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Interviewer: Kristin Meewen and Lilah Henderson
Project: Dock Stories
Transcriber: Blake Pavri
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Others Present: N/A
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00:00
KM: Okay, I'm good.
LH: This is an interview with Suzanne Forsythe on February 25 2025. This interview is being conducted in McIntosh, Georgia about the docks called [Valona] dock, and this part of the research process project and interview collection titled dock stories. This interviews are conducted by Lilah Henderson
KM: And Kristin Meewen.
LH: Can you tell us about your connection to the dock?
SF: It's been in my family, third generation, third generation of my family owning it. I've got one of my cousins researching it. I think within the next four or five years, we will have had it 100 years, but they're going to research it, and we're going to have a celebration when we hit that
KM: Wow, that's a long time. When did you first come to work here and be associated with the dock here?
SF: As a child, my dad ran the railway and the dock before he went to Sapelo. He's a marine biologist, but anyway, my husband and I leased the dock right over there from his first cousin, and that's where the dock that I ran. And actually physically ran that one over there, not this one, after my grandparents got older, then they leased it to King shrimp company, a big, big company, and then from there on out, we've just leased it and no family members run, actually running it, until trips started two years ago, and we've had leased- then my husband and I took over the lease, but we'd subleased it to other people because we had our own dock, and then we, then we retired. So that's where it's been going, but it's never, never has, and hopefully never will change hands.
KM: How long ago did you retire?
SF: Well…
KM: It doesn't sound like you're retired, if I do say so.
SF: Let's see. We closed our dock down. My husband died- May 22 will be seven years. So we closed that dock down eight years. So I've been out of the shrimp business for eight years.
KM: Has the dock ever had any other name other than the [Valona] or
SF: No. It's just people call it Durant shrimp.
KM: Grant shrimp dock.
SF: Durant.
KM: Durant. Is that your family name?
SF: Yes, it is. But then it's, when it was leased. At one time it was gosh, Mary Alice called it Ocean Bounty, or something like that. And then when Chris Colson had it, it was Shell Creek seafood.
KM: Shell Creek.

SF: This is shell Creek. The river coming up here is called Shell Creek.
KM: And what was your primary role here?
SF: In the shrimp business, or this dock?
KM: At the particular dock. So I guess we'd be talking about that dock.
03:27
SF: My husband ran. We had our own boats, and my husband ran, always ran a boat, and I ran the fish house. So see to the unloading of the shrimp and selling them and selling the boats, put ice on them, sell them fuel, oil, whatever you know, and then payroll for everybody. And most of the time we operated with nine boats over there quite a-
KM: That's a good number
SF: We did a lot of business for a long time till things got bad.
KM: Yeah. When did things get bad?
SF: The price started- the fuel started going up, and the price of shrimp started going down, and the boats are aging out. You know, the wooden boats were aging out. And that was people and the captains were aging out. And the second this, not second, this is probably the fourth generation of captains I'm going through now. But there, they weren't…. a lot of them weren't taking, keeping up with their, with their with their boats, you know, keeping them in doing what was necessary. Just a different mindset for the next generation, you know, like so it's kind of, you know, it's kind of started on the way down that. But up until then, the boats would fish from- our boats would go to North Carolina, Florida, and sometimes at way back it would, they would go all the way to Texas. And, you know, they would fish the whole the whole coast, depending on the season, you know, make what they call the brownie season in the Gulf of Mexico. The boats from here would go there and Tortugas. Our boats fished in Mexico for in the winter time. And that was good until Mexico closed the waters down. But we had to have big boats for that. And it was, wasn't for everybody. It was tough fishing, but it was, you know, you could, it's good way to make a living. But anyway, so the, it just, it was a combination of, well, the imports, people used to say, years and years ago, DNR, not DNR. We had a real active Georgia fisherman's Association, and the numbers of the imported shrimp were climbing and, you know, and they'd say, yeah, this is gonna catch you, running you all down. It's like, oh, everybody, nobody. Everybody knows how much better the shrimp, or, you know, domestic shrimp, or than imported, and it's just gotten so I think now they're importing around 90% of what's consumed in the shrimp that's consumed in the United States. Now back, I'm talking 30 years ago, when we first started kind of paying attention to it. I don't think it was down in this like 70% or something like that. So it's, you know, cost of everything went up, fuel, ice, equipment, everything went up, and its prices, shrimp went down, you know, so it was just and the other part is to though, like I say, not keeping the fleet up. The fleet was aging out, and the captains were aging out, and those were the very knowledgeable, and the saltiest, you know, and that would go in wherever they needed to go. And this next generation, like, oh, I don't want to go to South Carolina, you know. I don't want to go to Florida, you know. Gotta go with shrimp are
06:36
KM: Yeah, gotta follow them.
LH: And then, is there any dock similar? Is there any similar docks operated in Georgia?
SF: There used to be three here in Valona. Now there's only this one, and it's not even, you know, we got the shrimp boat is sitting on the bottom. All right. Thank you, Joe. Good to see you. There were two at Cedar Point. That was only one. There were four, four in Darien, and now there's only one that's Boones. Thompson is closing now, that fellas, those that property is

