

Avery Bates: Around them and they survived. Really survivors. But they were healthy. A lot of them knew the things to keep them healthy. It's so sad that we've lost a lot of our history and our old timers' remedies. But it's a blessing, I have fond memories of sitting anchored up out here with the other fishermen and hearing the old fishing tales. [laughter] These old timers, they could tell some tall tales now. But that's all in growing up, you hear all these old fishermen and stuff. But they were tough.

Harriet Richardson-Seacat: I have heard about fish tales, so to speak.

AB: Oh, yes. They were tough, man. Some of them old timers, they could pick up a drum of fuel and carry them from boat to – can you imagine a man? There is no way I could ever do it. But some of the old timers, they were much stronger than some of the generation today. But they had to be strong. What'd I say? They would chop wood or whatever. They get out and flounder at night with an old flambeau. There's a few of them things left, the old flambeau and the old carbide lights and the different things like that that they used to get out and get flounders. It's interesting how they survived and how they provided for their families. Today, you have very few people that can tell you when a crab's going to shed. If they see them, the old timers, they'd tell you, "He's going to shed in just a little while. Let's put him in a bucket of water and shed him out." But some people walk right over that crab. That's what we call a shedder. That shedder has turned into mega bucks for some people because they've actually got the technology now. Old James (Mars?) and some of these other people had literally worked on them systems that crabbers can shed their shedders, which is extra profit. They can get as much as 50 to 75 cents for that little crab that turns in to be that big. Once he sheds from here, he goes to here. If you've ever eaten soft shell crabs, now, that is, to me, the top of the line as far as crabs. As far as frying them and – they're good if you like them. Some people don't like crab, but to me, that's a delicacy.

HRS: Well, the soft shell is just when –

AB: It molts.

HRS: – it is when you harvest it, right? Is that –

AB: No, the soft shell –

HRS: – it is a particular kind?

AB: No, he's just growing. He's growing, and the water temperature and stuff has a lot to do with it. This time of year, it's getting to the time where we're going to have the best time for soft shelling because of the temperatures of the water and the intrusion of the crabs coming to the beaches and stuff. You'll see people start opening up their business for molting crabs. They'll start buying the shedding crabs from the crabber at a higher price. Then they'll shed that crab, and they'll sell number ones and number twos. In other words, the larger crab will be a number one that you buy in the restaurant. A lot of times, these people are buying number two and they'll sell them locally to different smaller restaurants and stuff like that. They're a little bit cheaper crab. But you'll see they're a little bit cheaper priced too, with their seafood platters too.

