

Interview Subject: Allen Amason
Interviewer: Kristin Meewen and Blake Pavri
Project: Dock Stories
Transcriber: Blake Pavri
Primary Investigator: Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes
Others Present: N/A
Interview Date: March 4, 2025
Duration: 51 minutes and 26 seconds
Place of Interview: Statesboro, GA

00:00

KM: Just in case, you know, technology? All right. Okay, so this is an interview with Dean Allen Amason on March 4th, 2025. The interview is being conducted in Bulloch County, Georgia about the dock called.

BP: It was just the abandoned ice plant

KM: Gotcha, and it is part of a research project and interview collection titled dock stories and the interviewers are Kristen Meewen

BP: And Blake Pavri.

KM: Okay, first, big question, tell us about your connection to the dock or to the ice plant.

AlA: It- There wasn't a large ice plant there. There was also a large crab processing facility, shrimp packing facility. Commercial freezer facility and Commercial Cold Storage facility so. I don't remember how large it was, but in the neighborhood of 50,000 square feet in two buildings, so it's not quite accurate to say it's abandoned, it's closed. It has been sold to someone who plans to repurpose it for what I don't know, but it won't be used again. To your original question. It was a business started by my grandfather, [Guy Amason]. I don't fully remember. Well, I wouldn't remember. It was before I was born, but I don't fully recall the date sometime. I believe in the 40s. It did start as a shrimp dock. He had a similar dock in Fort Myers, Florida, at Fort Myers Beach. As well as a number of shrimp boats that spent, you know, months of the year in both locations. And, you know, had an ice plant at both locations, my grandfather passed away in 1969 as I recall. And two years later, my father took over the business in 1971. Built it up into, you know, a pretty robust business, probably reaching it's high water mark in the late 80s.

KM: Okay

AlA: He built our house on the grounds of the property. It was back behind the plant, so I actually grew up in sight or sound of the place. It operated 24 hours a day so we could hear machinery running over there all the time you know and I worked there. But there's a, you know, as a kid and as a young adult soon after graduating from college

KM: What did- What kind of work did you do there?

AlA: Well, a lot of things. When I worked there is, you know, as a high school student, I was just a laborer cleaning up. You know, the plant employed maybe a hundred or more people. And, you know, did lots of things, drove delivery trucks, did what's called pulling ice, which involved taking it out of these large tanks. And you know, sort of separating it from its molds and stacking it up. Unloaded trucks, loaded trucks, unloaded boats. Did all those things. After college, and after a couple of years working as a financial analyst. I went back and was, uh, you know, just managerial guy. Selling scheduling overseeing crews of people who did all the things I did when I was, you know, in high school.

KM: You said y'all had shrimp boats come in and dock in there. Did you or your father or any of

your family ever captain in any of those boats or?

ALA: My... So my grandfather owned a small Fleet of shrimp boats, which is what got him into building the docks, you know, in Georgia and Florida. When he passed away, the boats were sold off. And my father just ran the business and built it up. He never got, you know, never got back into the boat side when my father was younger. He did captain some of my grandfather's shrimp boats so.

BP: Did you ever work on any of the shrimp boats?

0:4:30

ALA: A few times more for fun than for anything else. So, just to learn a bit about the business. I never worked exclusively on the boats, but yeah, I would go out with friends or. You know, just dad liked us knowing the business kind of front to back so. Went out on occasion and worked on them, didn't much care for it.

BP: So, from your memory. Is this dock similar to other docs, or was the stock similar to other docs operating in Georgia? Like, what made it different or unique?

ALA: Well, we had a large plant next to it. Most docks in terms of the dock operation. Yeah, they weren't that dissimilar. Oh, you had boats there. Boats unloaded shrimp. They took on ice and fuel. Face from their dock because we were the largest ice plant around. Really, I guess anywhere in Georgia, the largest ice plant of that type in its time. You know. We sold ice to all the other docks, you know. So, it was our ice going on those boats. But, you know, a dock simply gave the boat a place to tie up, provided them with fuel and ice, and took a small fee for, you know, unloading. You know, box packing, fresh, packing their shrimp. As far as our dock went, we did the same thing. We had the additional I guess element. Up the value chain of being able to take those shrimp and do some additional processing on them. Or if we run loading crab, you know to do pretty extensive processing on those. You know, we were, in some ways, very typical in some ways atypical.

