greenhouse. And that's how I got started. And I got paid just a minimum hourly rate for however many hours I put in. It wasn't like a nine-to-five job or an eight-to-five job. It was just when I wanted to come in and take care or do anything it took to keep an observation hive going in the greenhouse. And there was a guy that worked down here that I helped get it started. I—I didn't really have anything to do with it. I had worked—I had

worked with the Reserves several times in the [nineteen] eighties. I rebuilt a dock for them, and I rebuilt—or rebuilt a shed and done a lot on the island and done some work around this building and put some tanks in and just kind of off and on helped them. And then when this guy got—he—he left and left the green—the greenhouse observation hive, they hired me to take it over because I had set it up. He—he learned how to do bees through me because I took him after work, when he was off work I'd take him and—and let him be my laborer. And so he wanted to set up, and we all got together and set up the greenhouse observation hive. But when he quit, I took it over. And then this big job—we built a new building over in the head of East Bay, our main administration part of the building. It's been growing, and it's got a wet lab in it and the maintenance shop and built a pretty good sized building in 1996 over there, and a big dock job came along. So they hired me and a couple of guys to build that dock, and we've been working for them ever since. After the dock job, it was just one thing after another. We had to pour a bunch of concrete, had to jack about four of these portable warehouses up and put blocks on them, and pour pillars to keep storm surge from getting them. And then after that, they took us down to St. Joe and let us start building fire lines with the tractors and putting in culverts and fences and putting up new fence and taking old fence down. **[Laughs]** It was just—it's just been one thing after another, you know. So and then they trained us to do the burning, and I just kind of stayed with them. They've bought more and more property, and they keep saying they want to hire us full-time, but they can't get the positions, you know, so—I don't really care. At my age, I don't care about getting a new—starting a new career, anyway. I'm about ready to go off on my own and build things and build boats and—and shrimp before it's over, you know while we can still do it legally and all so—and the bees, too.

And I got into the bee business fifteen years ago. That takes a lot of time, and it's pretty good money in it. There's not real good money in the red honey but there's good money in tupelo. So I kind of am interested in that, you know, and I think I can survive as long as I stay healthy. And if I go down, I'm going to have to hire somebody to take care of everything.

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AE: *[Laughs]*

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GW: *[Laughs]* When I finally go down.

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AE: Well I have about a million questions because you've got all kinds of irons in all kinds of fires, and I want to try and get as much history of—and knowledge of what it is that you know from working on the bay with flounder and crabs and scallops and shrimp and all that. So would you mind kind of briefly going into each of those things and—and talking about what they're about and how that has—?

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GW: Well, I can tell you the way I see it, you know, and I've just done just about anything. The way I've always been is, after I master it and really start doing good I'm—I usually drift away and start into something else. For some reason, I don't know what it is, but after I've mastered something—it's really a waste. It's like I had a Masters Degree in shrimping and gave it up to do something else. But you know, I had some—some diabetic health problems and all. It wasn't just because I wanted to drift away from it, you know, but it was bad to quit shrimping at the time I did. But anyway, the shrimping—I'm talking about—I mean, unless you ask me a particular question, I don't know really what to go into with the shrimping. There's so much. I mean, we could talk about the shrimping all night, if you wanted to. I mean, but the shrimping you know—it's—it was real good at one time and it's went down, but I think it will come back up. One thing—I'll tell you one thing that happened to it was a lot of the bottom—offshore bottom out here—of course, we depend—with the big boats, the little bay ain't going—you know, it isn't going to really support a lot of big boats. You know, Apalachicola at one time, I'd say in the [nineteen] seventies and eighties had a pretty good-sized fleet, I'd say of about fifty big boats. When I say big boats, I'd say that the big double-rigs, sixty-foot plus up to the eighty-foot boats between, I'd say, fifty between Carrabelle and Apalachicola. And we depended on the offshore bottom, and everything was going smooth, and then the scallops came. And these big East Coast boats came from the—came and they had these big nets—heavy-duty and they actually chained to the max because scallops was on the bottom. And I'm talking about not the bay scallops, like they have in St. Joe Bay and down around St. Marks, but the offshore bottom had scallops. And I've never seen anything like the loads of scallops they were bringing in. I couldn't go because I was having to go to school. I'd go on the weekends some and go out and get in on it, you know—on these big boats. I had friends running these big boats, so this was when I was in about the

twelfth grade. I've never seen the loads that would come in on the back of some of these boats. In fact, there's one of them over there [points to a framed photograph hanging on the wall]. That's a scallop boat coming in from offshore. As a matter of fact, I've worked on that boat before, but that was in the—probably in the [nineteen] nineties, where this [big scallop harvest] went on in the [nineteen] seventies. And what happened was, those scallops, it was good money in it. I mean, there was one fish house down here that unloaded the first two months of the season—unloaded a million bushels of scallops just at one unloading plant. And there was about four places unloading them. But he was kind of like celebrating a little bit and said, *I've unloaded a million bushels*. That's a pretty good bit, you know. And a bushel is a basket that weighs sixty pounds and usually, it will turn out about a gallon of meat sometimes. So anyway, you know with the short—little eyes.

So anyway, when all this scalloping was going on, they took all these—these big boats, and they actually messed up our shrimping bottom because they tore down a lot of the coral and the rock bottom where the shrimp nets couldn't get because [scalloping] it will tear a shrimp net up. And after the scalloping went down, that—that messed up a lot of the breeding ground for our pink shrimp offshore. And at the same time, they were doing a lot of heavy pulp wood down around Perry—Taylor County, which is 100 miles east of here. And they clear cut a lot of the swamps and all and messed that up, you know, and all the—the runoff went down into the—into the Gulf [of Mexico], which is the shallow Gulf down in the bend of Florida. And a lot of our pink shrimp came from down there also and we—we'd go down there and catch them, you know. It would take five or six hours to run there and sometimes twelve to run to Cedar Keys, but that's where we caught a lot of our shrimp.

Well a lot of this timbering activity and whatever went in the—some kind of pollutant that comes from the mills got into the—into the rivers: the Econfina River, the Steinhatchee River, and I forget the name of them, but there's about four rivers that come out—Finn Holloway River—and it kind of messed up our pink shrimp for a while, but I think they're going to make a comeback. They've cleaned up a lot of the—a lot of the pollutants going in the water, and they started selling a lot of the timberland and managing it like we do, trying to burn it more often when it's supposed to be burned and not clear cut it and then replant it. Clear cut it and replant—burn it like it's supposed to be. A lot of the timber companies has sold out their land, you know, and then a lot of the scallops, the price has gotten to wear you can't hardly afford to catch them out here like we used to. And actually, shucked scallops, they import them cheaper than we can even catch them for so—. Actually, our bottom has been depressed now for several years and it might make—it will help the shrimp in the long haul.

Coastline development has got a lot to do with shrimp and all, so you know, that's just—it don't take a rocket scientist to figure out. If somebody is spraying the grass, well, that's just a 100-foot area that's going to pollute the water, and that little area of marsh isn't going to be productive anymore, you know. And enough of that goes on that's not good, but the really—like I say the really—the thing that happened was and—and at the same time all these big boats had sophisticated equipment. They were really tearing—I mean, we could go back to a place as big as this room [which is about twenty-five by thirty feet] night after night after night. The same way with grouper. This fancy—see, the old-timers went and they had buoys, these little homemade devices with the blinking light bulb on it with an anchor that went to the bottom of, you know, like a—a piece of Styrofoam with a cane pole with a flag on it and a blinking light. And they'd go and think they were about where they were and pull—they were trying—if they

had good shrimp, they threw out the buoy and circled it all night and picked it up and went in or, you know, anchored and tried to work the next night. But after the—they pulled the buoy and they—they—there just about wasn't any way they could get right to that exact same spot. But when the LORAN [Long Range Navigation] came out and the GPS [Global Positioning System] and satellite and all the satellite equipment, plotters, I mean, that put the shrimp into—I mean, you know, that—you could go right back to the same spot. But that didn't help the shrimp as far as, you know, a species. It didn't really help them. I mean, it helped the people, but as far as the shrimp making, you know—being able to survive and they had to have that bad bottom to get into—the rough bottom that you can't drag.

You can't just go drag anywhere, especially in Florida. Louisiana and Mississippi and Texas—a lot of that bottom was just flat mud, where you could just drag one way for two days and two nights without ever turning around. As long as you don't hit a pipeline or an oil rig or an old capped off well, you can drag for miles. But out here sometimes, we can normally drag like three or four minutes, sometimes five minutes, sometimes thirty minutes, you know, and then turn around and drag back the other way, you know, which isn't sometimes but maybe a quarter of a mile.

Usually, unless the shrimp is real thick, we'd never try to put out anything that was smaller than a quarter of a mile stretch at one time that you couldn't turn around and—and go back, you know. But we have worked some little tight fingered bottoms where it would be like sand hills, and it will run off into bad coral stuff—corals and sponges. And if you get off in it, you just have to pick your nets up and get straightened out and try to turn around and go back. But what happened with the scallop—the scallop boats is they could drag just about anywhere, and they messed up a lot of our coral—bad bottom to where—.

0:35:19.1

AE: What do they use to harvest the scallops and—?

0:35:25.1

GW: It's just a shrimp net. A smaller shrimp net, but it's heavy twine. It's like a rope, and it's real heavy and it just—it's just, I mean, you don't—you can just about stop the boat from hanging up with it and pick it up and not hurt it. And it's got cable running around it and about three chains, and then it's got a chain ahead of that. And I mean, it's just so heavy-duty, nothing will tear it up. I mean, you have to pretty well really do some, you know—catch something bad to tear up a scallop net. Where a shrimp net is lighter twine, and it's a bigger net, where it will spread, you—and you won't spread it because you're after—you're not after digging the bottom. I mean, you have to touch the bottom, but you don't have to dredge the bottom like the scallop drags do.

0:36:08.1

AE: So what are you looking for when you go out to hunt the shrimp?

0:36:12.0

GW: Well we just go out to the—to the spots where they're at, you know, and then you look for—it's according to how many you're wanting to come in. There's a certain amount you have to pull your little net. It's like a sample net [or a try net], and if you can't get at least two [shrimp] a minute in that—like if you pull it for five minutes and pick it up and have five [shrimp], that's not too good. But if you put it out and pull it [for] ten minutes and have twenty or twenty-five shrimp, that's usually the justify to set the big nets out and drag, you know, and that way you might get twenty and thirty pounds an hour and—and maybe more. It depends on how many they're in. You could hit a spot of them that you're not even knowing about and pick up and have several baskets, but you need to get about 300 or 400, 500 pounds a night. Used to, we drug a lot of nights for 200 pounds—100 to 200 pounds, which isn't very much now because the price of the imports has gotten us to where, unless you peddle your shrimp around town and get three dollars a pound, you can't really make it with a bay boat now. If you can—I mean you can—if you're catching enough of them, you can settle for the—for the dollar-fifty a pound, you know. You can get a dollar-fifty a pound from the shrimp house. And if you're catching a lot of shrimp, that's what you have to do. You can't peddle thousands and thousands of pounds of shrimp, if you start catching that many, but if you're catching like 200 or 250 pounds a day or night every other day, you can just about peddle a lot of them. And when I get my boat going, I'm going to try to get on the restaurant business and freeze some.

I've got a friend that bought my big shrimp boat on the East Coast. He's out at New Smyrna Beach, and he freezes a lot of his shrimp and resells them, you know. Just because they're frozen don't mean there's anything—there's not much difference in fresh shrimp. They don't have any chemicals, and they're not farm-raised and—and they're, you know, local. They're a local product, you know. I wouldn't say hold them for three or four years or anything, you

know. It's better to eat them within a few months, really. I mean, maybe they'll last through the winter, and then by the time the winter shrimp is gone—I mean, say if you froze them now, and you'd have through February to eat them, and I would, myself, consider them being, you know, good shrimp as long as they're grazed and all. I'm sure people have held them for a lot longer than that, but I don't like to keep stuff for a really long time, you know. Unless—I mean it can be done, but I'd like to go ahead and use them within two or three months. And by that time, the spring shrimp will be here and start all over again—in March—usually February and March. We used to start about, you know, around here—even in the bee business, early spring is the first of February. I mean, we have to be set out—usually I like to have all my beehives set out by the middle of January to be in line for the spring, you know, getting started on the spring because the maple will start opening. The same way in the bay; the shrimp will start coming out in February. And you want to pretty well be ready for them.

0:39:14.3

AE: Can you talk about that dynamic now a little bit about how you were talking about the price of shrimp is down, and people don't want to spend the money to pay for the gas to go out on their boats and—?

0:39:24.4

GW: Well they just about can't. I mean you know the—the average bay shrimper—most of them that I know of that's still operating don't—aren't really paying any big payments like we

used to have to pay—big payments and insurance and all. They're just living just about trip by trip, and if there's enough shrimp to go for, they'll—they'll go out after them and—but if there's not enough shrimp—if they hear—they kind of go by what they hear. If somebody goes out and has a catch, I mean, that's just like, well, you know, that's—that's a sign; let's go. You know, somebody had 200 pounds in one drag last night, and if that word gets out, which usually it will because everybody keeps up with what everybody is doing because it's kind of like a time-saver. The one that has to go out and find them is the one that really had to take the chance, you know. But just general knowing that the shrimp is out there right now, and they'll probably last until it's really freezing and gets cold, they'll go—they're going [out shrimping] now, just about when the weather will permit. If the weather permits going, you can go catch shrimp right now, if you know anything at all about it. You know, if you got a boat you've—just about have to know what you're doing to be able to afford a boat right now in these times and fuel up and the price now, especially, you know.

