

Danielle Sayre: My name is Danielle Sayre, and I am a student at Georgia Southern University. I am here with Andrew Ross conducting an oral interview as part of the project Fishing Traditions and Fishing Futures: Oral Histories of Commercial Fishing in Georgia. I have already received informed consent and permission to record Andrew Ross, but you could please confirm that out loud.

Andrew Ross: Yes, ma'am. I'm Andrew Ross. I'll be glad to answer any questions about this business as best as I can.

DS: Great. Thank you so much. For our first question, we would just like to know, when did you start fishing?

AR: Oh, when I was a young, young fellow, about five years old. Dad would take me out on the boat. He'd tie a rope around me and tie me to the mass so I wouldn't fall overboard. I mean, that's a long time ago.

DS: When did you start commercial fishing?

AR: Oh, dad was doing it then. I mean, I started running the boat when I was about 20. Dad retired. He was old, and I took over running the boat when I was about 20.

DS: Do most of your family do fishing, commercial fishing?

AR: Yes, a lot of them. I had a grandfather that was in the shipping business here. He entertained the big boats, the captains, and all that come off of it. He would cook them dinner and stuff up at the house, a strong shipping company. It used to be a big shipping four years ago.

DS: Did that influence your desire to become a fisherman?

AR: Yes. I just kind of wanted to follow the tradition with dad. I enjoyed going out on the boat.

DS: And how did your involvement with fishing – do you fish or do you shrimp?

AR: It's for shrimp mostly, just...

DS: Shrimp?

AR: Shrimping. Yes.

DS: So, your shrimping, how did it change over the years as you grew?

AR: Well, when I was a young fellow, it was a little money, but it kind of peaked up to \$7 a pound, we'd get for the boat at times, quarter of shrimp. I thought we was really going to get wealthy. It was a profitable business. But over the years, it's been overfished by bigger boats from all over the place. It's been overfished and the regulations that the state and all the government's brought down on us. We have to have terrible excluders and fish excluders in our

nets, holes that allow shrimp to escape. So, we don't catch as much as we did before with those things. But it's the competition and pollution, and there's a lot of things. It's just the price. Like at the retail market, they'll get \$15 a pound and give us as little as a dollar and a half. It's just amazing. If you had your own private dock, you could sell to anybody at a top dollar, but it's limited to the dock space. If you don't have your own private dock, you have to unload with the fish house. You pretty much have to take what they give you. You have to carry ice out on the boat to keep your shrimp cool. There's only one place in Brunswick to buy the ice from, so they kind of got you.

DS: When you were younger and starting out fishing, were there as many regulations or did you notice that changed?

AR: No. It was a lot, lot less. I used to open the sounds when I was a kid. Every September the 1st through the end of the year, four months, they would open these inland waters, the estuaries, the sounds. That's where the majority of the shrimp are. They used to allow us in there for four months. We wouldn't even fish the rest of the year. But they cut that out probably – I don't know – thirty years ago. They'd open it a couple of days a week, stuff like that. But then they just eliminated that from us. That cut down a lot of our profits right there and they make us go out of the islands now, offshore.

DS: What is your daily routine now that you do not fish in the sounds?

AR: Well, it's basically the same. It's just you drag different waters. The shrimp are more thicker in there, but you just can't get to them. You have to wait until they migrate out or the weather brings them out to you or something.

DS: What does your daily workday look like? What time do you start? What do you usually start out with?

AR: Most time in the morning, daylight, I mean, a lot of times you just fish the tides low water for three or four hours. Like when it's three miles off, that's like what we'll have to do until they open the beach area. Basically, out there, you fish. You catch them better on these big tides, like an eight, nine-foot tide, full moon. The shrimp tend to move out more with those big running tides. Sometimes we just fish low waters out there.

DS: Is it just you or do you have a crew?

AR: No. I have a crew. My wife worked with me for thirty years. She's been out of it about seven, eight years now. But just me and her worked a boat for a long time.

DS: Really? Just the two of you?

AR: Yes. But I had one crew that pull 250-foot nets and just basically have – well, last year I had a couple of crews, but most time it's just one crewman.

DS: How long does it usually take you for a day of work?

AR: Oh, I'd say we make two or three drags a day sometimes in the fall of the year. It's a pretty long day. Just depends on if the shrimp are there. Now if we drag and they're not there, you just quit and wait until another day. But if they're there, you kind of drag on them.

DS: How long is your season?

AR: Well, it varies. Coming up here soon is what they call the roast shrimp. It's the big shrimp that has the babies. That's the (shrimper?). If they're big, then we get paid by the size of the shrimp. You get a lot more for the big ones than you do the little ones. The federal waters are closed this year. We had a real severe freeze last year, and they closed out to fifty miles, I believe. You can't shrimp it all in Georgia now. Carolina, I think's the same way. Florida, it didn't affect them, but – I got lost.

DS: And did I hear you have two boats?

AR: No. I just got one boat.

DS: Just one?

AR: Yes.

DS: When did you get that boat?

AR: Dad got it when I was a child, around five. It's a seventy-five-year-old wooden boat. It's probably the oldest commercial working shrimp boat on the East Coast.

DS: What is the name?

AR: *Bernice II*.

DS: *Bernice II*?

AR: Yes. I don't know who Bernice was, but that was the name and we never changed it. It was built right here next door to this building, right in between here and the city –

DS: Really?

AR: – market. Yes.

DS: They used to build ships right here?

AR: Yes. Well, right in this place, it was a Brunswick Marine. They had a real nice boat-building place. But right next to it was a private, old man that owned a little land. He had a railway and all, and he built three boats right there.

DS: So, did this area used to be all fishing?

AR: Yes. When I was a child, there were over a hundred boats that tied up in Brunswick. It had a car tag, shrimp fishing capital of the world.

DS: Really?

