

Interview Subject: Andy Amason  
Interviewer: Lilah Henderson and Blake Pavri  
Project: Dock Stories  
Transcriber: Blake Pavri  
Primary Investigator: Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes  
Others Present: N/A  
Interview Date: February 28, 2025  
Duration: 1 hour and 17 minutes  
Place of Interview: Darien, GA

0:00:00

BP: Awesome. So this is an interview with Andy Amason?

AnA: Yes.

BP: On February 28 2025 the interview is being conducted in Darien, Georgia, about the dock called Sea gardens, Incorporated. It's part of a research project and interview collection titled doc stories and the interview, the interviewers are Blake Pavri

LH: And Lilah Henderson.

BP: So our first question is, can you tell us about your connection to this dock? When did you first come here? Why did you come working here? Etc.

AnA: My connection to this facility, this dock, and the building where we are right now began in 1970 when I was five years old. My dad, who grew up here, who grew up in the house that I live in now, he was a graduate of Georgia Tech. After graduating from Georgia Tech, he went into the contracting business, spent 10 years in that and then moved his family, who was my mom and my two older brothers here at the time, moved us back here to his home. He took over the business and and after my grandfather had passed away, who I never really knew, he took over the business and started running it in 1970. Our... the house that we grew up in, is right behind here. You can't see it from where we sit right now, but I'll walk you around and show you. So this was kind of like playing in the yard when I was a kid. If that answers your question.

BP: And you already touched on this before we started the recording. But what was the name before you guys bought this dock, if it had another name?

AnA: Well, when he... I think the name, when... When he took it over at that time, it was just sea gardens Incorporated. He changed it once he got the corporation reorganized, and he became the sole owner. He changed it to sea garden seafoods Incorporated. And then about seven or eight years ago, I changed it back to sea gardens Incorporated. Dropped the seafoods from the title.

LH: And then what was your role here?

AnA: Well, as a kid, I was just a flunky. [laughs] I was, when I worked here, I started working here after school and in the summer times when I was 11 years old and you... the job was just like my two older brothers, although I think they started when they were a few years younger than that. The... you know, is do whatever you told, sweep the floors, drag ice blocks around. The... my- I think my primary job when I was a kid was working in the crab plant, doing what they call catching crabs, what we called catching crabs, which was as the crabs were first cleaned after being cooked, they were thrown into a flume where water came down and washed them into a tumbler where they were washed, and then they fell out of that tumbler into a basket, and the basket was sitting on top of a stainless steel table, and somebody would stand there. And as each basket got full, you would- as the basket got full, you would pull it out of the way and then

put an empty one in place of it, and then you would take the filled basket and put it in the cooler to be ready for processing the next day, where they would take the crabs and individually pick the meat out of them. So if I wasn't doing that then, then I was working inside this room that we're sitting in front of right now, where this was, this is the oldest part of the building, built in 1947 this was an ice plant that was where they made ice blocks that were used to sell ice to the- to provide ice to the shrimp boats. So... was doing one or the other.

0:05:04

BP: So you worked with crab specifically. Did you work with any other seafood?

AnA: Sometimes shrimp, because we did. We did three different we three. We did three, primarily in those years, up until about 1990 we did primarily, or up until, pardon me, up until about 1988 we did three things. We made ice for shrimp boats. We processed crabs and processing, meaning you're buying them raw from the fishermen, and you're cooking them and processing them, and then canning the meat, and we processed shrimp, and later on, as I became a teenager, I developed an allergy to shrimp, so I couldn't be around them. I could be around them, but I couldn't really handle them, and I still have that allergy. It's actually worse now than it was then. I didn't have it when I -I didn't have it till I was about 12 or 13 years old, and... but never had the same problem with crabs. So anyway, so primarily I was in the crab plant, sometimes in the ice plant, very rarely ever in the shrimp operation.

BP: So in your opinion, what is unique about this dock compared to other docks in Georgia?

AnA: Hm. I don't, the, I guess the process, the dock operation itself, one was, guess one of the things that make it unique is we're pretty limited. We only had, we never had more than a half a dozen boats at this dock, because it's a fairly small dock, and we just had so much other stuff that we were doing with crabs and with the ice. We were always in an arm's length business with the shrimp, with the local shrimp business and the local docks, because we sold them the ice that they used, and we generally delivered it to their dock and unloaded it there. And so we were in business with all the other docks, or not in business, but they were our customers. And so the shrimp part of the business was always really kind of just something we did on the side, like we needed one more thing to do. But, you know, that's kind of how it was here. We were, our actual shrimp dock business compared to what you've seen at other docks in this county or along the coast, was really itself actually pretty limited. Our main thing was processing. In fact, at one time, we were buying shrimp from other docks and bringing them here and doing processing with it. So because we were pretty limited, we only had [what] that time, we only had one or two boats that were here. So.

0:08:18

BP: So because y'all were one of, like, the only, I assume, right, that y'all were one of the only ice producing facilities-

AnA: Right

BP: Here? Did y'all have, like, a bunch of the ice boats come here to this dock and then they got ice from here? Or did y'all send the ice to another dock?

AnA: We primarily sent it to the other docks.

