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00:00

BP: Okay, I'm also going to put this right here because it's just another audio recording device.
LC: This is an interview with John Wallace on February 27. The interview is being conducted in McIntosh County about the various docks John has worked on for the research project, an interview collection titled Dock Stories. The interviewers are Logan Collins and Blake Pavri. So tell us about the docks that you've worked on.
JW: Well, back in '76, I started out working at Jack Ward's dock, which is now Bill Harris's dock, and that was with my father's boat, The Struggler. And we left there after three or four years or something, and came to this dock, which was belonged to Lawrence Jacobs. This was probably in the late 70s. And then in 1980, I built that boat, The Gale Force, and we were at that time, it was the Valona dock that was called the King King and King shrimp dock, which was King of Prince over in Brunswick. They leased that dock back then. So we were, we did, we put all the rigging and all the engine and stuff in the boat, because I remember father built that boat, and we put all the engine and rigging and stuff on at that dock because it was closer to the land where you could get cranes and stuff to it. So since I was using their dock, I felt a little obligated to at least unload with them for a while. So I did. That was maybe three years. And then I moved next door to [Hunter unintelligible Dock]. I don't know why.
[Laughing]
JW: Just convenience. Which is no longer a dock. I don't know if you told you, if you look down river from the Valona dock, there's an old piece of dock that's left there, and that was the Forsyth dock, and which you go and talk to Suzanne. That was her husband and hers dock. So I stayed there for three or four years, I guess, and then we went scalloping with the boat down to the Cape, catching Calico scallops. And I went to work at scallop plant. But the boat went to work down there with another captain. In the, when we came back, I came to William Brannen's dock, which is now the timber unloading dock at where the Sapelo Ferry is. So it stayed there until they sold it to the state. Moved there to [Gore's] dock. It down to Patterson Island Road, and was there probably 8 or 10 years. And they decided that they were more into their tugboat business, so they went into their tug and the shrimp boats left there, went from there, back to Valona, I think it was. So stayed there for a long time, and I got off the boat in the early 2000s and put a captain on it. I was the president of Georgia Shrimp Association, and we were working on the marketing program, the do all Georgia Shrimp marketing program. So I got off the boat and had another captain on it. And he wanted to come into Darien, into what was TK King's dock, which is where the jellyball plant was. Between [stayin'] Darien, Darien probably 10 years

or longer, because wasn't long after that, the I got back on the boat and ran it out of there, probably until somewhere around 2015. And came back to, well, I guess it was earlier than that, probably 11 or 12, because I had a chance to get what was Protein Seafood, what is now Anchored Shrimp, and put a captain back on the boat and moved it back to my brothers. I had the dock leased in Valona. So when he lost that lease, this dock came available, and I leased it from the guys that had the jellyball plant, and then they ended up selling it to Jack Gore, but I was still using it through Jack Gore now. In other words, I've been to every dock in the county except Phillips', Boone's and Thompson's. But past and present, some of them not even there anymore.

06:51

BP: When did you get like in fishing? Like, when did you start fishing? Or just got interested with this.

JW: Well, when I got out of high school in 72, I started crabbing at the crab plant that was next door, and that's where I met my wife. She was secretary there and or, well she was her mother was likely over the crab pickers and bookkeeper. And then a wife was working in high school, coming out of bookkeeping class, so they would let her out, or her senior year to do the work here, and I met her here and crabbed from 72 to 76 I guess it was. And then my father had a boat. I mean, we built, my father built six boats, I guess. So he had a small boat and was building a bigger one for my older brother. So I started running the smaller boat, and ended up buying it probably in 78. And then I wanted a bigger boat myself, so I built the Gale Force for me in 80 so, you know, been with it ever since.

LC: And all the docks that you just outlined, what were your roles there? Was it just unloading?

JW: Yeah.

LC: Was there a shift in your roles when you got off? What a shift in your roles at the docks when you got off the boat and put a captain on and now you're renting out these docks. So what do you say your connections?

