

Jennifer Sweeney Tookes: So, my name is Jennifer Sweeney Tookes. I am from Georgia Southern University. I am here with Danielle Richardson and Mr. Leonard Crosby. We are doing an oral history interview as part of the project Fishing Traditions & Fishing Futures, Oral Histories of Commercial Fishing in Georgia. I have already received informed consent and permission from Mr. Crosby. But if you could just say out loud that I gave you all those forms.

Leonard Crosby: Yes. You gave me all the forms.

JST: [laughter]

LC: I signed them.

JST: Thank you. I have some questions to guide us, like I said. But I really want to encourage you to tell the stories that you think we need to hear. So, we would like to start way back at the beginning and ask you to tell us where and when you grew up, and what life was like in your family and your community when you were growing up.

LC: Well, I grew up on Salt Creek Road, which is on the edge of Savannah. It's on Salt Creek, and we stayed in the river all the time. We were catfishing and mullet jumping and all that, which a lot of people don't know what mullet jumping is. But you put a (fly bow?) back then, it was a (fly bow?), and you put it in the boat. You ride by the marsh, and you hit the marsh. The mullet will jump in the boat. If you didn't watch it, it would hit you in the head. But I was married for fifty-seven years. One of my first dates with my wife was me and my daddy carried a mullet jumping. [laughter] Back then I didn't have a motor. So, we went out with the tide and came back in with the tide with oars. That was fifty-seven years ago, I know. But I was raised right there. I was baptized at Selkirk Baptist Church. That's the name of it, Selkirk. I was raised on Selkirk when it was dirt. You could pick up Confederate bullets and stuff like that because it was right on the bank where they come across that marsh. That Salt Creek, it was one of the battle fronts because of the high bluff there. You dropped down about probably 50-foot off where the houses were down the hill to the creek. A lot of people don't realize that, but there's a bluff there. I lived there until I was twenty-one, and I got married to Margaret. I moved to Bryan County, and I've been living there ever since. I worked at the railroad. You want to know where I worked? I worked at the railroad. When I got out of high school in 1958, I had some – all my kin worked at the railroad. So, I got on as a clerk at the Seaboard Railroad back then. My daddy, he worked at the Coastline Railroad. He was a crew clerk over there that called the crews. When I went to work, I had to be a vacation relief because there wasn't a regular job. So, I went to Charleston, I don't know how many times, the Cooper Yard, I went to America's, and two or three places around Savannah. All what they had were people who went on vacation. But after a couple of years, I moved up to a regular job. But before then, I was a seal clerk. As a seal clerk, you have to walk down a train and write down every seal, whether the car was loaded or empty. Then you had to come back to the other side and do the same thing, which now they got computers. But anyway, I moved up to a bill desk clerk, which we had computers. But they were the size of a desk like you work on. We had cards and card holders, and you had to make concessions of trains going out. Then I moved up to the job like my daddy had. I was a crew clerk, a crew dispatcher. You had to know the contract of the engineer and the fireman. Back then you had five men on the train. You had an engineer, you had a fireman, you had a