AR: Yes. Now, there's less than ten boats out of Brunswick. It's just dwindled down. Every year, you get less and less. The actual endangered thing in this business, instead of all the sea turtles and sharks or whatever, it's the commercial fishermen. There's very few of us left. There's nobody coming along to take our place. I can see the business just almost dying out another ten years in Brunswick, here. Anyway, it's the same way everywhere. It's not profitable anymore. I mean, if you were young and starting out, you wouldn't want – I wouldn't advise somebody to get into it, the way it's went. I always saw if I keep this boat and stay in the business longer than the rest of them, I get a bigger piece of the pie, but it doesn't work that way. I don't know. There's no more shrimp. There's less shrimp, less boats. But it's just been overfished and pollution and different things. Like I say, they took from us where we could drag to catch the majority of shrimp. They reopened those sounds and let us fish there. But you can't have all these boats from Texas and Alabama coming here, these hundred-foot boats. Mine is fifty-five, pulled 250. But these boats will pull 470-foot nets. Well, they'll catch them up.

DS: So, do you have any children?

AR: Yes. I got one son now. I got one son, but he lives in Missouri.

DS: Oh, really?

AR: Yes.

DS: Not interested in the fishing?

AR: He used to when he was a child but he moved away.

DS: Why do you think the younger generation does not take an interest?

AR: It's just no money in it no more. It's hard work sometimes. I mean, it's real hard. When you're out there catching a bunch of other things beside shrimp, jelly balls and fish and there's all kind stuff out there. Sometimes you get an abundance of that stuff. It's hard to dig through that and get the shrimp out. It takes a lot of sitting down there, culling, putting the shrimp in the basket and throwing some other stuff in the water. There's a lot of work involved in that.

DS: Do you feel like your community primarily does shrimping?

AR: No. Brunswick is – like I say, very few people left that even do it, very few.

DS: That is heartbreaking.

AR: It's a dying industry. It's a dying breed, no doubt. Like I say, from a hundred boats to ten. I mean, like every year it's less and less.

DS: That kind of brings me to another question. What are some positive and negative changes that you have seen in the fishing industry?

AR: It'd be hard to find the positives. We just hung on to the boat because that's all we've ever done. It's been a family tradition. Me and my brother, we'll keep the boat as long as we're alive, but it's just not a lot of money in it anymore. This time of the year before, you'd see painting and maintenance, restoring the boats every year for the season. Now, nobody does that anymore. They don't have the money to put back into the boats. The boats are really just going downhill instead of being really well maintained. They just kind of go downhill and you got to keep them up for them to be able to work.

DS: Are those wooden boats?

AR: Yes. Most of them are wooden. The older boats are wooden. The bigger new boats have gone to steel mostly or fiberglass.

DS: How big is your boat?

AR: It's fifty foot.

DS: I am sorry if I use the wrong term. Is it like a cabin?

AR: Yes, it's a cabin deck. You have a storage hole with ice down below in the deck where you store your shrimp while you go. I usually go out for three or four days at a time and bring enough ice to store them in these little bins under the deck at the fish house.

DS: For three or four days. But what is your longest trip you have ever gone on?

AR: Oh, about five. You can't keep the shrimp real long. They start spoiling, falling, falling. You have to take the heads off if you're going to stay a long time. Most of these big boats now, they have freezers. So, they just keep the heads on them and they freeze them under deck and put them in bags and freeze them. They can stay out a long time, whereas the ice boat has to come back in pretty quick.

DS: Do you stay around Georgia?

AR: Yes. I'm a homeboy, what you'd call. I don't travel much. When I was younger, I tried it, but this area right here, let's say from Cumberland up to St. Simon's, that's where I basically fish. That's where I've done it all my life. I know that area real well. If I went somewhere else, it'd be a little harder to learn the good area.

DS: Do you have a favorite spot?

AR: Oh, yes.

DS: Yes?

AR: Yes. My name is Andrew. There's a place down called St. Andrew's Channel, and that's where I'll always be. A lot of people joke they thought it was named for me [laughter].

DS: Why is it your favorite? Just because of the name?

AR: Well, my dad fished there when I was young and I just went there. It was a bigger breed of shrimp down there. It was up in this area around Brunswick. Down there, it was usually bigger. Like I say, you get paid more for the big ones.

DS: Is there a dock that you usually drop off your fish?

AR: Yes. I'm committed to this city market dock, like I say, with the ice and the fuel. They supply the place for us to tie up free if we sell our shrimp to them.

DS: How many years have you been working with them?

AR: How many years? I guess it's been twenty-five years or so. The man brought the business. There used to be an old Portuguese seller that owned this fish house named Paul Merera. He sold out to a local guy named Red Stanford. When he got it, we started doing business with him. It used to be about ten different fish houses all along here. A lot of them were Portuguese. That's kind of what started fishing in Brunswick, was the old Portuguese fisherman.

DS: So, there were a lot of Portuguese fishermen here?

AR: Yes, a lot of them. Even my mother, she married a Portuguese man because of these shrimps.

DS: Really? Did he speak Portuguese too?

AR: Oh, no, no. Just because he was a fisherman, he was considered a Portuguese.

DS: Really?

AR: Yes. That's all it really did it, when it started. I don't know when it was, but it was Portuguese really. They got a little three cent a pound for shrimp, my dad said, back when he was a young fellow.

DS: So, your technique to shrimp, you learned that all from your dad? Did he learn it from another generation or he just picked it up?

AR: No. My, my grandfather didn't shrimp. They were kind of in the boating business. They, they built these bridges and jetties and the causeway like the Jake and St. Simon's. My dad was running a tug boat that done all that. Dad used to have boats. He'd hit timber up all the river's inland and big old rafts of timber just floating trees tied together. They would bring them out to the sawmills out near the coast. He'd done a lot of that when he was young, sand and all. They'd have sand on barges and stuff. They'd go up in these fresh rivers like Omaha and there'd be big sand mounds. They'd put them on barges and sell sand out to people.

DS: So, your dad taught you how to shrimp?

AR: Oh, yes. I started going with him when I was young.

DS: Is that how most people learned, just from their parents?