BP: Was there a specific part of you working that you liked the most because it sounded like you had like three separate things that the dock was working on. Did you like doing the crab processing more? Did you like the ice processing the fish or the shrimp

Ala: Truth be told? I liked getting paid more than all the above [laughing]. You know, dad was- He was an old school guy. You just, you just worked harder than the person next to you. Andy probably told you some stories of him, but you know, he was educated at Georgia Tech and had been a successful engineer. And came back to take over the business after his father passed away. And you know, he just believed you, you got up a little earlier. You worked a little harder, you know, and you stayed a little later than your competitor. I don't know the origins of the statement, but Paul McCartney used it in, you know, in the song Live and Let Die, and dad repeated it long before I ever heard McCartney write that song, but dad would say you just have to give the other fella hell. You just worked hard. So, he liked us doing something, I guess, the ice side was easiest for me because it was pretty solitary, you know? You can take a radio with you and listen to music over there. If you recall the building, it was- the crab plant was, of course, on the left. As you look at it, the ice plant. There was a small ice plant in the main plant, but the large ice plant was on the side. And when you were over there, working very often, you were the only person in that building. You know, you could crank up your tunes, and you know, kind of, be left alone. Also, you could- Ice was, it was laid out in rows. I'm sorry for some of this, you know, this vernacular, but, you would pull the ice and rows. You need to get a certain number of rows pulled as it was called this whole process to that, but oftentimes. You know, you'd be told if you pulled 16 rows, you could quit, right? You could go home for the day. Or go

wherever you wanted to go. You know out with your girlfriend or something? And I was really good at it so I could do it perhaps faster than anyone else, so I liked that. I like, you know, driving the trucks delivering. Sometimes we would deliver to long distances. That was, of course, always a lot of fun. Learn to drive a truck. Yeah, but it was all work, right? So, uh, I wouldn't say any of it was. What I would call, you know, particularly fun. Some was just, you know, maybe less, you know, less of a drag than others? There was a lot of variety.

09:38

KM: What about? Can you tell me about some of the people that you worked with at the dock?

ALA: Gosh, um, maybe? It is all so long ago, right? I left there in 1989, which is 36 years ago. And I really have, you know, I've been visiting? My, you know, my family. Never thought about going back. It wasn't. You know that this has been my profession since then, really, when I, when I left there, I started a PhD program at the University of South Carolina. And you know, I mean, I remember people. I just don't remember a whole lot about them, uh? It's, it's a. It's an interesting culture, right? Some things I can remember, not about specific individuals, but just about the way people interacted, right. Work was done when work was available to do. Perhaps this is similar to the agricultural community, right? It's a seasonal business. You work really, really hard when things are in season because you recognize that when the season is over, you know your opportunity will [dry]? Dad and many others used to say, you know, you make hay while the sun is shining. So, there were a lot of long hours. A lot of hard work. And you could rest in the off season. Certainly the fishermen in the shrimp and crab business lived much the same way. I mean, I can remember, you know, the people who used to dock with us and the people at the other docks and I can remember the people who ran the other docks. Some of the families that ran the other docks. I believe when Andy and I were just reminiscing, we were talking about how in Darien, in the, I mean, what'd we say six or seven different of these large docks along from Skippers all the way down to Boones, you know, knew all these families knew the Skippers. They had sons about our age. You know, knew the Boones the same way. And everybody just sort of worked that pace. When the season was there and there were different seasons, white shrimp season, brown shrimp season, rose shrimp season. You know you, you just did what you had to do to get through, uh, get through it. Again, I'm sure there are parallels in agriculture, as I've heard from my friends around, You know, the country over the years, you know, everybody complained about the price. It always seemed you were paying too much for your inputs and getting too little for your product. Seems to be a common refrain. Uh, it's funny, I've worked at three universities just as a parallel. Maybe it's commentary on The Human Condition, but here as a. As a dean, I've heard people complain, you know, we're just underpaid. Given what's expected of us, I spent 18 years at the University of Georgia, where I was a department chair in the Terry College, and everybody there said the same thing. But what no one ever connects is that people here say if only we were paid like they were at UGA. At UGA they say, if only we were paid. Like, we were at, you know, I don't know Ohio State or something. So, maybe it's just The Human Condition to be frustrated with the things you can't control. So that was always a thing. You know, I knew people who grew up working both at the docks or on the boats, or oftentimes, the two overlapped, uh, Mr Skipper, for instance, who had Skipper's dock owned a shrimp boat, you know, Boones had some shrimp boats. You know, and they would sort of work fluidly on the deck or on the boats. The generation under that, my age, I went to school with. You know, we enjoyed things that kids did. In those days