BP: Okay

AnA: It's kind of interesting, the way that the shrimping, the shrimp trawling business, has developed over the years. Right now, in today's world, most of the boats that are out dragging shrimp nets are freezer boats. They're steel hull boats. They're big. They have- down below deck is literally, you know, several 100 square foot walk-in freezer. So in those days, or up until about, well, up until about 10 years ago, the majority of the boats were ice boats. Okay, and it

had been that way up until about 1950 from about 1950 until 10 years ago. So 70 years. prior to 1950 when boats went out and harvested shrimp, they had to come back each day and they put them in bushel baskets, and there was an ice plant in Darien. That was... that, there's actually two ice plants in Darien. They're not- there's nothing there anymore. One of them is where the Oaks on the river hotel is now. But they, the others where the Adam Strain building is, but they were really, really small, and they couldn't produce very much ice. And most of the ice that they were selling people were using in ice boxes at their residences, because people didn't have refrigerators. So when my granddad built this place, it get really loosened up the shrimp industry. I can't think of a better word to say it. It gave them the ability to be able to put ice on the boat, go out and stay out, stay out overnight, if need be. And that probably existed in places like Charleston and Savannah, but it didn't exist here or Jacksonville, Fernandina. But I'm just about certain it existed in Fernandina, because that's really where the shrimp industry is. We know it in the US today really started. So that's... in those days, boats were going from being 25 or 30 foot boats to being 40 and 50 foot boats, and now 40 or 50 foot boats tiny. So anyway, that's what having the ice, the ability to ice and preserve the shrimp did. I can't imagine eating shrimp that have been out all day in a Bucha basket. But that's [laughing]

0:11:37

LH: And then how much would y'all sell the ice for? Or did it depend on the boat size?

AnA: No. When I quit college, quit Georgia Southern in 1984 after only being there briefly, when I quit and came back and got a job. You know, the way I ended up working here was my dad ended up that his assistant manager quit to go do other things and I had just quit college, so I needed a job. And he said, Hey, come back to work. You're in charge. And thank you. So anyway, the... in those days that was 1984, 41 years ago, I think we were, if we were delivering ice, we were delivering it for \$5 a block. It may have been \$6 a block, but, say, \$5 a block. When I closed it down at the- in early 2018 we were delivering it for \$20 a block. So that's... and really, there wasn't... It really wasn't that there was that much inflation and involved in the cost of producing it. What drove up the cost of producing it was that the customer base had shrunk so much in the early 1980s when we were first, when I first came in as part of the management the we were probably servicing 100 boats, and at the end of 2017 right before I closed it up, we were servicing about 25 boats. So we were having to keep it open and incur all the same expenses that we always had, but without selling near the volume in those days, we would sell around in a year's time, around 30 to 35,000 blocks of ice in a year, and- which that's a 300 pound block of ice. So do the math on how many pounds of ice that is. And at the end of 2017 I think we had sold about 3000 blocks of ice, so 90% decrease in sales. So anyway, it was, I closed it up for medical reasons that I run into. But it was, it only had a year or two left in it at the time it closed up anyway. So

BP: So what has this dock- Well, you already kind of touched on this. What has the dock been through the years you were here before your time?

0:14:51

AnA: Well, it was, it was first. The property was first built as an ice plant. Then my grandfather expanded it and got into the seafood business. And that's when he built the dock. Then he got into the business of actually owning shrimp boats. And he had, I think, 11 boats in his fleet in the 1950s as most he ever had. I may be wrong about that, but close. Then he moved most of his shrimp operation, the shrimping operation, to Fort Myers, Florida, and he leased this facility to a company called CPAC, which is a big value added seafood or shrimp processor that I don't even know whether they still do that or not, but I don't know [whether] that brand name even still

exists anymore. But anyway, and then he came back and took it back over and got into the... he got into the crab processing business and moved more towards that, with the shrimp just being something that was done on the side. And then he passed away in the mid 1960s in 1967. And then my dad took it over in 1970 and just continued operating it that way, primarily as a crab plant and an ice plant, and then with shrimp being done as a side business, really.

BP: And what about the people that you worked with at the dock? How were they like? What were their personalities like?

AnA: Lot of different personalities. In the late 1980s we started as a winter time fishery, started processing welks or conchs. If you walk down and look at the bank now there's conch shells piled up, all those tons and tons of conch shells piled up there. And you can go to various places on the coast around here, and you'll find conch shells piled up on the bank as erosion protection. And that probably came from here. And, but at one time, at various times when we were doing that, that was really really labor intensive. So I would hire as many people as I could, and we might have 100, 125 people working here during a day. It was seasonal, so it never was for very long, but it was good part time work and, yeah, you encounter a lot of personalities [laughs]. I don't know a better way to say it. It's just people that don't necessarily get along with each other and but they both get along with me, or they did for a few minutes anyway, and you just have to learn to adapt. So anyway, hope that answers your question

0:18:23

LH: And then, can you tell me the funniest thing that ever happened at the dock?

AnA: Oh, well, yeah, there was one time. This was actually just a few years ago. We were ahead we had after we had gotten out of the seafood business, we were just in the ice business at that time. This was, I'm guessing, 2007, 2008 sitting here one afternoon, and this car came through the parking lot. That fence was not there. Then this car came through the parking lot. He must have been going 25 or 30 miles an hour, and he turned and right at the dock, the dock kind of makes a dog leg to the left, and he turned just like he was driving, and just drove right off the end of the dock. [laughs]

LH: That's insane!