So, you'll see these people start bringing their crabs to these places. It's a twenty-four-hour a day job watching these crabs. Because you have to check them ever so often or they'll get hard and he won't be a soft shell anymore. He'll turn back into a hard shell. So, we've got and had to increase – years ago, we didn't see these people shedding crabs. They would just go along the beaches and pick them up. You don't see quite as many as you used to walking the beaches, picking them up. But it's something that you witness come to be. We hope our crab industry will get better. It's just managing it properly. Like most things, you've got to manage seafood properly. We hope that we can get up better access to the water. If you see this water behind me, this is one of the prime areas that we used to run from bad weather. Come out of the bay. You don't want to get caught in the lower end of Mobile Bay with a forty, fifty knot wind. You will have problems. Right on the other side of this piece of dirt, man, a [inaudible] turned (*Miss Glory?*) upside down. A little water spout hit it. It doesn't take a very big waterspout to sink it [laughter], which is a tornado on water. But if you prefer to be caught in the squall, you prefer to be here other than in the Bay. The Corps of Engineers dug this place out, and through here to [inaudible] a number of years ago. This is the area where we used to tie our shrimp boats, crab boats, fishing boats. But now, you don't have no docking facilities whatsoever for the commercial fishermen here. In fact, Dauphin Island's trying to get something back for the commercial fishing industry. If we can get some docking facilities, we can – some of these people like (Carol Dale Camry?), and [inaudible] fish is here. Gary Skinner and Michael Skinner, and all these people have to depend on leasing docks and getting docks from private individuals or private entity. We have no place for public – people coming out of the Bayou and Cody to tie their boats up now. So, it's important that we have access to the water so we can keep supplying the seafood. We are losing docking facilities, not only for commercial, but recreational. You take recreational fishermen, you'll see them backed up clap to the Cadillac Square. In the summertime, they have no place to launch their boats. This is it. We lost the one by the bridge where they used to launch. We used to launch there when we was working in Dauphin Island Bay. That's closed. Unless we use some good wisdom and start acquiring some beach frontage or access in these places to build access to the water, these thousands and thousands of people that's going to come to our waters are not going to have a place to launch. We are in desperate need of more launching. This little place down here that was put – there's no way the masses of people that we got coming and already here can have good access. In Texas, I hear they're fighting over access to the water. We are at the point now where some pretty heated arguments come off right down here. So, we want better access. There's some available – that should be used for better access. Now, whether they use that or not, it's all up to the politicians and the people with coastal zone management to use their knowledge to say, "Let's acquire this." If we have the Magnuson Act or the Coastal Zone Act, let's use the funding for our people. Not only the commercial people, but the recreational people will have better access to the water. A lot of people like to hook and line fish, and a lot of people like to eat good seafood. But unless we can get to the water, they're out of luck. We are out of luck. So, these facilities here, they look good. You don't see a boat though. But just what will happen? In the weekend, they'll be piled up all the way back there. But if we had a number of crab vessels that used to tie up in here – they're not allowed to now – and a number of shrimp boats – they're not allowed to now – we've got to do something, both commercial and recreational. The user groups – the recreational and the commercial that use the waters that belong to everybody, the access gets less and less. Giant condominiums are being put up, giant whatever is taking access that once was, whether it's the oil companies using certain facilities that we used to use, they have to have access too. But

we have to plan ahead and acquire properties for these people that's coming in right here with their trailers and their boats. We have a multimillion-dollar industry through the recreational, but we have a multimillion-dollar industry through the commercial fishermen. Well, let's think about both of them and let's use wise management. That place down to the west they're trying to purchase could be turned into something great. We got a fishing pier down there that don't have no water [laughter] and we don't have a public beach worth 2 cents here in Dauphin Island. There are grounds down there to the west. If they fill that cut back in, there's actually a place you could actually put a boat ramp, where it's nine, ten foot of water now. You could cover that thing off and put a boat ramp right there at the end of that thing and put a pier right there where there's deep water. Put your breakwater. Use the breakwater for fishing bottoms. You'd have a pier that actually would have water that would be there. Now, we have Sand Island that joins Dauphin Island. You can actually walk to Sand Island now, low tide. But unless you use common sense about future management and wisdom, and use good dollar and cents spending, don't throw your money away. We have monies available. Let's put them where the buck will have the best results. We got a \$40 billion company wanting to come in here that I think you should come in here. They like to play, and they like to eat seafood. I can't stress it enough, I mean, this is an area that we all use. So, let's keep it an area we can all use. [laughter] I'd like to teach my grandkids and stuff how to oyster. I don't have any none yet, grandkids, but I hope to have some someday. I'd like to teach them how to make a living from the water. I taught my son, but if he has to, he could catch enough to feed his family too. [laughter]

HRS: How do you think –

Michael Stieber: How did you learn?