brakeman, you had a flagman, and you had a conductor in the caboose. But now all you got is an engineer and a conductor and a red light on the back of the train if you look when you go by. Anyway, I changed jobs I think three or four or five times. I don't know, I just – in my off time, I was catfishing, and I was shad fishing because my first cousin, Fulton Love – his daddy and my aunt, my Uncle Obie and Aunt Thelma, own Love's Fish Camp on the water down there on Ogeechee. So, we grew up together. He was a year older than me, but we grew up together. We'd catfish and then shad fish on the Savannah River and Ogeechee. That's back then when Russo would back down, and they were as high as – that was before I-95. They were as high as twenty-five fishermen. They didn't have motors, and unless you were fortunate enough, most of them used oars. Some of them used double oars. They'd be two men rowing at a time because they'd go way up the river and drift back. Back then you'd set nets. But they'd come out with the monofilament and the shad fishing sort of died. Kept dwindling down. Then they built I-95, and they dredged all that water up there and made holes and all, where we used to set nets. I think it kind of ruined the fishing as far as drifting. Then when I quit shad fishing and catfishing, we bought a boat. I bought a little – small boat, and I started shrimping. When you start shrimping, if you're a commercial fisherman, it gets in your blood, and you can't get it out. I messed around with a speedboat for about a year. Then Roy Sikes in Richmond Hill, he had a little boat called (*Agilian?*). It was a 4-cylinder, and he fell in love with a small boat. I was still working, but then he found me a boat here in Georgia called the *Mickey Mouse*, and all the fisher on it. I went down there and looked at it, and I wanted it. So, I bought it. It was cheap back then, but I think I paid about \$6,000 for it. What I'd do, I'd go to work. When I'd get off of work, back then you could bid on a job on your seniority side, and get the night shift where I could shrimp in the daytime. So, I anchored at Kilkenny down at the fish camp. I had a boat I'd run out there or they'd run me out there to the boat anchored, and I'd go shrimping. A lot of times I caught more shrimp with two 30-foot nets because it was a shallow draft. It didn't draw but 4-foot of water. I'd catch more shrimp with that little *Mickey Mouse* than some of the bigger boats would. Back then they were up with 6-71s and very few V8s, which is 240 horsepower on a V8. But like that little 4-71, it didn't have hardly any horsepower, but I caught more shrimp than the bigger boats. So, after thirteen years, I decided to quit the railroad. Then I ran the *Mickey Mouse* for one year, and they started building the fiberglass boats in Savannah, Thunderbolt. Danny Lee, Daniel Lee, he ran a junkyard over there by Bay Street under the viaduct. He would build two or three boats. The first boat he used a school bus, turned upside down as a mold to build a fiberglass boat. That was on down there at Thunderbolt. Anyway, I wanted – while I had the *Mickey Mouse*, I got pictures of old railways down at Thunderbolt. There were three railways, and now there are condos on there. All the railways and the fish dock are gone. There's nothing but condos there. But I got pictures of when I went on the rail there. The reason why I left – I was docking at Roy Sikes', but back then they were – my daddy and all, he was in the pulpwood business. They had that short pulpwood which was about 6-foot, and they were loading it on barges at Rabbit Hill. What they would do is load it up, and then it would take barges to Georgetown, South Carolina on the inland coastal waterway. Well, when they loaded it up and all, that short wood drifted down the river with the tide and all. You couldn't hardly see it. Luckily, they never hit it, but it took five hours to run from Ossabaw Sound to Rabbit Hill where the dock was. Anyway, after a while, I decided to move to Sunbury. I moved around there in, I think, [19]72, and the sounds were open. The sounds were open back then. Then maybe the little boat, the big boats, they'd go by me. I'd be in the sound going around and around in a hole, different holes. A lot of times I caught more shrimp than the bigger boats and even out on the beach. Because the shrimp got in

