

Interviewers: Kendra Cooper and Alexis McGhee
Interviewees: Richard Puterbaugh and Kathi Harrington
Brunswick, Georgia
March 23, 2018

Kendra: 00:00:00 Right, and so, so my name is Kendra Cooper and this is Alexis McGhee and we're students at Georgia Southern University. I'm here with Richard Puterbaugh conducting an oral history as part of the fishing traditions and fishing futures research project. I've already received an informed consent and permission to record from Mr. Puterbaugh, but can you please confirm that out loud?

Richard: 00:00:24 Yes. You have my full permission.

Kendra: 00:00:26 Alright, awesome. Thank you. So I have some questions to guide us, but I really just want to encourage you to tell us the stories you think we should hear. Alright. So my first question is can you tell me where and when you grew up and what was life like within your family and community?

Richard: 00:00:44 I was born in northern Illinois in a little town called Sterling, which is about a hundred miles west of Chicago. We're nowhere near any salt water and lived there till I was 12 years old and then moved to Connecticut and stayed there for five, six, seven, seven years to 1972. And that's when I came to Georgia but had no, no background in, uh, in fisheries or salt water or I didn't even like fish, didn't eat 'em, didn't like but fish sticks. Someone made me an offer I couldn't refuse and I was unhappy at the job that I was working and things worked out. And here I am 40 years, 45 years later. It was interesting.

Kendra: 00:01:46 So what was life like within your family?

Richard: 00:01:49 I had two brothers and a sister and my father was a school teacher and my parents stayed married until 1980 something they were, but they were married 33 years I think, you know, just normal, normal growing up other than the culture shock of moving from the corn fields of Illinois to a Connecticut. It at that point, uh, in the, in my adolescence, in having to make all new friends. And you can't get much different from cornfields to - I mean it was 45 miles from New York City and Times Square. And so it was on the cutting edge of everything. And I came from - I came from literally from arithmetic to new math.

Richard: 00:02:44 And no connection between the two. So it was, it was difficult, but shrimping was a good escape for me.

Kendra: 00:02:55 Um, so you said grew up in Illinois and you didn't really grow up around fishing?

Richard: 00:03:00 No, no history of that at all. No connection at all. Um, my father owned a sailboat when we lived in Connecticut. Once or twice a summer we'd go out sailing in long island sound, but he was such a jerk because he didn't, nobody it, nobody really enjoyed it, so I just didn't really care much for, for sailing with him. Anyway.

Kendra: So you got into fishing or shrimping with an opportunity that arose?

Richard: I was sharing an apartment with two guys and one of them's brother had been living there and come south, was going to shrimp with a fellow that he knew, all people from Connecticut. And uh, so when he moved out to come shrimping I, that's when I moved into the apartment. So he and I hadn't even met at this point and I was sharing it with his brother and another fella, and they came home to visit when he came home to visit one time and say, well, if you ever think about it, ever need a job, you know, come shrimping. And I said OK, well if you need help sometime, give me a call. And about a month later he did and I'd had a bad week at work. And I said I'll give my notice tomorrow. And I did.

Richard: 00:04:35 So here I am. This, you know, this, there was nothing left in that time for me. I was a high school drop out at that point.

Kathi: Is that when you went to work for Bo Sam?

Richard: No, the blue boat with the star was the first boat did uh, that I ever worked on. I mean, uh, I went to work on other boats. I probably worked.

Richard: 00:05:08 Probably worked the deck on 15 or 20 boats, and was captain on 25, 30. I have a really short, very low tolerance for foolishness. I just don't want to put up with it. You want me to run your boat? Fine. Leave me alone. Let me do. Don't tell me how to do it. You want to run your way, here's the steering wheel. You do it. And I'd pack my bags

and go down the street. But we did own five boats over the years. It's been a good life, good living.

Kendra: Have you always done shrimping or have you done other stuff?

Richard: There were a few, a few lean years when I first started out that I would, uh, do something on land during the wintertime. I helped build, build a couple of shrimp boats one winter. Um, and then after Kathi and I got together, her brother's a carpenter. And so, uh, I worked some winters and some, some bad years after they had bad freezes and there were no shrimp. I worked with him in the summertime doing carpentry work. Soon as shrimp got, got ready to go - I was never a carpenter. I was a shrimper with a hammer.

Kathi: 00:06:36 They'd catch him drawing shrimp boats inside the walls and [inaudible]

Kendra: How did your involvement with shrimp change the years?

Richard: 00:06:48 Well, basically it changed because the industry itself changed. Originally the industry was almost completely unregulated. I mean, no government regulations, if you could do it, they would [inaudible] basically it's still that way. I mean, you don't have to have a license to be a captain, other than a state fishing license. But when the regulation started to, mainly it was with the, uh, with TEDs, they first started coming in the mid-eighties. Um, they had been up to that point, there had been people who had come down to stay on Jekyll and Cumberland Island and count turtle nests and you know, might go for rides on shrimp boats as observers and yeah, when it was all young college girls. And so everybody, ain't nobody taking it seriously. No. Oh, this again, this is just fun. It's just great fun. And in the few years later, guess what, this is mandatory now.