AnA: And there are two or three guys in there, just drunk as a skunk, and they, one of my guys that was working here for me. His name was Bert. He ran and Bert was big as that door, and he ran down there and grabbed a rope and was trying to rescue him and help him. And one, one of the guys started cussing him out and just talking really ugly to him. And Bert said, you know, time out a minute [laughing]. I'm just here, doing my job. I'm working. You know, you're I'm up here, I'm on the dock, I'm dry. You're about to drown. The first thing is going to happen is you're going to stop cussing. The second thing is, if you stop cussing, I'm going to throw you this rope. If you don't, I'm going to turn around and go back to work and I about died laughing [laughing]. Anyway, [laughing]

LH: I guess that's why y'all put up the fence right? [LH/BP laughing]

AnA: No, that's another story that happened after the place was closed down, actually, that, as I told you, the house that I grew up in is right behind here and a few years after my dad had passed away, and my step mom had moved out, she lived there for another couple of years after he passed away, and then she moved out, the place was just sitting empty. We had not sold it yet, and weren't real sure what we were going to do with it. And anyway, I had made it in my habit. Every Sunday morning, I'd get a cup of coffee, and me and the dog would go for a walk, and I'd walk over here, and the house was empty, so I'd walk by and there's a swimming pool on the house. I'd check the pool and make sure the pump was running and do whatever, and just walk

through the yard and come around this way and make it back to my house, which was my grandparents house. I think I might have mentioned that.

0:21:37

Well anyway, so I'll walk around the end of the building and I see a car parked there at the end of the building, and nobody in it, and it's locked. I didn't think anything of it. I thought, who did that? Somebody, you know, this is Sunday morning. The night before was Saturday night. Somebody was running from the police. Who knows what? I'm sure they'll be gone. Or maybe they, we get people sometimes to come down here and go fishing or something off the dock. Maybe they parked. You're going to fish off the dock and walk down to one of these other docks or something. I didn't pay a lot of attention to it. Well, anyway, so Sunday morning, I go back home, I go to church. I came home from church, and I noticed the car was still there and- but it had been moved, so that caught my attention, and so I got out and I looked around, and it was locked again, but it had been moved. So I walked around the building, I couldn't find anybody. So then I called the sheriff's office, and I had them come out and I explained to them what happens to this car has been here since last night, evidently, but it's been moved since this morning. So whoever owns the car is probably around here somewhere. So the deputy, he ran the license plate on it, and it was registered to some woman from Effingham County. And so he and I walked through the building and couldn't find anybody anywhere. And this is there's a lot of different rooms in this building, so and so anyway, I said, You know what, we need to look one more place. I said, let's walk over to the house. So that house over there is empty right now. There's nothing in it, and so let's make sure there's not somebody couped up in there. So we walked over there, and as soon as we walked, we walked up through the backyard, and as soon as we walked up onto the patio, I knew that there was somebody there, because there was a pack of cigarettes laying on the outdoor patio table. And I said, there's somebody in the house. So because those cigarettes haven't been there, and so he said, no kidding. I said, No. So we opened the back door and he said, Hello, and I could hear and not with him when we opened the back door, I said, there's nothing in the house. There was a TV and a couch, and that's the only thing that's in the house at the time, and the TV was on. And I said they're in the house because the TV is on. So we open the door, you hear the TV on.

0:24:27

And so he drew his weapon, and I walked in behind him, and once we got inside, I could hear the shower running in the master bathroom and I said, whoever it is in there taking a shower right now, the door to the bedroom was closed, which is right off of the kitchen, so he pounded on the door. Said, Come out with your hands up, and had his weapon drawn. And I stepped to the other side of the- away from the door. Thought they might have a weapon, they might shoot up the door. So anyway, so we hear the shower shut off and out walks this little lady who's about four foot nothing, and maybe weighs 100 pounds and she says, What are you doing here? And I said, What are you doing here? I said, I own this house and which I didn't own it, but my dad's estate owned it. I'm responsible for it. And she said, Well, my friend told me I could come stay here. So I said who's your friend? And she would never tell me who her friend was. So somehow or another, she managed to find the place. And so after you know the sheriff's deputy basically had me sign a peace warrant against her, saying, I'm not going to press charges against you. You just go away and don't ever come back and you know, she wasn't destitute. She had a- it was a nice automobile. It was a fairly new Toyota Camry, and so she left and but ever since then, I put up that fence because I didn't want people... it- Over the years, it had been kind of a hiding place for people. If they were... somebody was DUI or something, they would pull down here and



park or, you know, teenagers hanging out. So I just, I put that fence up. So just to keep from having people loiter in the parking lot. So anyway, that's how the fence got there.

0:27:04

BP: So what was the best memory that you've had at this dock?

AnA: Oh, just a lot. I love being around all the boat captains and the crew men listening to those guys poke fun at each other and poke fun at me and me poke fun at them and cut up and that kind of stuff. Up here in the business, up here in the plant, we used to always have a Christmas party. And all the ladies that worked here would bring food that was just, you know, just awesome. It was like, a Sunday cover dish kind of thing. And that was, that was always fun. Dealing with the people, you know, just, it's kind of hard to, you know, specific. And being able to work with my dad that was, you know, of course, that was cool, you know, be a part of a family thing. And, you know, you know, all the hard work at the time, I felt like it was killing us at the time, but it was, you look back on it, you realize, you know, hey, this wasn't so bad after all, it's actually pretty good. Yeah, so,

LH: And then you mentioned the women that was up here. Was it the captain's wives or