KM: you had fun

ALA: beer parties, water skiing. Yeah, going down the river, you know to water ski in the

daytime, you know, and maybe drink a little beer out on a sandbar that was, good, old-fashioned, fun, you know. So you worked hard and you played hard. And, and you really sort of just enjoyed the- I don't know if enjoys the right word, but you, you lived out loud. You lived out in the open. Most of the boats in the early days weren't air-conditioned.

14:53

You know, at the plant, the freezer plants were hideously cold at times. But I'm sure Andy showed you some of the features that were- it was hot. The buildings weren't air-conditioned. The offices were, but I didn't work in the office when I was younger. Yeah, I didn't get to make my living sitting down as I do right now. And, and no one did, and you just sort of took for granted that that was., that was your life. That, honestly, it's informed a lot about what I do here. I can tell you, you know, as bad as you think you got it. You've, you know, you've never lived until you've worked a summer on the loading dock of the old man Seafood plant. I've told people or as a striker on a shrimp boat, you do that for a season, and you won't complain about much else.

BP: So, can you tell us one of the funniest memories you have at the dock?

ALA: Gosh, I don't know. Funny memory. I have lots of memories. I would just have to ponder that question a little bit. [thinking] This really doesn't involve the shrimping business, but. Maybe a funny memory. We had a- You know, like everyone else, you had a motorboat you lived on the water. And , you know, you made your living from the water, but you know, you also had a lot of fun out there on it. Our playground, in essence, was everything south of Saint Catherine's Island and north of the, you know, the Darien River. Our parents, our dad, mostly didn't really much care what we were doing as long as we weren't getting into trouble. And as long as we, you know, were responsible and taking care of things. So, from a very young age, and by young, I would say 11 or 12, it was fully acceptable just to say, I'm going to take the boat, go down the river. So, the old man had a pretty nice motorboat bow Rider type thing out outboard. Andy has one still. He also has a pretty nice sailboat, but the boys, the sons. We had a sister, but not too much later. We had a boat of our own. You know. Outboard that was satisfactory for pulling a skier, and we got putts around in that sometimes. And dad always told us said, you know, you're, you're responsible. Take care of yourself, you got gas, you got to do. You got to take care of your motor. Take care of the boat. You stuck down the river, we're not coming to get you. Well. We got stuck down the river one time. It just had a mechanical problem on the motorboat, which we were. We were, you know, adequate to fix, but you had to get in the water you had to take the propeller off. You had to put what was called, you know, a Shear pin into it. Put the thing back on. I'm sure there's a better design now such that you don't do this, but what had happened, we'd hit something and the pin had broke, and this drive pin, had broken. So you had to get another one. So we had a spare on the boat and you. I don't remember- my brother Lee. The older brother was in there with us. And I don't think Andy was there. It was Lee and I, maybe a friend of ours, but anyway, you gotta pull the old pin out, which was broken. Yes, it just fell apart, and you had to put the new one in. Put the propeller back on, so you latch thing on. In fiddling around with this we dropped the pin

KM: Nooo

BP [laughing]

ALA: Of course. Who knows. We were in 10-15 feet of water in a small side Creek off of the? Intercoastal Waterway. Just on the south end of Sapelo Island. And. I mean, what are you going to do?