selling that, and they're moving closing that docks.
KM: [Thompson seafood]. Isn't that right next door?
SF: It's next door to Boone.
KM: Yeah. Okay.
SF: Yeah, those fellas, it's a handful of handful, I think it's about three or four boats, but they're looking desperately a place to go to tie up. But our docks in too bad of shape, we can't take them on until we do a lot of repair. So we'll have to see.
KM: Is there anything unique about this dock or the one that you sounds like you were basically the dock manager.
SF: Yeah,
KM: Anything unique about that?
SF: I don't, I can't think of anything individually except what and a friend of mine mentioned this one time. But the- virtually all the docks, Belleville, Crescent, Valona, Meridian, there was a nice dock of Meridian, are all run by were women, almost exclusively, because you're our husbands on boats and they're fishing, and that's, that's the way it has traditionally been. You know, the dock managers were women, but they were the wives of the fishermen, and it just all plays together, so everybody works together, and that's, that's the name of the game.
KM: And that's something you notice for sure.
SF: Always.
KM: Yeah, cool. Go ahead Lilah.
LH: I was just gonna ask. What has this dock been through, through the years, while you were here, or before your time,
SF: Before my time? My grandfather is the one that bought the property in the 30s. And he was a hustler. He had, I got pictures of this. He would sell bait for whatever, you know, catching bait, whatever, anything he could do to turn $1 here. And he was taking his shrimp, the shrimp that they wanted, loading here, they would take him to New York, to Fulton fish market. That was the best market by far, you know. And I think still they weren't, maybe $1 a pound. I might not even be $1 a pound. I've gotten some of the old records that reflect that but, but they would sell them, but that was what they needed to do. And some of the other docks that that dock over there belonged to the one that my husband and I ran, they belonged to his first cousin, who's a doctor with CDC he but his father would ship shrimp too. So both of these docks here in Valona and maybe other people in the county did them, I don't know, but I know these two docks would ship shrimp to New York. My grandfather had a trip- a truck, and he would, he and his brother would, they would kind of piggyback, and they would- his his brother would take him here from the dock. And he had a place up in mid north, somewhere North Carolina. Forgot the name of the place anyway. And then Papa would take them. My grandfather would take them on into New York.
KM: Rest of the way.
SF: Yeah, and it was, but they had oysters, they clams, whatever, whatever he could do to take, you know, to make a living he did here so and then eventually, after he got older, and they put the- he put the railway in before he bought the property, it would belong to my husband's family, and it was nothing but oysters. It was oyster factory.
KM: Okay.
SF: The whole thing was and all this parking lot under here is nothing but pure oyster shell. There's a good picture of it in the office there, but it's locked now, and they would sail out and gather oysters and bring them back in. And there was a cannery, an oyster cannery over and it

was one in Darien and it was one in Cedar Point. So anyway, there was a lot of oyster business. So he had oyster business and shrimp business. But eventually it morphed in as the more the state got into controlling leases and river bottom and stuff like that, probably some of the demise of that, but eventually it settled down to just unloading shrimp, and that was in the 50s.

11:14

KM: Is there a reason that you shipped them to New York? Could you could- do you know, if there was a local market for them?

SF: There was not much of a local market. And this was, yeah, and this was actually the Fulton Fish Market. So that was, you know, excel- sell everything you took up there, yeah. And so I think that was, that was the issue.

KM: Oh, gotcha.

LH: And it is not like the common practice now to see them ship it to New York?

SF: Nobody does that way. Well, I don't need to get off on that, although these guys around here, this is a good example of it. Some of these, like the boats sitting on the bottom there, they go out and say, oh, I caught, you know, 600 pounds, and that offer me but $4 and a half. Well, big shrimp, and they should really be about 6.50, or maybe $7 and that's what they're paying. So what you do is you go to the bank and get a small loan, and you get a truck and you- with a refrigerator back on it. We're not talking about big money used stuff. You put your shrimp on there, and you take them, 50-60, miles, 100 miles inland, and you can get $10 for ‘em. But that's what you have to do. You can't come and sit at the dock and go, oh, they give me $4.25 you know, you it's your business manager the product. And they don't, they don't do that. Oh, I don't want to do that. It's like, well, go broke. That's what we've always done. And you would think they would look around and see people that have made it a living, not made it that didn't mean say that, but have survived and say, well, maybe I ought to do it. They do it. You know, they're surviving,

KM: They’re doing something right!

SF: Yeah. So maybe, maybe I ought to take the…

KM: Huh. I’m surprised not many people don't go inland with them. You’d think, yeah.

SF: So easy, especially now. I talked to a fellow right before this boat sunk, but his son was running the Gray Ghost down there, and I think they gonna sell that. But there's so much field to table now and farm to table, well, it's the same thing. These, there’s farmers markets everywhere, and all the little towns and they'll all take, there's no restrictions for seafood. It was used to be, we would some- my husband, I would do that. Sometime we'd come in, he'd come in, we'd have 15 or 20 boxes of medium sized shrimp. And somebody, the buyer that we use, would say, you know, markets kind of flooded. We go to like Hinesville, that's 30 miles. But you'd have to know somebody, which we did, so they could let you sail on a corner, you know? And because it's if you do it too much, they go, well, you need a business license. You need this, you need that. Well, we could kind of cut through those, that red tape. Nowadays you don't have to do that with these markets, the farmers markets, it's, they're, they're happy to have you. All you gotta do is take your shrimp and sit there and sell them. Bag them up. Fella that, and he passed away, was doing it. It was called… dang. I'll never look that up out of here. His father was a good friend of mine. He was an attorney, and he said, We need to take these shrimp and sell them. I was like, yep, sure do [inaudible]. And so he would put them in five pound bags, and it took him about, didn't even take a year, I don't think, I think it took about eight months for him to develop the market, and people- the fresh market, and he would bag them up and had a truck. They paid for it in no time. And when he was hustling, he was doing it twice a week and selling, you know,