AnA: No, no, these were, these were all ladies. They were full time employees here. They were working in the crab plant. Let me tell you you want to do a, I guess it's an anthropological dig into, you want to do some research into a cultural thing. This is primary African American ladies that picked crabs. And nobody knows how to do that anymore, nobody. And mean, people sit down and I can't. I've done it, you know, several years after we closed up, I love crab meat. My son and I put out a half a dozen crab traps and dumped the crabs out, and I put them in a cooler one night. Then we went out the next day and caught the same amount the next day and dumped them out. And then we took what we had, you could, you can, as long as you keep them cool, they'll preserve well, alive, well enough to not be rotten. They're still in good shape. And then you cook them. And because you cook them whole, and you cook them live, and then we cooked them, and we picked the meat out. Well, we worked for like five or six hours picking those crabs. And, you know, we got just about enough meat to make a dish of crab casserole out and those ladies that used to work here would have picked what I picked in several hours would have done it in 15 minutes. And any one of them, and, but they're mostly dead and gone. Now, I ran into one lady the other day that, her name was Maggie, that I hadn't seen in a few years, and she was, she was the youngest of, probably there close to the youngest of, but her mom worked here, and her aunts and her cousins, and just, it was just a cool thing, cool thing. I miss that. I miss that a lot. And but there's, it's, there's just, there's nothing like that done anymore. It's, you know, you find, I'm sure you and you see, I know this from just talking to people, you see a lot of that same kind of thing on these shrimp boats. The guys that work on the deckhands, that work on the boats anymore, used to be the guys that did it. Could head shrimp just, you know, it was a sight to watch, sight to see they could, they pick them up and pinch the heads off as they pick them up and just clean up a deck in no time. Now, nobody knows how to do that, anymore than the deck ends that work on the boats. Now, if you get somebody to work on a boat, now they're all you know.. that job description is aging out because young people don't want to do that kind of work anymore, and I then that's just the way of the world. That's not necessarily their fault. That's just that's back breaking work, and they can make a lot of money on it, or you could, but, but anyway, working here was, you know, it's pretty decent, it's pretty decent work at the time, even we got out of that business in the late 90s, and it had pretty much gone to nothing by the time we closed it up, we couldn't sell crab meat anymore, just because of imported crab meat and but, the, if we had not gotten out in in the end of 99 we would have probably been out of it another year

or two later, just because there's no more... again, the same thing with the deck ends. The ladies that picked crab meat were aging out. They were all getting old, and they were retiring and there, and there weren't many new people coming on that wanted to do that kind of work. And actually, it was in an air conditioned room and it was, you know, even then, it was probably 12, \$13 an hour, but which was pretty decent wages at that time. It's nothing now but it's just, it is hard work. So that's just the way it goes

LH: Was it around the same time the other docks started having people age out as well?

**0:33:33**

AnA: yeah, well, again, that's- I'm bouncing back into between docks and processing. The- there were two other crab plants in the state of Georgia at the time, and we all went out of business at the same time at the end of 1999 but what I'm seeing now with the shrimp business is very similar to what happened with the crab business 25 years ago, because it's it's the same thing. The imported product is- depressed the price so much that they're basically working, getting paid. They're getting paid the same price for shrimp today that they were getting paid when I was a kid in 1975 and nothing else is the same price as it was in 1975 everything else is more expensive. So they've, they've- the ones that are there have been, have persevered, because there's, there's so little fishing pressure now, because there's very few boats anymore, that, you know, they've been able to stay in business, and one way or another, get a little higher price or get a little better catch each time they go out. So the efficient, they're a little more efficient because there's just nobody else around them. But even with that, you know, eventually you have to replace an engine. You have to, you know, the cost of living, if you're a deckhand, the cost of living still goes up. So, you know, even if you can go out and make four or \$5,000 in one week. That's a lot of money for one week. But if you only do that four or five weeks out of the year, because you can't sell the shrimp the rest of the time, then you know, it's, you know, makes it hard to keep people on. Plus, it's, it's who wants to, you know, if you gotta make 30 or \$40,000 a year, who wants to do that, sitting on a stool on the back of a shrimp boat, sitting in a pile of fish and shrimp, picking the shrimp out, when you can go do it and make that same money, probably a little better money than that sitting in a air conditioned bulldozer, you know, if you're, if it's, if it's, you know, that's basically what they're up against them. So anyway, it's aging out a lot.

BP: So you've talked about some of the changes you've seen in the industry already, but have you seen any other changes with the weather, the sea life, the water?

AnA: Yeah, a little bit. I've got my opinions. I'm not- I'm not a marine biologist, but I know a few, and I've talked with them. I don't fault anybody for this, but I think the paper industry has negatively affected the shrimp industry- has negatively affected the seafood industry in general. And now the paper industry employs a lot of people, okay, and, but they use a ton of fresh water. And in Georgia's coast, I don't remember it. I do a little bit, but there used to be, it used to be a very common thing in this part of the world to see an artesian well, you know what I mean? When I say a free flowing well, you stick a pipe in the ground and water comes up, and you don't see that anymore. And it used to be really common in areas along the coast where you would see naturally flowing fresh water out of the ground, or you might not see it out of the ground, but it was- it was there. It was back being a river bottom or in a marsh or something, and you don't see that anymore. So the my point is, the water that's in the estuary right out here in this marsh has gotten a lot saltier. It's gotten a lot the salinity is a lot higher than it used to be.

**0:38:25**

Unknown Speaker

Can we pause this for just a second? That's my brother. Hey, you got five minutes? I'm at the

plant right now, sitting on the porch.

Speaker 2

getting interviewed by a couple of young ladies from Georgia Southern who are anthropology students, anthropology students, and they're doing they can better explain to you, they're basically doing a historical survey of the Georgia seafood industry and and so anyway, so I told them about you and how the dean of the business school used to work here at the ice plant and at the crab plant, and I didn't tell them about the fact that you and Lee were, at one time, the youngest commercial fishermen in the state of Georgia and but you still probably still hold, still hold that distinction. So anyway, I might. I'm going to hand one of them the phone, and you can give them your secretary's phone number, because they'd like to talk to you Sure. All right. All right, here you go.