AR: Pretty much. A lot of that was going on here. Sure. A lot of it was handed down generation to generation.

DS: He has a unique technique or does everybody do the same?

AR: It is all about the same, yes. You have a net that goes down the bottom. It opens up and spreads and tins in the bottom. It's like a vacuum cleaner just going around on the floor. Anything that's really there, you catch it unless it's big. Now we used to catch real big sharks or turtles and stuff, but now we have these turtles excluder. Anything with size to it, it kicks it out the net.

DS: Is that good?

AR: Well, I lose a lot of percentage of my shrimp. When the holes open, the shrimp are going out of it too with the other stuff. So, like I told you earlier, those devices that exclude turtles and fish – we lose a good percentage of the shrimp with that. I thought when the turtles recovered and got out of being endangered – and they've done that. Sea turtles are like the nest along the islands. They've increased a tremendous amount since they started all this program. I was hoping one day we would get to take these things out of our nets, where we could catch more again a better percentage of shrimp. But they never take those away, and we're going to have to pull those. I don't see it ever being discontinued.

DS: What used to happen when you get turtles or sharks in there?

AR: Oh, we'd throw them back. I mean, you'd try to – very few turtles. I've caught a few back years ago, but very few of them ever died. Sometimes you'd have to resuscitate them. You could turn them upside down and push on the belly, and they'd spit the water out like you'd see on TV, saving a person from drowning. We basically could do that to some of the sea turtles.

DS: Wow.

AR: They'd spit the water out and be fine then.

DS: Okay. What do you think is the most rewarding part of your career?

AR: Rewarding? Just being away from everything, getting out there. You're by yourself. It's a unique experience. You don't have the rat race of society. You're out there basically on your own. When you catch shrimp, it is really good. You feel good. It is kind of like playing a poker game. Like let's say you going out here to go strengthen. You don't know where to go. You want to go where they're at. They're not everywhere. They change daily from where they are a lot of times. You're up there going – if you turn the wheel to the left and go there, you're liable catch them. If you go the right, you're not going to catch anything. It's rewarding when you catch them, but when you don't, man, you are wasting your time. So, it's a challenge, a gamble. You enjoy the thrill of succeeding in it.

DS: You said your wife used to work on the boat?

AR: Yes.

DS: Did you get her into that?

AR: Yes. She worked for a king shrimp company down here at King and Prince, used to be like a secretary. She's seen that part of it. Back at that time, I was making real good money at it. She quit that job and got on the boat with me. We done good for a few – five or six years. But it just kind of like I say, the price went from \$7 to two. The fuel prices are just how gas has escalated. The fuel's gone way up. The equipment, the nets and the ropes and chain, everything's really more expensive than it used to be.

DS: Does that wooden boat take a lot of gas? Is it more than the others?

AR: No. They're basically the same.

DS: Same?

AR: Same motors in a steel or wooden boat. It's the same motors, just the hull is different.

DS: Sounds like you got a reliable vessel though.

AR: See, wooden boats, you got to take them out the water and clean and paint them every couple years because there's worms in the water. Like a termite, it'll get into that wood and chew it up and eat it and make a hole in your boat. If you didn't keep this worm retarded and paint on them.

DS: How long does that take, the maintenance?

AR: It takes about a week to haul your boat out and clean it and paint it and fix it up. We used to do it every year. Now we kind of stretch it out after two, because it costs a good bit to do it.

DS: I know you said that the next generation does not seem very interested because of the money. But is there a generation of fishermen that you have seen that are involved? Where do you see them going in the future?

AR: Like I say, everybody's just getting out of it. I mean, every year you see more and more people either die or just – it's not profitable. They'll sell to boats and get out of it. There's no one coming along to replace it. I mean, like when you – as a young fellow, you'd see people coming up and down the dock wanting to go, begging you to take them out fishing. Now you don't ever see anybody anymore. Nobody wants to work that hard for no money, basically what it is.

DS: How do you find your crew for your boat?

AR: That's been a struggle. That's been a real struggle since my wife retired. See, when I had her, I had it made. I could depend on her, but, but now there's – a lot of the people that work on the boat are – I hate to say it, but they're drug addicts or drunks, and you can't depend on that. That's basically the help that shows up to want to go. You don't really want to go out there with somebody like that. It's dangerous. It's one of the most dangerous business in the world, commercial fishing. You got to have a dependable person. You're risking your life to help you out there. You can't really want to take a bum out there.

DS: How is it dangerous? What makes it a very dangerous job?

AR: Well, there's a lot of stuff that can break and come hit you and hurt you. You can fall overboard. The sharks – I mean, the sharks follow the boats all the time. If you fell in the water, you'd probably get hit up by sharks. They eat our nets up last few years. The sharks have really gotten bad. You make a drag and you get holes this big, all through your net. You have a brand-new net when you start shrimping. In the summer when it water warms up, the sharks come back here. You'll go fishing for two or three days. Then you come in, have to sew the holes up in your net for two or three days before you can go back. The sharks have really gotten bad. Nobody is aware of that. I mean, nobody has ever bit been bit off of at Jekyll. The water's kind of muddy here. Down in Florida, it's clear water. I think they can see. Here, you're kind of hit with the muddiness of it. But I mean, anytime behind your boat you can see sometimes dozens of sharks just following you. Like any scrap fish you throw back in the water, if I catch stuff, the sharks eat that. See, seagulls and sharks, porpoises, dolphins, like they follow around with the sharks to eat any stuff you put push back in the water.

DS: Have you ever had any type of accidents or close calls while you are working or shark incidences [laughter]?

AR: No.

DS: No?