KM: It's gone forever

ALA: I mean, the thing, you know, it's gone. We climbed back in the boat and we tried, you know, sort of getting to the bank and sort of pushing the boat along the bank, but we were at that point. Probably three or four miles from home. We're never going to get home that way and working against the tide so. And tried throwing the anchor out and sort of and that there wasn't a way to square that circle. So we sat out there and just baked in the sun.

KM/BP: No, no.

ALA: Till the sun went down, and then we froze our backsides off, you know, even though it was summertime, it gets cool on a clear night, you know, especially after you've been out there in the heat of the day roasting, you know, in the sun. So we sat out there all night, and we're laying there in the boat, looking up sort of talking about constellations. When we finally hear, you know, boat traffic would come by no. Nothing. We finally hear another motorboat [like] hours, midnight. It must have been. I mean, none of us wore a watch at the time. And it was Dad and someone else coming to get us, and he was mad as he could be at us. Because our mom was mad as she could be at him for not going out and getting us sooner. Anyway, kind of an amusing story, but. Yeah, it helps you grow up a bit. I could think of probably a hundred stories like that, but. You know these things, these things happen, right? Such was life on the river in those days.

[21:23](#)

KM: You mentioned a sister, and also your mother, did they have any roles at the dock?

ALA: The sister worked at the plant, like everybody else did. Dad was an equal opportunity, work you to death-er. It probably had less to do with, um, you know? She being the only sister, the only girl of the bunch. So, there were five of us. If you're a Tracker, you know, my board designation was second to five. She was, you know, fifth of five. So, not only was she the only girl, but she was also the youngest. So, yeah. She was pampered a little bit. But everybody worked. Our mom, you know, didn't. When, when we moved down there... He, I mean she. That's where my father was- had grown up, so she knew the place. But, she didn't really have any interest in working there. She had taught school for a couple of years. But eventually quit doing that and just kind of took care of the house, took care of the kids. So Bitsy, my sister. Her name is Bitsy. Now, an engineer and cyber security expert out on the west coast, but- Or, well in the Rocky Mountains out west, not on the coast, but she worked. But that, you know, I was 13 years older than her, and so I couldn't really tell you what she, you know, what she did or what her experience was. I was long gone by those years

KM: Gotcha. So you told us something funny that happened. What about your favorite or the best memory you have?

[23:17](#)

ALA: Gosh, I don't know. I, it was a neat place to, so I, um, have grown somewhat nostalgic over the past several years for a couple of reasons. One I'm going to retire at the end of this semester. I'll step down.

KM/BP: Congratulations!

ALA: Thank you. I've been doing what I do a long time and like to think you know I'll leave things better than I found them. And you know, I was pretty good at what I did. You know. As I've said to others, everyone leaves inevitably at some point, right? The only question is whether or not you get to do it on your own terms. I'm fortunate that I can. But also because back in 2019, I lost my wife, okay. After 37 years of marriage, she was my high school sweetheart and we were married while we were in college and. She passed away at cancer, so I've just become really kind of nostalgic about some things in the years since. And so I commissioned an artist in Savannah to paint a picture for me. I'll show you what it was. In fact, I've got Andy who you

met. Got his son, who's a tech expert to fly his drone over the property and take some pictures. And then I had those pictures sort of edited into the form I wanted and had that one converted to a portrait by artist named Irene Mayo in Savannah. And I don't know that I can answer the question on a single- with a single event. See this little mud flat now. The river has changed. It was dredged. It had a steeper s, and that came out, so sometimes we would swim down and you could just sort of bog in that mud like I loved. So this is Creighton Island. You could go over this way to a restaurant now called the Fish Docks that's closed, but it used to be called Pelicans Point. The Buccaneer club, which you might have heard something was around that way. This way was out towards Darien, and that Sapelo Island, go over to Sapelo. We're up to Blackbeard, Sapelo sound. Can remember taking the girlfriend that would later be my wife over the Blackbeard. And you know, we'd go exploring together over there. I can remember taking the motorboat out when I'm going to Blackbeard with some friends and just writing what was really, really rough surf and Sapelo Island and, you know, the hull of the boat cracked under the strain of, you know, sort of pounding the waves darn near sunk that one. You know, it was hard to remember just because all so long ago, but I look at this and I just think you know, that was, it's the strangest thing to think.