Speaker 1

Yeah, hi. My name is Blake. Um. Our project is working with Dr Jennifer Sweeney took from the anthropology department, and we would love to, like, get your secretary's number to interview you about working in the fishing business. If that's okay, perfectly. All

Speaker 4

right, so I do not know her phone number off the top of my head, I number. Off the top of my head, Rita had my executive assistant. I mean, all you have to do is search Parker college dean's office. Leave. The number is 912-478-2622.

Unknown Speaker

got sounds like that's what it is. 478, 2622.

Speaker 4

tell her, it will be helpful if you tell her you and I spoke and that you met my brother and are talking with him, just because, you know, as a general rule, she screens these things out for me.

Speaker 1

Awesome. Yeah, makes sense? Yeah, I don't

Speaker 4

do a lot of this sort of thing just because stay focused on the college mostly. Yeah, we'd be happy doing just, you know, she knows that we've talked she'll make it a priority and get you

Speaker 1

in sooner rather than late. Awesome. Thank you so much. I really appreciate this. So what prompted, how did you

Unknown Speaker

guys connect with what prompted this

Unknown Speaker

whole project, who got in contact with you? Was it Brian? Yeah,



Speaker 2

there's Brian. Is it Floyd? Is that he pronounced his name? He's, he's the director of UGA marine extension in Brunswick. You know where, you know where Carol used to work and and he called me. He told me about it about a year ago, and said it was coming down the pipe. You might want to talk to us sometime. Well, then he called me yesterday, and they're going around to they went, I'm sure y'all been to the Boone's dock, and they've gone to most of the docks along the coast, in the in, you know, up around Savannah and in Brunswick too, and and the name Sea Gardens has come up a couple of times. So he said, You know what we need to he knows me. So he gave me a call and said, you know, is there any way we can talk to you for an hour or so tomorrow? And and I said, Sure. So anyway, he's, he's walking around here somewhere. I don't know where he is, but he's anyway, he's, he's walking around taking pictures when they were actually, when they called me yesterday, they were at Charlie Phillips is talking to him. So, you know, it's pretty easy to get permission. So I'm sure the you know, everything probably

Unknown Speaker

looks kind of old and can

Speaker 4

promise you, there was a season when, my goodness, the place where you're sitting employed over 100 people, Phillips was booming and a hive of activity in the restaurant next to it was, you know, just slammed with people. Darien, you know, had how many docks were there along there 84 crystal

Speaker 2

pluggers. Yeah, yeah. There were, you know, there were, there were three. There were three on the actually, there were five at one time. There was four on the east side of the bridge, and and then skippers and browns, which would make it seven on the west side of the bridge. You could, you could

Speaker 4

probably walk from Boones all the way to all the way to skippers, other than the part under the bridge, without ever getting your feet wet, simply back going from

Speaker 2

hopping from one, yeah, hopping from one to another. We probably did that more than once. Kind

Speaker 4

of neat to go down and look at it fast, and it's kind of fun to know that somebody, somebody has some interest. We, I don't know y'all are in the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, but we, my wife, Larry, in Savannah right now, and you may have some interest the Parker College, our team will be here setting up starting tonight, and they upgraded us to presidential

Unknown Speaker

suite. Wow, cool. Swanky, swanky. With

Unknown Speaker  
Amy and.

Speaker 4  
Lady put you in contact with me COVID, she will be happy to get you in soon as possible. Next week's busy culture, we find the time Awesome.

Speaker 1  
Thank you so much. I'll definitely have either me or my like, Dr tucks, call you great, awesome.  
Thank you so much. You

Speaker 2  
bet All right, y'all have fun. We will do our best. It's work. Somebody's got to do it. Yeah, that's uh, take one for the team, please. And get this. There you go. All right, see you. You

Unknown Speaker  
any who

Unknown Speaker  
there's some stories I can tell you, but I probably don't one that comes to mind that I just

Speaker 1  
that's fine, so moving on with the interview. Sure. So you said that this,

Speaker 2  
did you turn it back on? Okay, yeah, cool. We're gonna cut out, yeah, okay, okay, yeah, that's fine, because that's a whole Yeah.

#### 0:46:19

BP: You said that this business shut down before COVID happened, right?

AnA: Yes.

BP: So was there anything else that kind of disrupted the flow of events happening around here?  
Or...

AnA: No, not there were, you know, no man- Well, COVID is not a man. Maybe it is a man-made disaster. I don't know the, in 1989 the we had in Christmas Eve of 1989 we had five inches of snow, okay, on the Georgia coast, pretty much from Charleston or just south of Charleston to St Augustine, we had five inches of snow. Snow is like poison to shrimp. Okay, so there were no shrimp the following year. I mean, none and and they- there were no, none the following spring. So that was kind of scary, because, you know, by the time spring time rolls around, you're already been through four or five months of really lean times with no sales, very few sales. And it was pretty well in mid September, before, before anything started showing up, before any shrimp started fall, shrimp started showing up. There were shrimp there that were larval size in the spring that didn't, for some reason, didn't die because of all that super cold water, but, but anyway, we survived, and then the following year was fantastic. So, yeah, that was a disruption. The- Yeah, I'm glad we weren't around for dealing with COVID. So that's... that would have

been tough.

BP: How do you think that would have impacted the ice and everything it would have?