Richard: 00:07:59 And the original, uh, designs with the TEDs, even though they had come from the shrimpers, they were hurt bad, they lost a lot of shrimp. 30 percent, 40 percent. So yeah. And so, well over time, thankfully the government was, was willing to work with the industry and they've improved them now to where they are much, much better. Uh, actually that there are probably some cases where they actually improved the catch, much improved the quality

anyway because you're not catching any of the larger stuff. But anyway, when, when they first started coming in, you know, we realized we didn't have any voice. There is nobody to speak for us. And uh, and so it was time to get political. It was time to jump in the game and it's, it's hard to start from zero and try and catch up. We still didn't have any, any voice to speak. I'm the president of the Georgia Shrimp Association.

Richard: 00:09:14 We don't have a whole lot membership because money's tight.

Kathi: Big change in communication too from radios to cellphones.

Richard: Well yeah, the industry itself changed too, um, when I started, you know, it was all pretty much within [inaudible] and locally it was, it was close to show marina within three or four miles of land close. Know if you could line up this telephone tower where this knot in the tree line and you hold that until this lines up with something over on this side and then you turn and that stuff that you just knowledge you just gained over years, you know, you guarded it, was valuable. And then electronics got better. I mean we started with the CB radio and a compass in a little [inaudible] meter that would just tell you the depth, but that's all it would do and from there it improved to better radios, better electronics, and then the navigation gear just kept getting better over time.

Richard: 00:10:24 And then when the government released gps and we're able to start doing, plot our fishing activities with gps and using a laptop or a flat screen or something rather than literally I could make a trip and come in and give you the boat and you go follow the exact same lines that I just made my trip on. And you'd never touched a steering wheel before in your life. But that's, that's how accurate things have gotten with the GPS. And so all the knowledge that you acquired over the years, well guess what? That yellow house is painted blue now, that big tree that used to line up with the telephone towers, well the tower's down and the tree's been cut down, you know, but you don't need anymore because you can go back and drag right where I was.

Richard: 00:11:22 Fishermen are generally pretty good about sharing information now, just because it's so much is available.

Back then, if somebody comes from out of town and they gonna drag, you're not going to tell 'em. Yeah, they're getting ready to tear up a net or something. You just sit back and watch the show. But people, people get along better now because they realized, you know, if you tell them what to do here will, they might tell you what to do when you go to their backyard. And uh, a lot of boats that traveled and [inaudible] with the shrimp up and down the coast from North Carolina to Key West or around over in the gulf. But then as the price of fuel – fuel was our biggest expense when it was twelve cents a gallon.

Richard: 00:12:12 Which it was when, that, when I started in, I think it's \$2 and something now, but I paid as high as \$4 and thirty seven cents a gallon before. And that was bad a bad year. That was a real bad year. I caught \$97,000 worth of shrimp and it cost me \$98,000 to do it and that's when I said, you know, I beat my head against this wall long enough that the wall's winning. And so it's just time to let it go, let somebody else have my place.

Richard: 00:12:54 If I was 10 years younger, I would still be shrimping, probably hating life. I'm enjoying my retirement finally.

Kendra: 00:13:05 So, uh, why do you think, when you were talking about how people used to not share when others would come in, why do you think that changed?

Richard: 00:13:14 Well, it was the, uh, uh, mainly the electronics and the more and more boats traveling with shrimp. When I first started, you know, the Brunswick boats fish Brunswick, Fernandina boats fish Fernandina, Darien boats fish Darien, and there was very little up and down the coast because this is, yeah, you've got to stay in someplace so you can learn all these ranges in lines and because you can't just go out and throw your net overboard. If you don't tear up, you'd go and catch a load of shrimp, you know, they were, you know, they'd get in spots and you'd have to learn the spots in. But again, with electronics getting better. And when I, when I started a big boat was 65 feet, um, and then most of the boats were built in St. Augustine. Most wooden shrimp boats, like the Bulldog.

Richard: 00:14:16 And as time went by and there got to be more money in it, in the sixties and seventies, you know, they discovered shrimp down in the Keys [inaudible]. And then, uh, over all

of Louisiana and Texas and, and eventually Mexico and they caught an enormous amount of shrimp in Mexico. But you would take a boat the size of the Bulldog and fill all the fuel tanks and blow the entire thing full of ice. And then you'd have barrels of fuel and oil tied to the deck or tied to the rails because it was such a long trip over there. And such a long trip back, they wanted to stay on the fishing grounds as long as they could. So the boats just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger. And now they're uh, I saw one in [inaudible], couple years ago, a hundred and 18 feet long, steel boat and it probably cost \$5,000,000 and you get to catch \$2 shrimp to pay for it.