the shallow. That picture you see of those boats was mostly deep draft boats. They draw 6- to 7-foot. So, they couldn't get up on top of the boats up the beach. But back then there were two or three speedboats around dragging. Back then there were fifteen hundred licenses, commercial licenses, and about half of them were speedboats. The sounds were open, and they got so congested in there that even though I had a small boat, I felt like the sounds needed to be protected where we'd have something to go out. The commercial fishermen pretty well got DNR. We had them closed with the promise if it ever got open – if it ever had a chance, we'd open it back up. But they have never opened back up since. That was in the [19]70s. I sold the *Mickey Mouse*. While they were building my boat in Thunderbolt, I went to work on one of the boats that they had built out there. Back then we didn't have any turtle shooters or anything. You had jelly molds, and you had (pogies?) everywhere. I remember when I was on the back deck, we went in Fernandina and tied up during the – must have been January. We were doing nothing then. We decided to come back up here, and we'd come down the coastal waterway down. Then we went out by the sea buoy, and we made a couple of tries and we've seen shrimp. So, we put out and everybody was done with shrimp and see you around here. We put the nets out, and we called them. I told the captain, which was a friend of mine, I said, "Let's call the dock." I tell you, he said, "Oh, let's catch it." But we ended up working for two weeks on the shrimp. When all the boats from the docks, all went out, all of them, I believe that was the biggest check I made. Well, I didn't strike for the year while they were building my boat. But that was one of the biggest checks I had. We had so many (pogies?) on the deck, it almost stopped the rigs. You'd have to take and dump them, and we'd have a big pile on the back deck. You'd get one little corner of the boat cleaned out, and they needed time to dump again. We'd have to carry them to the dock and get the headers that used to head the shrimp. We had to get them to help us pick the shrimp up out of those fish. That's how bad it was. But we worked a couple of weeks on them, and everybody got a good check. Well, they built my boat and sent me three. I was still at Sunbury. I caught good shrimp because I was the first one to leave and the last one to come back. Then a lot of times we'd stay. But there were a lot of shrimp back then, and I got pictures to prove it. We caught shrimp and the price of fuel was low, but the price of shrimp was low. I remember when I'm talking about the ones we caught, I think, we'd get 90-cent a pound or something like that. But the fuel wasn't very high either. It was about 70-, 80-cent a gallon. But in 19 – I bought that boat in [19]73. The name's *Denise*, I named it after my daughter. In [19]73, that's when the price of fuel started going up. Back then you could just drag around with the hot shrimp, but now with the price of fuel, you can't hunt them. It's ridiculous. Anyway, I worked there at Sunbury for – I worked there until 1979. But in the meantime, I got with Dave Harrington with the University of Georgia. He was talking about coming up with a superport on the Georgia coast. When you go swapping out from – when you went from Sunbury and got out to Dragon you got – if you go north you run into the fishermen from Darien and McIntosh. If you go north, you run into fishermen from Savannah, and if you go south, you go run into fishermen – some fishermen from Darien come down, but most of them from McIntosh. There'd be boats everywhere. There was shrimp everywhere. They'd come up with the idea of the super port. I said, "Well," I said, "We don't need a super port." I said, "These fishermen fish around here, up and down – they don't go that far from Savannah, up and down the coast here." I said, "It takes seven or eight hours to run from Brunswick to a super port." I said, "Why don't we build a co-op right here in Richmond Hill?" The University of Georgia helped us come up with the paperwork and all. We applied for grants, and in 1979, each member put up \$20,000, \$19,000. We had to show our income taxes that we were making

money in the past four or five years. We had twenty-five boats, and we met for two years before we built it. We'd have meetings down at the Holiday Inn. One of the members was – Danny owned it, and it didn't cost anything for the meetings, but we met and met. But the Industrial Authority had a lot to do with it, and the industries around here helped, too. They put up money, and in 1979, we started construction. We borrowed the money from Columbia Bank for cooperatives in Columbia, South Carolina. First, we opened in 1980. I was a shrimper. I wasn't a manager or anything else. I was a shrimper, even though I went to Commercial High, which I took bookkeeping and all like that, and graduated and I knew figures and all like that. But anyway, the people that were older than me back then – well, let's see. I was still in my twenties, I think. Anyway, we built the co-op, and we opened doors in [19]80 after roe shrimp season, which roe shrimp in the past has been your money-making years. Because of the full moon and the way we'd done it, made enough money to catch our bills up, do any repairs we needed to do on it, and then take a vacation and go on to the blessing of the fleets. One of the main ones was in Fernandina, where they had shrimp boat races. All the boats from around would go down there, and we'd race shrimp boats. One of the boys had a fiberglass boat that was built out there called a [inaudible], a Thunderbolt. He outran everything in Fernandina, all of them big wood boats and all. They gave him the title of the world's – and a trophy, World's Fastest Shrimp. Anyway, we'd go down there. We'd done that for several years. We'd go down there before things changed and all. We'd go down to Standard Hardware, which is not there anymore. They'd let us go in there and dance and play music and all down there. We'd party for about a week. Then we'd go back to shrimping, and then we'd shrimp. We'd go to the blessing of the fleets. We'd go to Savannah. While we were down at Savannah one time, we had it all decorated up. This old guy, a captain, had a boat out there. He had – everything was blue and all the t-shirts, the crew had t-shirts and all the parties had t-shirts. He wanted to win, which you do want to win when you go. But anyway, down there – anyway when they gave out the trophies, they gave us first place, and he took his second or third place trophy and threw it off that bluff down there. He was mad. Then we'd go to Darien for their blessing. Then Brunswick had a blessing. I went down there to Brunswick. But Fernandina was the one that we really used to have good times. But now we don't go to any. Because you can't afford to with fuel so high, you just can't afford to go. This is a picture of me at the co-op.

JST: What year was this you think?

