

Kendra Cooper: My name is Kendra.

Alexis McGhee: This is Alexis.

KC: We are both students at Georgia Southern. I am here with Joseph Michael...

Joseph Michael Rauls: Rauls.

KC: Rauls.

JMR: Yes, ma'am.

KC: We are conducting an oral history as part of the Fishing Traditions and Fishing Futures project. I have already received the informed consent from you. But we just need you to verbally say that you consent to the interview.

JMR: I consent to the interview.

KC: Awesome. So, I have a few questions to guide us. But ultimately, you are going to be the one speaking and not us.

JMR: Okay.

KC: So, our first question is, can you tell me where and when you grew up, and what was life like within your family?

JMR: I grew up in Kingsland, Georgia. That's a couple of counties from here. Life was hard because when I look back over life, I have asked my mother, "Were we poor?" She said, "Son, we weren't poorer than anyone else." She said, "That's the way it was back in the [19]60s." I was born 1863. My father always worked for himself. Back then, in the [19]60s, my father bought a shrimp boat, a smaller boat, about 50 feet. Me and my brother used to go shrimping with him. I went in the military in [19]82. My brother stayed, went shrimping with my father. But I enjoy shrimping. Now I work with the power company. I make a good living. But the shrimping is in my blood. I'm getting to retirement-type age. I want to do what I'm passionate about. It's shrimping. That's who I am. Short and sweet.

KC: [laughter]

JMR: They say shrimpers used to make a really good living. I'm talking about the professions and stuff you are all going into Back then, compared to what a shrimper was making, compared to then. But now the fuel and all the rules and regulations and the price of the shrimp. My father got what, back then, what we get for the shrimp now, because of the import and stuff. So, it's a lot of rules and regulations. The fuel cost us, used to be what, 50 cents a gallon. Now it's \$2 a gallon. But the price of the shrimp is the same. The nets and the cables and the upkeep on the boat, everything has gone sky high. That's me in a nutshell.

KC: In a nutshell. So, did your family's relationship with the shrimp, that influenced you to go in?

JMR: Yes, born and raised around shrimping, but I got out of it.

KC: You got out of it. Can you explain why?

JMR: Well, at the time, like I say, me and my brother had a boat, what my daddy brought for us. We weren't making any money that season. So, I got out. I went in the military, did four years in the Navy. Shrimping is always in my heart. The guys, we tease about it, say, "Once in your blood, you can't get it out." [laughter] So, it's in your blood.

KC: So, when you were shrimping, what was your day-to-day routine like? So, from when you woke up to when you went to bed.

JMR: Oh, you start early in the morning. Then you go. You start it up, warm up the engines. You going on out. It depends. Some days, you're already out there. You got your anchor down. Pull your anchor, drop your rigs back overboard, drag. Shrimping is pretty long days. It's nothing to do a sixteen-hour day. Nowadays, with the huge, big boats, they do what they call clock it. They don't shed it off, they clock it. You know what I'm saying? It's around the clock. They clock it. Especially when they're catching shrimp because shrimp will be here today, and they're gone tomorrow. So, you've got to catch them. So, if the captain gets too many hours in, he's tired. He's sleepy. So, the first night, I let him get four hours of sleep. They never shed it off. Keep it on. Yes, ma'am. That's a day of a shrimper. You've got a guy. He'll cook a little breakfast, pull the trawl net. The trawl net, it's the small net you pull every 15 to 30 minutes to kind of see what you're catching. It's small. You pull it to let you know. Depending on what you're catching in your trawl net, whether you want to keep going one way or turn around, catch jelly balls. Oh, we're catching that jelly. Then sometimes you might have to pick them up sooner than what you want to because you're loading up, tear your rigs and stuff down, trying to pick it up. Well, you've got to cut your bags or something to let it out. You all learning.

KC: [laughter] Yes. So, is fishing central to your community?

JMR: Well, explain exactly what you mean.

KC: So, you live here in Darien?

JMR: No, I live in Woodbine.

KC: Woodbine. So, in Woodbine or in Darien or in Brunswick or in the coastal Georgia in general, do you feel like fishing has a really huge impact?

JMR: Not like it used to. If you go over to Fernandina and look at the old docks and stuff where fishing used to – shrimp fishing all up and down this coast. Like I say, some of the guys laugh now at teachers. The salary that a teacher made back then and the salary that they made was nothing to compare. There were very few job that could compete with what the shrimpers made.