AR: No. I don't know. I had never really been hurt myself on my boat much, but I've had several people that fell overboard. My wife fell over one time. I didn't even know it happened and I was right – we'd been fishing. We'd just dumped her drag out. We'd be going behind the

island and take a little break, throw the anchor out and eat lunch. I went back there, and she wasn't on the boat. I mean, it's the worst feeling I ever had in my life. I mean, she was back there. She was tying up a tarp. When it's hot, the sun – you want to put your sun shade up to catch out or yourself too. She was tying up the tarp, standing on the back of the boat. The little rope, she was tying it. She was kind of pulling on it. It broke and the momentum – she fell in the water. Well, about ten minutes later, I realized she was gone. I mean, my Lord. I look back. I couldn't see her panicked. I mean, I turned around wide open, headed back to where I come from and thanked the Lord I seen her little head bob in there. I went up there and brought her to life and got her back on the boat. But that was scary. You wouldn't believe what goes through your mind when something like that happens.

DS: That is terrifying. I am sure she was pretty terrified too.

AR: No. That was a blessing when I saw her head bobbing up.

DS: Oh, okay. Here is a good question. What types of things could happen in the next five years that you think would help the fishing industry specifically in Georgia?

AR: Well, if they could let us drag back in these inland areas again, if they could ever see, see to it. Let us have more of our old fishing grounds back, that would help more than anything.

DS: Is that where your dad primarily works?

AR: Yes. Like I say, when I was a child with dad, we didn't work the summer months like we try now. You basically go out there when you can. But back then, we didn't even fish until September the 1st. School always opened, and I'd skip school that first week to go make me a big paycheck.

DS: Did a lot of kids do that?

AR: Well, some of them, that was in the business. Yes. I mean, that first week of the season was always the best. The first few drags were real good. If you miss out on that, boy, you had to try to make that.

DS: A lot of your school friends, they came from fishing families too?

AR: There were several back years ago but not anymore. There's very few left.

DS: Is there anything today that you wanted to tell us?

AR: Well, basically, we've been talking about how the fisherman needs help to survive. I mean, if they could get some of these areas to drag again and take – or if these turtle – like these turtle excluder. Since they've recovered and made them big, why can't we take those things out of our nets? We used to not never have a near hole. You sew up every hole. Now, I mean, you should see this. It's like a big old charcoal grill, the grate with the bars in it, and a big old opening. It comes down and hits, sat and kicks out the net. If we could ever get that out the way, where we

could seal our net up and catch more, that would help. I'd like to see – what do you call it? More to wage. If a local boat could fish in the local waters and keep all these outstate boats from moving in on us, that would be a help. If a boat is from Alabama, let them fish over in Alabama and Gulf, don't let them come over here. So, I don't migrate and go like that, I don't. I have a big old steel hole. I got an old wooden boat. I stay in my home area. But some of them, they just travel all over to where the shrimp are the thickest. They charge more for out-of-state licenses and stuff, but I would like to see it. A local boat fish, it's local waters. That'd be a big help.

DS: Do you see boats in this area that are local, that have been here for a while or are they all coming from other places?

AR: There's, there's about ten of us left here in Brunswick.

DS: And you guys all stay local too?

AR: Well, some of them travel a little bit, but most of them are – basically fish here.

DS: And are there any things that you think could change in the next five years, that are not related to regulations, maybe community involvement?

AR: I think the community would like to see all the boats gone. I mean, you go to islands, you see a shrimp boat out here. I think a lot of the people would not even like to see that. A lot of people don't like shrimpers. They kind of look down on you like you're a lower-class person, to tell you the truth. Because like I say, drug addicts and drunks and all, are in a lot of the boats and that makes the ones like us look bad. I mean, like I say, the help, it is just dwindled for no money that's having – sorry, help. That gives you a kind of a bad reputation.

DS: Do you always think that reputation has been around?

AR: Yes. I've kind of seen it. When we were younger, it wasn't so bad. But now that it's dwindled down, Darien, I mean, it's up the road they got a – it's a smaller town, more of a shrimping town. Brunswick's a little bigger. But they treat the people in Darien and shrimpers, I would say, a lot better than they do here in Brunswick.

DS: Do you think that is just because they are smaller?

AR: Yes. Most of that town is related to the fishing business more than Brunswick is. Brunswick has got these pup mills and all kind of stuff to flex, see out there. That attracts a lot of government people. Darien's basically just a small town with mostly just shrimp business really.

DS: For those people who are not in your coastal community, who maybe live in rural Georgia, what do you think is the most important thing that they know about your career, your profession, and your life in regards to shrimping?

AR: I don't really know how to answer that one.

DS: If you could tell them one thing about fishing that would make them understand shrimping and how it is important to you, what would you...

AR: I don't know what to say to that really. Basically, I about gave up on it ever getting recovered or get good again. I mean, like I say, I'm going to hang in there until I can, but it's, it's not a bright outlook on it.

DS: We are so glad that you came to talk to us today.

AR: Yes. I enjoyed.

DS: Is there anything else that you wanted to tell us or stories or anything you want to share with us today?

AR: We need help with these shark situations, the way they're – I don't know what the – how to help it, but that's, that's really hurting the business. There's so many sharks. I don't know the answer to, to eliminating them, but they, they just took over and the – and it was warm. In the summer, like in the fall or right here in early spring, they're not really there. When the summertime comes and the water heats up, you all just wouldn't believe it. I'd love for you to see something, how piranhas – you've seen in movies *Piranha*?

DS: Yes.

AR: It's like that with sharks. They're about six-foot-long all of them, called black tips basically. But I mean, last year, one time – I'm not lying. I look back there, I could see a hundred sharks behind my boat at one time.

DS: There is nothing you can do about it. They just follow you.

AR: Yes. There isn't no way to get rid of them. I mean, hell, these holes in your nets – I mean, all the shrimp and the stuff that comes in this net comes down to the back of the bottom and you pull that in and dump it. But they'll see that big old water shrimp fish there, and they'll swim down there and just bite the hole in it and eat them. Sometimes you'll take that net up, won't be the first shrimp in it, and the other side hadn't been a hole in it. It'd have a couple hundred pounds and that other side won't have near a shrimp. The money you lose in something like that – I mean, if it was \$4 a pound, that's \$1,000 you lost with that shark bite in that hole on your net, and you can't stand much of that. That really hurts your profit.

DS: How long does it take you for each drag?