LC: That had to be in the early [19]80s after we opened. I was telling you on the recording about the co-op. Well, they had managers. They had to hire the managers, two secretaries, guards, twenty-four hours on duty and all, which I approved. Because I was on the board of directors the whole time. We had a president of it or whatever. But anyway, that had to be in the early [19]80s. Anyway, it was about to foreclose on us once we opened up. Well, we just weren't making any money, and the boats weren't bringing shrimp to the dock. We had to get Gerald Edenfield, our attorney. We had to get a law changed when we formed a co-op to make aquatic products part of farming. They had to change the law because there wasn't an aquatic co-op. So, they made shrimp an aquatic product. [inaudible] It got so bad and all, but we had to go to try to save it from foreclosure. I ran the co-op for six years and got it paid off. I got off my boat and put somebody on it that worked with me and all, but they weren't captains. I run it for six years, which under the cooperative laws, a fisherman, a member of the fishermen can't run it. But if I had to run it, I believe they'd allow it. Anyway, I ran it for six years, and we got it paid

off and everything. But we had so many lawsuits, just like that big black steel boat, that there. They didn't want to unload the shrimp. They wanted to – they'd come in and get fuel and supplies and all in that one big boat. He had about twenty thousand invested. When he left, he owed the dock about twenty thousand and didn't come back. He would piss on the Gulf and everywhere else. But a lot of our members, we had a packing charge. We had a good price and all. But we had to charge for ice. We had to charge for fuel, and we made the co-op money, which we had a storeroom. We had guards twenty-four hours on duty. We had a railway, a marine railway to pull the boats out. We had everything. I believed in it so much because I wanted my son and all, I wanted to keep carrying it on. But back then a lot of them had got into drugs. A lot of them had hauled the Cuban Mariel boatlift in and all. A lot of them, I had to go to jail and some of our members did. I've been accused of hauling dope when [inaudible]. I don't want dope around. I have never smoked a cigarette. I don't smoke. I think that's why I'm so healthy. I'm seventy-eight, so I'm pretty healthy for seventy-eight, I think. But we had a lot of different things. The shrimp production and the fact that the boats – they started selling the boats and all. In the end, we started off with twenty-five members, and we ended up with twelve members. We sold it – must be fifteen years ago, I imagine.

JST: So, that ran for about twenty years? The co-op ran successfully for about twenty years?

LC: Yes. We all got together, and finally most of the fishermen around, they were fishermen from Chatham, Bryan, and Liberty County, just like I said. They never did build a super port down in Brunswick. After we sold it, we tried to get them to let us stay down there, but they didn't. But getting back to the governor, we had – the fishermen had clout back then. Anytime you'd get the governor to come down to you, you had clout. But after they hauled them towns, President Carter got them to haul the Cubans. I mean he okayed the Cuban boatlift. Some of our fishermen right around here went down there and went down on boats and all.

JST: Can you talk more about that?

LC: Well, some of them had the bigger boats. Times were kind of hard back in the – I don't even know what year it was. But times were hard back then and a lot of them had bigger boats. They all went down there and got tied up in that Mariel Bay, I think was the name of it. They wouldn't let them come back unless they loaded them down with the Cubans. You haven't seen pictures of that? Where they brought the boats down to Miami and Key West and they were all loaded up down with...

JST: I want to hear what you remember about it.

LC: Well, I remember a bunch of my friends went. They'd bring them food and drink and whatever they wanted down there while they were anchored in there. They stayed down there for a long time. I never did do it. Over the years, the ones that hauled the dope, some of them made money. But just about every one of them has either passed or the police got them. There are a few of them still around. They did good. But I have to say I have got no money, but I got my health. I enjoy what I do, and I'll go fishing when I'm going to go fishing. I sleep good at night, and all that. But that dope was a bad thing, and a lot of my friends got involved in it. My wife, if it hadn't been for my wife, I might have said – I was offered the opportunity. But I said