KC: Yes?

JMR: Yes. Now it's died off some. But now, the big-time shrimpers have these boats that we call a slab, big steel boat. Half a million dollars, 1.5, that's what the boat cost. Yes. I talked to a guy last week. He said with a boat that size, he's normally trying to gross 1.3 million a year.

KC: Wow.

JMR: Gross. Now you don't get to keep it. [laughter] But that's what those big slabs are looking to gross. They have to, because the fuel, you figure a boat like that is paying three to four people. That's just the crew. That's not the owner. The upkeep, those type boats, they just don't stay here. They're around the coast. Wherever they're catching shrimp, they got to go. The more local boats, they just shrimp their area. They try to make a living right here. Those boats are not as big and expensive as those slabs we call them.

KC: So, why do you think it's changed so much?

JMR: The rules, the regulations, the big wheels.

KC: [laughter]

JMR: Really the big wheels are squeezing the little man out. It's like anything else. The big wheels, they sit up high. They control the price of the shrimp. They control the price of the fuel. So, we started catching pretty good shrimp. They drop the price. For real. That's true. You all are going to see a lot of that in life. Life, you're going to learn about life. [laughter] I'm going to show you an example. Years ago, they used to do what they call puck wooding. You used to see the little trucks on the road. You don't see puck wooding anymore. It's what they call logging. See, a man used to get him a little bitty truck, cut a little wood, and make a living. Now, if you ain't got a couple of million dollars, you can't log. That's how the shrimping industry is getting. They trying to squeeze the little man out. I guess you're going to say, "This man's crazy." [laughter].

KC: So, would you say that is a negative change in the community? What about some positive changes you have seen?

JMR: Positive in the shrimping industry, I've never given it any thought. Well, I guess some things are positive. Nowadays, we have to pull what – we call them tins. You all know about tins?

KC: Yes.

JMR: It saves the turtles and stuff. Back then, we used to catch the big turtles and stuff. Dump them on the deck. They'd be dead because we drug them. We eat them though.

KC: Really?

JMR: That's good eating, girl.

KC: [laughter] I have never heard of that.

JMR: Yes. Years ago, we used to eat them. That's good eating. You ain't had no eating. [laughter] So, that's a positive.

KC: Yes. Okay. Saving the sea turtles?

JMR: Yes.

KC: So, what do you think about new technologies that come up, like the tents?

JMR: Oh, they've got a lot of new technology now. Especially, even the rigs themselves we pull. Back then, they would pull, say, two 45-foot nets. They were flat nets. Now, we're pulling four mongoses. Back then it was nylon, not a spectrum that cost three or four times more. But the webbing is lighter. They catch less water resistance. That's good. If you ever go through the shrimp with the four rigs, you got them. Back then it was two. The technology now with your instruments and stuff, back then, the guys, when they're going to run a course, they used to have to get a little map out and try to draw it and stuff. Now you've got wind plot and stuff on your computer. You pull it up on your computer. Just like they've got navigation on the land, they've got navigation on the water. Yes, ma'am.

KC: So, what do you think caused some of these changes?

JMR: It's high. It's a very expensive business. Like you say, you've got to take care of two or three men on the boat, just a regular boat, home boat. The boat doesn't travel a lot. It's going to be 15,000, \$20,000 worth of maintenance on that boat every year. The big boats that we call the slab, they don't pull them every year. They say when they pull them, it's going to be 35,000, 40,000, \$50,000. They have to go to Alabama to these big dry docks to pull them out the water. So, you can take a boat and gross, say, \$200,000 gross, and that could be a bad year, depending on what tore up. You had to get an engine or reduction gear. Or you caught on hanging towards up some nets. You can gross \$200,000 and not make a profit.

KC: It is a lot of work.

JMR: Yes, it is. It's a lot of work. That's part of the reason it's a dying industry where if you don't have the big money to do it big, it's hard to do it small. Because I'm a small man. I know.

KC: So, what have been some of the most rewarding parts of your career on the water?

JMR: Oh, a good catch, when you make a good catch.

KC: [laughter] I've heard that a lot.

JMR: A good catch. So, say for instance, you make your money. So, you're going to make your \$40,000 a year. So, it's pretty well-set. You know you're going to make such and such per paycheck a month. You can go out there shrimping. You could have \$20,000 a week right around here. See what I'm saying? That kind of money, that's the kind of money you need. Where that, say, 20,000 a year ain't no money. You make your 20,000 in a week or two. You're making money. You can get more accomplished and done with it. Yes. Good lick, oh, man, ain't nothing like it.