JW: It's basically the same. I mean, it's you, there is no dockage fee, but there is a packing fee, and it's based on what they catch. Some of docks now is starting, because there's so many boats that are not working, they're starting to say, Okay, if you don't catch X number of pounds, then you're gonna have to pay some dockage fees. But it's some boats- some docks do it, and some docks don't. And that's really the only thing that changed, probably about 10 years ago, before there used to be-this dock before, when Lawrence Jacobs had it, before was it was pretty much dilapidated when Lawrence got rid of it. And then, like say, the people that bought Lawrence would land here, rebuilt it this. And that it would, Lawrence probably had 12 boats most all, every year around. And we'd probably get five or six during the fall when the North Carolina boys would migrate down. And that was the- there wasn't the dock- they did have a dock here at Sea Gardens. And it had four or five boats. When I was in high school, I really ran the dock. My father least ran that dock at Sea Gardens. We had four or five boats there. The- but most every dock, when King and Prince had the dock in Valona, there's been as high as 30 boats of that dock. Now there's none. The same thing with Darien with the Boone's. All over every dock had 20 or 30 boats at it most, just all the time. There was another dock at- Gene Brannen that I don't know if they told you. Anybody told you about that one of that Valona. I mean, at Belleville. It's around at the end of the road where the boat ramp is now. And he had 10 or 12 boots there. Jack Ward probably had six or seven, which is where Bill Harris is now.

And then Phillips built that dock and had 10 or 12 boats at that one, and it's just now it's to the point where there's so few boats, it needs to be some consolidation. Because I would say, probably the only profitable dock in the state right now is probably Boone's. It's this dock, it takes, well, this dock, probably last year was first year that it lost a little bit of money, but one boat didn't hardly go fishing and the other one- there wasn't but two boats working at this dock, pretty much year round. And then the one of them, the Gore Lane. Gore took his boat. He went to work at the pulp mill, but he still got this other boat, but it broke down in November, I guess, and they didn't- they were going to try to fix it this winter. And then Fred Todd's boat was he just didn't go. I don't know the reason.

12:34

LC: How long did you say you were have been leasing out this dock?
JW: How long have I been?
LC: Mhm.
JW: Six years.
LC: Six years you've been over here at the [wait and see dock?]
JW: Yeah.
LC: What do you think makes this dock unique or different from other docks that you've been to?
JW: They spent a lot of money on this dock when they rebuilt this. This dock is, you see how wide it is. I mean, most docks are just four or five feet wide with two by fours. You know, is decking this docks got four [unintelligible] decking. It's got, I can drive a forklift up and down this dock and turn around on it.
[laughing]
BP: Comfortably.
JW: Yeah. 16, It's 16 feet wide. It was overkill. It really wasn't necessary to do what they did. And I really don't know why they did it.
LC: That was gonna be my next question, I was going to ask why?
JW: And nobody, I mean, to see, the industry was in decline when they built it. And nobody ever tied up here. Lawrence tied his boat up here. But Lawrence was kind of semi-retired. He might fish 30-40, days a year, you know, just get out the house more than anything. And then that boat eventually sunk here at the dock, and they had to get it up. And that was really the only boat that ever tied up here until I leased it.

14:09

LC: So, before they put all the money into this dock, and made it what it is now, what was wrong with it?
JW: Just Well, I can go show you the the barnacles, the worms and stuff that are in the into salt water, eats the pilings up, and they'll get they'll eventually just dilapidate and fall apart. And they didn't want to rebuild it, you know, Lawrence didn't, so he ended up selling it. And so like I say he was semi-retired anyway, so he, this dock had been here really, not sure just how I think it- Think Lawrence was married to Hugh Burroughs, Suzanne. When you talk to Suzanne, she can tell you more about the family, but he kind of inherited this dock through his wife's family. And it just, just over the years, just got to where they were less and less boats and less and less money in it. It really wasn't worth rebuilding. The people that bought land from him, I don't, I don't know why, but they thought they could turn it into something that just didn't materialize.