whatever he could get and out of this dock, because he's a friend. And then he just got this, I don't know, he just kind of got off or got tired of it, I guess, or whatever he get, had some issues. And I said, Mitchell, you're going to take shrimp up to Atlanta. He usually didn't even have to go to Atlanta. He's making it sell out everything. And he said, oh, I can do that once a month to pay my bills. Well, do it twice a week, and let's pay a bunch of bills. You know, it's just, he just fizzled out with it. You know, anybody could have taken that up his route, and because he had had established, you know, and his degree was in marketing, but he had developed, this is going to be, I don't want his mom to hear that, because she knows. But anyway, he died, but he developed some substance abuse problems, and just like, you know, don't care. It's like Mitchell is such a good business. Look at you, you know, and it was a really good product. He'd wash them good and put them in zip lock bags from the take off. That's what it takes. You gotta market your product. If somebody won't give you what you- I've always told people, they say, look at the price of shrimp. You know, 10 years, 30 years ago, the guy, a friend of mine, would say, 10 years, y'all be out of business. I was like, no, you know, there's always room for the best product. People will always pay top dollar for the very best product. It's at the top of the pyramid, but it's there. People are- people are never going to not have wild caught shrimp and only eat imported shrimp. That's not going to happen. That's not going to happen. It's a good product and it's a renewable resource, and it's, there'll always be a market for it. You got to, you might have to find that market, but it's there. Somebody supplying them. Let it be you. I was on the advisory committee on Sapelo for about, I don't know. I guess I'm still on it. I think we've about ready to disband as the commercial fisheries representative. So I got some figures up from the Georgia Fishermen Association. The President was a friend of ours, and he worked. He had this at one time. This was called Southern Seafood. That's what Jack and Debbie had it. Southern seafood at that time, 90% of the shrimp that were imported, or 90 something percent of the shrimp that were imported came through New Orleans, and they inspect at that time, 1% of what's imported, and they- 100% of the ones they inspect are rejected, but they only inspect and all. So if that's going all over the place, if you, if you inspected them all, they'd all fail, probably.
KM: Probably, yeah,
SF: But that's what, that's what people are consuming, you know? So we got the education part is what we really got to hammer on, too. People need to know that.
17:32
KM: Can you tell me about some of the people you've worked with at the dock?
SF: Well, with captains and what we call strikers, which are the deckhands
KM: Okay.
SF: And it's, it's a family type thing, you know? It's my brother in law tied up out of our dock. And it's that the good captains don't change the crews all that often. You know, they you, they're with you. If you making money, they're making money. They're happy. Everybody's happy. And so you really get to know them as family. And a lot of them were second or third generation, some of them, some of my good friends now, or their father was- worked with my grandfather, you know? And it's generation after generation, and they don't change that much, you know, the names pretty much stay the same. But it used to be a very honorable thing to be a deckhand, because you were making good money and you were learning things, and that's gotten hard, harder and harder to find now it's good- used to- the strikers, the deckhands. You generally would usually training one to be a captain, then you would get it if they had showed good potential, and you would go buy another boat, put them on the boat, and let them work it out. And that's the way. That's why a lot of these boats, a lot of fellas got the boats. My husband's

uncle would build a boat and let you work it out. And you take a percentage of what you made, because they kept the books, you know, and that, you know, lots of people were able to get in the seafood business with their own boat that way, you know. And he would, it was like financing them, you know. And he didn't, wouldn't charge any interest. It was just, you know, 10% of what you catch and whatever so you want, wasn't a set payment. It was wonderful, because sometimes you have bad years, and you got good years. You got good years. You make a lot of boat payments. You got a bad year, you don't make any boat payments, you know, make a low one. So it worked well, but it's, it was a really close knit community.
KM: You're not the first person that's told us that it's hard to find workers and crew,
SF: Very hard.
KM: Yeah. When did that start? And why do you think that is?
SF: I don't know. I mean, it's, it is strange to me. I don't know. I think it's another thing of aging out too. I guess it's a generational thing. These younger ones see their parents, have seen their parents make- put them through school and would and take good care of them, and they're aging out. But their kids are like, I don't want to do that. I don't want to do it. It's just, I don't, I don't know, I don't know why. What's wonderful way to I mean, you get on a boat and take a nice ride, and you got to do some work to do, but you're out, you know, you outside all day long. And it's, you're not punching a time clock, and it's, it's so you got, if you got a good captain, it's you make, you can make good money. But I don't know why, but it's gotten down to a lot of the crew that they have or have problems, you know, they'll be with you for a trip or two. We used to go, we go 10 years without, with the same crew, you know. And nowadays you go, you know, two weeks. And if- they're gone, it's crazy. And there you also are dealing with people that don't have the experience on deck to keep yourself safe, to keep everybody else safe, you know that you can trust. So it's just kind of a wild card, you know, he's put the shrimp down there and pick them up. But other than, you know, actually seeing, noticing what's going on and being capable is not there, and that's a shame. And so much of the knowledge about the upkeep and the things that they did with their rigs and things is gone because of the captain. So many of the captains are that generation is just gone, which is this was the second strong generation of captains
21:23
LH: And can you tell me any of like, your funniest thing that ever happened at the dock?
SF: I don't know about anything funny. When I first started running the dock, and my husband, he was fishing, we had boats sometime, depending on which boat he was on, he'd make a trip. So he'd be gone 5, 7, 8, days. And then we got a smaller boat. We kept that one, put a captain on it. Got a smaller boat. He would go in and out every day. When he come in, he'd leave 4 o'clock in the morning. He tired, you know, and I'm unloading shrimp. So when I first started, and this is probably, yeah, I'm 67… probably 40 years ago, I guess anyway, my first second or third time he came in, he helped me for a few minutes, and he had gone go to bed because he got go fishing the next day, four o'clock. So we had 100 boxes of shrimp. That's a lot of shrimp. 100- the boxes is 100 pounds, and it's got, you know, 60 or 70 pounds of ice in it, you know. But anyway, had 100 boxes of shrimp. And that was four boats had unloaded. They had done well, and so put them on the truck, and the driver said, now I was 10: 30, 11, o'clock at night. The driver said 99 boxes. I said, [nope] out of the 100. He said 99 [inaudible] and so we had to unstack those things and count them. And I wasn't, because I was not that was only like my third time of ever unloading. I didn't realize the importance of what we call a floor count so that I know, because I couldn't say for sure. I knew it was, but I couldn't say 100% because here's my paper, it's 100 boxes. So we had, because we were stacking them, he was, he had a helper on there. He was