26:31

In today's world where we worry about, you know, a kid going to their next door neighbor's house, you know, have four grandchildren I visit, you know them periodically. And, you know? Daughter walks, you know, the grandson to the bus stop and stands there. It's not the world I grew up in. We could. You know, going down the river! Off you went

KM: We won't see you till midnight!!

ALA: Well, hopefully that didn't happen often [all laughing]. But it was just a very, very unique time and place, right? And, and that was, that was kind of that was kind of cool, you know? Maybe it's why, I, you know, resonate so deeply with Jimmy Buffett's music or something, but, yeah, I mean, there were colorful characters, some, you know, maybe you know? A little bit. You know, everybody running from something or running to something, right? So, just lots of, I guess, nostalgia around the whole place. Les Goodman loved the blessing of the fleet, I'm sure.

BP: We've heard about it, yeah

ALA: I'm sure others have talked to you about that. That was the high point of the year. It was always in the late spring early summer, and that was kind of the start of the season. I guess that's why they chose to do the blessing of the fleet at that time. You know, just everybody was. It was a whole weekend long celebration. And just kind of neat, a really neat time. In fact, Andy may have told you, but our dad was the Grand Marshal kind of like me-

KM: [We did not know that!]

BP: Oh he didn't tell me that! Wow!

ALA: Yeah, dad was Grand Marshal. Let's see. I came back to Georgia Southern, I say back, because this is where I got my undergraduate degree. I came back here as Dean in 2013. And it was just a year or two after that. So, perhaps 2014 or 15 the dad was Grand Marshall and he was the first Grand Marshal ever to not actually be a shrimp fisherman. And dad was an interesting guy. Like I said, Georgia Tech educated very, very bright. I had traveled a lot of places around the world, went with me on some interesting trips just for the fun of it to Russian places, Eastern Europe, so he lived a full and fascinating life, said his greatest honor was being you know, the first Grand Marshal ever, who wasn't a shrimp fisherman. I wrote his, what do you call the thing in the newspaper, the obituary. And put that in because he had said that to me. So, it just kind of gets into your, you know, it kind of gets into your veins right. And, and I'm sorry, I don't have a

better answer, you know, well, I remember this one time. I remember lots of good times. I remember, we- do you know what it means to plug a watermelon? So take a watermelon. You cut a hole out of it. You pour some sort of alcohol in, you put it back, let it sit overnight in the alcohol sort of is absorbed into the tissues of the melon. And then, of course, you eat the watermelon, you don't really smell or taste the alcohol, but the effect is still there. So we had plugged the watermelon and took it out to one of these sandbars. I'm sure I was underage at the time, or perhaps just barely of age, because maybe one of the reasons I remember it, but we knew we had the watermelon in there and it was in one of the coolers because we were getting it cold in one of the coolers at the plant. And no one but us knew, you know, that we had plugged it with this so. You know, little things like that, but no, it's mostly just the sense of nostalgia I feel about the whole area and the world as it once was. I'm sure had I worked there until I retired, I would view it a little differently, maybe a little less nostalgically. But to me, you know, I mean, it was just. It was the job growing up. It was when I watched my dad do. I worked there for about four years. Until I decided to go back to school and do something different and. You know, that was whatever that works out to 36 years ago. And all of the memories of this sort of homogenized into this general sense of nostalgia that I have.

31:34

BP: So, while you were at the dock, was there any changes that you noticed over the time? This could be with the water, with sea life, with weather.

