

**ANTHONY TARANTO**  
**Apalachicola, FL**

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Date: December 2, 2005  
Location: Mr. Taranto's home - Apalachicola, FL  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Length: 1 hour, 37 minutes  
Project: Florida's Forgotten Coast

**[Begin Anthony Taranto]**

0:00:00:0

**Amy Evans:** This is Amy Evans on Friday, December 2nd, 2005; I'm in Apalachicola, Florida at the home of Mr. Anthony Taranto.

0:00:15.8

**Anthony Taranto:** That's right—Taranto [Tah-ran-toe] but we say Taranto [Tah-ron-toe]

**[Laughs]**

0:00:19.1

**AE:** And so sir, would you mind introducing yourself and also listing your birthday?

0:00:22.7

**AT:** I'm Anthony Taranto, and I was born August 12th, 1932.

0:00:29.0

**AE:** Were you born here in Apalachicola?

0:00:30.8

**AT:** I was born in Apalachicola and been here all my life.

0:00:34.1

**AE:** And can you tell me a little bit about how your parents came to be in Florida? Are they natives or—?

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**AT:** No, my father came over from Sicily, and I don't know what year, but he said the first time he came over he was thirteen or fourteen years old, and then he went back and came back when he was around sixteen and just settled here. Dad said that the reason he left home—there just wasn't enough to eat over there. Things were bad, you know, and he had a brother out in Mississippi, and he went by and saw him but—but he also had a cousin down here—they were first cousins—and that's how he got down to Apalachicola. And they went in the seafood business together. And then finally, one of them got out of it, and my dad took it over.

And my mother came also from Messina, Italy. Well, I think it's Sicily also but—but anyway, she came through New York and—with her parents—and she said when she came over she was about three years old. And her mother had a brother that lived here in Apalachicola, so they came down and settled here. And her dad worked at the Cypress Lumber Company as a

night watchman, and that's how they started here. And then my mother and dad met here at Apalachicola and later on got married.

0:02:21.5

**AE:** Okay, so I have a few questions.

0:02:23.0

**AT:** Okay.

0:02:23.5

**AE:** One is, do you know where in Sicily your father was from?

0:02:27.2

**AT:** He was from a town called Acitrezza, A-c-i-t-r-e-z-z-a. That was the only thing I knew.

0:02:38.9

**AE:** Okay. And then the folks that he met up with in Mississippi, do you know their names and where that was?

0:02:46.1

**AT:** His brother lived in Gulfport [Mississippi], I think, or Biloxi [Mississippi], I'm not sure. But he's—he went back to Italy, so we don't have any—I don't think we have any kinfolks over there. There's still some [people with the last name] Taranto, but I don't think they're kin. Well they might be in some way. We—we don't really know them. I do have cousins in Pensacola [Florida], but they are fourth or fifth cousins, and I know some of them. But I think my dad came down here because of his—double-first cousin—two brothers married two sisters—and then they went in the seafood business together when they got down here.

0:03:34.2

**AE:** Do you know about what year that was?

0:03:37.3

**AT:** He said they started in 1923 in the seafood business.

0:03:40.6

**AE:** Your father's name is Joe, is that right?

0:03:43.3

**AT:** Joe. Joseph or Joe.

0:03:46.8

**AE:** Do you know his—remember his birthday? What year he was born?

0:03:51.7

**AT:** [*Laughs*] I want to say 1895. I'm not sure. He died in 1975, and he was eighty years old, so that would be what, ninety-five—1895? And my mother died in [nineteen] eighty-one and—no, wait a minute—yeah, [nineteen] eighty-one], and she was eighty-one years old.

0:04:27.4

**AE:** What was her name?

0:04:28.9

**AT:** Madeline, M-a-d-e-l-i-n-e.

0:04:33.1

**AE:** And so what from those early days of the—the seafood industry and your father's business did he—he tell you growing up?