stacking them. I would help him stack three high. But I'm so short, I couldn't go farther than that. But they were stacking five high, and that's throwing that amount of weight up over you, because he had picked up from other docks. So he couldn't just count what was on the truck. These are big trucks, so we had to unstack them, two thirds of them, and count them, and then restack them. And it was 100 but I learned right then and there, every boat, you got a floor count and you and then from there on out. Somebody said, I was like, I know what's on that truck? I know it went on there, but that was a hard lesson for me to learn in the middle of the night, you know? But, and it wasn't funny at the time at all, but I haven't had anything too funny. All kind of crazy things happen. This- we were over getting ready to unload one day, and my sister, who lives right on the other side of where that boat is, came over to the dock and said, there's a pelican over here with a problem like, oh Lord. So we went over there with two guys that worked for me and my husband, and there was a pelican, and he had a hook in his foot. So my husband, who was- he was a master at Tom Sawyer'ing people said, boys, get down there. Let's get that catch that pelican. So he got him to catch the pelican and hold it. We got the hook out. But a fellow that was writing a book happened to be here. Ken, Ken, something. I forgot his last name. He and he wrote a cute story about it, but it was like, you never know what's going to happen at a shrimp dock. You never know. And it's very casual. I go down that you don't go to eight o'clock in the morning, you go, you go after lunch, and then you work for the afternoon and into the night until you get finished, you know. But it was, it was all casual. And people would, you know, a lot people would come from all over and you. Look, is that a shrimp? Yeah, that's a shrimp. You know? What happened to his head? We took it off because you're not going to eat that part. You know, they just don't. They were just fascinated by the whole thing. You know, that happened all the time. But anyway, it was. But I hadn't had anything really funny happen.

25:17

KM: What about your best memory then, your favorite memory?

SF: I don't, I can't say it was any particular memory, because it was just a way of life, you know, it was, it was just what we did three times a week for 40 years, you know. So it was, I loved it. I really loved it. But it was, it was all, you know. And you go home, shrimp come up through the VAT. And you, you know, after a few minutes, you go, well, what's for supper? Well, I guess we can have some shrimp, and a lot of shrimp or fish and snag a flounder. You know, we'd have, they had, we had whiting and flounder, also the boats as a bycatch, say, all those two. And it was just, it was, it was hard work, but it was easy. It was fun. Fun.

KM: It was fun. So it was easy. I know we talked about some of the changes in the industry already, like with the imports, and you mentioned, like, regulations in Mexico, but what about like, the water and the weather and the environment and the sea life? Have you noticed any changes in that?

SF: The only thing that, and when they first started with the and that's such a controversial thing, not recording this, I don't think. But

KM: Anything you say that you don't want online, we can always cut it out too well.

26:37

SF: Well like I say, my father was a biologist. He just passed away at 93 a couple of few months ago, but on Sapelo this whole time. So we were raised with an environment with a scientific background and hearing and seeing research and being involved, being exposed to that. But when it started, do you know Randy Walker? Dr Walker? Well anyway, he's good guy. He's a bi vowed man, but he started me when I got in the clan business. I met him, but he- daddy knew him already, but we were talking about global warming and all these terrible things are going to