The bay boats—small boat which is—when I—when I say a bay boat, that's just a small boat that don't go over about three miles offshore and specializes in shallower water. And, you know, most of them has got like a 671 Detroit Diesel which is a—they burn about forty to fifty gallons to fuel a night, you know. But it's an affordable boat to be able to go. They're about thirty-five—the perfect boat is about thirty-five to forty-foot, where you've got a cabin big enough to have a bathroom, a table and—and a little stove and sink, and two bunk beds, maybe. Or you could sleep a third person on the floor, maybe, if you had to, you know, and steering—pilot house up ahead of that. And then on the back you'll have your winch and your rigging, which the nets are pulled and worked from, and then behind the winch you'll have an ice hole, which is a below-deck compartment that—that will take care of several—maybe 5,000 pounds

[of shrimp], if you was to catch them. And then you've got some deck room to work, and then you've got a box. Usually they'll have a box on the back for extra ice. And a lot of times, if they're just catching 300 or 400 pounds, they'll put them in that deck box and not—and have some ice in that and not put them down below because it's just more time consuming to put them down below when you have to get them back out, you know. Mostly everybody works with deck boxes now, and it's kind of a—a daily trip thing most of the time. Some of them will stay out. I like to stay out several days myself because I want—for the amount of fuel it takes to run out—especially if you have to go out to the Pass, you know, several hour run, I'd—and then several hours back, I'd—I'd say stay two days, you know or—or three—however many—but usually, this time of year the weather will permit maybe two days in between these fronts.

0:42:44.9

AE: When you say Pass, you're talking about Indian Pass?

0:42:47.5

GW: Well mainly the West Pass, which is a little bit further on—it's the other side of St. Vincent's [Island,] West Pass. That's where most of our stuff goes on. Indian Pass has always been a shallow shoal(y) pass, and most of these bigger boats—bay boats, like I say, thirty-five or forty-foot, avoids it. You can go down there in the—in the Sound to Indian Pass, but most of the time they don't like to use it, unless they're a real small boat because the shoal has changed. They'll go to Indian Pass through West Pass—or you can go out in the cut, you know, at the

islands—between the islands and go out in the cut and work down the beach from the cut—is a good place to catch shrimp, too. But West Pass is the place—the natural pass, you know, and it was one of the biggest passes during the olden days where the Greek—one of the Greek guys came over, one of the fishermen that was like a snapper—the Greeks always wanted the snappers for some reason. But he said that he saw shrimp, the sheds off of shrimp which is the—the shell that comes off of them when they grow; he said he seen them ankle-deep on Sand Island, which is out the Pass and off to the east and—and if he saw shrimp sheds when he was a boy, and then that would be in the late 1800s before boats started dragging, there must have been a billion pounds right there. Because we don't never see a shrimp shed. I mean, every now and then you might see one, and it will be a lot of shrimp out there then, if you ever see one. He said there were so many big white shrimp. That's how many—and it's just—ain't no telling how many it was, and that was just at Sand Island or West Pass. And the white shrimp go all the way from Dog Island, you know, off of—mainly from the cut all the way to Cape San Blas. There's probably thirty—thirty miles of beach there on, you know, that our river supports. And also there's some down in Ochlockonee River, too. Not a lot, but there's a little, you know—a little beach down there that they come out of—the white shrimp.

0:44:52.6

AE: And when you go back shrimping again, do you have another boat, or are you going to get your old boat back?

0:44:57.2

GW: No, I've got another boat. In fact, I'll have it ready by this summer, probably and hopefully sooner. I've worked on it every day just about and just having a time getting it, you know—the short days and all and then the weekends and other stuff going on and the beekeeping, and all it's taking me forever.

I've got a friend that's a welder, and he's like my engineer specialist. He worked with me back in the [nineteen] seventies and helped me work on my other boat when I had it. And he was a shrimper also, but he's like a welder—torch man—and he's a good man to help with the engine and putting an engine in the boat. And when you put an engine, like a big diesel engine, in a boat, it's a pretty good task to know what you're doing, you know, to make sure that it's sitting on the engine bed right and make sure it's aligned right and bolted in and all, because if there's something wrong, it will mess up big time.

0:45:50.7

AE: So you're building this boat?

0:45:51.7

GW: Well actually I—I was going to build one but I got—I got an old boat that was already built and had been abandoned, and it was old cypress, and it was beautiful cypress, you know. The boat was just—and it had been kind of like sat up for a long time and I—I knew that—I said well, if that boat is still alive after what it's been through—they left it overboard [in the water]

for a long time, and they let it sink. They pulled it out and put it in the yard for a long time, and it filled up with pine straw, and it took me a long time by myself to clean it up. It was just the biggest job I've ever taken on by myself. But I got down with like a little scraper, and I went through every inch of the inside of the boat from the keel all the way out to the sides. I took all the decks off and just took the tanks out of it. Luckily, it didn't have an old engine to worry about so—it was gone. I took the water tanks—everything out of it and cut all the decks off, and then I started back—putting it back together and then—and putting a new—not a new engine, but a new rebuilt engine and took the shaft out and had it straightened, and now we're putting everything back together with the main drive train which is the—the main part of the, you know—the drive system of the boat and the rudder and all. And then we'll put the fuel tanks—new fuel tanks, which is very important—to have enough fuel and have them not leaking or put the thickness of the metal—not to give trouble, put them in the right place to balance the boat, and then start putting the decks back on. And after we put the decks, we'll put the house and then the rigging and fine-tuning, you know—it's a million things on a boat. It's always something to do on a boat.

0:47:33.8

AE: Do you name your boats?

0:47:35.9

GW: Yeah.

0:47:36.1

AE: What was your first one named?

0:47:39.1

GW: It was named the *Mae-Mar*. But it was already named. It was named after the man's son that built it, Marty, and his wife was named Mae. And it stayed that name for a long time. It was built in Pensacola about 1964, I think. And I bought it in 1977.

0:47:59.9

AE: Was it a boat that's similar to what you've been describing as a good boat?

0:48:04.5

GW: It was a little bigger; it was sixty-seven-foot. It was the outside boat—the offshore. We depended on offshore and longer—longer trips. It was an in between boat from the bay boats that I'm working on now—the thirty-six to forty-foot boat and the seventy-five and eighty-foot steel boats, which the big steel boats are the ones that—[distracted by his cell phone, which is clipped to his belt.] Uh-oh, I'm taking a picture. [*Laughs*]

0:48:34.9

AE: Did you lean on [the phone] too hard?

0:48:35.8

GW: Yeah. But anyway it—it was kind of like the in between boats that came out. It was a big boat in its time in 1964. It was a big boat and then later in the [nineteen] seventies, these big huge boats came and they went from Texas and Key West and Mexico and big steel boats—steel hulls—and they took over the Gulf, you know. But now they're the ones that's the prime because it takes them 40,000 gallons of fuel and 20,000 in freshwater just to make a trip, plus their groceries, and it takes about three to four people on the boat—three or four men, depending on—and, you know, if you go out like a week without catching anything, it is hard to make up that difference, and it's very few boats like that still able to operate. There's a lot of them in the Gulf, but they're all tied up. Texas has got a lot of them, and they're all for sale.

After the storm, a lot of the—Katrina. This is [Hurricane] Katrina, the storm [that hit the Gulf Coast in August 2005]. I heard that a lot of the Texas boats came—or the boats that went out to the Texas opening around Galveston and Brownsville came, and they opened Texas for brown shrimp in August. Well they had went out there and worked about several weeks or a month and loaded up. Those boats came from Alabama and Louisiana—went out there and loaded up, and when they got back, all their docks and everything was tore up. They couldn't unload the shrimp, so there was like twenty shrimp boats—steel hull shrimp boats loaded down and went to St. Joe—over here to Port St. Joe [just west of Apalachicola]. And this man over

there—Woods, I think his name is. Woods Fisheries was going to try to unload them, and he said he would do the best he could to sell the shrimp—twenty boats, loaded. I don't know what ever happened to them, but he told them he would take them—take the shrimp on consignment and, you know, they were hurting bad, you know. After going out and working for a month, they had some big expenses, and they needed money to, you know, pay for their operation, pay their crew. They probably wasn't very happy either, but I mean it was an act of nature and God that the storm came, you know.

Because storms are going to come. You know, it's not a bad thing, really. Everybody hates it and all but that's—a storm is what cleans up everything. [A storm] cleans the marsh up; forest fires take care of the forest; floods take care of the river; hurricanes take care of the bay and the marsh. And after that storm came through, we had some of the best marsh grass growing back—arrowhead. My bees love it. I mean it just cleaned all the debris and all out of the marsh; that rack line that it washes up that the trucks take weeks to get away—all that contaminates the marsh and all that has to be cleaned out every now and then—every five to ten years. And the bay bottom has to be re-disc(ed) up and disc the bay up—everything—just—just back to normal. It's been going on for a million years or longer than—however long the earth has been here and—.

0:51:35.0

AE: What about the red tide that that the bay just got done with? [*Red tide is a bloom of dinoflagellates that causes reddish discoloration of coastal ocean waters, which is often toxic*]

and fatal to fish. The Apalachicola Bay had been closed for a few weeks as a result of red tide, meaning there could be no harvesting of seafood.]

0:51:39.3

GW: Well the red tide is another natural thing. If there are too many fish, we believe—the fishermen—that if we don't catch the fish, the red tide is going to come get them anyway. That's why we hated the net ban on the mullet because I've seen more mullet dead on the beach from the red tide, which, you know, is an algae bloom. If you read—and you probably studied it and all—I don't know if you—.

0:51:59.7

AE: I haven't studied it intensively but I've—I've been reading about it, yeah.

0:52:03.4

GW: Marine biology and everything and we've got some papers in here—some brochures on it if you want to take one anyway. I mean it's—it's really a hardship on everybody, you know, when you depend on it, and that's why I say the shrimping—you've got to have a boat where you don't depend on it—just strictly on the seafood, in case something like that happens. Luckily it don't go for shrimp but it got flounders, it got catfish, sharks, poggies, which is bait fish, you know, and the mullet. It took out a lot of fish.

0:52:37.8

AE: Have you ever oystered?

0:52:39.5

GW: A little bit. Enough to know that I don't like it.

0:52:44.1

AE: Why not?

0:52:44.2

GW: It's just too hard—the same old thing every day. The same thing. And you know, it's just—it's kind of undependable also because you never know when some bacteria is going to come in or red tide or the river is going to go up and the bacteria level from all the—the cow fields and all up north of us that drain off into the river—that's what gets it. It raises up the level, you know, that they can't harvest oysters. It just shuts it all down.

0:53:19.4

[An employee of the ANERR walks in to shut of some lights, as the building is closing for the day.]

AE: Are we going to get kicked out?

0:53:21.9

GW: No, we're okay. We'll go out that back door [when we leave]. [To the ANERR employee] Lock the front because I don't have a key—only in the back. You want to get on the recorder and make a statement? *[Laughs]*

0:53:37.7

[Back to interview]

AE: Well but so then you've done everything—

0:53:41.1

GW: But I do like to go—I do like to go get oysters to eat, while we're talking about oysters. I go three or four times a winter, just on my own little boat and go and pick them up. My friend Jimmy that helps me with the—with the bees he—he loves oysters too, and we bring them in, and we'll shuck oysters for two or three days—just have several ice chests full and just go out

and shuck them and eat them raw and in stew and eat them fried and just have an oyster feast around the house every afternoon until they're gone—mainly in the wintertime.

0:54:10.4

AE: So you can just go to the public beds and go tonging for oysters then, huh?

0:54:15.0

GW: Yeah, we've got our secret spots we like to go to, you know that are dependable and where we know they're going to be. What we're really—we're really looking for salty oysters because both of us and our families, everybody really likes salty oysters to eat, you know—raw oysters salty. If they're not salty, there's a few people that will eat them but, you know, I mean, we don't mess with them. We might cook them, you know, and put salt on them and fry them in cornmeal. But really and truly, the flavor is in the—the salt. And when you can get the fat oysters where the rivers came down or, you know, not fresh water—got some meat, you know, and they're fat healthy oysters, and then the salt water comes in like on a west wind. The wind depends on whether they're going to be salty or not because the wind—like Indian Pass, we go down almost to Indian Pass around—they call it The Miles, which you've got the—the Six Mile, the Seven Mile, the Eight Mile, the Nine Mile—every road there's like these roads that go down to them—they call it The Miles, and we'll go down there. But [we] go across, usually, on St. Vincent's [Island] with the boat. And on a west wind, it blows that salt water in the bay, and it will make them get—taste salty—a lot saltier. If you get an east wind, it will blow fresh water from the

river down that way, and it will be—you'll have more fresh—fresher oysters, which aren't real—to—to us, aren't real valuable. You know, if they don't have any salt taste to them we just—usually just get a few and just leave and go after mullet or something and take our mullet nets.

0:55:47.2

AE: Does the wind—when you're talking about the west wind coming and bringing the salt, does that matter the most at harvest because the—the oysters have such a long growing time?

0:55:54.7

GW: Well it needs to be—during the—like if it comes back, a good west wind today and blows west today and tonight, usually by tomorrow, they'll be good. It can't just come out of the west and you start catching them, you know, immediately. It has to blow for about maybe twenty-four hours out of the west. Sometimes, though, when you do get a wester, it might do that. I've seen it in the wintertime, when you get a west wind, it might last a couple of days and that's—.

0:56:23.2

AE: So it's all according to what the wind is bringing in through the water and what's filtering to the oyster and [that] the oyster has been eating on?

0:56:28.2

GW: Uh-hmm. I've seen old-timers say they've gotten oysters out of the bay that were too fresh to eat in a bag and take them out and put them in the surf for four hours and bring them back, and they'd get salty because, you know, it's salty in the—in the Gulf. Put them out on the outside beach and watch them out in front of their house, you know—people that live on the outside beach—and said they'd be wonderful. But I've never tried that, but they say it works because they're filter feeders, you know. They stay alive when you bring them in the ice chest and ice them. They stay alive for a long time. They just kind of go dormant, you know, like anything else. When you ice them down, it don't kill them, but it will after a long time, you know, after not being able to filter feed. Oysters can live a long time with a—with a winter low-tide and get cold and blowing the cold wind on them—they'll live a long time, three or four days probably, if the tide don't come in, you know, in low tide. Of course, all oysters don't live in that shallow water. A lot of them live out and they stay submerged all the time. But sometimes the—some bars will come—come out dry and you can walk and pick them up just on dry land.