no. Back then when we got one of those disaster loans, we went down to the Pembroke Bank. Three of us borrowed \$10,000 and opened up a sportsman's lounge. You had to be a member. We'd have stakes and all for them. You had to pay to be a member. Then anyway, my wife got tired of that. I lasted about a year in that because I got out of it. But anyway, they ended up going to jail because they got tied up with drugs. While I was in the co-op as a member of the board, a lot of the time I was president, we were having troubles with those turtle shooters. I went with Dave Herron and all over the United States, meeting with environmentalists and trying to work out a deal where we wouldn't have to pull them twelve months out of the year because we had our own forms of turtle shooters and all. But we agreed we'd pull them six months out of the year, which that's all we needed to pull them. Because when that temperature drops to around fifty, those turtles, they're out of here. We got spring tides, and you couldn't get across the head. When you got – like you got a moon today, you could have as high as a 9-foot tide. When you get a 9-foot tide, all that logs and chairs and lawn chairs, all kinds of stuff move out. When you pull in a shooter, if you get a lawn chair, it'll stop up your shooter and you don't catch any shrimp. But we pulled shooters of different types. But anyway, they changed it. We had to pull them twelve months out of the year, and they never went back on it. They never went back on opening the sounds which I feel like they should be flushed every now and then. One reason why we don't have a bunch of shrimps, I believe my theory was – and I told Lindsey Parker, that I believe Hugo had something to do with it. Because back then we had plenty of shrimp and all, but after Hugo went up there and destroyed all those hog farms and all pig farms and everything. All the hogs were floating down the rivers, all that waste and agriculture stuff. The whole of North Carolina flooded, all that coming down in the rivers. I think that had something to do with it. Another thing is not being able to stir up that bottom out there. I know it would help because I showed you an example when we built the co-op, a speedboat just could get through the north end of our creek. It comes in from Bear River, Kilkenny and comes by the dock, and then goes out and comes back out the other end right at Ossabaw Sound. Well, that's about like St. Catherine's and Ossabaw. Well, after we opened the co-op and all, that flushing that creek out, you can run a 6-foot boat up there where you couldn't run a bat over for the mud and stuff. I think the sound's the same way. They need to flush it out. I don't know if the hurricanes had anything to do with the shrimp in here, but I believe that black gill – except for the black gill, I believe that comes from it. That's my theory from Hugo.

JST: Look at the fisheries in general and think about your lifetime in fishing in Georgia, what do you think have been some of the biggest changes for good or for bad?

LC: The price of shrimp and the price of the fuel, fuel sky high, shrimp's down. How any shrimper can go and unload unless they got a good season. They keep the prices depressed, so low, that I don't see how they pay for the fuel, not unless they catch a lot of fuel the honest way – a lot of shrimp the honest way. I can't even pay for the fuel and my son. He's fifty-six now, and he eats fried chicken no more. But he goes and runs a boat. I got a shop out there that I built. It was just a 10x20. I got a stainless-steel table. I've been approved by the Department of Agriculture. I got my scales and got my own ice maker. I make my own ice, big ice. In fact, when we sold the co-op, I bought – that's how old it is, I bought the two ice machines that we used for packing. I've been using that same machine since 1970. That's how old it is. But anyway, we make our own ice. The cost of nets and the cost of net repair, sharks, and turtle shooters are releasing all the sharks out there. They just – sharks, you can't drag for sharks. If

you drag, they'll go out there, and they'll eat you up in a hole in the net. With holes in them, if you don't know how to sew, all they do is grab them. We can't pull it in and just grab it and tie it in a knot and keep on dragging. But it's lucky that we know how to win nets, and we know how to repair nets. Before it got so high, we used to dip nets. But a barrel of dip right now, a 55-gallon barrel of dip, probably cost close to \$900 or more. You have to dip a net at least once a year to keep it in good shape. But we drag – we keep nets because we can repair them for years. So, we can work on them. I have to pay to get them dipped because I can't afford to buy the barrel. Because if you don't use it all, and then it'll go to ruin on you. What was that question again?

JST: So, it sounds like you are hearing the shrimp prices go down and all the other costs go up.

LC: Yes. I'll tell you what, when we opened the doors in 1980, Red Lobster – that's why I don't eat there. Red Lobster would back a transfer truck up to the doors and load up. I got receipts where the boat was getting \$7 a pound for 21/25s. When the co-op was open, we were – the co-op helped prices go up everywhere. Red Lobster bought from us for a while until they started all those ponds. They found out they could get China imports and sell to the public. Because back then, about, I'd say, 60 percent was imported. Now, it's about 95 percent is imported. When they found out that it could reduce the prices down, they cut the prices down to nothing. Well, I say to nothing, but you don't get no more than \$7 a pound. The dock had to be getting at least \$7.60. But they bought one – a few years when we really had boats, we had as high as fifty boats there at the dock. But we have unloaded – I know one year we figured it was one-fifth of the state's catch there. That was a lot of shrimp. But everything went downhill.