LC: So does that mean you had to put in the shrimp conveyer belt?
LW: Yeah, I put in the vat the and the ice machines and the ice blower. And because we do, we do, there's two types of boats. You got ice boats and freezer boats. Alright, all of our boats here are ice boats. So we put in ice machines and ice blower to blow ice onto the boats. I prefer ice boat shrimp. I don't- freezer boat shrimp is more convenient, because you can just take them off the freezer boat, put them in your freezer and work them whenever you want to ice boat. You you pretty much, you take them off the boat. You got to work in that day or two, get them, get them done. So it's, but I preferred ice boat truly fresh from and it works better in the plant. It works better I just thought we've ever had so.
BP: How much did it cost to put like the ice maker and the shrimp thing?
16:53
JW: Well, I bought used equipment. My brother had had some of the equipment, and it was, it was all used, and I had about $50,000 and doing it then. But since then, I've put I've had to replace the two ice machines that he's, that he had, and they were about 40,000 a piece. So it's not a legacy. So it's, it's easy to lose money, if you don't have production.
LC: What kind of prep did it take the building to get the vat in and the ice machines, or is there already space for that?
JW: The cooler was here.
LC: Okay.
JW: The, which is the storage. We just store the ice in there. And ice is on, the ice machines are on the ceiling, and drop down into the- Yeah, they drop down through those shoots into there.
BP: Oh, That's cool.
JW: I can turn them on and show you.
BP: Oh, I would love that after the interview. That would be really cool.
[LC and BP hushed]
BP: Yeah. So tell me about the people that you worked with while you've been at the dock?
JW: What at this dock?
BP: Yeah.
JW: My boat with my captains and crew is Captain, Ronnie Shaw, and he's you'll have various crews, crews come and go. So the Fred Todd has got the sun down, and like I say, the near Gore has the Shawna Lucille, and he did have the other boat, which was the Midnight Rider. And those are the ones. Those are the boats that we've had at this dock. I do have a couple of transit boats from up and down the coast that might come in my [boat], if they're working in this area, but those are the steady boats.
LC: What about people who worked at other docks that stand out to you?
19:00
JW: There's been, most of them are dead. [Laughing] The yeah I've worked with, you know, the I've been in the business since 76 so I've known all the old captains, all the new captains. So it's hard to say who all I've worked with. I've worked with Hunter Forsyth, which you're going to talk to Suzanne. Her brother in law, ran Hagen, which is one of the legends of the industry. He was, he was the one of the founders of going down in into the Key West pink shrimp industry down there. He found, he was one of the first ones to get into that. He used to work in what he called contoy, off of Mexico. He's he had about done it all, him and Hunter both. The- Lawrence Jacobs, we worked around all our life. Jack Ward, which is, you know, the mainstay in Bellville. I

used to fish me and Charlie Phillips was kind of competitive. We like to fish the same area before he got off him and into fin fish and but he had, he had boats there. The old timer, like Big Gene Brennen, William Brennen, which son has got, His son, Pat is still fishing. The John Sawyer, the entire Sawyer family, really, I mean Reggie, old, old man Reggie is dead, but his son, little Reggie, is still fishing. He's got the boat there and [unintelligable] to skippers. I don't know if you saw it, basically on the railway now, so if you're going over towards Suzanne's, I don't know if you go into the docks, but you're, you're, he's on the railway there, dry dock. You know, it's all been generational through me, you know. I mean, you know, during my career, you know, but the newer generation is not, not coming back in. Fred's got two sons. And Fred was, you know, third generation fisherman. He's but his two sons is not- one of the teacher, and other one works, Not sure where he works now, he was working with a railroad company, and Fred don't want him into the industry.
LC: I was gonna ask.
LW: So my son, he went out with me a couple of times on the boat. Didn't like it at all. But he got out of school, he went to just went to Starbucks and went to work, and we had a chance to get this, get to this shrimp plant and processing plant. And that's the reason we leased it. We leased it for four years, because I was too old to be doing this kind of stuff. So, I mean, I so I said, Son, if you want it, if you like it, we'll, we'll do something with it. If you don't, you know, we'll give it back. But after the four years, he said, Yeah, I like it. So we ended up buying it, and I got it. I mean, the guy that wanted was wanting to get he was wanting to get out of it, and made me a deal to buy it and financed it for me, which was [Speedy tostand.] And so that's where it looks like that's what he'll do until either he retires or the industry quits one or the other. Which I got a feeling the industry will go away before he gets old enough to retire. So-
BP: Why do you say that?
22:52
JW: No, like I say the generational, nobody's going back into it. I mean, these boats are getting older, the captains, I can probably shoot, I could do it on one hand, for people that's under 40. And probably on two hands for anybody that's under 60 that's in this industry. So when my generation quits, it's going to be a tough road.
LC/BP: Yeah.
BP: Sad to say, but the industry now, because the imports have collapsed the price so badly, the- nobody's wanting to get into it. The crews are not getting into average crew man now is probably 65. So they're, you know, none of the crews and the ones that are staying in it is, not of the best caliber. [Chuckles] I know that's not- So, you know, it's not, you know they're, I tell everybody, if you can, if you can pass a drug test and keep a driver's license now you can get $100,000 a year job. That there's that many pulp meals and stuff that are that are looking for workers. You can't make that kind of money in the shrimp industry. So you don't, get into less and less people that's that willing to do the work.
LC: Yeah
JW: Back when I started in the shrimp industry, especially in this county, you were considered aristocrat. The you know, they were, there was good money in it. Everybody, you know, everybody had them. You could go to any bank you wanted to and borrow any money on any boat, buy any boat, do what you want to do. And since, since farm raised imports have come in, it's made it to where, your- you went from being aristocrat to poverty level most of the time. The