Richard: 00:15:21 So you just take your house keys and go away because you don't, you don't get to go home, you can't pay for that boat with it tied to the dock. So it's, that's, that's a big way that the industry's changed, now, the way it's delineated.

Kathi: When I was pregnant with Savannah, he took his boat to the Gulf of Damn Mexico. And I saw him 3 times in 5 months.

Richard: Yes, it was rough. It was rough.

Kendra: 00:16:00 So when you were shrimping, what was an average day like? Like the day to day routine.

Richard: Get up about 5:00, 5:30, put on coffee. Some people like to jump up out of bed and hit the start button and start hollering at everybody and you know, and I was just never in that big a hurry in the morning. I'd rather get up a little earlier and get a couple of cups of coffee and then go out and get started.

Richard: 00:16:40 We'd try to anchor as closest we could to the shrimping grounds. I mean we don't have to run too far sometimes, depending on where we were working with, if the inshore waters were open. We just have to go around the corner behind one of the islands. So it'd take you five, ten minutes to get where you're going to start in the morning, uh, and other times a year when the inshore waters would close, you had to be a minimum of three miles off shore. So that meant you had to go, sometimes you had to run out the channels and the channel from the south end of Jekyll Island going out over north to Little Cumberland, you end up [inaudible] is five miles off shore, but you probably run

twelve miles to get to it because it. Yeah, just the way it curves and you'd have to dodge sandbars and things. You'd try to get overboard just as the sun's coming up and start dragging; it's hours of boredom interrupted by moments of terror or excitement.

Richard: 00:17:57 Um, there is no substance, man made substance or grown in nature, that is a quicker, bigger high than catching shrimp when you hadn't been catching anything. There is no drug, no drink, no nothing that can compare to the rush it gives you. When just all of a sudden you said I'm gonna go over there, I think there might be something over there. And then you go and you hit 'em and just, yeah boy, make you feel like the smartest person ever to turn the steering wheel. But it's a really good feeling.

Richard: 00:18:39 Obviously that's one of the things I miss anyway, was the the adrenaline rush because yeah, I used to wake up in the morning, and Kathi will tell you, that when I was at the house, I'd wake up 'Yeah, gonna catch me some shrimp today.' That's pretty good way to start the day when you think about it. Not many people look forward to going to work and uh, I just, I couldn't wait. I couldn't wait.

Kendra: 00:19:08 It's a good attitude to have.

Richard: 00:19:10 Well it was for awhile. Kept me going.

Kathi: [inaudible]

Richard: One picture, I put \$3,300 in my pocket for 20 minutes. So yeah, that was a good one. It was two days before Christmas. Hello Santa Claus. There were a lot of moments like that during years we'd be, we'd be down, you know, we hadn't caught any shrimp for awhile and bills were coming due and don't know what we're gonna do, and just say I just have to try and find some shrimp and I'd go find some shrimp and everything would be fine until the next time. And then we'd do it again. And it was, it was a recurring thing.

Richard: 00:20:10 You're able to then say to the main thing to take away from it is, you know, there were no shrimp and it was funny that in the, uh, spring of the year when the season was closed out to three miles, we catch good shrimp from outside of the three miles out to about six miles. And there were times

during the, uh, late eighties, early nineties that there'd be three or 400 boats off shore of Jekyll Island. It literally would look like the city at night. We kept saying over and over, yeah, we could catch some shrimp if it weren't for all these damn boats. Well the boats went away and took the shrimp with them. Finally come back where the, you know, the uh, diminished effort, I guess you'd call it, is finally starting show for, for some of the people that are still working out there. I don't know, I'm not up to date on landings, but I don't think the landings really changed a whole lot over the last, say 10 years. But there's a lot less people catching them. So the ones left in it are catching. But they, yeah, that's bigger boats with bigger expenses and a higher overhead. And again, like say you just don't get to go home.

- Speaker 2: 00:21:43 You gone for, with the boats that freeze their shrimp on board and those big boats you probably looking at 40 days, 50 days. I know a fellow who's got a couple of boats in Key West and one of them came in with \$200,000 trip last month. That's a lot of shrimp. That's a lot of shrimp. So yeah, there is that. But it's. His boats were doing probably close to a million dollars a year each, which is stunning. When I was shrimping even as recently as 10 years ago, that was just unheard of. Ridiculous numbers and now they've done it I think three years in a row, something like that. But they never get to come home. They do, they get about a one month off a year and during that month they work on the boat, paint it up, get ready, and go back.
- Richard: 00:22:44 Don't enjoy your little bit of time home. And I spent enough time away from home; I like being there now.
- +Kendra: What was your longest trip?
- Richard: Well let's see. I did make one, I ran a couple of freezer boats and longest one we made I think we was like 25 days, but we had like 25, \$28,000 worth of shrimp, which, which back then was, was good. It was just one of those years were the, you know, there was, there were a few shrimp but you had to fight for them and work real hard to get them and I've had trips as short as go up and put overboard and pick up five minutes later and turn around and put everything back on deck and go back to the dock, we'll fix something. You don't know.