0:04:40.3

**AT:** Well I was down there a lot, you know, and things were different back then than they are now, you know. The State [of Florida] is putting us all out of business with all their regulations and things like this, you know. But back then, he probably had—he, you know—as I got up a little bit, I mean, like I say nine—ten years old, I'd go down there a lot. And he was in the oyster business and also the shrimp business and also handled fish. And he probably had fifty, sixty people shucking oysters. You know, most of them were black. What I remember so much about that when they were shucking, you know, they would all get to singing or chanting and stuff like that, you know, and they'd carry it on all the time. **[Laughs]** All day long. I mean that's the way it went, you know. They paid them off. They had these little tokens, and every time they'd get a gallon of oysters, they'd give them a token. At the end of the week they'd count them up, you know. If you lost some, you just lost them [and you would not get paid]. But that's—that's how they kept track of the oysters.

And he would buy the oysters from—from boats that came in. Of course, most of them were his own boats, and they had these big barrels that unloaded, and they'd pay so much a barrel for them, and then we'd put them in the house and shelf them up on the—what we call stalls and the shuckers would shuck about half—they had a block of wood, something like—something like a knife sort of but it—it was driven into the wood and about that wide **[Gestures to illustrate**

*something about an inch-and-a-half]* and had a sharp point, and they'd lay the bill of that oyster up there and crack it and then take a knife and open it up.

And [*Laughs*] I can remember some of these other black people that worked for him, you know—had an old fireplace down there and they would actually cook on that thing. They'd have a kettle that swung in there and they would cook stuff like [rac]coons, and it smelled so darned good, and he wouldn't let me eat it. [*Laughs*] Coon and rice. It just looked so good and smelled so good. I have eaten it, you know. Not down there but it was—it's good, if you prepare it right.

But I remember all that kind of stuff, you know, and then—and the seafood part of it, sometimes well, you saw how the big building [on Water Street] was, right? So one of the buildings in the center, I can remember we had shrimp in boxes just all over the floor. We never had so darned many shrimp. You couldn't hardly do anything with them. You had to unload the boats to get through with them before you could put them in—in the icebox or the refrigerator or something like that, you know. We had refrigeration. But there would be so many shrimp back in those days, you just couldn't hardly sell them and couldn't hardly do nothing with them. And we'd ship them a lot of times—we'd put them in wooden barrels and ice them down and put them on the train—Railway Express and they'd go up to New York. I used to hate to do that. [*Laughs*]

0:08:24.5

**AE:** Why?

0:08:26.7



**AT:** That barrel weighed about 200-and-some pounds, and you had to load them and get them up on a platform and then have to get them up on the train, you know, and they were heavy. But it had to be done back in those days, you know, and sometimes you'd send a carload of—of shrimp out, you know. The same way with fish. We packed those in barrels and put ice on them and sent them up [north], too. And then later on, the trucks came in, and they took away from the Railway Express [way of transporting seafood], which was the train, you know, and everything went by truck freight then. So you just put it on the truck, and it would go to New York in just no time. On that train it probably—sometimes they would have to switch trains, you know, switch tracks and stuff like this, and they'd take sometimes a week to get up there, and they'd just have to keep re-icing [the fresh seafood]. And every time they re-iced it, what they did—they would cut a hole in the top of this burlap bag that covered it and put ice in them. But usually these people would get them a handful of shrimp to take home. **[Laughs]** So every time they got up there [to New York,] the weight was short. I was glad when those days were over.

0:09:45.2

**AE:** Well, and [your sister Dolores Roux's friend] Tom Daily was telling me last night that your dad's seafood house was the—the contact to the Fulton Fish Market in New York, and that most everything from the [Apalachicola] bay area went through him to go up that way, is that right?

0:10:01.3

**AT:** I don't think everything went through him. But he did deal with Fulton Fish Company and also—and a bunch of those people up there. But I don't—I don't think everything went through—it would be hard to say about that really, because anybody could ship to anybody back then. They were—they were all wanting seafood, you know, but I know he did handle a lot of seafood, and a lot of it went up to New York. But I don't think he was actually the contact point like what they thought, maybe. It could have been, though.

0:10:42.1

**AE:** Well and you were talking about your father having like fifty boats. When he started, though, did he start like with one boat, or how did that work?

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**AT:** He didn't—he didn't have fifty boats. I said he had about fifty, sixty people shucking oysters.