ALA: No, not really, I do. I mean, I'm aware that things were changing. What did change quite demonstrably was the level of regulation, and I'm sure that was in response to you know sort of changes in water quality. For instance, back in the 60s and early 70s with my grandfather. Let's say he was running it, and we didn't live in, you know, on the coast then. You know, we lived- I was born in Atlanta. And then we were in Greenville you know where my dad's engineering career was taking. Andy was born when we lived in Greenville, for instance. But we'd go down and visit. And, you know, discharging wastewater into the river was just what everybody did. You- as you walked around, may have noticed how many shells are still on the bank that was just from processing done in the 70s and 80s. Believe it. That's how many there are. It was. You know, the land accreted as you poured so many shells there. The rivers I mentioned was dredged to facilitate you know, boat traffic. But all of that is. You know, as derogatory effects on the, you know, on the life of the river and things, and so unaware of that. I don't think anybody was looking to cut corners or do anything wrong. Just didn't know any better, but in response to that, Federal Regulation was increasing regularly. So I am fully aware of that, you know, we had to each year. It seems we're adding some new bit of technology, some new step in the process. Probably you've heard from the, you know, if you've talked to any Shrimp boat captains of any amount of time, the turtle excluder devices. I remember when those came in, same sort of thing. I can remember, kind of concurrent focus from occupational self safety and health. On sort of safety in the plant. Coverings. I mean, we had a lot of Machinery that was there, virtually all of it's gone, but a lot of heavy machinery. We were the heaviest user of electricity in two or three counties, you know, I mean, we would switch on machinery and things would, you know, substations would go dark so it took a lot of coordination with Georgia Power that Dad because his engineering background was able to work out with them. But because of all that Machinery, you know, there's a lot of Hazard in the plant. And, you know, railings getting torn out and put in place or higher, we had. I can remember as a kid. Visiting. It was probably before I moved down and watching these guys crawl up to the top of these big fuel tanks we had. I don't remember what they held five ten thousand gallons, and there were two of them.

34:55

But rather than sitting on their side, as you might have seen these tanks. These stood vertically. And guys would shimmy up the ladder. Open the top, had this long stick, lower it down in the bottom, and get out. No one was ever hurt doing that, but I'm sure somewhere someone was hurting. So, regulation came in. That said, no. If you're going to do that. You had to have a catwalk that, you know, with the railing of a certain height. So, one year, we had to drain the tanks put, build these catwalks around. So I remember a lot of that, and I'm sure that was driven by, you know, the types of changes you're talking about. I was just mostly too young and too interested in. You know, passing- You know, passing whatever classes of whatever grade I was in at school, so I wouldn't be put on restriction, you know, working hard enough to make money and then getting off quick enough that I could go out with my friends or pick up my girlfriend. And you know? Working on, you know, the car I was driving, right? Those were the sorts of things as someone once said, for, you know, men of a certain age, boys of a certain age, which I was, you know, your interests largely come in the form of car fumes and perfumes [laughing]. I didn't think about much else.

KM: Yeah, hmm. I know you said that you handled some of the dock management and the financial side when you were doing that. Did you ever notice any financial struggles that the business was going through?

36:30

ALA: We were fortunate. I mean, we made it. Dad made a good living, and the plant was profitable. It's a different world, you know, than most people live in to own a facility of that size, you know, and Dad would occasionally, you know, sort of reinforce that he was the one who's as he would say, you know, name was on the note. You know, this was before the days of what I might call bailouts. Of you went out of business. You went out of business. You went broke. And, and people certainly did. We were fortunate that we didn't, but when Dad took over the business in 71, it was really a shell of its former self. A lot of equipment was broken down, hadn't been maintained well in the couple of years since my grandfather had passed away. So, I'm sure it was a struggle. I was nine years old in 71, and so probably didn't fully understand that, didn't appreciate it until later in life. Certainly, I understood, you know, the risk of what we were doing we had- I'd have to go back and really think about it, but I'm sure inventory that, you know, ran in the quarter to half a million dollar range. All of it perishable. You get a hurricane, takes your power out. You know you're very exposed. I knew the hazards, you know, having large trucks out on the road. And what would happen if one of those had a wreck. This was maybe a little before the days of sort of Morgan and Morgan styled. You know litigation personal injury litigation, but still you had compensatory damages and, you know, just damages to the vehicles. We had a driver. Driving through a place called The Ridge, which is between Darien and the plant, hit a tree with one of our trucks, ripped the top off of it. So, there was a lot of exposure, but you know, we were fortunate, you know? You know, dad, was a dad, was a straight arrow, which kind of goes with his personality. You didn't cheat on your taxes, you didn't, you know, you didn't pay people in cash so that you didn't have to pay their taxes. You, you know, you did everything above board. And you know, we were always insured, and you know it, it was a profitable business. So I don't really remember any great struggles for us personally, certainly, I knew we were exposed, and certainly I'd seen other people struggle mightily. I wasn't altogether sure whether that was through their own bad decisions or through, you know, some fault, not their own. I just couldn't say. But there was a pace to, you know, to life that I've observed to people- It's one of the reasons I'm in the field. I'm in, right? So my