Kathi: [inaudible]

Richard: I wasn't a big fan of them either. But bringing home a five or \$6,000 paycheck kinda smoothed things over just a little bit.

Kathi: 00:24:11 Yeah.

Kendra: 00:24:12 So would you say fishing is central to your community here?

Richard: Not in this area, not in Brunswick. I guess it's just too diverse, too spread out. Um, but there were really very few places left anymore. Uh, used to be a, you know, a fishing community in St. Augustine. That's one of the places shrimping started was around St. Augustine and then in Mayport where the, uh, where the ferry is, Mayport. Uh, that was, that was the fishing community for Jacksonville. I mean if you worked commercially, that's where you worked out of, was out of Mayport. Up Fernandina Beach and then St. Mary's, there used to be a lot of boats in St. Mary's. And then yeah, when, and right on up the coast in fact now in, um, North Carolina, once you, once you get up above Myrtle Beach, you start getting into situations in, had family situations that are more like they used to be here where you'd have the whole family involved in fishing. But in a lot of cases I saw with fishermen I met from up, there was a lot of them were farmers. They'd farm during farming season. And Yeah, when, when it was shrimping season, well, they'd hire somebody to, to harvest their crop and they'd go shrimping. And um, when you come to the - always keep the shrimp with the heads on because you get the dock, all the wives, that's how they made their money was heading the shrimp and I mean if you headed shrimp on the boat, you wasn't gonna get a whole lot of service out of them. Because you're just taking money out of their pocket and they weren't going to be very happy for you. You might make more money but they wouldn't. But that still exists. But it's further down south. Waterfront property got to be so valuable that it was worth so much more with yachts and condos than stink ass shrimp boats tied up there. And so there's been a lot of places, you know, you've got deep go deep water access right there, well, we'll just buy it up, the hell with the shrimp boats. And there's been a lot of it.

Richard: 00:26:58 Not a whole lot of docks. Like I said, there were 11 docks here at one time, now there's one. Fernandina, there used to be like seven of them, now there's one or two. Richmond Hill, there used to be a co-op and that had 30, 40 boats tie up, but it's not even in business anymore. So it's just been hard, you know, things is. Um, there's so many easier ways to make a living. There were a lot of, a lot of the people that I shrimped with were second generation, third generation.

Richard: 00:27:39 Almost without exception, they did not want their children working on shrimp boats. They would send them to college or do something but just don't, don't come around these boats. Them boats are no good. 'Course they put clothes on your back and food on your table. But uh, but yeah, they just wanted better for the kids. A better future than this. The way the industry's turned out, I can't really say they're wrong. I hate it.

Kathi: 00:28:10 Savannah never had a fisherman asked her out. I think there might've been a reason behind that.

Richard: 00:28:19 [Interruption] What's say, Robert? We good, bud. How we doing?

Richard: 00:28:33 We just letting these girls ask us a few questions and fill them in on the way things used to be.

Robert: 00:28:54 Well, I'll get out of here and we will, we'll see ya in a bit. Lindsey asked me to come by here today.

Richard: 00:29:05 Oh yeah, these, these ladies will wanna talk with you.

Richard: Robert and I shrimped together and we worked for the same owners. He ran one boat for them and I ran another boat for them, and we did quite a bit of shrimping up and down the coast together. That was, that was another thing. That was great about the situation of friendships, you know, you just, you're somewhere and all of a sudden you start catching shrimp and somebody that she barely know sees you and starts coming with, we're not going to lie to and make them run because they've got the tri-net and they're going to see the same shrimp that you're seeing in yours. So the best thing to do was work with them and just try and keep it quiet between the two of you.

Richard: 00:29:58 We used to do that. Doesn't happen too much anymore either, but there was a lot of hand signals and whatnot. So you didn't have to get it out on the radios because somebody is always listening. Always.

Kendra: 00:30:21 Um, so you talked earlier about like the technology stuff. What are some other positive changes you've seen?

Richard: Safety was a big improvement. There have been some lives lost in the shrimp industry, like any fishery. It's nowhere near as dangerous as Alaska or New England, you know, some of them are working hundreds of miles away from shore - if you get in trouble and it's long time for anybody to get to you, you know, a lot of things can happen. Um, and so basically it was, it was Alaska fisheries that brought the safety issues to the rest of the American fleet. But how you gonna complain with something that might save your life? Like with the survival suit or [inaudible] or something like that. I mean you just, you got the habit and if anything, get in the survival suit and stick [inaudible] your arm. Yeah, let the satellite signal go out from there. And you, yeah, I'm right here. So I mean you can't complain about that. And requirements on the boats have gotten stricter than they used to be, you know, just as far as maintaining seaworthy condition and some other things like build your alarms, you know, in, in, uh, in case you get water in the boat, in general alarms where you can locate your crew real quick and they hear that you go right here, this is where your job is going to be when you go over there.