only good thing that's happened is because of the, you know, we've lost so many boats that everybody's getting a bigger piece of pie. Back then you were working on price, you know, you didn't have to catch a lot of shrimp. You could you can make money. You had cheaper fuel, cheaper everything. You can make money on on on price. Now you're making money on production. If you get the average boat that works, you can make, you can still make a profit. But it's kind of got to be in your blood to do it, because, like I say, if you're, most people that really want it, have got their own boats now. They want to stay into the business. The one or two few captains that are around, you know that is and luckily I got, I got one that just, you know, he likes it, but he got no desire to own the boat. There's, you've got to be pretty good at business to keep a boat going nowadays. You can, back in the 2000s when, really, when early 2000 when things collapsed. You know, boats were working on we were also living on the maintenance. We you, you neglected your maintenance to keep groceries on the table. And that's when we lost probably 60% of the industry, in the into the 2000s early 2000s. And then it like say, it got to where, you know, there was less and less boats. It kind of switched over to production based instead of price based. So there but so many people got out of the industry. You know that that were in it before, but you know you, you and their kids didn't want, they didn't want to be in it. So their kids didn't want to be in it. Because mine, I mean, I'm my grandfather came here from probably back in the 30s or 40s, and started crabbing. He crabbed, would with bull nose on a string and catch enough crab to make money to to feed his family. And then he ended up being into the, went to work with one of the paper mills in the pulp wood industry. And my father was working same way, in he just always had the bug. So he built a couple of small boats that could fish back then you could work the sound systems there. Ended up and down the state. And he had some weekend warriors boats, you know, and ended up building the first boat, like, say, in 1970 which was 50 foot boat that I first bought from him. And so it's third generation fisherman, I guess. Yes, but won't be a fourth. Unless he [forklift beep: Laughing]
BP: That was a forklift just so the audio knows that.
[Laughing]
28:49
LC: It sounds like you have a really rich history in the industry, even though your kids aren't going to go into it. Do you have any-some funny memories happening at any of the docks that you worked at throughout your years?
JW: Fond memories?
LC: Yeah, fond memories.
JW: They were all, I mean, just camaraderie of everybody, just sitting around, shooting the bull.
LC: Yeah? Been more any inside jokes? Any one falling of the dock?
JW: Well, Hell yeah, you always somebody's gonna fall overboard sometimes during the year. But, like, remember, like, I say on low tide in my younger days, we had just jumped from the dock to the pilot house and climbed down onto the boat. One frosty morning, I did that and almost went overboard off the other side, I started sliding. I had claw marks all over the pilot house trying to stop.
BP: Oh man.
JW: So those kind of things just happened or you. You know, you slip off to cap rail, just, you know, everybody's fell overboard or or lost their phones when the back, since when we started having phones so, but yeah. Usually when you fall overboard, you'll sit there and say, Okay, I've