happen, and we were on the same page about that. It's like the world is certainly evolving. It certainly is. We're headed down a path the world, the world has always headed down that path. And for us to think that we, we have certain could certainly contributed to it, certainly have, but we can't stop it. And we not and the contribution that we if you took our contribution away, it still headed down that road. There to my feeling is we still headed down that road. It's always evolving. And it's going, yeah, we've had ice ages, and then it gets hot again, and it just happens. And, you know, that's one of those things, but, but, so that's my school thought on that, and he we were on the same page with that. But it's not like, it's like, if everybody goes to electric car. It's gonna, this is gonna stop. It's not gonna that's not the way it works. And for us to think we control the weather, God Almighty, you know, that's crazy too. You know, there's a guiding force, but it ain't us, you know. But my husband always said when you first came into Valona, soon as you get to that open place on the right hand side, it's what we call the flat Marsh. I was a child. As a kid, we had we had ponies, and we rode horses. We rode all over place. We used to ride around there. We could play soft. But out there was so much sand. Out there, it was like really sandy, big, large area of sand. And it's called the flat Marsh. So and I'm 4040, I wish I'm 67 be 68 this year. So all my life, that was all a lot of sand. And then it was, you know, in the last and then 25 years ago was like quite as much sand, but it's a hard pan out there, and people go out there and dig fiddlers. And so one of our theories was, you know, they dig so many holes they're breaking through the salt the salt pan, so now more plants can grow and but I don't think that that's what it was. But my husband would say, when the tides, because we fish on the tides, the spring tide. And my husband would say, on the full moon, in the new moon. My husband would say, tides up on the flat Marsh. And didn't come up every day, you know. But when the tide was springing, it would start and it would come in and be, wouldn't be that deep out there. And then, really, spring tide, you have that much water out there. Soon as you saw tide coming up on the on the flat Marsh, it's a time to go fishing. Well, tide springing, that's when you're going to catch shrimp. You don't need to catch em on the end, waste the fuel, or time on the in between tides. So now, how many ever years this is… 40 years later. No, 25 since we started to sit he but even saying that my whole life, tides on flat, moist time to go fishing, it comes on the tide. It comes up there every day,every day. So. So that is definitely a big change there. And it's and I have, but I had to make it live this long to see it, you know. So this, you know, it's this, this parking lot floods periodically when they have a big time, the whole the tide comes up and goes all the way through everywhere. Covers the covers the parking lot, it was really what they call it. Now, they got this term, they cut, say, king tides. We didn't never heard of that before. They that was, that was, that's a new word. We just call them spring tides, big tides, you know, a marsh and tide. But now they call them king tides. But we're having king tides because they come up there every time the tide, every high water, there's water on that flat Marsh, which is just crazy, because it never was that way when we were kids. And now there's not enough sand to put your foot on. It's almost completely grassed over and it used to be like, say, we could play softball out there. And, you know, that's quite a dramatic change out there.

30:57

KM: Yeah.

SF: No Tiger.

KM: What about changes in the sea life?

SF: I really- no Tiger. I haven't seen any. I haven't seen any.

KM: Okay, water, water quality? No?

SF: No, no. We pick oysters where we always have the oysters are always healthy. There's plenty

of them. You know, I catch crab off my dock, fish off my dock, shrimp off my dock with a cast net. I haven't seen any change for my whole life. I have never lived any other place but Valona, and I haven't seen any change in the resources.
KM: Okay. What hard times did you ever experience while you were a dock manager?
SF: Just some. Every once in a while we would have it to tie it. If you have a really hard freeze in the end, that's low water. You get a lot of banks exposed to real cold, and you'll have a shrimp kill. Every once in a while we'd have a shrimp kill, and those were hard times, because there's nothing you can do about it, you know, it's just they're not there. But you have to be resilient too. You know this, this boat sunk. We had a boat sank. Our little Chaparral was tied up in our dock. Had a- it was a storm of the century. We was growing that crazy, and it was tied in outside of another boat, and that boat broke loose, and they were tied together, and they twirled around and came over here and hit the dock over here, and our little boat went right to the bottom, just like this one did. By the next afternoon, we had it up. That's what you do, which doesn't happen. You see this boat sunk in like, huh? Boat sunk? He could care less.
KM: Yeah, is it carelessness? Or is it-
SF: Most of it- this is neglect.
Km: Gotcha
SF: Been boats- [bad] for him to hear this, but he knows been leaking, leaking four years. We got a railway right here. Boat leaks. You can't there's no future in a boat that's leaking. You can't trust it. Put it on the railway. Fix that leak. It's leaking four years, and it just leaked. Got ahead of it and went down right there. You see how it ruined it. How much it's gonna a conserVATive estimate, I think would probably be $25,000 if we have to foot the bill, which we probably will, to get this boat up from somebody else's neglect. It's not our boat. He doesn't care. But, like I say, our boat. By the next afternoon, we had it up. And that same boat, we were putting my son in college over at Valdosta, and it was for the winter quarter right after New Year's and fell. It was running the boat, and he was a good captain. We fell asleep at wheel and hit what we call a dolphin pile under two or three pounds, hooked together in Doughboy by Duboy island. But anyway, he hit that boat, sunk, same boat. It sunk over here. Fell. It's on the railway right now. Dragged it up into the, what we call the pocket of Duboy sound, and it landed. And spun over and over and over. It landed sitting straight up. And we the Red Cross found us in Valdosta and found us and said, come on the boat sunk. It was cold, cold, cold. It was January. So we came home. I kept the boat in the water. I had because I had a charter business on the side, and jumped in my boat ran out there looking like, oh, man, this was sad. It was one of my favorite little boats. You could drive a Volkswagen through the hole in the bow, and every time a tide came up, up down, it was like, ah, that's terrible. And we had it insured. So we called insurance companies. We had a total loss. Friend of ours down in Jacksonville. He said, uh oh, total loss, 50,000 it's like, well, but we love the boat. It was a nice boat from North Carolina, double plank Cypress, you know, it was just a really solid boat, just cool little boat, very similar to that one that they turned into a thing of it. You could have done the same thing with this boat. But anyway, so we went home. And just, it's just like a death in the family, and just like, God. And my husband. Next morning, my husband said, I think we can get that boat up. And so my dad helped us, and he was, he was really, could MacGyver a lot of stuff. That's not a very good term. I can't think of a term I'm trying to think of now. But anyway, he was very resourceful when it comes to something like that. And they put their heads together, and we, and I went over to Brunswick and rented every pump I could find. We patched that hole with all kind of different ways and foam and plywood and braced and then got those pumps going, and the tide came up and it we pumped