Speaker 2: 00:32:16 Yeah. When there's reasons for everything. And then you drill, you have safety drills. Why? Because you know, we've, I've maintained for a long time if you take the panic out of a panic situation, then all you've got is a situation, and anybody can deal with that.

Kathi: [inaudible] How many boats do you know that have sunk?

Richard: 00:32:46 There's been several over the years. Probably one or two a year.

Richard: 00:32:55 Some years, maybe more. But back in 1979 was pretty much the bellweather year for us here in Georgia. So we caught like seven or eight, 9,000,000 pounds of shrimp that year, which is just three times our normal. It was just phenomenal. And DNR issued almost 2000 boat licenses

for Georgia boats and for a South Carolina and Florida boats that would come here. And then there was boats from North Carolina that were following the shrimp, but they'd have to have license to come in and unload. And last year it was less than 200. 90 percent drop and out of that 200 there's probably maybe 50 to 75 of them are in good enough condition that they could work here every day. And that's just, it boggles the mind. The reduction in effort. Same thing in South Carolina. It's really, it's the same thing everywhere. In Texas at one point when they, uh, government's since introduced regulations are starting to regulate the Gulf of Mexico fishery. And you had to get a permit from the government to work there. They estimated there were 10,000 boats just in Texas and altogether there's 10,000 would work out in the gulf. Some of them just worked in the bays, like with Louisiana, but there 10,000 boats that were working in the gulf. And now it's down to about 1200.

Richard: 00:34:45 It just, it just boggles the mind. Where'd all the boats go, where'd all the people go, where'd all the businesses go, and you look up and down the river fronts and you see condos and you see, you know, parks and walkways, but you don't see outriggers. That's probably the biggest way it's changed is a lack of effort and people just trying to do something else.

Kendra: So what have been the most rewarding parts of your career?

Richard: 00:35:47 Probably right, actually right here, at UGA and the time I spent on the Bulldog. Because I worked part time for them for about 10 years and uh, did a lot of turtle projects with them where they are either testing experimental turtle shooters or um, there was four, five, six summers that I worked with them and we were actually getting paid to catch turtles so they could take blood samples and tag them, and I just thought that was sweet revenge. And so I did enjoy it quite a bit. South Carolina DNR paid for that. But they would have, there would be a lead scientist and then like five students, either vet school students or biology students, or postgrads or whatever and they would all come down to learn how to work with the turtles. And so they would do probably 95 percent of the work.

Speaker 2: 00:36:56 Me and Marty, all we would do was just work the wench and bring the nets in, and put it back out again. And we'd

stand around here, smoke cigarettes, drink a cold one and drag. Wait until they were done and was the deck down.

Kathi: Didn't they put monitors on the turtles? So they could keep track of what they did.

Richard: They did at one point they, uh, we were down at Cape Canaveral and putting a satellite monitors on the, uh, on some of them. And we had to, it was a big involved process, but it was, I think they got some good data on that. It was very rewarding. But working with the, uh, with the vet school students and the marine biology students and whatnot, and just letting them know, you know, there's, there's two sides to every story. You come down here with the attitude about the, uh, about those shrimp boats over there making a living. Well, let me tell you a little something about that, you know, and it's a, I think that was, that was probably the most rewarding out of all the times that I spent, was to actually change somebody's mind, which was pretty much an accomplishment. Um, but, you know, but yeah, basically show people, you know, it's not like a teenage mutant Ninja turtles where the evil fishing boats are coming to kill and slaughter all the turtles. It's not that way.

Kathi: 00:38:41 They named after Richard.

Richard: 00:38:47 It's another story I can't tell. I can't tell you. Turn that off, I'll tell you the story, but I can't tell it involves another individual to remain nameless. But, you know, that was part of the deal. You can go online and make a donation and you would be assigned a turtle. That would be your turtle. You know, you can go online and you see every time it came up, you know, when it breathed, you know, uh, where it went. I guess people want to know things like that. So you know, good for them. They, they gave the, the industry such a bad rep for, for turtles. And I know we had to have had a part in it. I mean there's just, there's no denying it. I mean, we were pulling nets with no way for them to get out and yeah, I don't think it was ever as extensive as what they say, our responsibility anyway.

Richard: 00:40:11 The fact that they have come back in record numbers since then, record nestings year after year after year. Um, and these are just the results from when the TEDs first went in because they'd take 20, 25 years for, for a male loggerhead

to reach maturity. We're just now seeing the results. And so that tells me that they're on the right track. The people with South Carolina DNR couldn't be happier with, with the readings that we've gotten because we've just caught more and more and more every summer, and very few of them were recaptures. Maybe one summer we would recapture and not necessarily one we had tagged this summer. We saw a lot of different turtles and uh, you know, that seems like it would be a sign of a healthy population. But the DNR people, they don't go by what's in the water, they go by what's on the beach and they go strictly by the nestings. And thank God the nestings have been up where it's reflecting what we have seen offshore. But they still don't go pay a whole lot of attention what we've seen offshore out there just because it's a different model than they care to use.