0:10:56.2

**AE:** Okay.

0:10:56.4

**AT:** At one time they had—he and his cousin there had about thirty boats, you know. They'd start off and buy a boat, and then they'd have a boat built and—as they could do it, you know. Because back then you could get a boat built for just a little bit of money. Nowadays it costs a lot, but back then, a little bit of money was a lot of money. **[Laughs]** You know, 100 dollars back then was about like 10,000 dollars now. But they had all these boats, and most of them were, I'd say twenty or thirty and thirty-five-feet long, which now, is a small boat. And those same boats were used for oystering. They were used for shrimping and whatever anybody did. They just used the same boat. If they went out oystering, like now, most of these oystermen now go out in the—what we call a skiff with an outboard motor, and they go out there, and they oyster and come back in—in the evening. But I can remember these boats going out oystering, and they would spend the night, and it would be three or four people on it, and then they'd come in the next day and the fish-hold would just be full of oysters. They'd be sticking up out of the top, you know, and come in the next day and unload. It never was just a few hours, you know—just a long trip like that.

0:12:29.6

**AE:** Can you talk about that relationship of the—the oystermen and the fishermen to the wholesaler and how that works?

0:12:37.0

**AT:** Well what they—the way they worked that, if I'm understanding you right, like dad owned the boat. Well the boat goes out and they catch X-number of dollars, say—let's say 1,000 dollars—an easy figure. The boat usually got maybe a third of that to keep the boat up, you know, overhaul the motor, and paint the boat, and all this kind of stuff. Then the rest of the money was split between the [oyster]men, and they'd have to pay their own expenses, you know, for groceries and stuff like that.

0:13:24.3

**AE:** Is there anybody who had their own boat that would—?

0:13:26.3

**AT:** Yeah, some of them would have their own boats, and they'd just buy from them, you know. But usually, the price they paid was about the same price. It didn't make any difference whether you owned the boat or somebody else owned the boat.

0:13:40.2

**AE:** So then, what about other competition along the waterfront with wholesalers? Is it just [according to] price? What they pay for the catch or—?

0:13:49.2

**AT:** Well normally like on the oysters, everybody paid the same thing. Now sometimes on the shrimp you would find somebody that would pay five cents more—ten cents more—just to get somebody to come down there and unload. And then once they started unloading, after a time, they'd drop the price back. But as a rule, they would pay almost the same price everywhere up and down the dock. They almost had to, you know, to stay in business.

0:14:23.7

**AE:** So was there an allegiance at all between the oystermen and the fishermen and whatnot to a certain wholesaler?

0:14:33.8

**AT:** No. [*Laughs*] Some people—well everybody back then knew just about everybody, and they either liked to work for you, or they didn't like to work for you. And if [you, the wholesaler] had your own boats, of course, they had to unload with you. But there—there really wasn't an allegiance like you're talking about. I mean they tried one time to start a co-op here, but it didn't work. Shrimpers, particularly. Not so much the oystermen but shrimpers, in particular, don't want to go out here and unload their product and, you know, wait for their money or something like that. Usually a fisherman, once he unloads, he wants his money right then. That's about the way it works. We had a few that—that unload all week and get paid at the end of the week, which are the ones that could save a little bit of money. They didn't know it, and they were better

off doing that because they had it all at the end of the week. I had some fishermen that would catch trout for me, and they would fish all season and not settle up 'til Christmas time, and then they had several thousand dollars coming to them so—. All of them don't do that, just a few of them. **[Laughs]** Now if they needed some money, they'd just come say, *Look, I need 200 or 300 dollars to buy something*. Of course, I'd write them a check for it. That's about the way it worked.

0:16:22.7

**AE:** Okay. And then—so if say your father had a wholesale order for X-number of oysters, but he couldn't fill it, could he go to another wholesale and top off his order that way? Was that—that relationship—?

0:16:38.1

**AT:** Yeah, they worked with each other that way. You know, if you needed some—now at times, we would sell—well later on, we mainly just dealt with shrimp instead of oysters. [My father] ran into a problem one time with oysters and got them all in here, and nobody wanted to shuck. He—he went out of the oyster business. He just quit. He told them—he said, *Y'all are going to have to shuck these, or I'm going to get the police on you*. You know, about losing the oysters and stuff like this. He said—when he got through, he said, *I won't handle no more oysters*. He quit. But on shrimp, sometimes we were getting small shrimp, and they would have to go out to a cannery somewhere in Mississippi or Louisiana or someplace like that, you know. And what we'd do, sometimes—they'll talk to everybody on the dock, you know, and if we could

get a truckload and get the truck loaded, and I'd go out there with the truck and take it out to where we were going and make sure that everybody was treated right on it, you know. And we've done that lot of times—you know, did stuff like that—everybody just trusted [everybody] then. We worked it that way.