been having a bad time since I got the monkey off my back now. So watched him, watched him overboard. Any other way, if I mean, as always. You know, people had their superstitions about just like if things were going bad, they would stick bananas on the piling to get the monkey off the boat.
LC: WHAT? That's what I want to hear about the superstitions. Are then any like dock superstitions?
JW: That's just superstitions. So, yeah, he's all kind of, I mean, you used to, I mean, you didn't see alligator around the dock. That was, that was a superstition. And I can remember old timers would if you said alligator, you crossed your fingers, taboo, too. Everybody had different things. The porpoise was bad luck to say on a boat which, which is the dolphin, but, don't say porpoise. You can say dolphin. Don't say porpoise, just all these crazy little superstitions that you everybody had.
LC: Oh that's fun. What about funny memories in the six years you've been here?
JW: No, that's just work. I've always you work somewhere 20 years you need to find another profession. So I've been here 40 so now it's just work. You come down and more bad memories, and then good, too much work.
BP: So out of the fun memories that we talked about, what's like a memory that stands out to you the most, like, what's the best memory you've had out of any of the docks that you worked at?
31:53
JW: Oh, wow. that's kind of a-
BP: A very broad question.
LC: It doesn't have to be funny. It can be anything-
JW: No, I mean, it's just, I mean, it's not, there's most of it is just, you know, camaraderie of being around, you know, the dock workers and the dock, you know, the dock owners, and listening to their stories and different things like that. I mean, so it's not, there's nothing that really stands out. But just a lot of you know more radio talk on the the water than really other dock. You come in and unload and go home. You ready to, you know, ready to call it a day. Because most of the time, when I first started, you were in and out every day, you know, you so you would leave at four o'clock in the morning, try to be it on the fishing grounds by daylight, and you'd work until you either wasn't catching anything, or you got to where you'd be back at dark. So you didn't really, you know, you come in a little early on unloading days, and you know, to where you still get unloaded and be on the dark. But it's wasn't really, you know, other than just a normal BS that happens at a dock, there's not nothing that really stands out.
BP: That's fair. That's really fair. Okay, so what changes have you seen in the industry that can be like in the water, in the weather, or like the sea life over your time, working like at a dock?
JW: Weather's, I'm not a big climate change proponent.
LC: That's okay.
JW: It's a more of a cycle, because I've seen all these cycles come through. So it's, you know, I don't really see, I mean, right now we are in a warm cycle, and you see different types of shrimp. Like we used to have the brown shrimp, which is summer shrimp that were, you know, just predominant from June till August. And they're not here anymore. And they will, but it's always been that if you have a good spring white shrimp season, you have a poor brown shrimp season, and we've had excellent white shrimp spring seasons. So it's that what's causing it.

Because, you know, you see that in past history that we've had too cold back in 18 they got we had some snow, and they killed the entire spring crop. We had an excellent brown shrimp season that year, and that's the last one we had. Last three or four years, white shrimp have really just worked right on through the July and August. You have enough that you can work on and the then you would start fall in September, fall, white shrimp. So brownies would, I mean, they were, there were still a few, but it wasn't really enough to work on, you know, to call it, you know, if the white shrimp hadn't been there, it wouldn't have been profitable to work. So it's, that's one of the changes that I've seen in the warmer cycle that we're in. But if you listen to the old timers that I used to listen to, this has happened before. So you know, that's why I'm more of a cycle guy than I am a climate change. If you go back and look same thing. You can go back and look at some of the record highs and record lows, they're gonna be in 1800s so cycle we're in. So it's a, I may be proven wrong. I'm not gonna say that I'm right all the time, 99%.
[laughing]
LC: I like the confidence.
JW: So but other than that, the only other real changes is just the decline in the number of boats, you know, and that is just strictly due to farm raised imports. When, before their imports back in the late 70s, and Red Hagen is one of the guys telling me this, because they used to work out of Fort Myers, Key West, and they could legally keep the spiny lobster on the boat. Then they'd bring them in and sell them as bycatch you know, if they caught him in the nets. So they're the spiny lobsters were the same price as 21/25 tails. Now spiny lobsters is 15, $18 a pound, and we're looking at four and $5 a pound. So when, I can remember, in 79 getting $6 a pound for 21/25 that you're getting $4 a pound for now. So the, that's what the farm industry has done to the to us. Inflation hasn't gone down, you know? I mean, it's not, you know, you figure even when you say, okay, inflation is only 2%, well, 2% over 20 years adds up to a lot.
[laughing]
JW: So it's, so things keep costing us more and more, and the price keeps going down, and that's what I'm saying. It's a matter of now being working on production by price.
BP: So what hard times has this dock specifically experienced?
JW: Hard times?
BP: Yeah.
38:05
JW: I can't really say. I mean, it's, you know, it's just a normal, you know, it's just normal unloading docks. I mean, last last year, because the price was down, you know, the couple of boats, just like, didn't go fishing, and docks like everything else works on production. There's no production. There's, you're gonna lose money. I didn't care. When we got the dock, it was more to have shrimp to go to my processing plant. So, you know, I said all along, I don't care if it really makes any money, but I didn't want it to lose any money. So I could just have it for the convenience it would be. I could get the shrimp and, you know, pretty much guarantee shrimp to keep the plant running. So it's, that was the reasoning behind getting the dock. But it was like, say, because there was two boats that backed out. The dock didn't make any money last year. I'm hoping it will this year, if I can get some more boats in. But you know, [muffled], you don't know how many docks you've been to, but you've seen a lot of what we call dead soldier. Boats that are just tied up and not working, or so dilapidated they can't work. I don't let them come here. I get to be the sob for a while, but still, it's a I don't need boats that are just gonna just sit