AR: Well, we usually drag the nets a couple of three hours. It takes you about that long to get it all sorted out and ice down before you make another one.

DS: When you are dragging, do you just go along the coast or you do like a circular –

AR: Oh, there's certain areas that's better than others. Certain little holes of sand by sand bars. It depends on a lot on the wind. The wind kind of shifts the shrimp around. They usually go against the wind, shrimp do. Like you think the wind would blow them out, but basically, they go against the wind.

DS: Really?

AR: Yes. That has a lot to do with direction of the wind. It's the tides, the moon, the wind, all that, the water temperature. There's a lot of things involved that make the shrimp move around.

DS: Did you learn that on the job?

AR: Yes, basically. Yes. So, I learned all this before there was all this modern technology with lower ends and all these GPS things that show – like now, you can get a computer. I mean, one of you all could be a shrimp boat cabin just as easy as me. I mean, if you had this equipment like a computer screen telling – it draws you a line where to go. I mean, you turn the wheel, you fall in this line. I mean, anybody could get these machines and get these little places and they could – you could do it. I mean, anybody could do it really. I learned it from things on the hill. I'd have to line up like a bridge and a water tank or a tree, to show me this little slew, a little deep slew or where a hang is. I learned all of it the hard way back from my dad and all. But when all this modern technology came out, man, a lot of people got into it that had never even been on a boat.

DS: A hang? What is that referring to?

AR: That's an old sunk boat, like a ship or it could be an anchor, a big tree, something that's in the water, that's big, that a net can't pull up. It rips the nets. You drag on and catch a boat or some places there's big rocks.

DS: Is there a lot of that here?

AR: What's that?

DS: Is there a lot of that in the water here?

AR: Oh, there's several of them. A lot of them are sunk boats that's caught on fire or sank for some reason, and that you have to dodge sunk boats. That's one of the main things.

DS: And you do not use the GPS, I take it?

AR: Oh, yes. I got one now. I was one of the last fellows to ever get one. I was the last boat here in Brunswick that ever got a radar.

DS: Oh, really?

AR: It tells you the distance of – back when I was a child, instead of showing you the depth of the five meter, dad had a rope with, knots on it, lead on the bottom. You'd stand up there and throw that rope in to the bottom and count the knots to tell you how deep you are.

DS: Did it have a weight at the bottom?

AR: Yes. It had lead weight. That's how we used to determine the depth before all this modern technology come out.

DS: I am really curious. How did you space out the knots?

AR: Oh, every couple of – probably every three foot, you'd – I fathom, I think it was six foot, and you'd do it every three foot to tell you how deep.

DS: And you did that with every tide change?

AR: Well, just wherever we went dragging around. You could see your floats of the net. Net has floats on, divided, like football-looking things. That rises the top of the net up. You can see that when you're getting to shallow water. When you start seeing your floats back then, you know you was getting shallow. If you're in deeper water, you don't see them. It goes down to the bottom.

DS: Is it better to be in deeper or shallow water?

AR: It depends. Like in the summer, it's generally better in the shallow water. But when it gets cool, the shrimp move to the deeper water, then they, they kind of come out of the rivers and sounds and move out to the deeper water generally when it gets colder.

DS: Why is that?

AR: The temperature drops, water temperature. The rain can affect a lot fresh water. Like you get in a bunch of rain inshore in these rivers and the rain all washes down. When that fresh water meets the salt, the shrimp don't want to be in that fresh water. So, they'll move out with the salt water. Some of my best shrimping I ever done was late in the year when it had a real big rain one time for a solid week. There hadn't been no shrimp. I hadn't caught any. They extended the season, usually close the end of the year, but they extended. They can extend it to March the 1st, I think or the end of March. But, but one year they kept it open enough, had nobody even fishing two or three months. In the last week of the year it was going to close up. It rained a week earlier. Me and the wife went out and we were on the only boat out there. It was like *Forrest Gump*, that movie where he caught them. I mean, we pulled on that, man, solid shrimp. For about three or four days, we just loaded the boat [laughter] because of that rain. The rain, the cool water just flushed them right out there. Lots of times shrimp move in schools. There'll be big areas they'll gather up and move in schools.

DS: So, with that, do you see a lot of changes with like hurricane season?

AR: Yes. Hurricanes affected a lot. Last year we had these two bad hurricanes. We didn't catch anything after that. Like in the *Forrest Gump*, we – after the hurricane, they caught a lot. But sometimes it does. Sometimes I've caught good after hurricanes. But depending on the time of the year or how the wind is and the weather before and all and after this – I mean, after that one this last year, I had a whole fishing fleet tied up, Basically. They had – the few that made any money went down to Florida around St. Augustine and stuff and caught pretty good down there some of them. I think it knocked our shrimp out of here, and they went south. If you don't travel with them, you don't catch them. Some of them done pretty good that went down there.

DS: What do you do with your boat during hurricane season if there is a hurricane?

AR: Well, we tie it up to the docks. Sometimes some of them will bring them up in the river, inland and anchor them up. Your boat bangs into the dock and all. Like we about lost the whole dock over here. It come up so high. Like it come way over the dock, tore the dock off of the foundation.

DS: Oh.

AR: You tie it up with a lot of ropes. You put a lot of fenders, tires and big fenders in between the boats and the pilings to keep them from banging in. Some boats get lost in hurricanes at the docket, just beat some up. You see on TV, some of them will break loose in the dock and wash away inland, be up in five or six miles inshore.

DS: Is there anything special about your boat that you think it has lasted this long?

AR: It was built real strong by a good smart fellow that built it right out of good wood. A lot of my planks on the boat are that wide. Like newer boats, it's just two bars. I mean, years ago, there were big trees. You could select your wood from giant trees, had wide boards. But my boat is mostly made out of cypress. Cypress wood, that last. Modern boats are built more out of like pine tree, pine and that's not made for water. It doesn't last. The material the boat was made, width and the size of the boards, had a lot to do with my boat surviving.