0:18:09.6

**AE:** Did your father ever work on the bay himself?

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**AT:** Yes. I don't remember it but he—he said he did. In fact, I still have two pair of his oyster tongs down there at the fish house that he said were his tongs. He was working—using them working with them. Of course, they're probably no good now but—they've been up in the ceiling of the building and probably dry-rotted, you know, after they sat out a long time, but—but I got them jammed into one of the rafters, and they're going to stay there as long as, you know, I have the place.

0:18:44.5

**AE:** Just part of the architecture, huh?

0:18:47.2

**AT:** Well they—just sentimental value, you know. I just don't want to get rid of them. They were his.

0:18:53.2

**AE:** Did he build that building?

0:18:53.8

**AT:** Yeah, I remember him building the building. I don't remember the exact year, but I would guess it was somewhere in the [nineteen] forties. Forty-five, maybe. And the one building, it was another wood building and—I did have a picture, but I don't know if I have it anymore. But the building, like if you're facing it, to the far left, he rented it to a man. And this was during the war [World War II], and the man made concrete blocks. And he had two or three—I want to say they were Honduran, the best I remember—well [my father] traded his rent out for [concrete] blocks, and he built one building and then he built the other building and built another building. That's the way he built them. He didn't physically build it, you know. He had—had a block layer that came in. And this old man had left everything at Port St. Joe [Florida] and—most of these kinds of people, I don't know how it is out your way [in Mississippi], but anybody that does this kind of work or painters or anything like this—brick masons—they all are alcoholics. [**Laughs**] It's probably the same way out there [in Mississippi]. But this—this fellow, he would build one of the walls of that building in one day. And he was the only one laying blocks. Somebody would



be handing them up to him. He was good. He's one of the best I had ever seen. **[Laughs]** But on the weekend, you can forget about him working. He just would get drunk. **[Laughs]** And then you were lucky if he showed up Monday morning. But when you got him there working, I mean he—he worked, and he really worked good.

0:21:05.2

**AE:** So what was the rest of that part of the waterfront like in the early days?

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**AT:** Well [short pause] right next door where that [seafood] house is—I don't remember it, but there was an icehouse there. I remember my dad telling me about it. And it was fish houses all up and down the dock everywhere. They started off—well how far down did you go? You know where Leavins [Seafood] is [on Water Street in downtown Apalachicola]?

0:21:40.7

**AE:** Yes, sir.

0:21:42.1

**AT:** [*Starting on the south end of Water Street, going north.*] Leavins, there was—that was about where the first actual fish house was. And the man down there was Bud Creamer. He had a little shrimp house. Then next to that there was—well it was built a little bit later, but it was another shrimp house. Now it's Buddy Wards. Next to that there was an icehouse where the Standard Oil is, and it stayed in business—I can remember it being opened because me and this friend of mine used to go down there and get this ice from under the saws, you know, and make a snow cone or something out of it and then just eat it. It was real fine. Then where the Rainbow—Caroline's [Dining on the River]? That was Marks Brokerage Company; they sold canned goods and well they sold everything—outboard motors, tobacco products, all this kind of stuff—sugar and—. And they had a—a railroad spur that came up, and the railroad went right straight down the road. And then they had one that went off and went down there like in front of the Caroline's or the Rainbow that they unloaded their stuff off the boxcar right into the building. Then they delivered that stuff to different places that bought from them, you know. Marks Brokerage would be just like who—Daffin or Sysco or some of these people who deliver, see. It was just like them. Then the next place was Boss Oysters [restaurant]—not Boss Oysters but the packing store that the Rainbow put in. It was—let's see, a Chevrolet place.