0:57:39.5

AE: What is that—there's a bar called Dry Bar out there on the west side; is that called that because of what you're saying?

0:57:44.1

GW: Well it's kind of got some areas on it that's dry. It's like some—some lumps, you know, some ridges that's kind of—that goes dry. Dry Bar is a good bar on St. Vincent's. It's kind of between West Pass and Indian Pass and the river, and so it's one of the best tasting oysters in the bay if—if there's some salt coming in the Pass, you know. As long as there's not this—it's so close to the river, though, you have to be careful about it. A little bit of an east wind will blow—will make the oysters fresh on Dry Bar quickly. I mean unless they're careful. You have to pick your time to go to Dry Bar, or they'll be too fresh and—and in that case, we have to go maybe ten more miles to the west down in St. Vincent's to Big Bayou and down around some of them bars before you get to Indian Pass.

0:58:34.5

AE: How does that work when the oystermen go out and they pick a place to oyster? Is there competition for one spot like you said some are—?

0:58:41.6

GW: Yeah, the seafood business is number one, competition. There's no doubt about it. Everybody is friendly, in most cases, but it's the most competitive thing you'll run into. because it's public bottom, and I've been in probably the worst trouble or arguments I've ever been in has been over seafood—mainly shrimp bottom, you know. I mean really get—really have words with one another, even on the radio on the VHF [Very High Frequency] radio, you know. There's

been all kinds of threats, and there's even been shootouts before—especially shootouts over the crab, the stone crab, when the shrimpers got into it real bad for a few years.

And the—the Wildlife finally put us offshore and gave the bottom to the crabbers. But back in the early [nineteen] eighties and late seventies, we were getting in there, and we were competing for the stone crab bottom. I'd say between Key West and—and here all of the shallow water down—Cedar Keys being right in the middle of it, Fort Myers, all up and down the west coast of Florida—stone crab bottom, big time. And we really got into it. **[Laughs]**

But there's a lot of competition. The oystermen aren't too bad because they're going out there to make their 100, 150 dollars between each of them, you know. The oysters are just about scattered there. Oysters don't usually move. They can't really move, and it's just first come, first served, you know. If somebody is there, you can be from here to the wall [about ten or twelve feet] oystering right by them, and it's not going to hurt him, you know. I mean you wouldn't want to get right in—catch them right out from under him or anything but the—the competition in seafood is mainly in stuff that moves like shrimp and fish, and stuff that's not going to be there very long, you know. And just about feuding over schools of fish and flounder bottom.

And flounder, there's about ten of us that like to really flounder around here—ten or fifteen people that flounder—and we are all out running in front of them and getting to where they can't see—we can't see each other and turning on our underwater light and start going ahead of them, and they'll be coming, but they won't know we're ahead of them until they get there and start seeing signs that there have been some fish here, and then they've gone. And then they'll see what's going on, and they'll run around and run ahead of us, you know, or go ahead of the other man just all night long and just—there's been some pretty good—pretty good words over flounder, because the flounder—once you do—run a beach for flounder at night, that pretty well

messes it up for the rest of night. So we've been in more—more competition for flounder than probably anything.

1:01:29.6

AE: Is that part of the—the excitement of doing that, though, is the competition and—?

1:01:34.7

GW: Not really. The competition is just something you don't want to run into. That's aggravating. That's the biggest thing flounder—I mean, that's what a flounder man hates to see more than anything is another flounder man. *[Laughs]* You know, it's just well—if there's three or four lights on a certain area of beach we won't even go there—just go somewhere else, go across to another place but if—you have to go where the wind is on the leeward side. Like if the wind is out of the south, you go on the backside of the island where the south wind is hitting the face of the beach, but you're on the backside of the leeward side. You have to be in calm areas to flounder and calm shorelines and beaches, where the water is clear. So you also kind of like are competing where—where you got clear water, where it hasn't been blowing all day and waves stirring it all up, where the bay has had time to settle down and not a lot of bait activity causing the—the mud to stir up. So we go after the calm, you know, beaches. If the wind is out of the north, we mainly stay on the mainland shore because the island will be rough on the island side.

1:02:40.1

AE: Why there are so few folks who go out floundering?

1:02:41.6

GW: It's just too hard, you know—over—feuding over the bottom and then you've got—they're a restricted species, so you've got to go enough to catch them—5,000 dollars worth every two years or something like that—to be able to qualify to catch over ten fish, you know. Anything that's—that's considered a restricted species, you've got to make enough money on the commercial industry to qualify to get that license, and it's kind of hard. You know, you have to go—that's why I want to get back into shrimping because, if I don't, they're going to make it a limited entry, and we're not going to be able to shrimp. They're going to weed out all the shrimpers that's not active. In other words, in the next few years, what I'm hearing through the inside, they're saying get in the game, or you're going to be out of it. So if I don't get my boat going and start catching at least 5,000 or 6,000 dollars-worth a year, I can just about, you know, kiss it good-bye.

1:03:46.3

AE: So then, but that's going to—over a long term then, it's just going to dwindle out the people who are capable of doing that.

1:03:53.6

GW: It's going to dwindle. It's going to be over with before it's over-commercial, and that's the way they want it. The government wants it over and wants us all to be a pleasure area and—and import all the food and not tamper with our bay or anything farther, other than to just go out and cast net a little bit and bait net for the shrimp. And they think it's going to be billions of pounds of shrimp, and there might be, but what good is it going to do if you're not going to be able to harvest them and, you know, what—what's going to happen if you can't import seafood? What if something happens, you know? Who would feed the people here in the United States, if the import business went—went down, you know? What if something happened to the shipping industry or something like 9/11 [The World Trade Center attacks in 2001] that happened to all of the trade ships? If it wasn't for ships, there's not going to be any import—a little bit of air freight, you know, but that's so expensive you can't hardly do a—you know, 100 vats of frozen shrimp in an airplane. They do some of it on specialty stuff, you know, but that's really not feasible—all the imports is coming in, like honey and—and groupers and all the stuff—the stuff they call grouper. Shrimp is coming in on these big ships, you know, and we're dependent on them ships.

1:05:10.1

AE: So there's going to be a day soon when you come to Apalachicola and you're not eating local seafood?

1:05:14.2

GW: It might be a while, but I believe, unless there's oysters—they're fighting—there's a few hundred oystermen fighting to keep that industry going. The County Commissioners, the local people, and some of the people that's moving here, that's for that are—are into it, you know. But you get some of these developers who want it gone because that's the biggest hindrance to development is they say, well, you're going to mess up the seafood industry. They've heard that a thousand times: you can't build here. You're going to mess up the seafood industry. So they don't want the seafood industry, basically. They want it out of their way because they can make big money, sell it to somebody else, and move off, and then we're ruined, and they're gone, and the fishing is over with, you know. And they're gone. They made the money and left and left us in a—you know, pretty well predicament, really.

I mean, so we're trying to—trying to hold on as long as we can, but we're going to lose because our kids aren't going to carry it on. There's fewer shrimpers and fishermen now and crabbers. Everybody is going [into] corrections, Sheriff's Department, real estate, construction—big time. A lot of the guys can make good money in construction that used to be out on the water.

I know people now that's—that's—a lot of Deputy Sheriffs that's—that's—that used to be oystermen, you know. A lot of them even go as far as being a Marine Patrol, you know, just do anything to keep from being out on the water because it's so undependable. And like I say, you can't really raise a family decent and make a living and pay for a vehicle, pay rent, pay your insurance, pay for school clothes, pay for everything: food, TV, cable, television, phone. You just can't do it on the water anymore. You have to have other jobs, and then go on the water when it's good, you know. There's times when it's better than anything else, but then there's times

when it's bad—worse than anything. So it's just a matter of something that you've got to be able—the way I see it, you can't depend on it as the number one thing hardly anymore.

1:07:32.0

AE: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

1:07:33.6

GW: No, I've got step-brothers, and I had a step-sister, but she moved off. But no, I don't have any brothers. I've got two daughters, one is twenty-one [Kara Watkins] and one is twenty-four [Amber Watkins].

1:07:49.5

AE: Are there here in town?

1:07:50.3

GW: One of them is.

1:07:51.9

AE: What does she do?

1:07:52.9

GW: She works at the [Apalachicola State] bank down here. She's a college student.

1:07:59.7

AE: Well do you think your father was ultimately pleased that you stuck with working on the bay or—?

1:08:03.6

GW: No, I don't think so. He never wanted me to and never—never was satisfied with it.

[Laughs]

1:08:11.3

AE: How about your grandfather?

1:08:13.8

GW: I don't know. He—he liked me to help him, you know. He was into the labor—hard labor. He'd rather have me to help him. He—he really didn't mind that bad. I mean as long as I would take him fishing, he didn't really care what I did, you know, when he got too old to go. He was into his own thing, and when he got too old to go fishing, I had to take him or I'd—I'd like to take him, you know. He was fun to be with. He would work as hard as anybody—the hardest working man I've ever known for a little guy. But,, you know, he didn't really—he probably liked it. I brought him a lot of shrimp and fish and crab, you know—stuff he didn't have time to go catch, you know. We'd catch a lot of back-catch—shrimping.

1:09:03.8

AE: The kids that you were coming up with here in Apalachicola, are they—were they all in the industry as early as you were and buying boats?

1:09:10.8

GW: Not really. There was a few [who] ended up getting their own boats, but now they're like Charter Captains that shrimp with me. A couple of them went into the oil field industry, and they ended up working there and came back. A couple of them had boats and ended up getting rid of their shrimp boats. Not me. I had the biggest boat in the shrimping [industry], I believe and maybe—there might have been a few more guys, but none of them hardly do it anymore—in the shrimp, you know, and—.

1:09:42.5

AE: How many guys would you go out with?

1:09:44.9

GW: On my boat, I usually took two, sometimes one. A lot of times I'd just take one guy—one good guy—and I'd help him. One deck-hand. But it was a lot of strain on me because I had to run the boat and take—take up a lot of slack of helping him, if we'd really hit the shrimp big time. I've seen it before, where we would dump our first drag on deck, and then one after another—and suddenly the shrimp, we'd have to ice them on deck, and they would still be on deck from the first drag by daylight almost. I mean, it was just—we'd pile them up where we'd be there forever. So that was kind of hard. But not all the time like that, you know. Most of the time we took care of it.

1:10:29.7

AE: What makes a good deck hand?

1:10:32.2

GW: Just somebody that's willing to work and not complain about anything, really, because you can't have—you've got to have somebody that will—that will kind of be, you know, people that

can work good together, two people that will—that will bond together and work together and understand what they're doing and like it. And we'll really want to see what they can do—how hard that—I mean, really willing to work and see just how good they can do together. And when you start making money, that works good—when they see money. If you can produce—if you're a good producer and produce the money and the shrimp and really do good, that's what, you know—and have somebody that's not going to be, you know, drinking a lot and, you know. Right now, they have a lot of trouble getting deck hands because the only ones that does it—that really want to go—is—they drink a lot and do drugs and whatnot, and it's hard to get good help. A lot of these bay shrimpers go by their self. Some of them has got guy that will go with them or a deck hand, but a lot of them just get set up and go by their self.

1:11:38.4

AE: Are most deck hands—are they people who are trying to get into shrimping and want to move their way up, or is a deck hand pretty much always a deck hand?

1:11:43.7

GW: Most of the time they're just a deck hand. Sometimes they will but they won't be a deck hand long, if they've got any what—any producing blood in them, you know, that can really—or any will to produce—they won't be a deck hand long, if they can produce.

1:12:04.7

AE: Is there a system at all of the seafood houses [that is] kind of financing people to go out? I mean, I know there's some—some houses that own their own boats and send people out, but a way to kind of move—help move a person up so that they can end up owning their own rig and go out?

1:12:24.6

GW: Well they used to be, but now there's not anymore. Nobody really—there's a few places like the—Buddy Ward's Seafood down here [on Water Street in Apalachicola]. He's the last of the big shrimp boat owners and—and his—he's got about four or five boys that—his own sons—but most of them don't run the boats anymore. Most of them got into other things, and I think one of them [Tommy Ward] runs the Thirteen Mile Oyster House down there, the oyster operation. And a few—few of them work for him, and maybe one of them is a tree cutter, and one of them runs the—the shrimp house—the main shrimp house, but they don't go out on the boats too much anymore. They just let other people do it, you know, and they keep having a pretty good operation.

Of course, when you've got big boats, you've always got something tore up. If you've got five—four or five boats like [Buddy Ward] does—three or four boats—something is always going to be giving trouble on one of them boats when they come in. It's just a nightmare, you know. **[Laughs]** So that's probably the last thing you—you kids want to do is—is—you know, on a weekend is go help and work on the boat, you know, or something. But not—not too much anymore. There used to be some—some—some guys that had boats that really let the guys work

the boats and pay for them and all that, you know—let some Captains run them and then ended up letting them buy them from them and all the—not too much anymore.

It's gone down quick—in the past two years, I'd say. Just in the past two years, the price went way low, and that was the beginning of the end—the imports. And they're trying to subsidize them a little bit, but I don't think that they're getting a lot of money out of it. The government is supposed to subsidize some of the shrimpers and help them get back some of the money off of the tariffs, maybe, and pay the shrimpers—the big boat shrimpers, the ones that are really suffering, the ones that can't hardly peddle the shrimp to little places, you know. But they did the same thing to the honey because of the imports, and I had to fill out all this paperwork of my expenses for the past I think—for the past year and—or two years and—and got it all into them and all, and I had a pretty good of expenses and I got a check for twelve dollars. **[Laughs]** I spent a day filling out all that paperwork, making copies, getting it notarized, and all this to send to the Trade Commission—was going to give us all a percentage. There was like 1,000,000 dollars recovered from not-paid tariffs by them importing honey—or something to do with it. And so anyway, I was belonging in the Beekeeping—American Beekeeping Federation and qualified to—to get some of that back pay money, and I got twelve dollars.