AnA: Well, it... several ways. One by that when we got out of the seafood business, what I replaced it with was a special events business that where we did ice sculptures and that kind of stuff. And we also did this thing where we would go around using the same equipment that we use for blowing ice on the shrimp boats. We would blow snow out on the ground and let kids get out and play in it.

BP: That's cool.

AnA: And we've actually done it at Georgia Southern several times in the sweetheart circle, where they have a tree lighting thing there right after Thanksgiving. And we would do it at that event, and that was before Allen started working there and- the so, you know, things like that. We- that was only about 30% of the ice business, but it was an important part of the business, and that would have ceased to exist. Plus, the ice business, just like the crab processing business was, and just like the shrimp boat business is, was this was all business. This is all 1940s and 50s technology, and it was hard to get employees, hard to get people that were willing to do that. I was paying \$15 an hour then. It was hard to get people that wanted to do that kind of work. And it's not career work, I know, but was for me. But you know, so I can't imagine having to go through the job of getting people to do that kind of work, and in particular, not in with that, with the pandemic thing, everybody was so scared and, you know, nobody wanted to be out and all that. So anyway, yeah, glad I wasn't around for that. It was two years after that when we- I closed it up, and at the end of 2017 actually, we stayed open till about the middle of February of 2018 just, you know, they were still catching a few shrimp into January and early February. So I didn't want to, I didn't want the boats to have to stop because they couldn't get ice. And that's pretty much the way each season runs. The DNR lets them hang over into the early part of the next year, but, but then once we closed it up, I spent about six months just turning it into an empty building with the hopes of renting out storage space and just whatever, and then that didn't work. So it worked a little bit, but not enough to pay the bills. And so we put it on the market in 2020 right about time the pandemic was starting, and it sat on the market for two years. We had a lot of interest. Charlie was a blessing, because he bought it with the intention of leaving it pretty much like it is now. I mean, you know, he's got things he wants to do. He's going to, I think, put in a boat yard for servicing boats, which is kind of a throwback to what the adjacent property originally was, because that was a railway over there that my grandfather built. So, you know, I think it's, I hope he does really good with it. So anyway, and he's got his oyster farming operation that he's wanting to base out of here and whatever, so see where it goes.

[0:52:32](#)

LH: And then were there any other financial struggles?

AnA: No, just the, just the seasonality of it, there were, by the time I closed up, I had cut my weekly salary by about 40% so and this place when it... was to run at all, even at a minimal level, was still a seven day a week operation, not in sales. We weren't open selling ice to customers seven days a week, but it was, it's all refrigeration equipment. So you don't ever shut that stuff off. You know, with you, you expect to sell a little bit of ice, even if it's not much, a little bit each week. So you have to keep your coolers cold and the freezers cold, which means you have to keep all the equipment running. And so when, when that, you know, just because of that, there's only so much you can do to cut costs, and well, the only, the only thing left to do to cut when you know, when you get down to the bare minimum of what you can afford to... you

know, when you've cut the cost, as much as you can cut it, there's one more cost you can cut, and that's how much you pay yourself. And by the time I had done that, and that was another thing that led to shutting it down, you know, if I were to cut it anymore, it was, you know, I could go get a job at Home Depot and get paid what I'm was paying myself without near the headache and or at Walmart or some, something like that. So it was tough because this, I mean, it's, you know, I started like I said, I worked here, started in the summer times and after school when I was 11 years old. And Lee and Allen started when they were, I think, eight and and then we have a younger brother who did it when he was in high school too. My sister, she didn't have to, but the you know, you it's kind of like the family farm, you know, you don't want to. You hate to. To shut it down but the bottom line is, if it's better than running the risk of getting into your personal savings and whatever to just be able to afford on it. So anyway, so that's why we shut it down, and ultimately why we sold it a bit

LH: You talked a little bit about having to keep it, of course, keep everything basically cold. Did you have anything like a hurricane that affected or

0:55:29

AnA: No we never had, well in my lifetime, we did not. In the early 1960s they had a really bad hurricane here. Think that was Hurricane Dora and and I don't know how long they were without power then, but from during my lifetime, from the time we moved here in 1970 until Hurricane Matthew was the first... we had hurricanes. Hurricane Hugo in 1989 got pretty close, but we were only without power for a few hours here and and then Hurricane Floyd in 1999 got really close, and I don't think we ever lost power for that, but the tide got up really high. But then when Hurricane Matthew happened, that's the first time I've in my lifetime that we've ever lost power for multiple days. For you know, we were without power here for five days. Now we had a generator in place that we could have, that we could run the place on, but you could only there wasn't really a whole lot of by then we were, if we were, if we had still been in the seafood business, I'd been running the generator, because then you've got a bunch of valuable inventory that's worth several \$100,000 and it'll bankrupt you if it goes bad with ice. Who cares? You know, I opened the doors and said, you know, the two days before the hurricane, the shrimp boats were all icing up, because hurricanes actually stir up the- they always catch a lot of shrimp right after a hurricane, okay, that kind of stirs the pot, brings them to the surface and makes them easy to catch. So the shrimpers buy a bunch of ice. So I just made sure that, you know, by the time we had gotten everybody iced up, we only had a little bit of ice left in the freezers and and I figured, well, I'm gonna close the doors, and if we lose power, just to keep all that ice from sticking together and making one big chunk of ice, and I have to go in there and chop up. I'll either open the doors and throw it out on the ground or or, you know, I'll just hit it. I'll leave it in there in such a way that it doesn't stick together. And so that's what I did, and it all melted anyway, but made for really clean freezers, you know, so anyway, but that was, that was a that was a big disruption, and then hurricane Irma in 2017 which wasn't quite a year later, between Hurricane Matthew and hurricane Irma. Those, you know, it's interesting. I'll go. You know, from time I was five or six years old, as far back as I can remember, until, how long is that? That's 50 years, 48 years, 46 and 47 years, 46 years to Hurricane Matthew from 1970 to 2016 we never lost power. But then we had two years where we lost power and 2016, 2017 that would, and again, if we had been in the seafood business, then that would have been bad. That would have been really bad, because there's, you know, there's no substitute for refrigeration, and you can only do so much with a generator, because you can, you know, it works for a period of time, but eventually it runs out of fuel, and if you can't get fuel delivered to it, then you got a problem.