here and sink. So I'm real picky as to who I let come in.
LC: Were you, was this dock affected by COVID at all?
JW: What?
LC: Was the dock affected by COVID at all?
JW: No, actually, COVID did us good.
BP: Really?
JW: Yeah, because they we were essential industry, so because of food. So they didn't, you know, they didn't restrict us in any way. And but they did restrict, you know, because it was worldwide, you know, they didn't import shrimp in, like they were doing, but so the prices were better then, and we were catching good shrimp. And so the boats really made real good money during COVID. And everybody was working and, you know, so I don't want to see it again, but it didn't, you know, it was, it was a good period for the for the shrimp industry. Mainly because we had people calling looking for shrimp that had never called before and has never called since, because they couldn't get the farm raised. But when you look at United States consumes about 1.6 million. I mean, we they're about 1.2 billion, but they're importing about 1.6 billion in. The domestic industry does less than 200 million. So when they couldn't get anything in here, they were just screaming for shrimp. And that's the way it would be again, if it wasn't for the farm imports. But when you see, when you see shrimp at Dairy Queen and Chinese, there's your you know, you know you're in trouble, they're bringing us that cheap. I mean, it's no longer the luxury item. And that's what we were trying to do with the Wild Georgia Shrimp program, is get back to the niche market that, you know, there is a significant taste difference in the shrimp. So the antibiotics, things like that that they use, you know, it's not into the into the wild shrimp. So we were trying to create a niche market for that, and we've done it to an extent, but it's still not enough. They're still controlling the marketplace. And when you go into the restaurants that, they look at it, say, I can buy this shrimp for $3 or I can buy yours for $6, which one you're gonna do? And most of them will lie to you and tell you they're serving local anyway. But we've, we actually did a, I'm up on the board of the Southern Shrimp Alliance, and they are, they did a, is a guy that has got a traveling DNA test, I guess you best way of doing it. He went into Tampa about a month ago, and 96% of the shrimp in Tampa was imported. He can, he can take, he can go buy a shrimp off of the menu, come in, take a sample of it, had results in 30 minutes. Whatever number. He did that in Savannah last week, 60% of them. So any I haven't got the final numbers, but he told me that roughly 60% is still using farm raised imports. And he had sites five different restaurants to just bald face lied to him. Just said, yeah, these are local shrimp. We buy them straight off the boat. Farm Raised imports. So that's what you're up against in the industry. And the average person doesn't realize that, you know, there is a farm raised industry, they say a shrimp is a shrimp of shrimp. That's not that’s our that's our downfall.
43:45
BP: So outside of the decline of shrimp price that's been happening, has this dock experienced, like any other financial struggles since you've had it?
JW: No, because, like I said, I didn't this, this dock is kind of unique that, you know, everything is going to to the plant. I mean, I'm go by what these boys catch, whether it's more than I can handle, or where I might not, If I need to go to another dock and buy a shrimp, I will, you know, to keep the plant going, but I don't have to, you know, I can. So those docks are a little more at the mercy of other buyers to where this one is not, you know, I mean, I can so I don't have the