JST: When do you think that was? About what year?

LC: The what?

JST: When do you think that was? About what year was that?

LC: That was in the early [19]80s.

JST: When they imported?

LC: Yes. The imports when they found out they could buy Palaemon shrimp like John Stephenson over there on the Gulf, [inaudible] He was an insurance agent, but he opened up a quick freeze, and he went to China. I know John Stephenson did. But they opened up everywhere. Ponds came up everywhere, and the imports increased. That's why you got tariffs on shrimp. But the shrimpers don't get it because the processors, unless – some do, they caught one in Savannah. It was in the paper the other day. Did you read that article? I knew his daddy was a switchman when I worked in the railroad, and his sons are shrimpers now. But I've applied for the thing two or three times, and I think the most I got one time was \$3,000. The rest of the time it hadn't paid the postage to fill out the application and send it in. But the processors, with all the attorneys and bookkeepers and all, they can – but I had applied. I don't know whether it's still – I haven't applied for years now.

JST: So, when you think back over your whole career on the water, what have been the most rewarding parts of that?

LC: Well, I used to enjoy – the furthest I've shrimped was mostly Port Royal. I enjoyed going over there in Carolina and shrimping and the further south is Cape Canaveral. I enjoy going down there. Because you shrimp in October and November. If we get a decent season, they go through that cycle. You know what the cycle is.

JST: Can you tell us about it, though? Can you explain it?

LC: Well, right now it's roe shrimp season. They worry about roe shrimp. But these shrimp that they're catching in Fernandina, they would probably be catching some in Brunswick, but it's closed. But our shrimp in October – well I start off with the May prawn. They come in May and April too – April, May, and June, and they are out there spawning. The tide's bringing them in and out. Then you got the brown shrimp. I believe they come from offshore, but they have little ones. If you have a good roe shrimp season, the last end about June, you don't have very many brownies. But if you don't have – a lot of times when you got a good brown shrimp season, they start in the first of June and about the fourth of July if you got the right rain and all. By the fourth of July, they're about a medium 36/40 shrimp. Then, let's see, July, August, by the end of August, they kind of dwindling out. Then the offsprings that were laid in April and May and spawned in April, May, and June, they show up in early July – the end of August – middle of August into September. Then they, if the weather's right, they grow – they can grow, count every week or so. When it starts cooling down in October, about the middle of October, they are up as big as they – 21/25. Well, you catch them in October and November, the bigger shrimp, and 21 is about as big as they get around here unless you got a way to grow them out. When it starts turning cold, they start moving south. Some of them go north because you can find records with DNR where they used to tag them. Some of them would go north and some of them go, most of them, go south. But they go down as far as Cape Canaveral. Then they turn, around and they ease back up the coast. Now, they catch them in Fernandina and now here. But that's your roe shrimp coming up. Then in the meantime, if it's warm, the over-winter stock, they're growing. Then by the time they open the beaches, which is usually about June, they start mixing, see, and then you catch them until the roe shrimp play out. They go through that cycle every year. It's the same cycle. Sometimes, it's better, and sometimes, it's not. But they've caught more shrimp this year. I don't know. I don't believe in global warming. But we're all having changes, but I don't think it's due to global warming, just like that record set up, that coal up in the United States this past year set records. But it is warming up. But it goes through a cycle, I think. Just because you have a record cold or a record high, that isn't necessarily global warming. It's that cycle that you go through over a period of time, in my theory. I got fruit trees around here. I plant a garden every year. I look at that, and that tells you a lot right there about the weather. But the shrimp, like I say, they go by temperature. We could still have a roaster up even though it's closed. When they opened, it couldn't last, it doesn't last long. We could still have one.

JST: So, for young people who do not live on the coast, who did not grow up seeing shrimping or seeing fishing, what do you think they do not understand or should know about fishing in Georgia?