- Kathi: 00:41:40 When Savannah was eight or nine, a DNR agent went and spoke to her class about turtles, and she came home crying because the kids danced around Savannah saying, "Savannah's daddy is a turtle killer, Savannah's daddy is a turtle killer." That was awful. I'm still mad.
- Richard: 00:42:11 Oh, she had another shrimper's child tell her the reason I stayed out shrimping and didn't come home was because I didn't love her or her mama, and that's why I went and stayed out for a week at a time, week or week and a half at a time instead of coming home every day. She was upset with that too.
- Richard: 00:42:38 Never did find out who the parent was. That was probably a good thing.
- Kendra: What do you think younger people or people who don't live near the coast or on the coast should understand about the history and the heritage of coastal Georgia?
- Richard: 00:43:08 The parallels between this and, and, uh, the family farming industry are real close. Real close. I know there are very few family farms that are left. Most of them been bought up by the conglomerates and the way the, uh, the shrimping industry is gone as a smaller boats are owned by the, by the public. And the bigger boats are all corporate owned because they're the only ones who can afford \$5,000,000 for a boat. If the boat loses money, well hell, we need the write off anyway. It's bad. It's bad.

Kendra: 00:43:46 What are you hoping to see in the next generation?

Richard: 00:44:18 I would like for there to be a next generation of commercial fishermen. That's what I would like.

Richard: 00:44:27 And I would like for them to be able to participate in a viable industry, which I think we have. There's always going to be shrimp here and there's always going to be people that want them. Whether you'll be able to catch them in marketable amounts, that's yet to be determined. It's been pretty good for the last hundred or so years. So I would expect people to continue with the, you know, with the limited effort. But I would like to. I mean I would like to see the industry come back. I actually want to get to work with Captain Lindsay, trying to get the sounds back open. They've been closed since, uh, 1990. 91, 92, 93, maybe. And the problem we're having with the black gill in the shrimp right now is because the sounds being overgrown.

Speaker 5: 00:45:34 And it also, if we, if we can get the sounds back open, we can get smaller boats back in industry and that's where the future's going to be. I mean, you can take a small boat, spend \$5,000 on it and you can go shrimping. A hell of a lot quicker than if you go to the bank and say, well, I want to borrow \$5,000,000 to buy me a shrimp boat. They won't laugh you out the door, they will run you out the door for even daring to come in there and ask them for something like that. I mean, if you had \$5,000,000 collateral, they wouldn't give you the loan. That's, I mean maybe they've been burned bad over the years. And I understand that, same with insurance companies. But if we can get them back open for small boats, it'll put more people back in industry and put a more available fresher product for the public. Because a lot of those people will shrimp in the morning. And then be parked on the side of the road come 1:00 in the afternoon selling what they caught that morning. You can't get any fresher than that. Fish houses, of course, are against that, they want people to come to them to get the shrimp.

Richard: 00:47:04 I don't think that's necessarily the best way to go about it either. I mean, most of the fisheries, you know, you can, you can buy straight off the boat, get better price, whether it's lobster or stone crab or whatever. The uh, if you tie up at their dock, you unload your catch with them. Or they

will run you of, and then where are you going? There aren't any other docks. They pretty much got you. Which is unfortunate. And that would be a problem for the smaller boats. There's a certain amount that you can put on a trailer. I mean you can put the 32 foot boat on the trailer. Yeah. Without too much difficulty.

Richard: 00:47:59 That might would work. That might would work, but we've got, we've got to get more, more of the small boats involved because if we don't, it's just we're going to end up with a distant bluewater fleet that the people around here on the coast, like you go to the grocery store. You go in the grocery store now and what you see is Key West shrimp; aren't any local shrimp because the local waters are closed. But it's a long ways from Key West to here. And they don't taste near as good, either.

Kendra: 00:48:46 So what types of things do you think could happen here in the next five years that you think would help the fishing industry in Georgia flourish?

Richard: 00:48:58 I think getting the sounds open would probably have more of an effect than anything else. They tried so many other things. As far as the openings and delayed openings and partial openings and seasons depending on how the shrimp are this year they had a lot more snow and ice north of us. Our shrimp around here weren't affected all that bad, but from Darien into Savannah they got a lot more snow and ice and the shrimp crop got hurt a lot more up there, and up in South Carolina, so they may end up doing a partial opening, where they'll open from the Florida line to [inaudible] Sound or Sapelo Sound or something like that, and then stay closed up there for an extended period. There's really no telling how, how it'll all work out. It depends on the uh, what, what they find in the tests in the next month and a half or so. But uh, getting more involvement. I really, I really feel like there's a segment of the populous that is not being served. The only, the only boats that are working are working way out offshore in the Keys or somewhere.

Richard: 00:50:32 Uh, economics will dictate whether or not you can afford to work. If you, if you go out and lose money, you're not going back tomorrow. I mean that's just the way it is. If you can make money, then fine, you go back tomorrow and you

go until you don't make money then you take a couple days off.