specialty years, what's called strategic management, which you have no interest in, I'm sure, but the fundamental question, sort of intellectually that strategic management deals with, is why does one firm perform better than another, which is kind of a fascinating question when you think about it, and there's a lot of economic and psychological and sociological theory underlying how firms operate in a way that makes them profitable.

40:15

And then how they compete against one another. Competitive Dynamics is called. Part of my interest came from my observation that when business was good, you know, life at Casa Amason was good, right? Snow skiing trips to Steamboat Springs, you know? That's great. Trips to the Keys, cruises? That's all good. Getting the pool put in. Or if business is bad, you know you didn't go anywhere other than maybe your grandparents house in Atlanta. The, you know, the- you didn't have a great vacation that year, and again, it wasn't the sort of thing that I would have been keenly aware of, or that I would have understood deeply as a teenager or adolescent, but certainly looking back, you can see that there was a pace and that probably had to do with the fact that some seasons were good and you made a lot of money. Some seasons were bad, and you, you didn't make much. But what that triggered in me was a keen interest in how much of that variation between good and bad was attributable to things that we could control? Was dad just being smart one year and not smart the next? That's, you know, hard to fathom because he's the same person. Was, you know, he the same manager all the time, but the industry was just favorable some years and crummy other years, right? Turns out, there's a lot of research on that. So, you know, that sort of thing, so the, if you think about sort of the causal relationship between the quality of management, the outcomes of a company, and then what that, you know creates for you know, for, for the people who live off the business or in association with the industry. That's always been a fascination of mine as a researcher and scholar. Where I spent most of my time sort of studying early on in my career. Okay, thank you Rita. So, yeah, I noticed some of it, but I wouldn't say it was in the sense of, you know. I remember these great struggles other than when we first moved, and dad took over the business. I don't remember much in the way of struggle, and even then I only remember him not being- [I mean] he worked just all the time because he was building this place back. You know and doing it mostly with sweat equity and you know, in his wits.

43:12

BP: So docks essentially are businesses.

ALA: Yes,

BP: So what kind of recommendations do you have for docks to continue being successful?

ALA: I don't know that I have anything at all to that, and I'm sorry. It's been 36 years since I've been gone. I don't know what the price of things is anymore. I'm sure that the price they get for their product seems too low and the price they pay for their input seems too high, but that's kind of- that's characteristic of the human condition. I'm sure it's gotten worse with imported product. I'm sure regulation has made it harder to get a good yield. And I'm sure that taxation has made it very, very difficult to use Waterfront property in large, you know, in large measure for something like a shrimp dock, so it doesn't surprise me as an academic, uh, just to see how there's been a concentration. And a shake out if you will of marginal producers. If someone was going to try and open a new one. I would say, don't. Conditions simply aren't favorable any longer. They were at one point they're not anymore, and this really has nothing to do with how many shrimp are out there. How many crab are out there. I have no idea. Maybe they're, you know, scarce, now, relative to what they want to. Or maybe they aren't, I don't know. But

regardless, you know, it is just much, much harder to make a living in that industry than it ever was in any previous time because of all the things you know, we talked about more than anything else. That's why you see fewer of them.

KM: Well, we're out of questions for you. So, this is the point where we look at each other and we see if we have any more questions.

ALA: Well, this is also the point where Rita tells me my 3:45 is coming up [laughing]

KM: Awesome! Well is there anything that we didn't ask you that you would like to share?

ALA: No, I don't really know what you're doing. Andy told me a little bit. You're doing some sort of. You know, some sort of retrospective on the industry, but not knowing what you're doing and, you know, not understanding kind of the research question or why you're doing it. I couldn't anticipate which questions are or what questions you might have missed.