LC: One thing they should know is that Georgia has got the best eating shrimp anywhere. There's no iodine in them. They're the sweetest shrimp. South Carolina shrimp is the same way. Probably if they're white shrimp they're catching in North Carolina, it's probably the same way as Florida. But the shrimp over there, I've been over – I've taken my kids on vacation to Key West one time when they were coming up. I walked up to the dock, and there was an old man fishing there. The shrimp were lying there, and they looked like they were cooked. Because they were pink, but that's what they were. That's the way to catch them. They were pink. They caught the shrimp down there, it was pink. Then you go around, you catch white shrimp in Texas and all, but I have never been around there. I don't plan to go. [laughter] Oh, Lordy. But, anyway, another thing, and I've proved this point, I don't use any sodium bisulfate. All your shrimp, just about at your imports, has probably got sodium bisulfate on them. When they get through mixing all that bread and all, if you take – really haven't got – there wouldn't be no – there's no comparison. All my – the shrimp that I catch, I don't nip them because I sell them fresh. We don't catch that many, that's why [laughter] I can't get rid of them when they come out. If I do have to carry them down south to – well I was carrying them down to Clark's Seafood, but they closed last year. They got a place in Tampa. But I don't know why. I don't know unless they caught so many shrimps over there on the Gulf that they closed down. But the price of the shrimp down there was about a dollar to the fishermen cheaper than I was getting up here because I was selling them myself. It's a mess.

JST: So, is there anything else you think they should know about the history of fishing in Georgia or what do you think are the most important things that people should realize?

LC: Well, like old David Herrington used to say, in one of the regulations, it's like putting a nail in your coffin. [laughter] Oh, Lordy. But it's lucky I got a fiberglass boat. Last year, we had some shrimp, a few shrimps. But for every penny that I made on the shrimp, I had to put it back in the boat. Because you had salt water eat up your boat, and it eats up the rigging and all. I had to replace the wheel, I had to replace the keel cooler underneath it. I had the fiberglass – just lucky it was fiberglass. I had the fiberglass, a lot of the rails and all, the boat rails. But I haven't been with the Georgia Fishermen's Association lately because I haven't had time. I've been tied up with my wife for three years. It's like a Vidalia onion. It's the best onion, if you like sweet onions, you can get. Just like the Georgia shrimp, it's the best shrimp you can eat. I advise them not to eat the sodium bisulfate shrimp and these – I am not calling out any restaurant names. [laughter] But if you don't know the name, you don't know what you're eating. It's everywhere you go. If you get something, you might taste good. But if you got down to the shrimp, it's bland. The Palaemon shrimp especially is bland. I don't eat them.

JST: What do you think is the future of shrimping in Georgia? What do you see happening?

LC: That's kind of hard to say. Like everybody tells you, it's a dying industry. But we're just so lucky to be where we at and have my son running the boat and tying up where I'm tying up at Sunbury. Because he can't afford to pay rent and all like that. I'm behind on my rent, but I try to catch it up. But in the meantime, if we do catch shrimp, [inaudible] he gets fresh fish. But it's a struggle. It's a struggle right now, especially with the price of fuel. My son keeps on going, and I keep on going. If I'm not here and if he goes shrimping and doesn't have anybody here to sell

the shrimp and have to carry them down there, he'll go out – he can't afford the shrimp. By the time you haul them down there and they pay you in the price of fuel, no shrimp will amount anything. When they opened the beaches this year there was a boat, he went on Ossabaw. I think he'd seen one or two boats. There was one boat in the channel, and there was one in Glory Hole. He'd seen maybe a couple down toward McIntosh. Other than that, there weren't any boats and there wasn't any shrimp. Usually, that's your best time.

JST: So, what will happen to this next generation of commercial shrimpers?

LC: What's going to happen when?

JST: What is going to happen? What happens to the next generation?

LC: Well, it's already happened. You can't find anybody to work on a boat because they've whacked out on drugs or something like that. I'm talking about somebody getting out of school. You can't hardly get anybody to work anymore. They work, and they get a percentage of your catch. If they don't make money, they aren't going to work. The only reason why we can do it is because his wife has been on the boat ever since he's been – my son's been married. She's been on the boat. They carry other people out – other strikers out sometimes, but mostly they run just him and her. My grandson, I thought he might like it, which he could run a boat. He's twenty-seven now, I think. But he's a heavy equipment operator, and he's one of the best. That's all he's ever done since he was a little boy. But he could run a boat if he wanted to. He's that smart, but there's a lot more than running a shrimp boat than an axe. You got to know that bottom, you got to – well, they got all these sensors now. But that bottom changes out there and the beaches change and the sandbars change. But they got these big steel oils out there to drag twenty-four hours a day. I don't know if there's shrimp there. I don't see how they do it. When they leave, they just drag, drag, drag. They can do it because – but they can't do it inside the 3-mile line. But they can drag outside the 3-mile line. A lot of times if there's any shrimp out there, they out there dragging twenty-four hours a day. I've never been much at night fishing. I've always liked to get up, go in the creek, and anchor, which I got pictures to show it. But it's going to be a scrape from here on out. All the old fishermen, a lot of them are gone, and their sons and family and all. If they had real estate, it's probably – if they had real estate – when the family had real estate and all and they inherited it, they haven't got to pay for a dockage and all like that or you can find some docks that – very few of them that charge – they'll charge you the dock there. You just can't tell how they'll afford it if you're not catching them. I don't know what the answer is.