- Richard: 00:50:54 But I would really like to see, see something get done on that. There's been a lot of resistance from not so much environmental groups as sport fishing groups. Unfortunately, their idea of conservation is to take fish out of my cooler and put it in theirs.
- Richard: 00:51:18 You know, that's not the way I read it, but there's, you know, I mean I understand their point and they spend a lot of money at marinas and buying tackle and fancy toys and all that, and good for them, good for them. But don't cut me out of my living, you know, just so you can go out and play on the weekend and you think you've got a god given right that you're supposed to catch fish. Well maybe if you were a better fishermen, you would. You don't have to put me out of business so you can catch fish. How about you get better at what you're doing? Uh, so that, that is really an obstacle that they have a lot of sway with, uh, with DNR because again, like I said, they spend a lot of money at these marinas and tackle shops and whatnot. And we're how many, how many people in our association? What little voice we had is just a whisper in the darkness compared to them because they have Saltwater Sportsman Magazine and Georgia Outdoors Magazine and all those. A hundred percent behind their, their side.
- Kendra: 00:52:35 So what do you think would help raise your voices?
- Richard: 00:52:41 More involvement. More people. More people. And younger people, too.
- Richard: 00:53:00 Back in the late seventies, early eighties when things were really booming, there were a lot of doctors and lawyers and bankers. They invested money in boats, uh, cause it was you either have a real good tax write off or you can put some fast money in your pocket. You know, it could go either way depending on how you want to work the books. Or you could go smoke you a load of dope with it, ya know? There's a bunch of that going on, too.
- Richard: 00:53:48 Temptation. Yeah. In 77 and 78 we had horrible freezes in the wintertime. I mean killed every shrimp. You couldn't find a shrimp.

Richard: 00:54:10 Hypothetically, someone comes along with the shopping bag with \$100,000 in cash in and said, would you take this and take your boat off shore? About 25 miles to meet somebody. A lot of people didn't turn it down. I put it that way. A lot of people didn't turn it down. A lot of people got caught. A lot of people didn't. It was a lot of money made. I put it that way, there's a lot of money made. The sheriff of McIntosh County owned a shrimp boat and he was in it up to his ears. And this is documented. The boat came in to unload and the government was waiting, but they hadn't contacted the sheriff. So the sheriff's people are out here to get it and pick up the dope, and the government people are over here waiting to bust him for picking up the dope, but neither one of 'em knew the other was there. It was all kinds of exciting.

Richard: 00:55:30 That's, you know, it didn't take long once they started with the satellites that they know they can track them. But it's a long ride from here to Columbia, you know, you can put 50, 60, 70,000 pounds of reefer on a boat. That's a bunch, you know. And so, I mean, I understand the payday possible payday at the end, it doesn't make it right and you know, it's still illegal as hell, but it's understandable. You got, you know, you got a bad shrimp season and then you've got a stack of bills this high, and boat payments coming due, and then somebody comes up with that shopping bag. It makes it a little easier to say yes. Uh, but it changed when it seems like when it was just marijuana being smuggled. It was a difference. Different crowd of people that were doing it. Mainly they were doing it for the money or they were pot heads or bringing it [inaudible]. But then they started, they shifted and started bringing in cocaine because you could bring in so much more and was worth so much more money and you really start getting into serious criminal element then yeah, you started dealing with, you know, New York people and Atlanta people. And again, this is theoretical because I wasn't involved, but I've heard a lot of details and talk to a lot of people in, you know, there was, there was one fella did you know, did it three or four times and got away with it. And then people did that financing come to him and said, we need you to carry a body off shore.

Richard: 00:57:33 What do you do then? When someone is sitting there like this [motions like a gun to the head], you carry the body off shore. And they ended up getting the man for, I don't think

they got them on accessory to murder, but he had filed a, he was a government informant and he lied on his taxes and so they got them on the tax fraud. Tax evasion. Because they couldn't, cause he had been granted immunity. But when they found out about the, uh, this other activity, it pissed them off so bad. So they said we're going to get you on something. They did. Uh, I don't miss that element being out of it now. It's probably the worst thing that ever happened to the fishing industry was cocaine and crack. Cause they'll be so much easy money. You got people that are, a lot of cases, high school dropouts or society dropouts are burnouts or whatever. And uh, you go out and make them a thousand, 1200, \$1,500 out. You got two days off and then we're going back in the ocean. Well hell, you can't go back with money in your pocket. You got to spend it all. You got to, you're obligated. Fastest way to do it is go find you crack dealer.