1:15:18.5

AE: Woo-wee. **[Laughs]**

1:15:21.2

GW: [*Laughs*] You know, it wasn't really—I don't know what the shrimpers are going to get, you know, as far as that goes, but I can—it's not going to be that much, you know.

1:15:32.3

AE: Well, I hate to change the subject because I—you've—you're such a wealth of information and knowledge about everything here in the bay area, but I think we need to talk about beekeeping.

1:15:41.8

GW: Yeah.

1:15:42.4

AE: So tell me how you got into that and what interested you in keeping bees and—?

1:15:49.3

GW: Well, I guess I started—I mean, I liked honey. My grandmother, when I was a kid, got honey from the local beekeeper out here, and he did tupelo honey, and that's where I first tasted tupelo honey. And I think I've—I've kind of like ate it off and on. My dad loves it, so he always had it. The—several old-timers around here—one guy was named Joe Zingarelli [brother of

Genaro “Jiggs” Zingarelli], and he was an older beekeeper that had always done the honey. I mean, he done—he was the honey man. He worked for the City. He was like the city’s head of streets and water department, but he did the honey on the side—him and his two sons. And, you know, he had a—a fairly good operation. Not huge, but I mean 100—100-something hives and colonies and he—he worked pretty hard. And so I kind of—in the early [nineteen] nineties, when I got on the Fire Department in the eighties and nineties, I started—he [Joe Zingarelli] was on the Fire Department. He was Assistant Chief, and I talked to him a lot and went with him and some and then went with this other fireman that we had—he was into it. He was like his son-in-law, and we kind of got into together and—and I’d always liked tupelo honey, so I knew I would—you know, I’d like to produce it. So I just started studying on it like everything else. Went to a guest lecture right here [in the education room at the ANERR] in 1992. Jack Polk, I think his name is, a beekeeper from Havana, Florida, over by Tallahassee came—him and his wife. They were experienced beekeepers. They did a guest lecture right here. And in 1998, I think it was, I was doing a guest lecture right here in the same place. And I need to do another one now because it’s been several years since we’ve done one. About every five or six years—we can hold about fifty people, you know, for several hours and talk about everything there is to know about bees. But I got into it small and then bought into it a little more. I got—bought three hives from some guys in Panama City, and then I got—bought—went back in February. That was like in October. And then I went back in February and bought twenty more and then worked up to around 200 hives by just building them and splitting them and building more and—and splitting and doubling and splitting and doubling. And we just got into it and got—ended up getting a tractor and ended up getting a barge—a small barge and two trailers and a truck and just paid for a lot of stuff. I mean, one of my fellow beekeepers told me, he said, *Well, I’ll tell you*—we would always

talk about whether we were going to make it or not. He said, *If you take care of your bees, they'll take care of you.* And he was right and he—you know, he—the same thing with him; he did good.

And if it wasn't for the tupelo, though, I don't think we could make it as a beekeeper around here because of the imports. I hate to keep dwelling on it, but they bring in this cheap Chinese honey and Mexican honey, Vietnam honey. We know that's where it's coming from because they give us the old barrels to put our honey in. Most of our honey goes to Dutch Gold in Pennsylvania—big company, Dutch Gold—and they ship barrels down here to a dealer, and all the empty barrels—they give us the barrels, and we put the honey in and give them back to them, and then they got their old barrels with our honey, and they pay us for the honey and—but the barrels are all from China, Mexico, Vietnam, and—and South America—Argentina. That's where it is—that's what I was trying to think of. Argentina is a big honey export. So anyway, if we didn't have tupelo [honey], I don't know that we could make it with, you know, the low price of the import honey business. We can't compete with them.

1:19:49.4

AE: Can you explain what's special about tupelo honey?

1:19:53.3

GW: Well it's just a—a specialty honey. Every area has their specialty honey, and the tupelo honey is just a tree that grows in our river that nobody probably ever—in the years and years ago

before—you know, bees haven't been in the United States that long—since the late 1800s, early 1900s is the beginning of the—the European honeybee. It was introduced to the United States. Before then, it—most of our bees was just the bumblebees and the sting-less bees, and the ones that didn't carry surplus honey. You know, they—you don't harvest a lot, you know—probably no honey from anything like that. So anyway, they brought the bees over here, and somebody discovered that—that the bees were working the river. Now I don't know the exact story. I'd like to learn about it. But they discovered that the bees would make honey off of these trees up the river, and the trees were really powerful trees. I mean, big trees that put out a good blossom. But the only bad thing is, they don't last but three weeks during the bloom. If you don't make that three weeks of the—I mean, and every day counts. If you don't make the honey within three weeks or have a spell of one week of bad weather, I mean, it messes you up big time in production—in the line of production. Every day—every minute of every day counts because them bees have to get out and bring the nectar in. That's the only way to make tupelo honey. If you can have a machine and go up there and harvest the blossoms or something and manufacture honey—squeeze it out—it would be wonderful, but you can't. The only way to make it is bees collecting the nectar off of the male blossom and a little bit off the female. There's two trees: a male and female tree. But they—it's just a—a real different taste in honey, and we don't have very much of it either, and there's not a lot of the honey because there's not very many beekeepers left. And I don't know what the—the average of the barrel is, but I mean, I'm sure they don't make it—we probably—everybody in this don't make 500 barrels of tupelo honey produced in the—and that's—that's in the world. Five hundred 55-gallon drums would be my estimate of what is produced in the southeastern United States between the Ochlockonee River, the Apalachicola River, and the Choctawhatchee River, which is about the extent of it. A little bit

of it may grow up the river some but it's not really good enough to really produce certified tupelo honey, which has to be enough of the tupelo pollen in the honey to actually get certified as—as—to call it, you know, tupelo honey—good tupelo honey.

But it's got a distinct flavor; it's got minerals, vitamins. In fact, before you leave, I'll give you the brochure that we have on it that was put together in, I think, 1981 by the Tupelo Beekeeping Association of Leon County, maybe, over around Tallahassee. There were some big beekeepers over there back in the days and around Havana, but most of them came down our river and had leases on our river. And now I've got about the only bee leases on our river that's existing. But we don't run enough bees up there to really—I mean we could run a lot more bees and produce more honey, and that's what I'd kind of like to do because that's—there's a lot—there's been an explosion in the market of tupelo honey. People are discovering it and it's, you know—and, of course, like everything else, it's more and more people, you know, on the earth right now than there's ever been and traveling down here and tourism, you know, still going pretty good and pretty strong, and they come and buy a few little jars, and they'll go back, and then they'll call me and want me to ship them a lot of it. And—which I do a lot—as much as I can. Sometimes I just can't do it, and then usually we'll sell out.

I try to keep it in about six stores, maybe eight—six to eight little stores around here, mainly the Piggly Wiggly and the IGA [grocery stores] because the big grocery stores sell more than anybody, and they don't mark it up like the tourist shops. Now the tourist shops and the markets—I mean, like the meat market on [St. George] island, they'll market it up a little more, and they sell a lot but not like the grocery stores, you know. They really—people that know anything about buying anything is not going to go to a tourist trap to buy an amount of food; they're going to go to the grocery store to buy the same thing, you know. So we sell a lot at the

stores; we usually go every Wednesday night. We kind of set aside a night a week when me and Jimmy Moses, my—my friend and helper and we do the bees together and he—we get together at my house on usually Wednesday or Thursday nights, when it's kind of the middle of the week—not a lot going on. I don't have fire drills then and whatnot, so—and we'll bottle—and try to catch up on all our orders that we have. People will call in orders and we'll bottle up and usually, though, by now we're getting pretty low in stock; it's lasted from May. But I have kept it all year and made enough for the last two years, and it was a good thing because some of the time, like we might go a year and not make hardly anything—be bad weather, a norther come out or something. I've had—out of my fifteen of fourteen years of doing it, I think I've had two seasons where we didn't hardly make anything and it was, you know—just you don't make any honey, you don't do any work. You do something else—go after more flounders or fish, you know—mullet, when I say fish—mullet or crabs or whatever.

1:25:36.9

AE: Would you go over the timeline of beekeeping and how you set up the bees and the seasonal preparations and whatnot?

1:25:47.3

GW: Well the season starts in January. Actually, that's the beginning, which is right around the corner now. January we start getting our bee yards mowed, and we'll mow them. [A bee yard] which consists of some barbed wire, electric barbed wire fences [that are] about four-foot tall for

the bears, and they got twelve volt—twelve volt chargers that—like fence chargers for cattle fences and we used the—the remote twelve volt battery system, whereas you're away from power most of the time, and we've got about three or four locations up on Highway 65 that we can put our bees in and we let them—I mean, we'll go get them. We've got some up on the farms now in Jackson County, which is up towards Alabama. They go after watermelon and cotton and soybean and just—clover and golden rod and several—there's about four or five different floral blossoms that they go after up there that we don't have down here in the summertime. So right now most of them is up there. And we go get them and—usually at night because they're all in, you know. They come in—they're a daytime insect. We bring them at night and usually, we'll leave and be up there and load them right at dark, come back and set them in the yard, usually by eleven or twelve o'clock, when we get home after that—maybe one or two o'clock. We're usually through by then on a night move. And then we'll—they'll stay there, and we'll medicate them a little bit. And the season will start about the middle of February. The—or maybe the first of February. The maple trees will start opening—give or take. Sometimes they're early. I have seen them early January and sometimes a little later in February, but the maple is the first—the red leaf maple—and they'll put out a blossom and that really brings the bees out of the—their wintertime slump with the cold weather. And they've not had nothing but their fall honey to survive on or whatever syrup we give them. Sometimes we give them syrup or sugar-water or just dry sugar and kind of feed them like animals, you know, if they need it. Sometimes we do that. I'd rather not do it because they do better if they can—a good hive will usually take care of their selves, unless we strip the honey off of them. But if we don't really strip honey after August, they can usually—a good hive that's going to make it through the winter will make it, you know. You don't have to feed them.

After the maple, the titi starts [to bloom]. We got a plant—or a tree—a shrub around here that grows in the ditches and in the swamps and in the creeks called titi and titi is like a—it's like a bunch of little blossoms on a single little flower that becomes real important. [Titi is a small semi-evergreen tree that grows to thirty feet and is common to swamp edges, wetlands, and streams.] Now I make a lot of honey on titi. And after that the elderberry starts and blackberry, gallberry—high bush gallberry is the next big thing that comes and the high-bush—after the high-bush gallberry, we start getting ready for the tupelo, and that's about the first of April. We start pulling the honey off of them—by that time, we might have five honey boxes stacked on the brood nest, you know, the collecting boxes. And we'll start pulling that off and taking it in and extracting it and storing the empty combs for the tupelo. And then the day we move the tupelo, we'll go up the river and look at the trees before we decide whether we're going to make a move. Because we usually pull away from the last of the high bush gallberry, which we're going to lose money from the time we leave high bush, to set out on tupelo, to the time the tupelo starts, but we don't want to be late because tupelo is so much more important. So we'll take the boat and go up and just kind of scan the river several times and see how the trees are progressing. And also I've got some tupelo trees planted in my yard that I go by, you know, as gauges—guides—and when I see them starting to show the blossoms, getting ready to open, then we start getting things rolling, I mean, big time. We start stopping everything—what we're doing. I mean, we stop in our tracks pretty well. Unless there's a bad funeral in the family, we're—we're going to take off of work and take about four days and pull our honey and put clean boxes on the bees and move them up the river, you know. We don't do nothing for four—about four days. Both of us stop what we're doing in the middle of everything, you know, and we give everybody pre-warning and that's—that's important, you know. If we're going to do it, we have to be, you know, on time

and do it right. So we get everything moved up the river after that four days, and then we come back and start—of course, they set—they're up there, and they start to show signs of collecting the honey and we're—we got empty boxes on, and we come back and start extracting our honey. We go back to work, but after work every day and every night up until twelve o'clock at night, we extract our gallberry and titi and maple honey. And that might go on for several weeks—might go on for a week and a half, sometimes two weeks. And then every four days, we'll go up to check those bees up the river and give them empty boxes, the ones that are showing signs that—that first box is full. We'll give them an empty box about a week after we put them up there, and we'll come back and try to take care of other things, you know, and get ready, and we'll come back and put another box on. And usually, about three boxes—maybe four—is about all they'll make. When we start seeing signs of the bees not coming out, we'll go up there some, and we'll make plans to start pulling the honey off of them.

In fear of getting bad weather or a cold snap or something, then they'll start eating. They will consume the tupelo honey, and that's bad. So we'll go ahead and pull all the tupelo off of them and bring it back—store it—stack it and store it and then move all the bees off the river the same way. We'll usually go up there at night and move it and load them right at dark and bring them back and then take them up to—the next morning, take them up to the farms and put them out where the—by then usually it's May, first week in May, and the watermelon—the farmers are crying for pollination—want the pollination because the watermelon blossom has to be visited seven or eight times by an insect to get good pollination, where they'll make a good big watermelon and get the weight out of it. Otherwise, they don't do too good. So they want the bees bad. Bring them bees, we'll pay you—or what I do, is I say, *Well you let me sit out here and put all my bees out here, I'll let you have pollination free.* And they say, *Bring them on! You can*

have any of our land you want. You know, because it's important to have good places to set out because it just isn't anybody that's going to let you set a bunch of stinging insects out on their property. I ran into, you know, both sides: people wanting them and then people not wanting them. So you have to really—you have to be friendly enough to let them know, you know, and not—I mean, you're wanting there what they've got, and they want honey, of course. We give them honey and—and I also pay leases. I lease land. I've got five leases that I take care of. It's not real expensive, but it adds up, you know.

1:33:01.3

AE: And working off the river, was that something that was important to you to do because not anybody is doing it anymore?