KM: Gotcha. Well, we're hoping to identify ways that we can help commercial shrimping in Georgia, because dock infrastructure is dwindling. Fleets are aging. Captains and fishermen are aging, so it's really a dying industry. So, we're trying to preserve the culture, history, and also identify opportunities to make it be sustainable.

[46:10](#)

ALA: Oh interesting! So I guessed at the first part, I didn't guess at the second. So, yeah, I mean, it's not attracting new capital, which is evident. And the reason it's not attracting new capital is there just better opportunities for capital. If I had that piece of property, I would not build up a shrimp dock on it, right? Too much regulation in terms of having the fuel. Too much liability you're exposed to in terms of injury. It's a dangerous business. How would you attract New Capital? It will have to be through some sort of innovation. I would think that the opportunity there is not in catching shrimp for domestic consumption anymore or catching crab for domestic consumption. Too easy to get that from imports and candidly, the quality of the import's pretty good. But. Even if the quality wasn't good, people are happier, it seems oftentimes with a mediocre product. At a very low price than they are with an extraordinarily high quality product at a higher price. We saw the same thing in the textile business. You see the same thing happening in, you know, in the lumber business suit, you know, in agriculture, honestly, see it in automobiles. And a whole lot of other things, right? This is, it's the same basic phenomenon that allows a Walmart to move in, all the businesses to drop, everybody to be unhappy that the businesses have dried up. But all of them to enjoy shopping at Walmart, right? It really is better for. You know, in some ways, it's better for everybody. You know, now you get everything you need. You spend less on it, and you have more that you can spend on other things. So it's unfortunate to be kind of, I hate to say selected out, but in a natural selection type of process to be- to sort of economically bypassed and selected out, but propeller planes were selected out by you know by better technology, a jet plane. So, it seems where there will be opportunity, it'll be, because there is novelty in it, right? Not because it is competing in terms of its sort of former occupation because it's former position. I don't know that there will be a way that the domestic trawling industry is ever competitive with, you know, imported shrimp, I don't know. For instance, if you like salmon, that longline salmon will ever compete effectively against farm-raised salmon. You know, people will say, I only eat the longline. They don't even know, right? Because-

KM: Even restaurants don't know

ALA: Yeah, oftentimes the restaurants- I joke oftentimes. I'll sit and ask a restaurant, you know, most recently, my wife laughs when I do this, but... where were we? Some inland location and eating at some fancy. Oh, I know where we were, we were in Boise, Idaho, and there's a river

that runs right through Boise Island, Idaho, and we were having scallops. And I said, now these are local scallops, asked our server. These are local scallops, right, that come right out of the river? Oh, yes, sir. [laughing] Yeah, they have no idea. And I don't blame them. You know, I mean, can you tell me where the clothes you're wearing came from?

KM: Yeah

ALA: You know,

BP: I can't.

ALA: Yeah, yeah, neither can I

KM: My closet!

ALA: Exactly. It's just in the nature of things, so if there's opportunity there it'll be driven by the novelty of it. Which suggests that it won't be broadly applicable. I don't think we will return to a day where we see all those boats. I read somewhere that we're at about 10 percent of licensed boats where we were back in maybe the late 60s. I don't know what we'd consider the apex, but we'll never go back to that.

KM: Yeah.

ALA: So, what will be there will be profitable. A because it's, you know, it's scarce and unique, and B, because it leverages that novelty to appeal to. You know

KM: Foreign markets or-

ALA: Or tourists. Yeah, we're going to take you out on a shrimp fishing expedition.

KM: Yeah, you're going to get to pick your own shrimp! That sounds fun, honestly.

BP: You'd like that

KM: I would!

ALA: Yeah, until that sea sickness hits, or the smell of those diesel fumes is that thing's just grinding and pulling out.

KM: I'll just look [for Ralph] over the edge.

ALA: It's how you're giving back to the fish population. Well, hey, thank you all for coming in. I appreciate y'all working on this.

KM: Absolutely!

ALA: Take that off.

KM: Thank you so much!

ALA: I hope that was helpful

51:26

Ends interview