- Richard: 00:58:57 He'll be carrying your money around for you before long. I've known people, who, pay them \$800, and they broke before daylight borrowing cigarette money. I mean could not make it from dark to daylight with a penny left in the pocket out of \$800 paycheck.
- Kathi: 00:59:14 I know one you gave a paycheck, and he came back, and the video at Knight's Seafood had him carrying Richard's brand new TV off the boat in a big box so he could sell it, so he could buy him some more.
- Richard: 00:59:23 After being paid. He would rather do without television on the boat for the next week.
- Richard: 00:59:40 So he could go and get him a little. What are you going to get, \$20 for, you know, a 19 inch flat screen?
- Kendra: 00:59:54 Did you get it back?
- Richard: 00:59:56 No, because I was going to have to buy it back. I bought it once, I'm not buying it again. What I can do is I can fire your ass, and I did. Crack really did it because I saw it. It took a bunch of good men down. A bunch of good fisherman, and every fisherman I know could probably name four or five people that they either know real well or had either liked real well or had respect for, that fell victim to it, and just terrible, terrible. And now there's, I don't

know what the drug of choice is anymore. Heroin. I think a lot of people are doing heroin and Oxycontin.

Richard: 01:01:00 I just know there's no place for that. There's so many ways that you can get hurt if you were paying attention or being be that [inaudible] up is scary. Scary to me and hopefully scary to everybody else too.

Kendra: Any bright spots in the future?

Richard: Well, yeah. Yeah. You got to think that there's bright spots, or it'd been so damned depressing that you couldn't go forward. So yeah, there's, there's got to be a future for the industry. What it's going to be, I don't know. I wish I did.

Richard: 01:02:08 But like I said, there's always gonna be shrimp out there and there's always going to be somebody that's going to want them. So there needs to be somebody here to catch them, and it doesn't matter if there's five boats here, 500 boats here, somebody needs to be out there catching them and the more boats we can put up there doing it, the better off it's going to be for everybody. You know, it's more product on the market it's more revenue for the state it's more tax dollars. It's just more and more and more. If they do it right, I don't see any downside to it.

Richard: 01:02:51 One of their big complaints was they're afraid that it would be like when they opened the sounds before, but there were 500 boats down in Saint Andrew Sound last time they opened it. Well there's not 500 boats on the East Coast anymore.

Richard: 01:03:08 So open it up, but restrict it, limit it. Limit the net size and the number of boats and we'll work with them. We would work with them.

Richard: 01:03:28 You know, and if somebody gets caught dragging illegal, take the license, boot them out of business for the year. You'll put some teeth in it where people will obey because it's more important that everybody gets to drag in there rather than one person getting to drag illegal and fouled up for everybody else because that's what they're waiting for, for people to drag illegals. They'd say, "see? we told you, we told you that's what they're going to do. Them shrimpers ain't nothing but thieves." And that's unfortunately that the DNR attitude has been guilty until proven innocent. You

know, we know, we know you're a shrimp thief, we just haven't caught you yet, but we will.

- Richard: 01:04:14 And so it's hard to. Hard to deal with some of the people in charge over there in the past, but they're making changes over there. So maybe somebody will have a little more enlightened attitude about it and be willing to work with us. But since the going back to the TEDs, the industry, our industry has done nothing but give. We have, you know, we've given up money. We've given up profits. Pulling god-awful TEDs that didn't work. Then they made us pull BRDs, fish eyes that didn't work and lost you a bunch of shrimp. Fortunately that's been worked on some but it's still got a ways to go and we gave up fishing time. We gave up fishing grounds by giving up the sounds. How about getting a little something back, you know, we give and give and give and give and that's part of the reason that you see 10 boats in Brunswick. But I just have to get with Lindsey and then we'll get started on it and it's contacting legislators and, and all that. And since he's retired now he can. I'm guessing that he can do it since he wasn't allowed to be political when he was a state employee. Well there was one occasion that the people here were in direct opposition to the DNR.
- Richard: 01:06:06 And so the director of the DNR went to the governor and said, what is this shit? They can't do that and you know, we work for. They're supposed to be on our side or on no side, but they're not supposed to be proactive. And so they got a pretty good scolding here. And ever since they've just had to remain neutral. They provide information all they can, but they can't take a stand. But Lindsey, his reasoning might be a little bit different than mine, but the end result is the same. We both, we both want the sounds open.
- Kathi: 01:06:52 They was following the science is what they were doing. That's not something one side or the other.
- Richard: 01:07:00 But that's, that's what I see as bright spots is the possibility of that. Just the fact that fishermen are eternal optimists. You've got to be. If you're not getting this drag, well, maybe next drag, don't get them today, maybe tomorrow. Don't get them tomorrow, maybe next week.
- Richard: 01:07:24 But you got to. If you don't have hope, what do you have to have? You at least got to have that.

Richard: 01:07:37 Because if you just out there for the money, that's the wrong place to be. That's why I retired because that was the only reason I was there, was for the money. And it wasn't worth it. I'll let someone else have my share. And I don't mind. I used to mind a lot, didn't want anybody getting any part of my share. Usually wanted to get part of theirs. But now? Eh, I don't care, you can have it. I got mine. They still got theirs to get. Anything else?

Kendra: 01:07:59 Is there anything else you wanted to talk about that we didn't?

Richard: Not on the record.

Kendra: Thank you so much for your time. [Interview ends]