JST: Is there anything you think could happen in the next five years or ten years that would make it possible for a younger generation to go into shrimping?

LC: When I started, they were building boats in North Carolina. They were building boats at Thunderbolt. They were building boats in Darien. They were building boats at St. Augustine. Now I think the only place they're building boats is out there. Big steel hulls over there on the Gulf. What they're doing with them, they're probably going to foreign countries. I don't see it getting any better. I think one reason is just like when we built that co-op. When we built the co-op or build it, one of the things that we needed to do was diversify, and not depend on shrimp. So, we diversified. We started catching fish offshore, out there on the reef and all. We caught

fish. [laughter] We started – when I started when I was at Sunbury before we built the co-op, we started off with hand reels. Then we went to electric reels. Then we tried dragging. We had a bunch of crab nets down there, and we started – we took the crab nets. We had a rig on the bottom of the neck called the Texas drop-down chain, which the chain dropped down about 8 or 10 inches below your net. Then you floated – your net would be up off the bottom. But on the long pieces of chain, we put a 2-inch PVC pipe on where the PVC would roll. We went out there, and we caught – I had one trip I caught 8,500 pounds. We had five hundred boxes between the four boats. Five hundred boxes, they were fish. I got pictures of them, I'll show you. We had to sew a piece on the top of the net. When the fish went down in the tail end of the net in the bag, he'd turn around to go out. He couldn't get out because he hit that web. We were doing good at that. Then they put an emergency ban on that. We used to catch them with the reels. That was going to be a part of the income to the co-op, but they stopped it. We used to trap them with crab traps, and go out and catch blackfish. They put such size limits on them and restrictions on them that you can't even go out there fishing anymore. I tried to – last time I tried to go fishing, carry my boat out there, and just carry friends and all or wanted to commercial fish out there, you had to buy two fishing licenses. They'll drop – they'll eliminate one of them. So, that was out. Even though I fished out there for years, that eliminated that. But in my lifetime, I've enjoyed it. I got a book of poems here I wrote while I was out there. I got a book of old sayings. I got three hundred and something old sayings I'm going to show you if you want to look at them. I enjoyed life, and life was good to me. I have not got a big house on the bluff somewhere. I bought that same double-wide trailer there in 1973. I bought – I got a lawnmower I bought in [19]73. But I am not running it right now. But coming up, those were the good years, and I enjoyed every bit of it.

JST: So, if you had to do it all over again, you would sure...

LC: Yes, once it gets in your blood. Right now, I believe if I was physically able, I could go out there. If there was any to catch, I could figure them out. But I'm too old.

JST: But what should we have asked that we did not?

LC: What? You got something?

JST: That was my last question. What should we have asked you that we did not? What did we miss?

LC: Well, you haven't looked at my poems, you haven't looked at my old sayings, you aren't looked at none. This whole book of poems is what I wrote. I don't know how many poems are in there, probably fifteen or twenty. But this last one I've been through a lot. My wife just passed, and my brother just passed thirteen days later. I wrote this a while back. "Here today and gone tomorrow. Death has only one friend, and it has no sorrow. It brings us tears and a lot of grief. For when your number is picked, He won't pass you by. By then it's too late to worry or too late to cry. It's like a guest without an invitation. The Lord above is your only salvation. If you like Him, and a lot of us do, it will be left up to the devil and you. Here today and gone tomorrow." [laughter] Would you look at that? [laughter] I got a Grim Reaper in there. See him in there? On the wall? Nobody wants to read that or buy that. Walk there and get it if you will.

Like I said, there's a story behind all of these. [laughter]

JST: I bet there is.

LC: See the *Grim Reaper*? That's the poem I put on there. There.

[end of transcript]