DS: Do you by any chance remember your father purchasing a boat?

AR: Yes. He paid \$18,000 for the boat when I was about five years old. Everybody said that was crazy, to spend that much money on a boat, but dad recognized it was – he said it being built right here by a man. Before he went in the war, he started on it. When Pearl Harbor happened, dad went in the war for four years. When he come back, the boat was basically finished then. He'd worked on the boat with the man, knew the man real well. He went out shrimp fishing with the man. The man had the boat mainly to carry people offshore, charter fishing. He tied over here to St. Simon's Pier and load people on there, bring them out there with little fishing poles and charged them so much to do that. But dad knew it was a good boat, so he spent all that money. Like I say, it's lasted all my life. A lot of other boats – it's all wind, by the way.

DS: It took four years for them to build it.

AR: At least, yes. Probably so. This one man basically do it himself. Smart, good builder. But some people, they can build them but they don't know what to do and they don't last. You got to have a really smart carpenter on how to cut all them boards and fasten them together right.

DS: That is amazing, such a great investment too. It has been so long.

AR: Yes. It made a living from a family all my life. I mean, we never were really wealthy, but we always got by. But I really thought I was something – a friend of mine from school, my best friend, he worked with me when the first guy on the boat. Man, we'd sit there dragging with your pencil. "Man, I'm going to be a millionaire in five years." When you'd get in a quarter of shrimp, think about it. Boy, you could just see it, man. "If I work hard here, I'm going to be rich." Over time, the price dropped and less shrimp. Man, it just – from being profitable to nothing.

DS: Do you want to retire like your wife or just keep at it?

AR: No. My, my health is probably going to make me retire. I got diabetes now. I can't really do what I could when I was younger. I'm going to probably try to do it as long as I can if I'm able to.

DS: Why do you want to keep going?

AR: That's all I really know. It's what I love. I mean, yes, I've done other little things. I've painted some. I surveyed one year, but in the off season, basically when we weren't shrimping. But every shrimping season, you got to go out there and try. I mean, the big hope is I'm going to, I'm going to get them next year, a shrimper. I'm waiting on that big run the hope of the business recovering and being thick like it used to be. But the few people that's made it good in this business had their own private dock where they could get that big dollar a pound. But it is not adding, there's no private docks much in Brunswick.

DS: Oh, really?

AR: Yes. Just that one. There used to be two last few years, but night seafood over here. It is kind of closed down. It's another fellow built it, bought it and trying to redo it. But the city market is the only place you can buy ice.

DS: Have you ever seen like shrimpers who own docks?

AR: Yes, some of them have. Yes. In McIntosh, there's a few of them that did. But I had a friend that tied the food in Jekyll, who went – there's two marinas over there. He tied in the marina there and he lived on Jekyll. But he'd sell his shrimp to tourists and stuff for top dollar.

DS: Do you sell directly to people?

AR: No. I sell to the shrimp house. See, to tie up there. They furnished that, and we have to sell to them. If we were to sell to other people, they'd see that, and they would run us off

because they want to make that money instead of us. See, they got a market right up the street, a big market where they sell them. I mean, they up them up from – I can tell you the price is just unreal. They'll get \$10, and we get a dollar.

DS: How do you agree to a dock relationship? How do you agree, "I am going to sell to you"? Do they determine the price?

AR: Yes. They keep the price.

DS: They do?

AR: Yes. A lot of times you'll go out, it'd be – let's say it'd be \$4 a pound. You come in with a good catch and they done drop it to \$3. I mean, if you had 1,000 pounds, that's \$1,000 you'd lose with the price drop.

DS: Did you guys ever talk it over?

AR: Yes. We tried, but they just control it. The local fishermen don't have any control over the price. You have to take what the fish house gives you unless you have your own dock. That's one of the big problems. Like my friend in Jekyll, he'd go out and catch fifty pounds, and he'd make more money with that fifty pounds than I would with five hundred.

DS: What is your favorite thing about shrimping?

AR: I like to eat them.

DS: [laughter]

AR: I love seafood. I knew if I was a shrimper, I'd always be with – eat shrimp, fish, and crabs. That's the three things we really catch. We used to catch a lot of crabs. That's kind of played out. I'll tell you something. Catfish, everybody knows where a catfish is. Well, when I was a kid, you'd go out here, you'd catch millions of them in the net, little small ones, this long. You'd be picking the shrimp, the little things would stick in your fingers like needles and hurt your hands real bad. You can go out here now and you never see a catfish anymore, any size. Porgy fish – you know where porgy fish. They've made fertilizer out of them. They used to have a lot of these porgy plants. They would make fertilizer out of these little – it's a little silver fish. It doesn't get any bigger than that but big schools. We used to catch catfish and porgies all the time in our net. If I catch stuff, those two things completely don't exist anymore now. Why? Pollution, I guess. Why would all that not be – when I was a kid, you could throw a fishing line out in this river anywhere along here. You could have two hooks on it. I guarantee every time you put it down, you catch two catfish every time. They're not here anymore, none. How did that happen? I mean, I don't know the answer, nobody really does. But that's two things I've seen that don't exist. Crabs not as thick either. But the sharks somehow or another, it's not affected them. They have overpopulated. A lot of these people catch sharks on what they call long lines offshore, like a trotline in a creek and they go out. They said the sharks were getting

fished out, overfished and getting extinct. That was the biggest joke there ever was. I mean, the sharks are just way more than ever used to be. They survived. They learned how to survive.

DS: That catfish, what did you guys make with it? Did you just take it back, fry it out?

AR: No. There wasn't really edible.

DS: No?

AR: No. I mean, freshwater catfish is good, but saltwater catfish, you don't – nobody eats them. I mean, they just – taste wouldn't be any good.

DS: Well, what do you do with your shrimp? Do you cook up your shrimp?

AR: Oh, all kinds of ways. What's that Black guy on *Forrest Gump*? He taught you all the ways to cook shrimp.

DS: [laughter]

AR: Yes. I've probably tried most of them. I mean, I like them all kinds of ways.