it out, brought it here, spent the night and put it on the net, railway the next day, and fixed it and insurance. So, because it wasn't a total loss, now, they wouldn't give us any money on it, like, oh,
KM: So you had to pay the [talking over each other]
SF: Yeah. So it was all on us, which we did. It was about 12,000 you know, but, but we got this, you know, it worked 10 more years. But that's what you have to do, which is not what these guys do now.
KM: Gotcha,
SF: They just don't.
KM: You mentioned you had a Charter Business. Did you- what did you fish for? And did you do that to kind of supplement income, or just for, like, for fun?
36:15
SF: I kind of did it started for fun, really. I love to take a test of any description. I don't care what it is. And a friend of mine got her captain's license. Oh, you're gonna take a test. Like, I'm gonna get mine too. I'm gonna do that too. So I went to sea school, and I would just wanted to get my captain's license. So I did. I did very little fishing because I didn't care for that. People. You got to provide most of the time your own equipment too, rods and reels and things, and they're not careful with them, you know. And, and most of the time it's men, just men, and they want to go look fish. And you'll be catching fish on a drop, and then they'll say, let's go to another place. Well, well, all they want to do is find out where you what, what your drops are, you know. But the more I thought about it, you know, I said, and I love history, and so I was able to easily turn that into trips out to the barrier islands. Whole family can go, they want to fish. They can fish in the surf, take a crab trap, or crab lines, you know, the mother and children can crab like, you know, or pick or comb the beach, pick up shells, whatever they want to do for the whole family thing. And that was what I rolled it into. And that worked real well for me for a long time. I take deer hunters over in the fall and to Blackbeard and Sapelo. And so I just enjoyed it. And take a- there's a lot of history on Blackbeard, there's a crematory over there. There was a… shoot, come here Tiger. It was a god. I just blanked out on that quarantine station. It's called the South Atlantic quarantine, quarantine station, late 1800s early 1900s a lot of ships came through there. A lot. We had to be quarantined coming up from the Caribbean and things like that, lot. But for a lot of history over there, a lot of people would, would want to know the history, and would, we'd hike the island, show different things, you know, what's left over there, that kind of stuff. And we also, one of my husband's first cousins had her captain's license. She worked with Emory University every year, Dr Brill Hart, and then Judy Morgan. And we would take their biology department. They would be on, staying on St Simons. We'd take their biology department out, pull nets, small nets, let them identify everything you know. And so we did some of that with colleges. Worked with Clemson and on a project on Blackbeard, a history project on Blackbeard, but it was, you know, there was something going on a lot of times, but it also let me afford a much bigger boat than I would normally have, you know, and but anyway, I really enjoyed it. I met a lot of nice people doing that. Sometimes people would just want to go out for afternoon, you know, and just that, are not from the coast, and just just get a taste of it, you know, we'd do that. And like she, can go into Shellman and Hunter's cafe, a little restaurant there, spend most of the day fooling around, go in there and have lunch at, you know, tie up at their dock. It's, it was, it was fun.
39:28
KM: When did you stop doing the charter?
SF: Well my husband got lung cancer, and we were in the VA hospital in Charleston, and it was

my, we have to renew your license every five years, and they'll give you a grace period, a one year grace period. And I was into the grace period all way all the already, you know, and he was really sick. I said, you know what? I'm just gonna have to let it go. And I don't know, I can't. I'd have to look it up and see how long I had it. But I think it was 32 years.
KM: Wow.
SF: It was either 32 or 37
KM: And you've captained your own boat.
SF: Yes.
KM: Awesome. Did COVID had any effect on the dock or anything?
SF: No.
KM: No?
LH: I know you did talk about routes. Were there any like other people that was- that would take your route, or is that like a [criminal] occurrence? Or did y'all just stick to a certain…
SF: No, we didn't do it enough to establish anything on us now, Mitchell, did you know he had, he had his well defined routes, but, you know, and it's when you were working with restaurants to supply a restaurant. Shrimp grow. You know, in the spring we start off with real big shrimp, 21, 25 and then in the summertime, wait Finn, then summertime, we got smaller shrimp, and then they grow again. So for them to- they say, We want 26, 30 is or they usually don't want big shrimp. We want 31, 35 year round, you can't guarantee that. You can guarantee them how fresh they're going to be. It's a good product. You just got to deal with whatever size it is. So but the public does not have a problem with that. Restaurants do. That's why so many restaurants have because they don't. They say, we can't repay the menu, because now we got small shrimp than a big shrimp, like, come on, you know, but, but for the fresh market, it doesn't matter. It's like, these are, that's a real good product. It doesn't matter if it's, I'm not talking about what we call small shrimp, or what everybody else calls medium, you know, to 40, 50, is what I think is a medium shrimp. To me, that's a small shrimp. I want a medium shrimp, but, but it's but it's difficult to to supply the restaurant market with that, and that's why so many of them usually import it, I guess. And they'll tell you, they say you put enough garlic powder on it. It tastes fine.
KM: You can taste the difference.
SF: Yeah. The texture too, is a really big thing for me.
KM: So I know we talked a little bit about financial struggles, like, when there's no shrimp, there's nothing you can do. Do you have any other financial struggles that you can think of?
SF: Nope.
KM: Okay.
LH: And then when you think about the future of commercial fishing in Georgia, what do the docks of today needs to be- needed to be- for them to be successful?
42:36
SF: We forgot, completely forgot about this one because you asked about a while ago about the collapse of it, when the ice plant closed over here, that was a death wish for everybody. The ice plant wasn't- was a crab factory for a long time. And they picked crab for years, you know, and did real well, but they also made ice. And these ice are in 300 pound blocks, big blocks, and so you would individually, we had an ice truck. We'd go get ice. Was Cedar Point load, where John Wallace load the ice up. He probably told you all this, come on. We had everybody all the docks, had their own ice blower. We'd blow the ice on the boats. But when, when they closed the ice plant, that was it you took to put up something at this dock right now to supply shrimp boats that are working, which we don't have. If we did, we could get, you could get them, but it's talking