KC: How does that make you feel when you get one?

JMR: Superman. [laughter] Now say, for instance, don't you want to beat her? Yes. It's life. If you all were a competitive person, people wouldn't be in college. They'd be out there trying to get some food stamps as the welfare stuff. You are all trying to be members of society. You're trying to make it.

KC: So, would you say that the fishing industry or the shrimping industry today is very competitive?

JMR: There, you took the words out my mouth, girl. Very. But one man wants to beat the other man. He wants bragging rights. He wants to make money. The more he can have his boat, the better he can have the newer stuff. Very competitive. One man can be catching something. You ain't his buddy. You ain't in the clique. He isn't telling. You might be his buddy, and he ain't telling you. They say that's money. If I'm making big, I'm catching them. You think I'm going to say, "Hey come on over here"? It's giving away money, ain't it?

KC: Yes.

JMR: This is what some of the guys say, "Keep your mouth shut and watch your hole fill up." I mean, you may have somebody tight, tight you would holler at. But if I'm in them and then I call and tell and then I've got ten boats on me, I just split my profit with ten people where I could have shut up. Maybe one and two and three of us scooped them on up. What will you do?

KC: I'm not sure. [laughter]

JMR: What will you do?

KC: I have no idea. That was a tough question.

JMR: Because tomorrow might not be none. You see?

KC: Yes. Got to get it while you can.

JMR: You've got bills due. You've got an engine need rebuilding. Say you're catching 3,000 or \$4,000 worth per drag. You figure, if I call everybody, they're going to be gone. They're going to suck them up. If I sit right here and grind on them until tomorrow, until I got them all, I've got them. Instead of having 4,000 or \$5,000 worth, now you've got \$20,000 worth. That's how they

do it. That's real. You're all going to see. Just in life, you're all going to come up against some of this stuff. What do I do? You'll see. Even when it comes to jobs and getting jobs. You may get hired. They're looking to fill another position. Who are you going to tell? [inaudible] Girl, they hiring over there. I don't know. Let me get myself in first. [laughter] That's how it goes. Any more questions?

KC: So, what would you tell somebody who wants to go into shrimping now?

JMR: It's hard, unless you've got a lot of money. I know a guy – even the family is tied to it. A guy told me, he said, "Well, we'll see what kind of wife you've got." I said, "What'd you mean?" He said, "You've got \$40,000 sitting in that account. You tell your wife, 'Ain't no money.' She wants to go shopping and do this and do that. Well, that's the boat money." Now that's a person that's pretty well-established. Most people who's not established like that, they don't have a boat account. He's like the fourth, fifth generation. See, it'd been passed down to him. I'm doing mine myself. So, I got a daughter that, she said, "You never know, daddy. We might have that big million-dollar boat one day." I might not get to see it. But each generation will do better and better, but depending on how much money you've got. You've got to have a good cap. That's the bottom. That's the main thing. Because you can give a man – that's just using on the low term – you can give a man, say, \$100,000 boat, pretty decent boat. You can give a man a \$200,000 boat. The man with \$100,000 boat can beat the man with the \$200,000 boat. I'm talking about coal whip his tail. He's got the better boat. [laughter] That's how it is. That's the truth. Captain catches the shrimp. I mean, you've got to give him something to work with now, but you've got to have a captain. We good?

KC: Have your daughters expressed any interest in shrimping?

JMR: Jasmine. Yes. Well, not far as going out there, but far as taking the business over and doing that kind of stuff. She said, "You never know, daddy. I might be the one."

KC: [laughter] Would you want her to?

JMR: Well, I'm not sure. Just yesterday – I've got two left in college, Jasmine and Tyler. Jazz is a year older than Tyler. So, they were on spring break. So, I told Tyler, I said, "Well, you want to go down to the boat with me, chip and paint?" Because you've got to chip them and paint them. He said, "No, you've got to do your own boats now."

KC: [laughter]

JMR: So, now Jazz is home. She wants to go down to the boat, chip and paint, to make money. I said, "Well you can't climb up in the rigging and stuff." You all have been around boats, right?

KC: Yes.

JMR: You know the metal, the pipes? I said, "Well you can't climb up there and paint." I heard my wife, "Oh, a girl can't do it. A woman can't do it, huh?"