same pitfalls that the average dock has, because it's part of my processing plant. And it's by design. I've been there long enough I knew, I knew that's the way I wanted it.
BP: And then when you think about the future of commercial commercial fishing in Georgia, what do docks today have to do to be successful in the future?
JW: That's what I was saying. You'll have to consolidate.
BP: Ah, Okay, sorry, you want to try to-
LC: Want me to re-asl this?
BP: Yeah, because I'm bad at asking stuff.
LC: Oh, What do you think the commercial fishing industry needs to succeed?
JW: What?
LC: What do you think the commercial fishing industry needs to succeed?
JW: Price.
LC: Price?
JW: Yeah. I mean, we can sell the shrimp. I mean, it's just that you've got to get enough, You've got to get enough price to keep up with inflation. When I started, you can build it. You can buy a net for $200 that same net now is $4000.
BP: Wow.
JW: And I pulled four of them.
LC: What about you talked about earlier, a lack of young people. Do you think there's any hope of getting young people back in the industry?
JW: Not unless you get the price back to where it becomes, I mean, it's you're not gonna walk into a job it’s gonna make you $20,000 a year when you can go make 60s anywhere else. And that's what, you know, you can't blame them.
LC: Yeah
JW: So you've got to get you've got to get it to where the industry is, is viable enough to attract people we used to when I started in the 70s. We had doctors and lawyers coming in, buying boats and putting captains on just for investments, you could easily make 30, 40% profit range on what you were doing. And, I mean, you can't even do that in stock market today. So they would invest in the boats, and they were the first ones to get out. We had captains boat owners that had master's degrees. They would make more money on the boat. That's the reason I got in it. The pulp mill was available when I was there, back then, you had to pretty much know somebody to get in to get a job, but I could have got there, but I can make more money crabbing and shrimping. Well, I can make more money crabbing than boys were coming out of high school and, you know, going to work at the pulp mills. I had two of my friends, and we kind of had a bet that that, all right, the first one of you that can make a $500 a week, which is nothing now, but in 1972 that was good money. We go with treat the other two for supper. I had to do the treatin’. So, I mean, you work back then, I mean, and I was in 70s, my father raised six boys on $100 a week. Mother didn't work. So that's the difference in, you know, the you've got to be able to be able to keep up with the times to get to attract people into the industry. Then you then you could do it, but now you can't. And the reality is, for the number of days that the average crew man works, he's making more money than your daughter pulp mills, but it's not a year round job. You had bad weather. You're lucky to work 150 days a year. So for the I mean, these boys can go out and make 400 to $1,000 a day, but then you got more days off than you do working days. So it's, you know, it's still a viable industry as far as number of days working

compared to your wages, but it's just that, you know, now you used to working year round. This it's always been this time of the year, and it's always been that way. You know, the 150 day average is probably a good average of days of the average boat fishes forever. You got so many, too much wind one day during the winter season, this time of the year. It's just they're kind of dormant. You don't catch anything anyway. So that's the reason we're doing maintenance work getting ready for the next season. So it's always been that way, but back then, you made enough to get you through the winter and get all your boat work done, get all your maintenance done and be ready for the next year. It's not the- If you have boat famous now, the average boat, the big steel holes that they're doing, the last one that they build within the $3 million range, that's a tough payment. I built that boat in 1980 for about $120,000 that boat right now, the engine would cost you that much.
BP: Expensive.
JW: So it's a, you know, even a small boat now could run into a million dollar range. And that, that's that takes a lot of shrimp. I can make it now with that boat, because been paid for. And it's, you know, it's not to lift with no payments. It's more profitable. If I had to replace that boat today, I'd be hard pressed to do it.
50:45
BP: So has this dock ever been affected by like hurricanes or storms or anything like that?
JW: This one. I mean, was it Irma? It got up because everybody wants to come here and tie up because it's such a strong dock, you know, and it's so it's and they, you know, you let them, but it's still this dock never went underwater, but it did get to the to the bottom of the deck timber or the decking. That same dock over my brother had the Valona dock, and it was two feet into the office. So yeah, this dock didn't do it, but other docks have. The Boone dock and the Thompson dock. They were both, You were wading waist deep to get to it.
LC: What about throughout the time where you were jumping to different docks, during that period of time was your boat ever affected when you were tied up at those docks and a major weather event that happened?
JW: Honestly, the worst hurricanes were those, I mean, you know, we didn't- We're lucky in this little cove that we're in, they'll bypass,you know, we all when Hugo hit Charleston, it was that was probably before you was born. But they were expecting it to come in here, so everybody was evacuating and expecting the worst. So we took the boats really up to Darien River and tied up Thompson's, because these docks here wasn't like this one today. It was, they were in pretty bad shape. So they were, you go up the river to get behind that high bluff. And then it just everybody left. We stayed to make sure the boats didn't break loose, whatever. And it just made a little jog and hit Charleston instead of us. Thank God. Bad for Charleston, good for us. But it but those, that was probably the only worst hurricane that scared that you had, until these last ones come through, and these didn't, they didn't hit. They just skirted by. But you just got, you really got more tidal effect than you did. You know, wind effect. I mean, we had down trees and stuff throughout the county, but wasn't nothing devastating.
BP: So if you had the money to invest in the dock. What would you spend the money on?
JW: I'm 70 years old. I don't spend no money. [laughing] I'm through investing.
[laughing]
53:47
BP: That's fair. Okay, so our final question that we have for you is, what are some