about $100,000 worth of equipment to make that kind of ice, that volume of ice. So that was where it's like, what are we going to do? Is like, we can't, we're not, you know, we're not willing to do that. And that time when Andy B, when they closed the plant, the ice plant, they, my, the ownership of this, of this dock, had not passed to this next generation. They were, my dad was still alive with both of his sisters, and they were like, we don't put that kind of money, you know, and something like that. But that was the biggest thing for the small docks. And they're just going like flies, because you can't, you can't, we got a trip, can- he's got an ice machine in there. I don't know what, how much money's got tied up in it. Nothing like what it would take for a big plant, but he could supply a minimum amount of ice, but it's enough for him to work, but you're not going to get a big boat that, you know, to come in. It would take normally, you know, my husband, our boats, would put 20 blocks out, 20 300 pound blocks on blown onto the boat just for a week, and it's lots of lots of ice. So that was one of the major things. And by then, they had quit with the crab, because the fresh crab market is so good, the crab they were getting commercially were the smaller ones. Are much harder to pick, and because the big, big males were going in the Fresh Market, that's what people want, you know, to boil a big, pretty crab. So they that's when they closed. The yield went way down. So they closed the crab plant, and then they operated on, just on ice for a long time. And then Andy was still kind of trying to diversify himself. He was- bought a fancy machine that would make ice sculptures and take them, you know, he tried different all kind of things, but it was just not enough business, just on just the ice. So

45:26

KM: When that closed down, where did your dad get his ice from?
SF: Oh, my dad was not. He was always on Sapelo.
KM: Oh, gotcha,
SF: Yeah, this was just the plant. I don't think the plant closed about, about seven or eight years ago. Yeah? Well, hadn't been that long, yeah. But like, the Boones have got a huge ice facility. And if you were shrimp, if you were shrimper, and you catch shrimp, and you're going to work, then you're going to have to type at a place like that that can supply you with ice. Or Bill Harris in Belleville, they got the same thing, but there used to be all these little docks, but we would go buy the ice and come in our trucks and, you know, come unload it and blow it on. But that was one of the really hard things. Come on Finn, no to come back this way, baby.
KM: When you think ahead to like future storms and hurricanes or high tides, how do you think this dock and this- the surrounding docks will fare? You think they'll be all right?
SF: I think they will. Yeah, yeah. You got to keep up with things, you know, always. And this just had gotten to be, you know, one place would need a few piling. It's very expensive to put piling in. You know, you can, you can put one of these, like one of those out there, if you get a real -depending on they charge by the size of the diameter of the thing. But we had one dropped in, took a section off the roof and dropped it in at our fish house. This was least 12 years ago, and it was a big one, because we needed a good piling, because we're going we had to cross brace it. My husband had a plan anyway for that one piling, $2,300 and you see how many piling out here? I mean, that's, you know, that's $10,000 worth right there, you know. But when you see a piling get bad, you got to go on and stay on top of it and fix it. And we've had so much transition here, you know, just people weren't keeping the people we were leasing to supposed to keep the dock up, but that's to them. That was [men patch it], you know. And it's, they don't own the property, so it's kind of a disconnect there, you know? So it's, it's everybody's fault that we've gotten in the shape that we're in now.

KM: Collaborative effort,
SF: Yeah, but it's, it's, no, I don't worry about it. And also, as we have done many a time, and you could still do it if you got a shrimp boat that, with a winch, like that gray ghost down there. You don't have to call the man with the dread, I mean, with the piling driving to come around here and get on his list, you know. I'll be there in three months. We've put many piling down. My husband would do it over at our dock with a shrimp boat. You got the piling, you buy the piling, and you can pull them down, and we jet them with a gasoline pump, you know, and wash the mud away, and while you're pulling down on it with a shrimp boat, and pretty soon you got a piling down. It didn't cost you anything, but that's what you got to do. And the people are not doing that either. They're like, oh, call the dock man, he'll be in three months. Lord!
LH: What investments could be made to this dock to keep it successful for the next 5-10 years?
SF: What I see here? Well, we got the soft shell crab up there.
KM:Okay,
SF: He does good with that. My nephew is that's hard work. It only lasts for about six weeks. It's hard. I mean, it's 23 hours a day. Yeah, Lee mode, you gotta babysit those things. But anyway, I see the aquaculture, mariculture. Really, it's going to take a few little bit more time, and the state's going to have to work a little better for the leases and the, for the bottom, for the oysters, not just clams, but the oysters. Clams are wonderful, you know. And I had a clam farm for three years just for fun, and it was, well, I made some money doing it, but it was a lot of fun, lot of fun, but a lot of work. But people around here, I say, you want a mess of clams? They go, no, not really. They're not. They're oyster people. You know the oysters is the is the money crop. Quit Tiger Lily. You got strong fingernails, baby Tiger. Tiger said, would you take me home? But I see a tremendous future in growing oysters, and-
KM: Just oysters or other bivalves like clams?
50:08
SF: Well, well, the clams too, yeah, the clams are okay. But, you know, I can say the local, there's no local market for clams, you know, and the oysters and clams hold up, well, too, I would take my clams. Well, I had fella, you don't know, Charlie Phillips, probably over. Phillips,
KM: Yeah we ate at Fish Dock for lunch
SF: Charlie would. He had a grater, and he bought almost all my clams, which was appreciated for whatever it was, 12 cents or something like that. But I could put them in the cooler and take them to Charlie Russo in Savannah and get 20 cents a clam for them. So that what I did was some of my clams, but it's like, well, Charlie, of course he's Charlie. He's a clam man. He got clams in his restaurant, and they do real well, Skippers and Darien say, well, y'all don't have clams up in your row bar, you know, steam clams. Like, oh, we tried that. Nobody wanted was like, you know, it's just it's frustrating, but if you get but oysters, they're standing in line to get them. But I see a good future in- Valona is the closest place of the intercoastal in the whole county, and really good, close to a lot of the bottom that's up that stayed on for leases and things, because the state owns the islands. So I see a future in that. And for that, we, what this dock would need would be floating docks, so and in a way, to lift them, instead of using, you know, your back, but it's, you're not talking about a big investment there. And I see that as being a… and people say, oh, why don't you put it floating docks in, let people tie the boats up here. We don't want to do that. I don't want to. We don't have enough parking. And they got big trailers, big boats and and it's so much traffic coming into Valona, you know, and we've gotten used to it now, with very low traffic compared when you got, when you unload trip three nights a week and got, you know, what we call Bobtail or 10 wheelers, big trucks coming in and out. It's a lot