1:33:09.0

GW: Well, if I didn't do it, nobody around here would get any good honey, that I know of. I mean there's Lanier over in—in Wewahitchka [Florida], and he's—he makes good honey, but it isn't from our [Apalachicola] river. He's over in a branch off the Chipola River and the Dead Lakes, and he's over in Gulf County, you know. And I don't bother him, and he don't usually bother me. He has sold honey—I took his market from the Piggly Wiggly, but they're the ones that told me to bring it. You know, he sold honey to Piggly Wiggly, but I was—you know, I cleared the land from—for the Piggly Wiggly before he was even thought about. I mean, he's older than I am—or about the same age. But what I'm saying is, I helped him cut the trees down

and—and sign the paperwork—because I live down the road from the Piggly Wiggly—that said yes, you can put a commercial store in our neighborhood. So I feel like, if I live two blocks from them, and I want to sell honey, I'm not going to let another beekeeper stop me, you know. I mean, I didn't go in there and really disrupt him, but after I came in, I don't think he sells any honey in town anymore. I pretty well took him under. I didn't mean to, but my product was just good, and when they found out it was made by boating them bees to the docks where they can't—see, that's the thing about it. Our lease is on the river and the bees—we travel two miles. They can't get to the mainland hardwood forest to get gallberries, so all they can get is tupelo. And we put them up on them remote docks that's only boat accessible—by boat which is, you know, that's pretty hard in itself to have to haul a bunch of bees on a boat, you know. But our old-timers has been doing it for years, and that's how they got up there, with barges and little boats and bateau boats [the French word for boat; a flat-bottomed boat] and all kinds of different, you know, boats. I hauled them on a lot of different kind of boats—mullet boats, crab boats, flounder boats, skiffs, duck boats [*Laughs*]—we've done it all kind of ways, but the flat deck pontoon barge is the way to go that—we pull out on a trailer.

But the bees have to go—I mean, they go two miles, so if you set out like they do over in Gulf County and on the mainland and let them go, sure they'll go to the tupelo, but they're getting a percentage of gallberry. And once you get gallberry mixed with the tupelo, it don't taste right, and it also goes to sugar. They would call it “sugar in a bottle,” where tupelo—good pure tupelo won't granulate. But if it's got gallberry in it, it will settle in the bottom, and it will be about a half-inch thick, especially after cold weather. If it's cold, it causes honey to, you know, thicken up, and it will cause it to granulate, if it's got the capability. I love, personally, orange blossom honey, but it granulates bad, big time. And it just ruins the taste to me.

1:35:56.3

AE: Does the tupelo gum tree specifically like being along the river right there? Is that the habitat?

1:36:01.0

GW: Oh, yeah, they're water trees. They grow right out of the water. They will grow on land. Like I've got them in my yard, but I have to water them a lot, and they don't never grow as good as they do in the water. I've seen some huge trees—I mean this big around—three-foot big around or bigger and sixty-foot tall or more. Just huge trees growing back in some of the swamps and cypress swamps, is where they like to grow in the water. And they get reproduced by the seeds. The seeds will float around, and when the conditions are right, it will take off, you know. That's how I planted mine—the seeds.

1:36:38.1

AE: Are there any youngsters who are interesting in apprenticing with you about beekeeping?

1:36:42.0

GW: There's a few, every now and then. Most of them end up going to college and moving off, though. I don't know that there's going to be too many that really—it don't seem to be as many—nowadays—as many born food producers as it used to be. Because they don't have to. Back in my day, a lot of people were food producers. I mean I've seen the food production, you know—being you're [doing] a study of food, I don't know if you all went into the lines of how many people produce food, and how many people consume it and all that, but there's not near as many food producers as it used to be. I mean I could—I've produced thousands and thousands of pounds of food for people to eat myself, you know—by shrimp, fish, crabs, honey—but there's—I mean, you'll have some—some people that never touch anything like that and never have to produce the first, you know, pound of anything and that's good, you know. I wish that's the way I was. I wish I could surf all my life, which I like to do. But I can't get the food producing out of me, and I just don't think that the youngsters have got it in them. They're more into computers, video games, CDs, cars, motorcycles; a lot of them are getting back into motorcycles. And it's just, you know—they don't have to, and it really ends up being a bad thing for them to really do, as far as the seafood.

But on the bees, I don't know. It takes somebody that really wants to work hard to be in the bee business because it's the hottest work you'll ever do. It's so hot you can't hardly do it. Every year I say I'm never going to do this again. That's one of them things—never again, after this—this does it for me; it's just too hot. But I end up keep doing it, you know. Spring will get here, and the spring is nice. If it stayed like spring every year, I mean all—the whole year, it would be fine. Spring is wonderful. [I] make plenty of honey and everything, but then when it starts getting June and July heat, and you've got thunderstorms and muggy weather and storms and just that heat—intense heat in August—you just about can't work. And after the summer,

you go back in the fall, and you just have to take the dead [bees] out, you know—it's just part of it. You lose some by not working. You'll lose them. The Queens will die. The moths eat all the combs up, you know, and basically—just throw them away and build new frames and foundations, and then take them away from your powerful hives in the spring to rebuild. You have to keep—they take care of their selves but not *by* their selves. You have to manually go in and rebuild.

1:39:23.0

AE: Where is your honey house?

1:39:25.0

GW: It's at my house up here about—not far from the Piggly Wiggly. It's not big though. It's just like a shed that I closed in, and it's got a concrete floor. And it's too small. I've outgrown it a long time ago, and I've got a—but then I said, *Well I'm going to build me a big honey house*, but I just hadn't got around to it. I've got another house that I've inherited from my grandmother, and it's got an old shed that I can—that I'm thinking about redoing it, you know, and making—because I'm eventually going to move down there. It's a bigger piece of property, and I've got more room for all of my boats. I've got about five boats, and I've got them at different locations you know—got a few at my house, few at my dad's house, couple here and a couple there. Got one up at the bee yard. The boat stays up at what we call the Bee Yard Headquarters up on Highway 65, but I eventually am going to build a new honey house.

1:40:23.3

AE: The honey house that you inherited from your grandmother, did she keep bees?

1:40:26.2

GW: No, it was just a—it was like a—a shop—concrete, where my grandfather kept all his concrete tools and all.

1:40:35.0

AE: Something that would just make a good honey house?

1:40:35.8

GW: Yeah, it will be a good—it will be a good honey house. The neighbors, you know—you have to kind of be in sync with your neighbors and—[George's cell phone rings] hold on—.

1:40:47.8

AE: Okay.

[Recording is paused for about two minutes as George takes a call from one of his daughters.]

1:40:51.6

[Recording resumes]

GW: Probably need to—if you want to know anything, you could ask me, or I mean we could—whatever else if you want to finish we can, you know, right now. I don't have to go right now.

1:40:59.8

AE: All right. Well, I want to get the bee—the rest of the bee stuff out while we're here, and then I might call on you again next time I'm in town, and we can sit for a spell more. But for—for the beekeeping, when all year these—the bees are at different places and there are different seasonal things that they're getting pollen from, are you bottling that honey, too, or is that just—they're sustaining themselves?

1:41:24.9

GW: No, they're sustaining themselves. That honey, we take that—the honey that we take in the spring like that, they make in January and February and March and—and the first part of April, all that goes as baker-grade honey. It all mixes together. A lot of them call it red honey—a lot of beekeepers do—baker grade [honey]. Light amber is what it's called on the market. And it goes

anywhere from—I've seen the price start at thirty-eight-cents a pound and be as high as a dollar [and] thirty [cents] a pound. Unfortunately, I've never sold any for that kind of price. I think the most I've ever got was like maybe ninety [cents]. I had already sold mine, and then the price goes up tremendous, you know, when nobody has any at one time and then—.

But anyway, we usually leave all the honey from about the end of the summer and let them sustain itself with that honey, but we take the baker-grade and barrel it up, and sometimes we might keep it for several years—keep it in a shed in the barrels—tight drum, you know, and all. And you can keep it for years until it—because it goes to sugar, and it's just in a sugary form—not crystal sugar. It's kind of like a paste. It's kind of like cake icing, thick cake icing [in] consistency. And it'll—it'll be good until whoever gets it will heat it up and then liquefy, and then they'll filter it, and most of it goes to the—to the baking industry, like I say, baker-grade.

In fact, a few—about four years ago, we sold to Dutch Gold, and they took it up to Pennsylvania. I don't know what—where they go. They're all over with their honey. But the last time we sold, the year before last in the summer—about a year-and-a-half ago, it went to Sara Lee Bakeries because they didn't want any imported honey because they heard it had chemicals in it, and our whole truckload of honey, like sixty-eight barrels went to—to make honey wheat bread or honey bread that they came out with. Sara Lee was selling to Wal-Mart and still does, you know, and you see the honey wheat and the honey bread, so she—they bought all of our honey for that company, and it went somewhere in South Florida and went to North Carolina and got spread all around. That's where it went and we sold—we made it here and it stayed here, you know, in the Southeast.

1:43:43.2

AE: Hmm. Well then, I want to ask you about the bee boxes themselves, and I have one question that's—I've always been curious about, and it's probably a silly question, but the bee boxes in—because in the Mississippi Delta, we have a lot of bee boxes, too, in the fields and—and they're always all different colors. And I wonder if that at one time like one producer had one color, and they just got mixed up over the years, or if that means something.

1:44:06.9

GW: Kind of a combination. That, and sometimes they'll just go—it's just a preference. Like I've had friends that wouldn't paint theirs nothing but white. Myself, I like the silver color because I think it reflects the sun better, and it don't show the stains as bad. I've had people that painted them light green—seen them paint them, and I've had one guy say he just buys the paint that's on sale and paints his—his houses all different colors, whatever is going that year. If he builds 200 in-hive bodies, he paints them whatever he's got—like old paint that he bought from somewhere and it just depended—don't even care about the color. And they get all mixed up. And when you sell boxes to one another—and I'll buy somebody else out or they might buy somebody out—they just get all mixed up.

1:44:54.6

AE: Okay.

1:44:54.6

GW: But it's mainly like somebody painted 100 of them here and 100 there, but just a certain color that they decided they liked or something. People get into the business and get out of it all the time. I mean there's a lot of people that get in and out of it. I've seen five or six people get in it and back out, since I've been in it.

1:45:18.0

AE: Does everybody pretty much make their own—maintain their own boxes?

1:45:21.8

GW: No, usually they buy them from somebody else.

1:45:26.1

AE: But you make yours?

1:45:27.4

GW: I have made them, and then I've paid some—some friends to build them for me. Like I buy the—the lumber—they build—they have them already precut; all you've got to do is assemble

them. They come from all over. The best wood comes from like out in the—ponderosa pine that comes from Oregon, and they make them up in Minnesota, and they've got some good pine up there. Illinois, you've got some good—good wood, and you want to try to get the good pine lumber, of course, and they ship it to us. I mean, they'll have it at the back door in three or four days. They've got plenty of it and they want to sell it.

Bee—bee equipment is expensive. There's about five big major companies of beekeeping supplies in the United States—five or ten probably—five or ten and we deal with several of them. Some of them is in upstate New York, and they do a lot of alfalfa honey up there that lasts all summer, you know. It's pretty big. There's some big beekeepers out in the Midwest—affect[s] our price on baker-grade honey when they sell. They save—save all their honey. Like Sue Bee, they're a big operation, one of the biggest in the world, probably. But a lot of our wood, where it comes from up there in the west and the north, and we assemble it down here. I've done it myself. I've had friends—like I say, I've paid them to do it and bought boxes already built and painted them. It's a job.

1:46:49.9

AE: About how long will a good box last?

1:46:52.3

GW: It could last twenty years. It might last longer than that. I know I've got some old boxes—I don't know how old they are, and they're just like the day I bought them fifteen years ago. I know

they were old then and so—the older lumber is better than the newer grade lumber. You know, some of the older lumber was more heart lumber, and most of the big trees have been harvested now have been more of a, you know, a smaller tree to try to make everything go. That's why they pressure treat a lot of it now. It's mainly sap wood because they don't let the trees get big enough to be a lot of heart, you know, like it used to be. They'll last a long time, to answer your question.

1:47:37.8

AE: Is Jimmy the guy who helps you with the bees—is he the same guy who welds and helps you—helps you with the boat?

1:47:42.4

GW: No, that's Tommy. Tommy ain't into the bees too much. He's—he's always been a good mechanic—do anything around the boat and build the boat. He's built a steel hull. [He can] do anything, you know.

1:47:59.7

AE: Does Jimmy just help you with the bees? Is that—he kind of—?

1:48:01.7

GW: No, he does fishing, too. He goes fishing and shrimping and oystering and whatever we need to do, you know. We've hunted together. He's done it all.

1:48:11.3

AE: Did y'all grow up together?

1:48:14.1

GW: Not really. I started hanging around with Jimmy—he's younger than I am, and I started hanging around with him—he works down here, and he's worked here a little bit longer. I worked here in the [nineteen] eighties, and he started about right after I—I had done some jobs, you know, but I've known him basically, all my life. My dad worked with his dad, he said, years ago. But he's a good man. We work pretty good together.

1:48:44.8

AE: Well then the honey—the—can you talk about—back to the boxes again, like the architecture of a box and the—the boards that go in it and the spaces between and the—?

1:48:59.2

GW: Well the normal box is like a deep—when I say deep, it's a nine and five-eighths-depth box, and they're about sixteen inches wide and twenty inches long. That's the standard high-body box. And they hold nine frames all the way across. We call them frames, and they're wooden little slats that go in, and they have a plastic or a—a bee wax foundation. And once you set them on a hive, they'll actually draw out and make combs out of it. So you've got nine combs in a box—in a normal box—and that comb can just be used over and over and over. And after they put honey in it, they'll seal it off, and you have to uncap it and use all the cappings after they—the caps that come off of it—there's a machine called an uncapper—uncapping machine or a hot knife. The old-timers used old hot knives. You melt that down, and that's what makes candles and, you know—we have about several hundred pounds of surplus wax every year just from—from old cappings and combs and stuff that might have been broke up or something. But anyway, they—they're all the standard width and length, but you have different depths. Some of the beekeepers like the shallower boxes, and they're easier to handle especially when they're full of honey. So I have seen honey boxes weigh eighty pounds before—or more. I don't know how much they weigh. I just can't hardly pick them up. So over the years, they've developed a medium-sized box and a shallow box. The shallow boxes are really too shallow, the deep boxes are too deep, and the medium boxes are really the best depth as far as, you know, the honey boxes. But a lot of people won't use a medium box because, when you extract them, and you take out the load and extractor—there are these deep combs. I mean, you really put out a lot of honey. So if you're going to go through the trouble of loading thirty-five frames into an extractor, it might as well be the big ones because when you put out—when they unload and spin—the honey spins out of those combs, you're going to have a lot of honey compared to just a little bit. You've done—all the time is loading and unloading the extracting machine—the centrifuge is what they

are—a spindle. That's where the trouble—you know, the work is. But I mean that's the basic principle of a box.