AB: How did I learn? Oystering is something what you call a school of hard knocks. You watch your papa do it, and your papa throws you a pair of rakes, or your daddy throws you a pair of – "Son, I've got to have some help." First of all, he throws you in a pile of oysters that hadn't been culled. He said, "Cull these oysters," and he shows you. "Don't mess that oyster up. You cull all the dead shell away from him and all the spat, and you leave that marketable sized oyster. Rake all the other stuff back overboard. Now, don't concentrate on that oyster too long because you're losing time. I want this cull hatch clean." Here you are a little boy saying, "You want me to cull as fast as you catch? I don't know if I can do that." "Well, your pay is going to be cut. The more you produce, the faster you are, the more oysters you – and the more money you make." So, at a young age, you learn now productivity. How can I cull faster to stay up with papa so that I can make more money so I can go buy some more whatever I want? [laughter] If you want to learn and you want to make more money, then you will speed up and you won't rake oysters overboard. Because if you rake oysters overboard, papa don't like that. It loses production. So, it's just like telling your kid to cut the lawn. If your kid cuts half the lawn and he cuts it all up, "Son, you done it wrong." It's the same thing with culling oysters. "Son, you got to do it right. So, it'll look" – you cull a good oyster so when you sell them to the shop, they look good. It's the same thing in life. You teach your kids how to be the best he can at what he's doing, whether it's working at farming or whether you're fishing, or whether you are oystering. If you had a farmer say, "Son, we're going out here and we're going to break all the suckers off the tomato, so we'll have bigger tomatoes." You say, "What in the world are suckers?" That's the little things that might take away from the actual growth of that tomato. You want bigger

tomatoes because people like bigger. So, you break some of the suckers off so your tomatoes to be bigger. So, in other words, teach your kid how to farm and how to fish the best you can. That's very, what you call basic. But it's very instrumental teaching that kid how to work, how to be responsible. Some people say, "What makes a good parent?" Well, if you are a mother, you want your child to be the best he can be or the best she can be. Today, many mothers are teaching kids – they don't know how to cook. They don't know how to sew. They don't know how to do anything in the house. Who's going to keep care of the family? They don't know how to do anything. They don't know how to wash clothes. They call, "Mama, what's this bleach stuff? Am I supposed to put that in there with these brown pants?" "How do you fry eggs? My husband will say easy over and they come out rubbery and cook through." They don't know how to cook a steak. They don't know how to cook fish. They're not teaching them the basics. How to work, how to produce as a good husband and a good mother, and as a good family. Simple, isn't it? You say, teach them while they're young, fold clothes. Teach them while they're young, cull oysters. I'm talking about men. You got men jobs. You got women jobs. We got some good women oystermen out there, believe it or not. Some of them surprised me. They catch as many as some men. But we got some of the best oyster catchers in the world. Some of the best shrimpers, some of the best net builders, some of the best fishermen. You're saying, "I know. I've seen it. I know." There are some good ones around the world. But I said, as a whole, Alabama produces some of the best. I can take you to some people to prove it too.

HRS: So, when do you think things started changing out here on Dauphin Island in terms of the waterfront access? What was going on?

AB: Population growth. Population growth. You go down past the Drury, go back here, you see all these houses, millions of dollars spent on houses. Habitat loss. People say, "Well, why don't you see the mullet where you used to see them?" The mullets change their moving. They liked deeper water. You'd have marsh everywhere. They'd get up in the marsh and then you'd see them jumping in the shallows and stuff. Now, before this was here, this was a marsh area. Before they dug this fifteen-foot channel, or whatever it is, twelve-foot, fish stay on the bottom, saltier. It's safer. Pelican won't dive on them. [laughter] Used to not have no pelicans until they outlawed DDT. Now, pelicans are everywhere. It's very seldom you don't see these pilings covered with pelicans. They all out fishing now. But fish has got smarter as far as the surrounding. If you're going to stay on top, you're going to get caught by a pelican. There are more pelicans now than I've ever seen. If you go to Gaillard Island up there, you'll say, "My goodness, where in the world's all these birds coming from?" They're reproducing. If you go to Cat Island, of course, we lose half of Cat Island and we continue to lose it daily because of the cutting island. But Cat Island was one of the main islands for bird habitat – for bird nesting. You would see thousands of white cranes, egrets, all kind of nesting birds. [laughter] To lose half that island due to erosions without anything done, and to keep losing it, I think as far as people liking the sea birds, at certain times of the year, that place is covered with birds, but half of it's gone. That means half your habitat's gone. Birds can't raise. You see that's a great big thing now. They have birding events now. You see them all over the place. This island here is a stopping off place from migrating birds, and thousands of people like to bird. That's what they like to do, and I don't have nothing against that. But also, like I say, there's other avenues and other things that we need to protect, and places like that need to be protected. So, we can do something about it if we really think about what we should do. If Dauphin Island does purchase