of traffic through our little neighborhood, which is fine because that's where we grew up. But now we've kind of gotten used to it not quite being so busy. But yeah, the idea of having just a tie up space for people with the speed boats, I don't think we want to do that. We've always been in the seafood business anyway. You know, I'd rather, but I think the time is coming. Within the next five years, I think for the oysters and clams are going to really take off, and it's, and it's, this would be a perfect place to very close to unload them.
KM: Do you have any recommendations for the future of the commercial fishing industry?
SF: No, just the main thing is getting the information about your product out. And they had a good article in the Brunswick paper a couple of nights ago, about the because now we've passed, they passed the bill, or, I don't guess it's completely passed. About the restaurants have to say, if this, what, if the seafood is imported.
KM: I did see that.
LH: Yeah,
SF: But Texas and Louisiana and Florida, they already do that. So the- in the paper Brunswick News said that they had the ones they tested in Louisiana was the best percentage. Only 79% of them failed the test. But in Florida, they were like 85 and 90% of the seafood that was advertised as domestic was not. It was imported. So that's a big problem. People would- when you go in a restaurant, you'd say, what is this? And people would call they'll say, I had some fish the other day and it tastes all right, but I don't know it was grouper. I said, what it looked like? So it was real thin. I said, if it looks like it's been ironed, it's tilapia or [swine.
KM: Grouper is real meaty right?
SF: Yeah. I said, if it looks like it's been ironed, it was imported. I don't care what they called it, but the consumer needs to be informed, and it's up to, you know, the people in the industry to get that word out and then for the consumers to ask. That would help a lot.
KM: If you had money to invest right now in the dock, what would you spend it on? I wish I could just give you the check.
54:34
SF: It would be, it would be, and you wouldn't have to. It would be a dedicated place closer to the other end down there to for clams and oysters, people, easy place to unload now, trip called me a- Matthew at the railway said somebody wanted to buy the VAT, and that's my VAT. Came from my dock over there. And I said, well, you know, I don't know what it's worth, not much, but this, but the fact of the matter, Tiger come back. Without the VAT. It's not a shrimp dock, you know. And we could, somebody could come in here with some shrimp and we would unload them, you know. So I don't want to get rid of the VAT. I want to keep the VAT and I- and we got to get- we'll get rid of this boat. And King shrimp companies wanted to put these fingers in here for this pier thing that was their design. Undo that and do it just like a normal shrimp dock, where you pull up sideways and unload your boat. When we were in the heyday, we would have boats that came, would come from Carolina that we unloaded with. When our boats would go to South Carolina, they would unload up there, Mount Pleasant. Then they would come here to unload with us and come and tie up here. Or they'd unload and or they'd unload with me and come tie up, tie up over here. But they were, they catch a lot of shrimp, and that was that helped us a lot, you know. But we were always welcome to that.
LH: [to the dog] Just wanted a little love.
KM: I know, I left mine at home, and I miss her. So a facility for unloading the bivalves like on the other end of the property, anything else you could think of that you'd like to spend a little money on?

SF: No,
KM: Nah.
SF: Every once in a while, people will say, y'all go put some because this is and it's, thank goodness there's nothing but oyster shells under that dirt there. You couldn't build condos or anything like that down here. We would never do that anyway, but thank goodness for the future generations of our family. They won't be able to do it either, you know, so that's protecting us. We don't, you know, it's just, I don't know, it's sad, it's very sad, but it's a reality of we look out there and Lee, you know, it's hard to imagine, this is what we've gotten down to, but here it is.
KM: Is there anything that you want to talk about or let us know that we didn't ask you or didn't even know, like we don't even know to ask you?
SF: Not a thing, and we're on a [COVID] territory.
KM: Good.
LH: And did you remember any interesting stories that you might want to tell us?
KM: Going back to that!
SF: Nothing comes to mind. We've had some, a lot of unusual things happen, but it just so it's just such a part of life. You know, it's like nothing comes to mind right off.
KM: Alrighty. On that note, I'm gonna stop recording.

57:43
Ends interview