So my hat's off to guys like Charlie that are into the seafood business as deep as they are, because it's an expensive business to be in. You, they make a lot of money, but they, I say they make a lot of money, they handle a lot of money. They don't make a whole lot of money. But anyway,

BP: So in your opinion, what do the docks around here today need to do to be still successful?

1:00:10

AnA: That's a tough question. They need to pray. Because there's a lot of circumstances that are in their primary obstacles or circumstances that are beyond their control. Imported seafood is what's- is what has done in the domestic shrimp industry, or a large part of the domestic seafood industry, and one of the- I keep referring to Charlie, one of the smart things he's done is transitioned into the shellfish industry. I don't think there's because that's served from the time it's harvested to the time it's delivered to a restaurant table or to a retail counter. It's handled raw. So there's not a lot of ways that imported product can affect that, because you can't import something over a month and a half from another country that's raw. You have to have a short period of time between the time it's harvested to the time it's consumed. But with everything else, with any product that can be frozen, shrimp, fish, crabs, whatever. Any product that can be frozen is being replaced, has been, is being or has been replaced by imported product that in the cost of production is not apples and apples between the US and China or the US and Mexico or other countries. It's just not. And so, you know that's... they just what the docks can do to to help preserve themselves as just, you know what do what they can do, which is, manage their own expenses and and try to be smart about, you know, look for new, creative ways to to make their to make domestic shrimp appealing. And there's, there's niches, you know, there's, you know, some of these guys are really, really resourceful. A lot of them are really, really resourceful, really creative. They've done some and, you know, there's, there's a lot of- I always encourage people, if you're going to go out and eat shrimp, go to, don't go to a chain restaurant. Go to a local restaurant that's small, that's single owner, or one guy that owns maybe two or three restaurants, but not a big chain. Go to a locally owned restaurant because he's probably using locally harvested shrimp and locally harvested if he can get them, locally harvested fish, the crab meat there's almost no domestic production anymore. So I don't know what you do about that. There's one, one plant I know of in North Carolina and one in Maryland. And other than that, I don't, you know, it's just not there, but with, you know, there's- Brian is familiar with the wild Georgia shrimp thing that's been a really smart way of of marketing domestic shrimp that's kind of like the Vidal onion, and that's so more of more of that and and working together cooperatively to market their product is, is the only way it's going to survive. I mentioned earlier, before Allen called, you know, this water out here isn't nearly as brackish as it once was. The salinity is a lot higher, meaning the ocean water is encroaching a lot further into the estuary. And the that has not affected the shrimp as much as it has affected the crabs, but it's affected the crabs a lot, and it has affected the shrimp some the summertime, brown shrimp is not what it used to be here, but so, but there's, you know, ain't a whole lot you're gonna do about that, because the paper industry that- I hate to pick on the paper industry, but that's where it comes from. They use a ton of water. These ground, and they in the water- they use all groundwater, you know, they pump it from the aquifer. And what made this water so brackish? You know, if you go to Louisiana, the thing that makes the water brackish is the Mississippi River coming out right there. Well, you have several rivers here coming out, but the thing that makes it so brackish here is the artesian, the natural artesian flow. And I don't think that's completely gone, but I think it's probably about 75% diminished from where it was 100 years ago. So- or maybe even 60 or so,

you know, say in 1950 that's probably that doesn't seem like it, but that's almost 80 years ago. So anyway

[1:05:54](#)

BP: If this place was still up and running and I gave you a check of however much money, what would you use the money to invest into this plant?

AnA: Well, what I that was the question that I was faced with when I closed it up, and what I needed at that time just to bring- one of the problems that I had run into when I precipitated me deciding to go ahead and close it up, aside from my own medical problems, was I needed about 250 to \$300,000 to to replace the existing refrigeration equipment. Okay. And what I decided was that you know, everything- you know, any project like that ends up costing more than you thought it would. It never ends up costing less than you thought it would. So, you know, if I went and borrowed \$300,000 could I stay in business long enough and get a return to pay off that loan, plus get a return on that investment that would make it worth making the investment? And I determine and that what you're looking at that from a 20 or 25 year long perspective, and I don't, at the time that was in 2017. I determined that it, I just believed that it did not this industry, the you know, this industry did not have the life in it it needed for me to get a- not to mention I was to the point, you know, I could do this until I'm 75 but I'm not really sure I wanted to. But if I had to, I would, you know, could I get it done? Could I get- make that money back in 20 years? And I just no, I don't think I could. And so, you know, the refrigeration equipment would be the thing. And it's interesting, the ice plant, the shrimp industry, one of the things that bothered me so much about shutting it down was I was friends with all the guys that I sold ice to. We all grew up together here, so I've known them all my life, so they and that was before. That was seven years ago. Doesn't seem like it, but it was seven years ago. Well, that was, the freezer boats had not yet. I was seeing more and more freezer boats at the time, but we were still dealing with a lot of ice boats and ice boats have advantages over freezer boats, actually, in some ways. If they're catching a lot of shrimp, you don't want to have to be on a freezer boat, if you know, if the shrimp are really abundant at a given part of the season, it's a lot easier to deal with ice, but a lot more cost effective. But I, you know, I hated shutting down the ice plant because I thought, you know, where are these guys going to get their ice? Because they can't operate with that. I mean, we're going to go back to 1940 here, where they are putting it in bushel baskets and, or if they're going to do it, somebody's going to have to invest a lot of money. So when? But I didn't have any choice, and that's when I have to weigh in all the options that you know, that's just what I got to do. And so I don't know if you've met Bill Harris at Sapelo shrimp company.