You know, you can get some books and there's some—some nice little books that you can get, if you really want to learn about it. That's all it takes you know. That, and if you wanted to do some bees yourself, you can do them in your backyard. You just have to be willing to get stung every now and then. But you'll get used to it.

1:51:33.2

AE: Do you know much or anything about the folks who use bee stings to help arthritis and things like that?

1:51:39.8

GW: Yeah, I've had some people, they use it for Muscular Dystrophy and arthritis, but I've—I've had people come and get bees from me before that was traveling. They use it, and they say it works good. Otherwise, they wouldn't be as—wouldn't be able to move sometimes. It's kind of like it's got cortisone in it—in the bee sting. It's protein is all it is—it's protein—protein, but they say it's got cortisone and it will go into you and—and, you know, support the muscle or refurbish the muscle somehow. That's what they—and I know it goes into your muscle because it swells up big time, especially if you're not used to it.

1:52:22.6

AE: So people just call you up because they know you have bees, and they'll ask to buy a few?

1:52:25.6

GW: They have before, uh-hmm.

1:52:26.5

AE: And you sell them?

1:52:27.6

GW: No, I just give them to them.

1:52:29.2

AE: Ten bees or whatever?

1:52:31.4

GW: Yeah, they'll come with a jar and little forceps and catch them. The time when they got them—several times they got them—they caught them in the honey nest where they were

trapped at the window, and we'd open the window and let them go because that's the bees we bring in—in the honey, when we try to get—when we take the honey from the bees, you have to get rid of all the bees. I mean you take a—this chemical we put over them and then—if that chemical don't run them off, we—we hit them with the blower and blow the—like a leaf blower and blow the bees out, and they'll all go back to the hive, and then we take and stack the boxes on the bars of the boat and cover it up—or the truck and—. But sometimes some extra bees accidentally will not leave those combs, and they'll be down in a little hole or hollow space, and we'll bring them in, and we might have fifty bees, every now and then, in the window of the honey house. And we'll just let them out, and they'll go outside. And we'll keep a weak hive out there, just a small place for them to go to, you know, because they won't never find their exact colony. A lot of them die when they come back to the honey house and can't find their colony. But if we can keep a little operation going outside the window or something, they'll go to that box. The first beehive they see at night—they might fly around all day, but they'll finally go to a beehive. If they smell a beehive and a Queen in there. But they'll never find their house again, you know, once they bring in. But those bees come and go so fast. They live thirty days—sometimes they might live three months, you know, but most of the time they—they live about two months, probably—a month or two. It's like ants. There's just so many of them, you know, and they come and do their thing and dwindle and then more hatch out. It's a continuous cycle of bees dying and hatching out the whole time, you know.

1:54:17.0

AE: Well and you were mentioning medicating them over the winter sometime. What does that—that mean?

1:54:22.6

GW: That's just a treatment we give them for an anti-bacterial powder, like Terramycin that they give to cattle and chickens and poultry and that kind of stuff and put it in [the] animal's water and give it to them and—sugar and water or either in powdered sugar, and it kind of like—it kind of just keeps them free of brood disease that they'll get that will cause their brood to just die and just go to mush, you know—foul brood. It's a disease they can get, if you don't give them Terramycin. And then there's mites also that invaded us a couple—maybe ten years ago—fifteen years ago—varroa mite, as you've probably heard so much about. We give them a fruit tree miticide sometimes and give them these strips that they sell us. But most of the stuff is not effective. So we have to treat them for mites. So anyway—

1:55:20.7

AE: Sounds like a lot of work.

1:55:21.2

GW: By law, we have to do that, you know. And when the inspector comes once a year, he has to check them for mites and see if they've got them. If they got them, they just make you give them more extensive treatment, you know, because it can spread from colony to colony and bee

yard to bee yard, you know, and can kill somebody else's bees. Or if you have lots of disease or mites because the bee will go and check out other bee yards a lot of times, you know, if you're within two miles or—they might want to come and mate with the drones or the Queens or something, and some of my drones might come out and mate with your Queens or something. And they might fly five miles [to do that]. So when they—when they enter the brood, they can transfer mites or any kind of disease, you know. So that's why the Department of Agriculture checks. Because, you know, it teaches us. They help us do anything they can to keep the bee keeping industry going because that's jobs for them—the inspectors, you know, and food quality inspectors—everybody—and they should try to help, you know. Everybody should try to help. Every now and then, you'll get a cocky food inspector who will come and is going to straighten the world up, you know; he's going to clean the world up in his time. And he won't last long.

[Laughs]

1:56:41.6

AE: When you get your boat back on the bay, are you going to be able to keep up with all the bees, still?

1:56:46.4

GW: I'm going to try. I'm going to try to do all three: do my job, do the boat, and—and do the bees, you know. Because there are seasons that we don't do much with the bees. During August

and September there isn't a whole lot going on with the bees, except for bottling and selling honey that we made in—in April and May.

1:57:06.0

AE: What name do you call your honey that you sell?

1:57:08.0

GW: My honey that I sell, well, I call it Apalachicola River Tupelo Honey, and I—I've got my company, Watkins Honey Incorporated. I had to incorporate for liability purposes and just to keep all the books straight and all. It's more aggravation. You would not believe the trouble it is to keep—just to be a beekeeper. *When you say, Well he's a beekeeper. He's got some bees in his yard, and he sells honey and that's that.* [**Laughs**] But it's just like when you get into the corporations and the food inspector and the—all the inspections and you have to go to the license and insurance and leases—licenses and the leases and the—just permits and the—just everything. The income tax and the liability insurance, products liability, and just the labels you have to get, the containers, and the woodware and the feed and the chemicals [**Laughs**]—not chemicals but the antibiotics, you know—medications, I'd say. I mean it's—it's just about an overwhelming business, you know, being—. And I know some big beekeepers that's got out of it here recently, but I never really wanted to get into big enough that I couldn't just get out of it pretty quick. You know, I don't want to be into it with 1,000 beehives, where I'd be locked into it for—for life and, you know, lose a lot of money, if it didn't pan out or something came in and

killed the bees or something, you know. I don't want to—I don't want to have all my eggs in one basket, so to speak, you know, with the bees. But it's been fun.

1:58:49.5

AE: Would you say you're unique in having these three hats you wear—or probably twentyhats you wear. But with the work you're—?

1:58:57.2

GW: I'm saying there ain't very many—probably nobody that I know of around here that does as much as I've ever done and, you know, I do four things at one time. I mean, it's a job but it's just—it takes planning and it takes pre-planning because what you do today is going to affect what's going to happen this time next year. That's the biggest thing. You've got to be able to plan ahead. If you don't plan ahead and know what's going to happen—and that takes years to, you know, learn, and you know what's going to happen. Where am I going to be this time next year, if I do this for this and that with this over here, you know? What's going to happen, you know? And that's—it's just like when you're planting, see. Well I'm going to plant seed in September, and in November I'm going to be eating mustard greens, you know? You've got to say, *Well what's going to be going on in November? Am I going to be able to take care of them or do I want them then?* You know? *Yeah, I want them, so I—*. And then another thing, like planting the seed, you've got to take care of it. For two weeks, I'd say I—I water all my seeds every day because once they start germinating if you—you know let them go dry, then they can't make it.

But once they develop roots, of course, they can take care of their self. But that's the type of thing I do to make sure—kind of repeated every day thing. But being a diabetic, I've learned to live with a schedule. And that's probably one of the biggest things in life that anybody can be that I've seen that can really be important production-wise or anything is to be on a normal schedule and not be sporadic, you know, and do things all, you know, mixed up—different times. That just really—

It's just like my dogs. I keep two Jack Russell Terriers, and they're waiting right now for me; I know exactly where they are, and they know where I am. They're sitting in that window right now looking for me, and when I pass the house, they'll both jump out of the window because they know it's me, and they can see me coming, especially when I slow down. I guess they know the sound because I don't think—I mean, even if it's dark they know it's me, and they can hear the sound. But they know I'm going to come and take care of them and let them out and run and feed them at the same time and walk them at the same time and, you know, put them in and take care of them and, you know, they—and they—you know, they last pretty good like that—not let them go wild, you know, and chase all the cats out in the neighborhood because then I'd get killed. But by staying on that schedule with them, they do better, and I do better, you know. They know I'm going to be there. And I know they're going to be there. And by not, you know—I mean, if I go somewhere, like if I go off somewhere, then I have somebody to take care of them or my wife does or my girls will take care of them. But just for an example, you know, by staying on a schedule with them, they don't never mess up the house or anything, you know. They eat at the same time, do all these things at the same time. Well that's the same way it is with shrimping and beekeeping and all. Just about—.

Like Jimmy, a lot of times when Jimmy—Jimmy and I go beekeeping, we'll get out of the truck, and I won't say anything to him, and he won't say anything to me, unless, you know, we'll be talking about fishing or something, and we'll start doing our—lighting the smoker and doing all our stuff, and we'll do a day's bee keeping and never hardly say that much. Because he knows what I'm going to do, and I know what he's going to do, and he knows what I expect him to do and. And I know what needs to be done, you know. And, you know, we'll talk about different things—what's going on and—now, but we're pretty well in sync about knowing what to do and when to do it, you know.

And that's another thing you were saying about the—the deck hand of the shrimping. If somebody knows what's going on, what their Captain is going to do, and knows exactly what to do, it could be more trouble to bring on the third party. You know, it could really, you know, just being—unless they just get out of the way, you know, two people can pretty well work just about anything this bay has got to offer now, as far as a lot of shrimp, you know, or fish or whatever.

2:03:18.5

AE: Well when folks ask you what you do for a living, how do you answer that question?

2:03:23.0

GW: I mainly say that I work for this operation down here, you know, for the State because that's basically what I could fall back on. If the weather is bad—all of us are tired of working for the State and the government, you know. I mean it's just—it's really just—at least we're outdoors.

I couldn't be—like the girls in the office over there that go and do the administration and do the computer work and all—the biologists, they really—they go out in the field a lot, but you know, I'd hate to sit there on a beautiful day and have to stare at the computer all day long. None of it's good. I mean five—there's about five of us that work in the field in our Resource Management part of the operation and, you know, we're not—just won't be inside. I don't think any of us has got a computer. They want us to have them, and we have to use them to do our timesheets and all, and we could have them, but nobody wants them. We've had a little bit, you know—do the maintenance records and all and have to record our purchases and that kind of stuff, if we buy some kind of equipment or something, but we just put it off on somebody else, you know—somebody that does the computer every day. Now I've got one at home that I use, and I look at the weather, and the satellite radar and the radar and the weather and do the eBay a little bit, you know, and—but as far as just liking to come in on—on a day and do the computer and talk to people all—you know, email and all, I don't have time for it. We love to be out on—out in the sunshine somewhere, you know.

Or, if it's bad weather, we'll be building nets or something or equipment. That's the way I've always done it—done all my net work, because there's a lot of net work in the shrimping and fishing business that you have to do. You've probably seen pictures of—on the docks up north, around the lobster docks and all, how they'll be working on the nets and traps or something. We have to do the same thing. Now they've got net shops where you can take your nets, and it's expensive, and you can do it, but we like—I like to build—try to build my own, if I can, you know, during bad weather—especially when we did it full-time. All the bad weather—build nets and equipment, you know, and then use it and tear it up. Of course if you're in the middle of a bunch of shrimp and tear a bunch of nets up, you don't have time—you're not going to take time

off to fix nets. We'll take them to the net shop and pick up some more, you know, and then pick them up when you get in and have some spares. Because occasionally, you'll hang up on something and tear the whole bottom out of it. **[Laughs]** Like they're just unusable for the rest of the trip. You might try to fix it out there, you know—do a quick fix on it—but it takes so many hours to sew up a net, especially a torn one real bad, where you hang it or whatever. You just don't have time to do it out there. But bad weather is usually when we take advantage and do maintenance or wintertime. A lot of time we did our boat work—painting and all that—in the wintertime, when the shrimp was gone, you know, or, you know, off season—had to do something maintenance-wise.

The same way with the beekeeping. We do a lot of building of frames and what boxes we're going to put together, if we have to cut out tops or paint stuff and all that—we do that in the off-season. But during March, April and May—then that's the extracting season, when you've got to extracting the honey. You don't have time to do any woodware or anything like that, you know—painting or anything.

2:06:59.8

AE: Do you think there's something else out there that you're going to pick up and know how to do?

2:07:03.0

GW: Hmm, I don't know. I don't really want to do anything else. I mean I've got enough to do.

[Laughs] I'd like to—I'd like to get in on a little more of this money that the tourists are bringing in because that's where the big money is.

2:07:21.0

AE: Well let me ask you this, talking about the change in Apalachicola: with the seafood industry, do you think that there is a chance that some co-ops could be established? Because that—somebody was saying they don't think shrimp will—shrimpers will ever be a part of a—a co-op, but do you see that as part of a—of the possibility of the changing face of the industry here?

2:07:42.6

GW: Possibly—and probably—they would probably if—if they hired the shrimpers that was already here, it would probably work. But if they—if people were brought in from other places, they would probably be shunned and probably—they probably would just—I mean, they'd probably go to the extent of—I mean, I don't know how bad they wouldn't like—they probably wouldn't like it but—but the locals, you know, that's the biggest thing.

2:08:12.7

AE: Do you—do you think it would work if a local seafood house tried to establish one?