DS: You got a favorite?

AR: All fried, no doubt. I like everything fried. Everything's better fried. I mean, what do you all think? Like a potato [laughter], I mean, fried is better.

DS: How much of your catch do you usually keep?

AR: Oh, very little. I might bring home two or three pounds to eat. Like at the end of the year, I'll put some in the freezer to eat on for two or three months until it would go again.

DS: That is fantastic. Thank you so much for your time.

AR: Yes. No problem. I enjoyed.

DS: Like I said, if there is anything else you want to tell us or if you think about something later and you want to come tell us, we are always open. We really appreciate the time and learning so much about your career.

AR: I wish the DNR, the Department of Natural Resources, they're the ones that make up all these regulations. They have some boats that go out and drag some, but it's like they're not in it to help us. It's almost like they're our enemy. If you see them, that's usually the – get aboard. If you don't have the proper amount of life jackets for all these equipment, you have to have tons of stuff to pass inspection. Like I say, with a lot of abundance of money, sometimes you don't replace those things and you get fined. It's like right now, for instance, a federal permit you have to purchase. It allows you to drag from three miles out. I bought my new federal permit

recently. They randomly select some – it's called an observer, has to go out on the boat. They weigh everything that you catch in one of your nets, any kind of fish, crabs, shells, sand dollar. I mean, they'll have little small baskets. They weigh each one of them up. But you have to take them out for six different times. It messes up your normal procedure. You got to do all that and it's kind of a pain in the neck. You hate to really get selected. I've been selected several times. It's supposed to be random but there's so few boats that's got licenses now. If there was two hundred in it, my chance would be slim. But when it's only twenty, I'm going to get selected a lot. I don't like messing with that, to tell you the truth.

DS: Was there a time period when you noticed DNR really kicking up?

AR: Back when this turtle excluder thing come out, that's – that was – and taking the sounds from us. That was the two main things that I've hated they done.

DS: Have you had to make a lot of adjustments in shrimping?

AR: Oh, yes, yes. Really, all those – all that stuff costs a lot of money you put in your net. It has to be on a certain angle. That, that bar that kicks it out. Let's say if it shifts in your net to a couple of degrees off, DNR, they'll come measure that angle. If it's not right, they'll fine you a ton of money for it. Not having the right angle on that bar if the flap opening is not wide enough or you got to have a float on that, a floating device. If that somehow comes off, sometimes the rope will break and you take up – and don't have to float. The DNR come along and happen to tell you, "Let's check your rigs and something isn't right, boy. Bring it to the dock," and fine you. I've been lucky I haven't had much of that trouble. I've always tried to keep everything right as I can.

DS: How do you know when there is a new regulation? Do they tell you?

AR: Oh, yes. They'll come up with them. They'll send it to you or post it on the doc or something.

DS: Posting on the dock?

AR: Yes.

DS: That is how you find out things? Do you find out other things with postings on the doc or regulations?

AR: Well, they have the events, the blessing the fleet or something. They have that up there.

DS: If regulation was not an issue and DNR was not involved, what would you do with your vessel right now? How would you treat shrimping from your perspective?

AR: Well, you could take all those devices out of your nets and eliminate the loss. You could eliminate that. If you could drag in the areas to where the shrimp are thick – like right now, you could – right out in this river here, they have shrimpers. They're allowed to drag a twenty-foot

net and catch a certain amount, but they're out here dragging now. A lot of them, they'll keep a bunch of shrimp. If they can get by the – or the DNR not catching them, they can go sell them and make a lot of money. A lot of that goes on the bait shrimpers catching the shrimp and there's cast netters that do it, that catch an amount and sell.

DS: Do you do that cast netting?

AR: No. I've never really tried that much. I used to do it when I'd go pole fishing. They catch a trout, he'd throw you a little cast net or something and back – years ago.

DS: Do you still pull fish?

AR: Oh, a little bit, not, not near as much. My brother likes to a lot still. But I've kind of got burned out on it.

DS: Is that just for fun?

AR: Yes, it's just for fun.

DS: I have covered all my questions of the day. I would love to go look at your boat.

AR: Yes. We can ride over here and take a picture of her or something. Yes. One of this ladies said, "I'd like to take a picture of me standing on the boat or the dock and the boat behind it," kind of.

DS: I mean, if you are willing to even give us a tour or two.

AR: Sure.

DS: We would be happy to look at it.

AR: We kind of got it in repair right now. We tore some of the rotten boards off the stern deck. But it's not real clean or straightened up at this time like when we were fishing during the years, real clean and nice. But see, this is sort of the repair time of the year, so it's not really – I'm not proud of the way it looks now.

DS: Oh, we see.

AR: But when it's fixed up, it's really nice.

DS: When does your season start? Is it soon?

AR: Well, June the 1st, they usually open the beach area where the waters are closed on off now. But generally, when the federal waters are open, you can go three mile – there's a three-mile line off the beach. You can go out there and catch. But that's closed now, so that's eliminating some of our money here for this year. Like you generally start fishing about April,

but they're not going to be open, so we're not even going to get to try. If you went out there now, you're not allowed to even have a shrimp net on the boat or they'd fine you. They let your drag net. It'd be four-inch square, but the shrimp would get out of that four-inch – see.

DS: This makes it a silly question, but how do they know if you are violating those rules?

AR: They'll come out there and board you and make you take your nets up, and they'll measure it.

DS: They patrol the waters?

AR: Yes. Lord, that's why I say they're like the enemy. You see that DNR coming. "Oh, Lord. Here they come again." What really hurts you the most, sometimes you'll be catching a lot of shrimp, let's say. Generally, you catch your shrimp at low tide or high tide. It's kind of when the water slacks up, you do better. We'd be there catching goods and not breaking any law or nothing. They just decide it's time to go check this fellow's rig. So, they make you take your nuts off, and two or three hours you're on the boat with them. They're measuring this and that and checking everything and you're missing that good prime dragging time. You put them back when the tides change. After they're gone, there are no shrimp. Then you done lost that whole day, but it's their fault. They could do this at the dock or on the way out here. A lot of them will wait until that prime time when you're out there.