KC: [laughter]

JMR: I said, "No, that's not what I meant." Tyler is athletic. He plays football. So, I wouldn't mind him climbing up through there, painting. I just didn't want my daughter climbing up through there, trying to paint. So, I just gave her money not to go.

KC: [laughter] Oh, God.

JMR: But I see women around. I see women that go out on the boat. Well, I saw some women painting. Yes, they were painting outriggers the other day. I mean, they could do it. Now the women do everything. Yes. [laughter] They do. But I don't know. It's something new to get used to.

KC: What do you hope to see in the next generation of commercial fishing?

JMR: That the government will work with the shrimpers. I'm going to tell you all what's going on. There's a lot of politics in it. There's a lot of money involved, a lot of rules and regulations and different things. Imports and stuff are tied to Congress because a lot of the stuff cross seas they own. Let me show you how this stuff works. You all think this is a joke. About three years ago, the price of shrimp was up good like never before. Do you all know why?

KC: I do not.

JMR: You know why? Because the shrimp ponds across seas had bacteria in them. So, there's less import, right? Now price is up. That's good for us. So, let the government go over there and help them clean it up. They own it. I don't believe this. This is how business work. It might not be in one of them, their name and stuff, but they get all the kickbacks and stuff. Those lobbyists and stuff, that stuff is real. Money talks. The rest don't walk. Just like I asked you in there, what's the bottom line? The bottom line is the dollar bill. You're paying all this money to go to college so you can make money, so you can live and survive. Get the new car when you want. Live in the nicer neighborhood. Your kids go to a better school. Atlanta is segregated by how much money you make, if you want to know. Everywhere, you're just...

KC: So, beyond changing regulations at state and federal levels, what types of things could happen to support the fishing industry in the future?

JMR: That DNR will listen to the shrimpers. Because you take some states, they open what we call the sounds. You all know about the sounds?

KC: Yes.

JMR: See, the sounds, sometimes it needs to be drugged and cleaned up. Better breeding ground and laying the eggs. If it's all dirty, it's just like a field. You've got to plow it up. You've got to turn it over. You all know sometimes we get this black gill and stuff. Because you've got people go up in the rivers and put this feed and stuff out, and they eat it. It's all in their gill. You get the black gill. You ever saw a black gill? Where do you all say it come from?

KC: I actually don't know. I just learned about it a few days ago.

JMR: See, sometimes we have bad seasons. Just like this winter gone, what happened? You all know what happened?

KC: Freezes.

JMR: Hush, girl. You on it.

KC: [laughter]

JMR: Yes. So, they normally close the beaches around January 1st or so. You all extended it to about the 15th, 16th. But those freezes came in there. So, what the freeze's done?

KC: Killed the shrimp.

JMR: Yes. It dropped the water temperature, made the little small shrimp come out. The beach is still open. The guy's dragging, killing the little shrimp. Oh, maybe I shouldn't talk about it.

KC: No, you are fine. Or we can turn off the mike if you want to talk about it. That is not on the mike.

JMR: No. Well, I heard some of the guys say the shrimp was so small because the cold water ran them out. It was going through the webbing. Then they'll pick out what they can pick out. Shovel the rest of them back overboard. Do you all know Georgia waters are closed right now, the 25 miles?

KC: Yes.

JMR: That's why. They normally would close them up to 3 miles. Now the crop could be killed because of that cold. I know the guy said, years ago, when something like this would happen, they would give the shrimpers a little something to help along. Because shrimping is like farming. So, let them know we need something this year. You all go in there and stand up and say, "You all need to help them guys this year."

KC: If you could go back and do it all over again, would you still be a fisherman or a shrimper?

JMR: Yes. If I can go back, back from when my daddy first got us into it, and I went off in the military and got jobs and stuff, I will stay. With the person I am now, I'd have had one of those million-dollar slabs. I would've had me one because I'm not going to let nobody beat me. That's just who I am. You don't beat me.

KC: [laughter]

JMR: That's life. It's competitive. If I'd have stayed with it, I'd have been one of those big slabs



now. So, right now, I'm starting from scratch.

KC: So, are you getting back into it?

JMR: Yes. I bought me another boat about –

KC: Nice.

JMR: – four years ago.

KC: All right.

JMR: We good?

KC: Do you have anything? Thank you so much.

JMR: Thank you, little mama.

KC: [laughter] You are welcome.

JMR: Thank you, sugar lumps.

AM: Thanks.

[end of transcript]