that west end down there and get one thousand feet on the other side, like the mayor said, and that island's closed back off, Dauphin Island can utilize that for public beach. Dauphin Island can use that for a public pier that will stay in the water if they wanted people to fish. They could also, on the outside bars, build that up a buffer zone, or what we call a break water, so that we wouldn't impact the weak area. We did it right here at little Dauphin when it's run through several times, and they've done it. So, it's using knowledge about, let's turn what happened in Katrina into something that would be beneficial to the people on Dauphin Island and to the people and the environment and to the people that want to launch down there. If they would put a launch on the part that's left. You can fill it in partway and leave the other part open and put you a boat ramp down there. If you could put six boat ramps down there and you could have access both to the Mississippi Sound and to the Gulf to the West, it would relieve the pressure from this area and relieve the pressure from the cutoff.

HRS: So, in terms of docking space out here for the fishermen, are you reliant on the governments to buy that or could you all band together somehow?

AB: The states like Maine, the states, North Carolina, have already taken into effect in using the Coastal Zone Management Act. They kept seeing the availability to the commercial fishermen to have access to the water. Not only commercial fishermen, the recreational fishermen, the users of the water. They've seen massive amounts of building by the great, I would say, move towards the condos, the other things, like certain marinas, taking areas – large, vast land areas, and taking it away from the little commercial individual that used to launch here. If we, for whatever reason, forget in Alabama to learn from states like Maine and North Carolina, if we forget to use some wisdom that they've seen that they're having problems with. Or even in the Chesapeake Bay area, the growth that they had literally killed their bay due to overloading with pollution and stuff. If we don't learn from other people's mistakes, Alabama's the loser. If we don't learn to manage our growth and manage the resources that the growth might be impacting, we are going to be the loser. Our children will be the loser, and these people that like to come and enjoy. In 2004, there was right at four thousand people that actually come down and what you call charter boat fished – 400,000, not four thousand, 400,000 that chose to go to Orange Beach, Gulf Shores, Dauphin Island to charter boats. It's a big industry. But if we don't have any place to launch these other people that tow their boats, that's a big industry too. Remember, out of the 2,043,000 in oh four, there was only 400,000 of that. Roughly, 400,000 was what you call people coming from out of state. The other 1,600,000 was from right here – trips. So, we impact it locally as well as from out of state. So, let's think about doing something right for Alabama. We've got people running for office. We've got people in the office, and we've got people in the governorship that's wanting to – as you see these oil company rigs out here? You see these rigs? Right there where they were setting, we used to drag for shrimp and crabs. That rig – no, that rig, you can't see it from where you – that rig was the one – no, it might've been that one. That was the one that had the first \$2 million lawsuit for polluting the bay. Now, we want the oil and the gas. We need it big time. But we want production from our seafood industry too. You see rigs scattered all over the place that used to be productive fishing bottoms. Mississippi Sound, the Gulf of Mexico, imminent domain as far as the oil companies go. But remember the resource that we harvest, we think it's important too. Now, we can't harvest these areas now. We can't shrimp them because for twenty-five to more years someplace less, we can't touch that area. But I think the resources we produce are important too. I know we need oil to