2:08:18.8

GW: The only bad thing about it is the—the history of the co-op type thing is—they control the price too bad, and they'll want to give you so much less for your product. If they would keep a good price, that's the biggest thing because I've—I've had more trouble in the seafood business and—and really had more hurt feelings and seen more trouble is with somebody not paying the same price as somebody else. I mean you depend on somebody, and you sell your shrimp to them, and you tie your boat up at their dock and all, and then, if they drop their price, and nobody else does—like I mean, just five or ten cents a pound can mean a lifetime friendship. I've seen it happen time and time again. If you get locked into having to get cheaper prices and all, that's where the co-op won't work. Everybody has got—because see, these independent guys they might can—they might can pay more for their shrimp, you know, because they're independent. They might be doing more of a peddling business, but the co-op might be bringing in so many that he's having to export them for a cheaper price. So if he reduces his price, and somebody else over here is paying more and got a better market, you know—they find different fluctuating markets. But if it was all the same price, it would probably work. But if he's going to have so many boats that he can't pay or many people working that he can't pay the price, then, that's where the trouble comes in is with the price. I've seen that happen before.

2:09:55.0

AE: [Clears throat] Excuse me. Well how do you see a possibility of you getting into the—the tourist trade that's growing here?

2:10:04.6

GW: The way I was thinking would be a restaurant, like I was telling you. The restaurant business is really—somebody that would manage it their self. The worst part of a restaurant—I've seen this happen a lot of times—is they'll get a good restaurant operation going and let somebody else run it, somebody that was a good foundation, a good person that could work with people and know—and know how to cook and know how to run the operation and get it set up and all and then move and not have a good manager. That's the death of a good restaurant. I've seen that happen a lot of times. But if they stay there—I've seen mom and pop operations with little restaurants raise families forever and retire on a little restaurant, but they never left. The mom and pop never left, and just a little operation and make a good—make a good living, but they opened a lot and they had a good—they had the same product. They never really got—went off the wall, you know, and had—they had the best hamburger in town, the best fried chicken, you know, and they sold a little beer and whatnot, but they never turned it over to somebody and went off and did something else and, you know, left the country or tried to do something off the wall like that, you know. But that's the biggest thing is—a restaurant has to have. But I'd like to get into it; I just got so much going.

But since I've been in the honey business, I've started making honey mead, which is like honey wine. And I'd like to make that and sell it on the commercial operation, but you can't—I can't sell it to you and you sell it to the public. You have to sell it to another dealer, and then

they'd have to sell it, the way Florida law is. Or either I'd have to have like [have] a pub or a bar and brew it right there and sell it in the glass but not sell it in the bottle. But everybody wants to get bottles and sell it to their friends—or give it to their friends, you know, and—and they want it. Everybody I've made it and gave it to, they want to buy it, you know. That's the first thing [they say], *When are you going to sell me some*, you know. But you can't make but so many gallons a year as a recreational operation. But I learned it from a guy—a friend in New Orleans. He taught me how to do it, and he said [to] use any kind of honey. It don't have to be table-grade honey. But I tried that, and it made a real strong—the sugary honey like gallberry goes to sugar fast—it made a real powerful alcohol that I didn't like too good. But the tupelo made a better—a better tasting wine.

2:12:50.3

AE: Is there anybody else who is making honey mead from tupelo honey?

2:12:54.5

GW: There's one other guy that made a little bit around here, but he quit. He made a little bit but see, he was having to buy his honey from the guys over in—in Wewa[hitchka]. And I've taught a guy, another friend of mine, I've taught him to make it, and he's on his first batch now. I've tried to teach a few people, you know, and gave them the honey—just gave them the honey and told them to what to buy. It costs about thirty dollars to get a kit to make five gallons at a time. It takes three-and-a-half months for it to make, from the time you boil it down and the night

that you—or the day you make it, and then when you bottle it and drink it—about three and half months. So it's—you know, it's a long time to make just five gallons. So I usually make five jugs at one time, so when it does come off, it will be five of them instead of one, and then I'll have enough to give away and whatnot. But right now, I'm presently—I'm kind of down in storage. I've—I mean I've had a lot of it here lately. I've just about used up all of it, and now I'm starting again, you know. I've got one jug going and—but it's fine to play with. But you have to really be careful with it. *[Laughs]*

2:14:13.6

AE: Drinking it? *[Laughs]*

2:14:14.3

GW: Yeah. *[Laughs]*

2:14:15.3

AE: Or making it?

2:14:15.1

GW: Drinking it. You have to drink like no more than like two cups is about all you really want to drink. And then wait a couple hours and see how you feel before you drink a whole bottle of that. Compared to like wine—white wine. It's comparable to wine, like white wine—Zinfandel or something.

2:14:33.8

AE: Are there old-timers around here who had it a long time ago and had a taste for it and heard you were making it, or is it something new that—?

2:14:39.8

GW: It's something new to this area. Only a couple of guys—a couple of us around that I know of has ever really done it. Now, they made a lot of home-brewed beer. And my granddad made the Scuppernog grape wine; he used to make—grow the grapes, and we still got the vines, but it's—for some reason, the animals love the grapes, and I just about can't produce grapes. I mean I had the most beautiful grapes here and the possums and the coons and the rabbits and the animals get them, you know. But anyway, he made the Scuppernog wine, and it was real good. And really did good with it. He used to like to make that. But that's with sugar when you make wine. The honey mead is no sugar; it's all honey. The sugar comes from the honey and it's—it's a little bit different. I think it's more powerful, and it's just—it's just a different effect. It's a little bit different alcohol—I mean, not different alcohol but just a different effect on your body that—that mixture somehow. It don't seem to run my blood sugar up near as high as just regular wine

because it don't have the raw table sugar, you know, cane sugar. So I kind of like that feature of it.

2:15:59.1

AE: Do you do anything with the excess wax that you have after the—?

2:16:02.0

GW: No, I usually—I make some candles. And then usually just give it away or either sell it.

2:16:09.4

AE: What *don't* you do, George? [*Laughs*]

2:16:12.2

GW: Well, I mean, I do a lot, I can tell you. I've done a lot. I've done—I've done a lot of boat building, too, that I really love to do. I've built all—just about all my own boats, except some of the fiberglass boats, and I didn't build the shrimp boat that I've got now, but I was getting ready to when I found it. I had bought the saw and everything. I mean I was getting ready to go for it and still might before it's over with. That's something I'd like to do, you know: build a big boat. It would be a challenge, you know—something different I ain't mastered yet. I've seen a lot of

beautiful boats. Most of them that I've seen came from Alabama, like Bayou La Batre, Alabama. They build some of the most beautiful boats out there that will ever—that you'll ever see.

2:17:00.6

AE: Have you traveled much outside of Apalachicola—or the Gulf Coast area, I guess?

2:17:04.9

GW: Not too much. I've been to North Carolina and in the mountains. And the most favorite place I've ever been was to Costa Rica. I liked that.

2:17:16.8

AE: Did you go on vacation?

2:17:17.4

GW: Uh-hmm, I went with a group of fellows that surf out of here and—we don't have a lot of surf, except for when we have a hurricane and maybe a cold front. But we went down there in the wintertime—winter here in February, and it was warm down there, kind of warm, and we went on—on a surfing trip on the Pacific Coast. And that was—because it was swells rolling every day over there—not like—it's not like here, where you say we'll go whenever it gets, you

know—starts to roll again, some swells roll. Over there you say, *Well I'll go—I want to go next Sunday* and we'll go—we'll meet and go next Sunday. When you can know that next Sunday it's going to be some swells because it swells every day over there, coming in on the Pacific Coast. Just a slow roll every day. And you go to these different shores where it's bigger and better at certain times of the tide, you know. You might have to go several hours down the coast. But there was one particular place that stood out to me called Nosara [Costa Rica], and I want to go back there—to Nosara. But Playa Grande beach was big. Playa Grande that was—that was a pretty good place to—there was a lot of—it was a little bit crowded, but not too bad. That's the most favorite thing I've ever done, really. I didn't see too much shrimping going on, but I know it goes on in El Salvador. Because Tommy that works with me, he's worked on—on a big operation down there, like a thirty-steel hulled boats, one man on thirty-steel hulls. And he got to go down there and run the maintenance operation and just run everything, you know, tell them what to do, teach them—be a teacher. So I know they catch good big shrimp. He said they were all big white shrimp in El Salvador, which they were about 200 miles or so north of Costa Rica. And we ate some big shrimp at the restaurants down there, so I know they've got them, but we never did see any of the boats where we were.

2:19:21.3

AE: Well I know that I've—I'm making you late for supper already, and your wife is probably asking about you still, but—and I definitely want to talk to you again, but we can wrap this up. But I want to ask you about your general kind of emotional connection to this place to kind of leave [the interview] on—the place that is the Apalachicola Bay.

2:19:42.5

GW: Well, I mean, it's kind of—it's a place I probably will always be. I mean the only—like I say, the only place I could ever live other than here would be that Costa Rica shore over there. It was kind of like this in places. I mean, I could see me living there but nowhere else but here. And I really like it, you know; I really like—I know I can survive here, is one thing. I can survive and teach a lot of other people to survive, if they wanted to know, you know. But I mean I—I like every part of it—what's left of it, you know. There's a lot that it has that people don't even realize, you know. A lot of—I guess—I don't know what word I'm trying to say—serenity of—just of all the birds that we have out there on the flats at night and over on—over in the marsh at night on a low tide night in May, you can probably hear twenty different kind of birds that come out at night that people don't even know we have, you know. And I like to go over there and fish and flounder and—and just—just to be out with that kind of nature, you know, at night in this area and just—it might not be another person. There might be maybe three flounder men over there—maybe, you know. And when the tide gets real low there's all kind of skimmers, sanderlings, herons; you can hear owls, black birds—there's still some of them and many other—oyster catchers, but they—you know, there's a lot of—lot of activity that goes on at night, mainly at night, that people don't even know about. That's why I like—I've always been a night owl, and I love to be out at night, but you know, it's hard on you to be—to get you—like I was saying, you need to be on a schedule to do good work, and that's one thing that kind of gets you off schedule is staying out at night, you know. I just try not to stay too late, but if you're going to work at night, you have to just about work at night every night, you know, for weeks at a time and sleep

in the daytime and get your schedule switched over to that orientation, you know, of—of night schedule. But yeah, I can see me staying here. *[Laughs]*

2:22:12.6

AE: Well is there anything that we haven't talked about that you want to make sure I know before I leave here?

2:22:18.1

GW: Well there's probably—what I can remember—I know about food, and I don't know if you—but I can tell you the best of the food that I think around here we have to offer—a few things that my grandmother used to make is deviled crab. And she could make it; she threw it together. I mean, she knew exactly what to make without looking at a recipe, you know. She just has done it so many hundreds and thousands of times, but she made the best deviled crab and shrimp salad and crab salad and this stuff called oyster pie that was just about like an apple pie, only it was made with the oysters. And, of course, fried and broiled mullet and shrimp fried—good fried shrimp is good, too, but those things that she made stood out and I'll never—I mean, you can copy them and—and they would probably be as good, but I mean they were like classics. Let me tell you, the kind of deviled crab you get that's pre-made, you know, in the little shell and all, just aren't—aren't the same, you know. But that's something that—that this place has really got to offer. We've got—and also we used to cook our soft-shell crabs, and that's good. And also pompano is good. A broiled pompano is hard to beat. People say, *Oh I don't like*

pompano; they're too rich and all that. But if they ever had them fixed just right, they would know that a pompano is a good fish. And most people around here don't get them because they ship them up north. We used to catch a lot of them, but they shipped them up to the New York market to the Jews or somebody up there that really liked pompano, and all of our three and four dollar a pound pompano, which we were just wanting to get that big money. I mean when you've got to get 1,000 pounds at night—500 or 1,000 pounds of fish like that and get three-fifty or four dollars a pound, you know, that's pretty good. It runs into some pretty big money after several nights of that, you know, so with an independent making that with a little 20-foot boat, you know, we didn't care where they shipped. But a few went to the restaurants on the island and around, you know, but that was an expensive fish. For some reason, pompano has always been the most expensive fish because they're hard to get. They're a real oily fish, but they're good. And I used to really like that, and haven't had any in a while, but occasionally, we'll catch them, if we're cast netting for mullet—accidentally, you know.

2:24:51.9

AE: Are you a big cook yourself?

2:24:54.1

GW: I can. I don't like to do it because I don't like to take the time. I mean I like to do it, but I don't take the time to do it, you know. I can, though. I've cooked a million pounds of mullet because that's what we eat a lot around here, and we do that—like for a Fire Department benefit

or anything we have, we—we can always depend on going and catching 200 or 300 pounds and 200 or 300 mullet and cleaning them and frying them and getting five or six dollars a plate and raising a quick 1,000 dollars for somebody in the year for some equipment we need or something, you know. And everybody just about around here likes the mullet because we've got good island mullet. And you don't really want to catch them around the river and the muddy places, but good island mullet is hard to beat for a cheap fish, you know. If you know how to fix them right and all and eat them fresh. You don't want to freeze them and hold them for a long time, but we eat them a lot.

2:25:50.6

AE: Do you eat the [mullet] roe?

2:25:51.9

GW: Yeah, the red roe. We don't eat the white roe too much, but yeah, we specialize in the red roe, and it's good, too. But I like broiled mullet, my wife fixes a good broiled mullet just on an open, you know, broiler under the oven. You put it about that far—about six inches away from the broiler until it kind of blackens it, with garlic salt and butter and salt and pepper. That's pretty good. In fact, I might have some tomorrow, if we go to the island. I probably—I usually bring some back about every—once a week because, you know, I can't—you can't really, you know, run it too far. I mean, you know, she—she won't eat them but once a week. I'm lucky if I can get away with bringing them in once a week. **[Laughs]** But during the fall, when they're plentiful

is—is when we usually get them at least once every week or two, you know. But everybody now is wanting oysters because it's been closed from the red tide and all, so everybody's wanting oysters. It's going to be the next big thing to go catch—oysters.

2:26:53.5

AE: Well I know I've been eating them all week, and I've been enjoying them a lot.