DS: They just do not know?

AR: Oh, they probably do. They don't care. They got a job to do, the board. I imagine they have to make so many inspections over a month or something. Like I say, it used to be a lot of boats that could get spread out. But now it's just a few, so they don't have much choice. "Well, I got to go board this fellow again."

DS: Oh.

AR: So, we've developed a kind of not a very good relationship with the DNR because of –

DS: Do you think it could change?

AR: No. It gets worse.

DS: [laughter]

AR: There's more regulations every year. It is not change. It's getting harder and worse. You have to buy more stuff to go every year. Like the license this year has going up in price for the state license, so we have to buy. They send us something here a while back. It's going to be about \$300 more a month – I mean, a year now than it was.

DS: I have heard a little bit about councils that fishermen can sit on. Have you ever had any involvement or did your father have any involvement with it?

AR: We wasn't never on a – we'd go to some meetings. Georgia had a shrimp fisher association. We used to go to meetings and stuff about all this stuff. Since so many people got out of it, it's kind of non-existent anymore. They don't really have much of that anymore. I wish I could tell you something good about it, but –

DS: You can tell me just what you love about it and that would be...

AR: Well, I kind of have – I love to eat them. I love the get away from the world, the rat race of the world. It's neat to be out there and just you in the water. I mean, look up and see the sunrise and there's no noise. It's good-smelling air, no pollution. [laughter] I just love the freedom of it. Like I say, it's like a vacation in a way. I mean, it's an escape to mother nature. I mean, it's just you and the ocean. You all ought to just do it one time. I tell you what's so neat about the person – people that's never been. The vast variety of sea life that you put on the deck, the different species of fish, starfish, sand dollar shells. I mean, I've caught conch shells this big. I mean, there's things you pull up. You never know what you're going to catch.

DS: What is the best thing you have ever caught other than the conch shells?

AR: Best thing? I don't really know. It's just such a variety to see. I mean, like I say, before we had those exclusive nets, one time me and my dad caught a shark. It was fifteen-foot long, a hammerhead shark. It stretched off from one side of the boat to the other. It was that big.

DS: How did you guys get it off your dock?

AR: Well, we got winches and put a rope on it. It picks up a lot of weight. Winches are strong. We put a couple of ropes. We got his head to turn, put a rope on it, round wraps and it picks it up. But it's a big variety of stuff to dump out the sea. You throw everything back that's alive, that you don't keep if you can. You let it live.

DS: Is that important?

AR: Yes, I mean, to me. Like I don't want to kill nothing. I hate anything – part of the life to live, I mean. But you feed a lot of animals. There's seagull. There'd be thousands of those that follow you around. They'll [laughter] do it on your head a lot of times. I mean, you'd be back there, you would say, "Can't they just miss me?" I mean better wear a hat.

DS: [laughter]

AR: I mean, they drop it on you. But they're eating all that food. They got to get rid of it. I mean, make space and buddy, they...

DS: [laughter]

AR: I mean, you have to wash your deck off. Like the roof of your boat, let's say that – you go out for four or five days, that roof gets covered. You got to get the hose and scrub, brush out,

and do the cleaning. It's not real clean. A lot of the stuff gets smelling too. It'll be hot in the sun. It is a stinky kind of business at times. A lot of people can't stand the smell of it. It's a different life, but it's something you all ought to see. You all at least go out on this Bulldog. They go out and make little drags in the sound here. A small net that just shows you a small idea of what goes on. I mean, we drag a lot bigger nets, catch a lot more than they to show you. But they have several little crews they'll take. Usually, it's University of Georgia, but I'm sure they do you all too.

DS: Yes.

AR: You all go out and do that. That'd give you a good idea how it's really done. *The Bulldog*, it's like a commercial shrimping boat.

DS: So, it is similar to the one you own?

AR: It's similar, yes. It's a little bit bigger than mine, probably ten foot longer. But, yes, you, you enjoy seeing that stuff. I'd like for you all to see those sharks behind the boat. If somebody like you all could put out to the world about these shark situation – I mean, they don't need to limit the shark-catching. They need to catch more of them or they need to send them out for us somehow. That'd be a big help. You understand? Like you lose your whole catch by a shark hole. You go out and you have your fuel. You lose all your money you had in fuel. You lose money going to work. It's like a poker game, like I say. If you go to the right places and all and have luck with no sharks, yes, you can do good. But if you have bad luck, go to the wrong place, and you catch a hang and destroy your net, that costs \$2,000. Sometimes, you catch that thing. You can go to take your net up and it keeps it. I mean some of these fellows lost as much as \$20,000 in one drag, lose all their equipment. That's a lot of money, cables and chain and the trawl doors that spread the net. Big old wooden doors with iron on the bottom, it brings it down. They open up and spreads the net, and it just sucks up the the bottom like a vacuum really but you lose all that stuff.

DS: Do you notice the sharks are heavier in certain areas?

AR: Well, they are everywhere.

DS: Everywhere?

AR: In the summer. Yes. They sure are.

DS: How does your wife feel about fishing now that she has retired?

AR: Oh, she'd love to go again, but her health – she's old, I mean, like I am. She's not as strong. We didn't get along the last few years either out there. It's kind of like you're around each other every day. There's no escape.

DS: [laughter]

AR: We've had arguments when she'd be on one end of the boat, I'd be on the other. [laughter]
That gets kind of old.

DS: Thank you very much.

AR: Yes. I enjoyed it.

DS: Thank you. If you do not mind, we are going to go take a look at your boat.

AR: Sure. I'd love to, no problem.

DS: Thank you so much. Also, are you comfortable with us taking photos of you today, not just of your boat but just maybe just you by yourself?

AR: Oh, yes, you can. The camera might break. I'm not very attractive. I haven't got any teeth, old man.

DS: [laughter]

AR: [laughter]

[end of transcript]