recommendations you have for the future of the commercial fishing industry?
JW: It's going to be for the for the shrimp industry to survive, you're going to have to create that niche market. Because, like, say, all we got to do is hit 10% of the people. If you can't find 10% of the people that's willing to buy it and pay a little more for shrimp, then you're not doing a marketing plan right. And I was part of that marketing plan, and we haven't hit that 10%. We have. It's been, it's been a helpful it's been we boats on this coast get more than boats in the Gulf. So it has helped. And you, you, you know you're, you're getting more and more of the higher end rest of. That are looking at it, they don't use enough volume to to really, they think, if they think, if they use 25 pound a week, that's a lot of shrimp. No, that's not a lot of shrimp. I mean, you get like, B and J's, which is just a fried shrimp Haven. He's used 1000, 1500 pound a week. I don't know if he's that way anymore, but when he was doing the buffet, he was burning through ‘em. But he's higher end reference. We're going to put three or four shrimp on the plate thinking, you know, 25-30, pounds, because we sell, we sell to some of them at Savannah, and 50 pound is a big week. So there is some of them that are, you know, fry shops that use two or 300 pound, but really a 500 pound a week restaurant is few and far between. So you've got to get more people involved, they did pass that thing to the house to where you got to start labeling the country of origin on your menu. That should help if it goes through the Senate. It’s still not going to be 100% but it's going to be, you know, if you if you could get an increase in of 20% out of out of that ball, that would be good for the industry. But the main thing about getting to keeping it surviving is attract another generation. And that's, that's the tougher part, because, like I said, so easy to get another job that's an easier job.
LC: I wanted to ask. I want to get back to the previous question. And I know that you're done investing, but what, in a hypothetical sense, what do you think other docks could invest in that might help them be more successful.
JW: The dck itself is just strictly an unloading, you know, I mean, if you don't, if you don't want to invest in, you know, further processing, you know, which is, you know, like we've done, then it's, there's really not much else you can do. There's not, there's no real technical advantage, or, you know that you're going to get out of a dock. I mean, it's just plain and simple, cut and dry, you unload them off the boat, put them in a box, ice them down, and take them to the processor. So unless you're going to make a processing plant out of your dock, or start a retail market out of your dock. You know, that's, that's about all you can do with it. And it's tougher to get, I mean, it's pretty good investment to do in a retail, I mean, I've got, I've got probably three quarter million dollars worth equipment in that plant. So, and to start from scratch is, is a tough investment for the, you know, for an industry in the decline like it is.
BP: Is there anything else that you want to tell us about this dock that we didn't ask you?
JW: No, yeah, I can say a dock is kind of a cut and dry it's just a little bit boring little situation. The only thing has changed is like we used to stack boxes by hand, one at a time. We got forklifts now. [phone ringing] We used to shovel ice into, into the, you know, into the bins and stuff. We got blowers and, you know, it does you do have an advantage of, you know, technology and equipment now, but makes life easier, but it's still very cut and dry. Unload go home.
[laughing]
BP: But yeah, thank you so much for this interview. I enjoyed it.
LC: You can stop the recording.

BP: Yeah.
LC: Before we un-mic you.
[end of interview]
59:03