2:26:56.6

GW: Are they good?

2:26:57.7

AE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

2:26:57.8

GW: Have you eaten any rawm or are you scared?

2:27:00.3

AE: No, they're all raw that I've been eating, yeah.

2:27:03.4

GW: They tell us, you know, be careful for the bacteria and all, but if I go—or if I know somebody that's caught them, I'll eat them raw. If it kills me, it will just be my time to go because we've eaten raw oysters—as long as everything is healthy in the bay, and I know where they came from, and I know they're fresh, I'm going to probably eat them until it gets me, you know.

2:27:23.0

AE: And that's not a bad way to go, either.

2:27:24.8

GW: I mean that's just something that—oysters are something that was meant to be, you know.

[Laughs] And all—sometimes it's hard just to quit something like that. It would be like a cigarette smoker trying to quit smoking cigarettes, for me to quit eating oysters raw. So anyway, well maybe we should stay in touch.

2:27:47.1

AE: Yeah, definitely. Oh, yeah, you haven't heard the last from me. But I—I definitely appreciate you spending all this time with me here this evening. It's really generous of you.

2:27:54.4

GW: Maybe in the future, if you come back, we can go out on the boat when I get the shrimp boat going.

2:28:01.3

AE: All right.

2:28:01.4

GW: If you've never—have you ever done that?

2:28:03.2

AE: No, I've not. I'm hoping to. It hasn't happened yet, so I'll hold you to that.

2:28:06.7

GW: Yeah, that's nice. I mean some people like it, you know.

2:28:13.9

AE: Well all right, George. Well thank you very much.

2:28:16.2

[End George Watkins-1]

[Begin George Watkins-2]

Follow-up interview

Date: March 22, 2006

Location: One of Mr. Watkins' bee yards off of HWY 65, near Sumatra, FL

0:00:00.8

Amy Evans: This is Wednesday, March 22,nd 2006 and I'm in—outside of Apalachicola. Are we close to Sumatra here or are we—?

0:00:14.9

George Watkins: Whiskey George Creek.

0:00:16.0

AE: George Creek?

0:00:16.4

GW: Whiskey George Creek.

0:00:18.4

AE: Whiskey George Creek, and I'm with George Watkins, and we're at his bee yard. George, could you talk a little bit about what you're doing right now?

0:00:26.1

GW: Well, all I'm doing now is lighting up the smoker to do bee work. The first thing you do when you get to the bee yard, light the smoker. And it consists of—I like—most people use pine straw, but I like charcoal and lighter pine, which lasts a lot longer. It lasts all day long, and it kind of makes the bees more subtle and confuses them in a way and keeps them from getting angry. That's what we're doing now. The next thing we'll do is open up the bear fence, so we can go inside.

0:01:02.1

AE: And you were saying this is a deer lease out here?

0:01:04.7

GW: Yeah, this is actually leased to deer hunters and—and but it's also bear habitat, so we're where honey bees and bears go hand-in-hand together, but I mean it's a constant problem. We have—we have to put electric barbed-wired fences around all the yards and usually, we have a little trouble with bears, but so far this year, we haven't. Usually, they start about the first of April. We start having digging around the fences, and if the batteries aren't real hot—hot batteries, they'll get in you know, and they can tear up everything, if they want to, they're so huge. And bees don't bother them a bit. They can have a hundred stings in their face and never slow down—black bears. The perfect—this is probably one of the most perfect black bear areas in the world right here where we're standing.

0:01:54.5

AE: Have you come across many yourself?

0:01:57.3

GW: Oh, yeah. Usually, though, we'll see them—they come do their damage at night or do their digging at night, late in the afternoon or early in the morning, and we—we'll just see them like crossing the road or something up ahead of the truck. Like—those hours though, they all—they move early in the morning and late in the evening. Like we're going to move bees or something

late in the afternoon in April, and we'll see one cross occasionally in front of the truck or early in the morning.

0:02:23.7

AE: I bet that's a sight.

0:02:25.8

GW: Yeah, they see them up here more often all the time—people that come in here, you know, to take care of the deer, feed their flocks and all, they see them track, doing fire lines, and tractor work, and plowing. They see—occasionally, see bears here and cubs.

0:02:43.0

AE: So do you have like a lease agreement with the—with the deer lease or with—?

0:02:47.2

GW: No—with the land owners, the Schulers own this land.

0:02:50.3

AE: Okay. Okay, how long have you had this bee yard right here?

0:02:54.7

GW: Probably about twelve years.

0:03:00.0

AE: It's beautiful.

0:03:01.1

GW: Yeah, it's a nice place. It goes—their property is between Cash Creek—on the map between Cash Creek and Doyle Creek, Whiskey George Creek over here and Cash Creek on that [the east] side, and it's kind of like a big horseshoe about—I think it's close to 3,000 acres, and it runs off into the marsh and to the left—the plains of the wetlands and right on into the water, so they own it from the highway all the way down to the water line. And then they've got some more property on up the—the road towards Sumatra and Brickyard on the river and some off the river on the—in the forest. They've got another yard up there, and they've got one about halfway in between there on Doyle Creek—some other private property. But most of our tupelo is—is—our lease agreement is with the State Fish and Wildlife Commission, and they're on the main Apalachicola River. That will be in like April when we start that.

0:04:11.7

AE: And you were saying like today it's kind of cold out for the bees.

0:04:15.4

GW: Yeah, we just—I don't know, bees are like—you know, any insects go dormant in the cold weather, so on a cold—cool day they don't come out as much. It's dry, nectar don't flow, they can't hardly bring nectar in, so they don't go out in the numbers. Now this afternoon they might be out to where you can actually hear them roaring, you know—you can hear a roar going on from so many coming and going. And then we don't like—most beekeepers don't like to pull their sheets of eggs out and inspect the brood nest of the young bees when it's below seventy-degrees because the nest is like ninety-two to ninety-four-degrees, you know, in the incubation chamber, so we don't too much like to do a lot of bee work, like split the brood nest up and make—see, this time of the year we're trying to raise bees and trying to get them strong for the—for the spring by taking from the strong and giving to the weak. The weak colonies need more brood—more bees, you know. Each sheet of comb has maybe 2,000 bees on it, so we're trying to take sheets of bees out of the strong and give to the weak colonies and build up more colony—equalize them and build—build the weak ones back up. And then when we do make our tupelo, which is our big money crop. We'll have as much power as we can because, when we take away sheets out of a crowded strong hive and give it to a weak hive, then that leaves an empty one in the strong hive, and they can relay that. That Queen can relay that and that just gives you more and more power, you know—kind of like splitting up plants, the same thing, you know—taking

away and splitting them up like cactus. Christmas cactus is an example, you know, you can split them up and let them get strong again, so.

0:06:01.9

AE: Do you ever—each year—lose a colony or two?

0:06:04.4

GW: Oh, we lose hundreds of colonies sometimes. I mean it's just—the mites has been the big problem every—everybody has probably heard. But we've got new medications for that out this year that's just approved in March, so we're going to start—after the honey flow we will start giving them that and hopefully, next year we'll have more power—because most of the mite problems is in the summer and the fall after the honey flow is about over anyway, so then we start giving them charges of medicine to kind of get them—you know, make them winter—mite-free winters so that when the next spring gets here, they'll be in more shape—better shape. They'll be in better shape than the—the next honey flow.

0:06:45.5

AE: What does the mite do to the colony, exactly?

0:06:46.9

GW: Well it goes into the brood chamber and takes away from the—the embryo from the time it's twenty-one days in the gestation—they'll—they'll take from it. They might chew the legs off, the wings, they'll distort it, suck the juice out of it, the blood or plasma to where it has—when it—when it hatches out, it will be so deformed that the bees will just take it out, you know, and discard it, so you're losing—you're just losing more and more young bees, and it just weakens the whole colony workforce so tremendous that finally the—they can't carry on hive operations and finally, it just goes into collapse, and it will die. You know, it can't—they can't run away predators and invasion-robbing insects, and they can't protect their honey, and they just finally go out of business. And if you don't check them at least every two weeks for that the—the moths—the wax moths will move in and eat all the comb up, and then you've got double trouble. You've lost all your bees and the comb, and you have to just about start from scratch from—with a box and a top and a bottom board, put new frames, lose out valuable drone comb.

Because the beekeepers need a lot of drone comb. That's our—pretty—well, that's you know our stake in the business, how much drone comb we've got, because you can't buy it, usually. You have to build a frame to put foundations, which you can buy but then you have to draw it out on a strong hive. Each hive has to have—I mean, you know, say four boxes of drone comb for the honey to be put in, and you can use that drone comb and turn that into brood. Once it's a brood colony—brood comb—then that gets it dark, and you don't usually ever take that back into the honey production again. Once it's turned honeycomb into brood comb, that stays down, and that's the brood comb is the nine frames that's down below where the queen lays her eggs and they bring in and do the reproduction. Everything above that is honey. It's just solid, clean honeycomb. So that's the difference in brood comb and—and honey comb. So you try to

build up at least four boxes—four—four or five clean boxes of—of honeycomb for each colony. So and then all that honeycomb has to be stored in a moth room, like to where you can put an insecticide in there every now and then to keep the—the moths from eating it up, to keep it moth-free. We've got a problem with wax moths also, you know. They'll eat your combs up, and then you're pretty well out of business. I've always said that the beekeeper is strong as how many combs he's got and how many land sites because that's the two most important things. You can buy bees from other beekeepers, but usually, you have to have—I mean you have to pretty well establish land sites and you have to establish some combs, you know—your drone combs—that's two things you have to pretty well be up on.

0:09:53.0

AE: And when you say land site you just mean a place where they can—?

0:09:56.2

GW: A place you can put them because you—kind of like, you know, there's more and more development coming along, and there's more private land turning into—well, I won't say private land, but a lot of State land that—that's being burned and all, you know—these burn sites aren't really good for the beekeeper. They are in a way, but they—some of the biologists think they need to be burned every year and every other year—two-year cycles, which is really too much for the beekeeper. It's just too many, you know—it stresses out the gallberry, where it don't have the blossoms, and takes it like five years to blossom, so it's kind of a little bit of controversy

about that with them. But the beekeeper don't have any—very much pull in the—in the forestry management process, you know, because he's just—there's so few of us, and this forestry management and endangered species management is so much more important to—to the State officials, you know that the beekeeper just—they just burn what they want to. So we are taken out a lot by burning, and it's just a hard thing to get. People don't like stinging insects on their land, you know. We have to have insurance for that.

0:11:13.0

AE: Oh, really?

0:11:14.0

GW: Yeah, we have to carry liability.

0:11:17.2

AE: Wow; what kind of cost is that for your—your business? Is it significant or—?

0:11:23.6

GW: It's—it's about 300 dollars a year, probably—300 or 400 dollars a year added to it—the other stuff—not too bad.

Are you allergic to bees or stings or anything? You know there's always a liability when you go around a bee yard, especially this time of year because of the strength of the hives. They're coming out and getting stronger, so naturally, they're going to be more aggressive this time of year. The type of nectar they're in—so I'll try to break open a hive and show you the honey. You want to try to wear a bee veil or anything or you—are you pretty comfortable about taking a chance on getting stung, or do you want to kind of stand across the fence, maybe?

0:12:29.1

AE: I can stand across the fence, yeah.

0:12:31.5

GW: You know, if they get after you, just get into some bushes. They shouldn't but—

0:12:34.4

AE: Okay.

0:12:36.4

GW: —but they're mainly—usually after the person that's tampering with them, you know, but—

0:12:41.7

AE: Yeah, do you wear a bee veil when you go in or you—?

0:12:45.3

GW: I usually do. It's according to what time of year it is. This time of year, I do, but during the fall and sometimes in the—in the winter they're not too bad. Sometimes I'll wear a more heavy-duty suit. I mean sometimes I'll wear a heavy-duty piece veil, and then sometimes I'll use a small one. If I'm going in for a lot of work all day, I'll usually wear my heavy-duty one—to do brood nest work. [**Banging**] This is the lighter pine [for use in the smoker]. This works the best with that powdered dust on it, kind of like the base of a pine tree. They use different things. Some people use these little chips—wood chips and also burlap—this is burlap over here. [**Sound of bellows on smoker**]

0:14:23.2

AE: Is that a pretty new smoker?

0:14:25.8

GW: Yeah, it's a new one. It's leaking juice all around it—the residue. It don't usually do that.

[Points to another smoker in the back of his truck] That's an old smoker, and it hasn't done it yet.

0:14:33.2

AE: Oh, yeah, I see.

0:14:34.5

GW: A different brand. [*sound of bellows on smoker*]

0:14:41.9

AE: Now, you have that twig stuck in the opening of that [older one].

0:14:45.0

GW: That just snuffs it out at the end of the day. Or you can leave it in there; I mean, you can open it up and dump it all out on the ground and cover it up, and then if it's got a lot of fresh wood you just stoked in there, it wastes, you know. Yeah, most of the time it don't take this long to get the smoker going, but I like to really try to get it going good because they can be aggravating. Just get started and the smoker go out; just get started and then it will go out again,

you know. I go ahead and try to light it up good. You can get away with just a little pine straw, but for a short job—but I'm going to be into them a little more today than just a few minutes.

0:15:36.2

AE: So what is your plan today, just checking on every box?

0:15:39.7

GW: Yeah, checking on most of them to see how the weight is and see what—what they've accumulated, and then I'm going to bring boxes back probably Friday and give the ones that need—that's already filled—what's on them, give them an extra box—an empty box. Maybe with some foundations in it, which will be for drawing out combs. This time of the year we—we put a lot of foundations in there, which is just a wooden—brand new wooden frame and a foundation, and that's for kind like drawing new combs out.

0:16:15.3

AE: Can I get a picture of you with the smoker before you go in there?

0:16:19.0

GW: Uh-hmm.

0:16:21.4

[Recording is stopped as photographs are taken. End of interview. Then George works in the bee yard, while the interview stands on the opposite side of the fence, taking more photographs of the scene.]

0:16:24.8

[End George Watkins-2]