[1:09:44](#)

BP: Yeah, we met him already.

AnA: Bill Harris over there and the Boones in Darien. They each invested about \$100,000 in ice making, automated ice making. Equipment much smaller than what we were doing here. There's a dock over in Valona, not far from here, that's out of business now, they didn't have to invest that much because they just didn't have the need for it as much. But so they were able for their individual, for their- for the folks in Belleville and for the folks in Darien, those two docks were able to take care of the boats that are there. But it took 100 even for- even for a smaller capacity. That's, you know, if you look at those two investments combined, that's a \$200,000 investment. Now that spread between two different facilities, so hopefully they got their money back out of it. But, yeah, it's but, you know they relied on me, but I relied on them too, because, you know the, as I said when I first came to work after quitting college in 1984 just in this county, where there was like 100 shrimp boats here. So that's how many different boats we were taking care of.



Well, you know. And in 2017 I counted it up. It was 25 [laughs] so, you know, that's just a diminished, is just a diminished industry, and, unfortunately, a diminished culture. You know, that's the thing that really, from y'all perspective, that's so interesting, is there's such a culture around it. You know, it's like, it's a lot like agricultural farming, or whatever it's, there's a culture that goes with it. So anyway,

BP: One more question,

AnA: sure.

BP: What are some recommendations you have for the future of commercial fishing industries?

1:12:00

AnA: Just be open to innovation and pray [laughing]

BP: I was just about to bring that up- pray [laughs]

AnA: Because, you know, it's, it's the same, that's the- it's the same problem that the docks face. The majority of their problem is dealing with things that are beyond their control, that are political and geopolitical, and, you know, it's the reason Donald Trump got elected. You know, hate say it, but it is, and I don't want to get political here, but that's that kind of thing. This is a microcosm of why that happens, because it's happened to so much of our nation's industrial base we basically sold it out, and that's, you know, kind of philosophical about it, you know, maybe that's not so bad. Maybe it's not a good thing. It, when you, when you sold out your ability to produce food, a society's got problems, and I think that's a large part of what we've done. And so anyway, can't everybody work at Walmart.

BP: Yeah. Well I think that's all the questions we have for you. So, thank you for this interview!

AnA: Anything else? Yeah, no problem. I hope it work.

BP: It was fantastic.

LH: If you had any last minute stories, funny stories you might want to tell us.

1:13:44

AnA: Yeah, I'd love to tell you the one that I don't want to tell you, but the guy, if I say it, and somebody ever hears it, then they'll think, they'll get insulted by what I'm gonna say. But anyway, yeah, I better not talk about that anyway. But yeah, I it's, you know, there's days I left, you know, usually came over here about seven, 7:30 most mornings when we were in the seafood business. And but those ladies that worked in the back, they preferred to work real early in the morning and then knock off about midday. And so they would come in at like 3:30, 4 o'clock in the morning, and then start winding the day up about 12 and and so if there was ever a problem, I would get a call, get woken up, come over here and deal with whatever the problem was, and go back home and try to get a few hours sleep. We had a van that would go around and pick folks up. A lot of these were older ladies that didn't drive so the van would go pick them up, bring him to work. Well, I got a call one day. This is funny. This won't hurt anybody's feelings. All the witnesses have died [laughing]. I got a call one day from a lady calling me from her house, one of the ladies that worked here, and she said I had to get out of that van and walk down here to my house to call you. Charles is down there in the club. And I said, do what? She says Charles is down there in the club. He's picking us up. This is like four o'clock in the morning. Down in the club? So where are you at? See I met my house, and he's at the Ponderosa where there was this bar called the Ponderosa club. And for some reason they were still open at four o'clock in the morning and sure, so I got up, got dressed, and drove out to where the Ponderosa club is. And sure enough, there's our van with three or four ladies sitting on it, and they're all mad as you know what. And they said, he's inside. I said, well, are the keys in it? No, he took the keys with him! So now, if it was, if the keys were in, I was just going to leave my truck there and

I'll drive, bring them to work and fire him. So anyway, so I go walking inside, and he's in there on the dance floor. [laughing] He's just, you know, he's just getting down, he just boogie in and just, you know, doing all this stuff and just having a good old time. And I walked up and tapped him on the shoulder. Oh, hey, Boss Man, how you doing? [AA laughing] Give me the key. No, I'm about to go to work now. I said, No, you're not just give me the key [BP snorts]. You just keep on what you're doing. You're having a good old time.

BP: That's a good story.

AnA: He was probably drunk anyway! Figured, he was probably drunk anyway, driving a van and hurting somebody. Just give me the key. I left my truck there, and he went back to boogieing [laughing]

BP: That's a good story

LH: Yep.

AnA: Anyway,

LH: Thank you so much.

BP: Thank you again!

AnA: No problem. Yeah!

[1:17:30](#)

Ends interview.