produce seafood, but without food – my engine doesn't run without food. Your engine doesn't run without food. You say, "Get back to the basics." What you put in your mouth fuels your body. Whether it's corn, whether it's beef, or whether it's oysters or shrimp or crabs or fish, that fuels you. Gas will fuel your tank. These other products will fuel your body. So, we are important too. We fuel a lot of bodies. I mean, to tell you some good fuel too, I would call it ethyl. [laughter] The old timers said, "What kind of gas you want? Regular or ethyl?" What we produce here in the state of Alabama, I would consider the product to be high octane and good. So, yes, we want Dauphin Island to build another boat pier, let the commercial fishermen come back in here. Let people come right up to the commercial fishing vessel and maybe have what you call a market that they could come right to the stern of the boat and say, "How much are you getting for the shrimp right there?" They might be able to save a dime or a dollar cutting the middleman out. Would be nice, wouldn't it? You couldn't get them no fresher than that. We'd love to have a place like that on Dauphin Island. Where we once used to tie up, we can't tie up. So, Dauphin Island is wanting to help us. They're wanting to put a docking facility for the commercial fishermen. I applaud Dauphin Island for that. I applaud the people that's concerned about bringing some history. Because the history of this island truly was, in the beginning, commercial fishermen. This is how they fed their families and all of theirs, a lot of other people. Sure is.

[laughter]

HRS: He always wraps it up real nice. [laughter] Well, I am about out of energy [laughter] with my back and all this.

AB: [laughter] Well, bless your heart. You're doing good.

HRS: [laughter] I think that we have pray kept –

AB: The fish that's most healthiest is the fish that's caught in the wild.

HRS: True.

AB: Now, only half of the people or half of the resource that used to be for the commercial or industry which fed the consumer, only the people that can enjoy that resource now is a recreational fisherman. The President of the United States, by designating red fish as a game fish, he has robbed the right of the consumer for having that fish. That's sad. It really is. Okay.

HRS: Now, that is the fish you were talking about yesterday, I think.

AB: Sure. Yes, and –

HRS: The one that you are supposed to throw back.

AB: Well, we can't touch him. If we can't have him on our boat – now, recreation fish, you can have two, both for recreation and the commercial fishermen have access to it. But once you get to that quota, you shut it down, let the stock bill back up, it's just – but you're going to have

trouble out of Texas and you're going to have trouble out of Florida this year. Big time trouble. They cut back to two snapper, and Florida said, "We are not going to pay attention to the federal governments." National Marine Fisheries said, "We are going to do what we want to do and we're going to fish them extra days no matter what you say. We're going to keep four fish in state waters." They done that. Now, National Marine Fisheries has come down hard on the recreational fishermen in Florida, just in Gulf Waters. They can't control what happens in state waters. But remember, in Florida waters, they go three leagues out, which is nine miles. Same thing in Texas. They go three leagues, which is nine miles. We only have one league, which is three miles. That being, they're going to impact the resource of the snapper more in Florida and Texas than anywhere else where they impacted more anyway. Alabama's got plenty of red snapper. Alabama's got red snapper running out their ears. We got more fisheries that you can shake a stick at. There's more habitat for them here. Man, that's a good eating fish too, that snapper. He is fine eating if you – I like old cheap fish.

HRS: It is grouper that the restaurants try to – they give you the Asian –

AB: Catfish? [laughter]

HRS: – totally not [inaudible] thing.

AB: It was funny though.

HRS: I confuse snapper –

AB: The people in Florida were screaming and hollering because they were getting the Asian catfish and they're the first ones that would come down on the commercial fishermen.

HRS: [laughter]

AB: So, they were the first one to get a big bait of them catfish. [laughter] We're trying to get a bill passed through – the labeling bill, right now in the legislature where the people know what they're eating. The first one that knocked us out was these restaurants. These big chain of restaurants come up there and ninety-nine percent of everything they bought was foreign. They didn't want nothing to do with that through the label. They wanted people to eat catfish for snapper and catfish for grouper and catfish for whatever.

HRS: For everything.

AB: Yes. Yes.

HRS: [laughter]

AB: Well, just put catfish on it.

HRS: What does fish taste like? [laughter]

AB: Same fish. I ate catfish last week. It tastes just like that.

HRS: [laughter]

AB: Well, just put a different name on it. It comes out of so and so.

HRS: Yes. Now, I think that you guys have been doing a good job at trying to get the word out about the foreign seafood.

AB: We're trying.

HRS: Yes. I think that there could be an upscale kind of market for –

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