0:23:53.1

**AE:** Really?

0:23:53.2

**AT:** Then, of course, the next place over was my dad's place and his cousin and then the old icehouse, which was nothing but iron when I remember it. Over by the City Dock—across from the City Dock there was another fish house. I don't remember what the first name was, but later on somebody bought it and they renamed it Commodore Seafood. Right next to that there was a Texaco Oil Company; next door to that there was a—well, there was a canning place. I don't remember the name of it. I think it might have been Bay City. And then next to that there was an oyster house—Andersen Oysters. Next to that—Green Point Seafood and they of course was next to the City Dock. Then next to that on the other side of the City Dock was Franklin Fish and Oyster Company; he handled fish and shrimp. And I don't think he handled oysters but he handled crabs and—and picked crab meat. Next to him, there was another oil company. Well he handled mostly like propane gas and stuff like that for the boats. And on the other side of where Buddy Ward lives now was another crab house. And there's a little building just to the side of Buddy Ward that was the Standard Oil Company. I mean, it was all kinds of places, you know. And then next to that there was another icehouse. And you went on down the line past the icehouse there was a West Point Fish and Oyster Company. Then just past them was another little fish house that unloaded grouper and snapper and stuff like that; the fellow's name was Mowbray, M-o-w-b-r-a-y. He didn't own the property, but he had a little old building there that he unloaded at. Next to him there was another fish house [*Laughs*], United—United Seafood. He handled oysters and fish and shrimp, too. You went on down the line to where the BP station is, there's still a little wood building before you get to the BP—that was Mosconis Brothers; they handled grouper and snapper and stuff like that—in a little fish house. Then of course the—BP was for Gulf Oil back then. The little old building just past them was Kirvin Brothers Seafood. And the one on the end where that boat place is [Deep Water Marina and Boatyard, now

closed]—it was Standard Fish and Oyster Company. And then that was all. The rest of the part there belonged to Cypress Lumber Company, which—now is just two or three seafood houses down there now, you know. But—but back then, it was a lumber mill and everything. That was all that was there, plus they had a boat way there you could pull a boat out on and also they had a commissary, you know, to buy food and stuff. But that's as far as it went right there.

0:27:35.7

**AE:** Well it was packed full it sounds like.

0:27:37.4

**AT:** It—it was. It was a lot of business going on.

0:27:40.3

**AE:** And now are there only like three or four fish houses right there?

0:27:44.4

**AT:** The only ones that are there now—of course, if you go all the way down, you've got Water Street Seafood, and then coming back down this way [south down Water Street], you've got—what's the name—Creamer's, where the icehouse is. He also handles seafood. And then you've

got Buddy Ward's. And, of course, my place, but I'm not handling much anymore, you know. I mean they—I just rent it out. And then Buddy Ward's [shrimp] peeling plant down by Leavins and Leavins Seafood, and that's all that's left. There must have been fifteen or twenty of them.

0:28:32.5

**AE:** Did they just kind of dwindle, or was there a turning point when all that changed at once?

0:28:37.3

**AT:** Yes, well they—they got—mainly things changed, you know, and people got older and didn't have anybody to run it, and they just got out of it or died or something like that, you know. And the kids didn't want to stay in there. And every time legislation meets, something new comes up, and you can't do this and you can't do that—can't catch but so many of this kind of fish and—and then, like with your shrimp you have to put in these TEDs [Turtle Excluder Devices]. Your turtle shooters and stuff like that? Where you can't keep all of your product, and a lot of it goes out. It's just gotten worse and worse and worse. And, of course, now they want everything in stainless [steel], you know, and it costs you so much, you can't hardly go in business. Two or three people might can stay in business and get all of the boats coming in.

Then, too, what everybody used to do [**Laughs**] on the smaller boats, you know, they'd give them ice to go out and catch the product. Well, if you gave somebody say three or four ice chests full of ice—it got to the point where—with me—instead of them bringing me everything, they'd bring me all the small shrimp and then go sell all the big ones—go around town, you

know, and sell all that, so finally I just quit dealing with the ice and—just got tired of it. Let them buy their own ice. Let me see, that—just a minute. Also, if you went out Highway 98 West, when you got out in the Two Mile area, you had more oyster houses. There was a crab house out there also that—that picked crabs and everything. It—it was just a lot of business everywhere. Now population-wise, it's about the same in the town now as it was then. Or if it was more, it wasn't very many more—no, but just everybody was busy that's all.

0:31:10.7

**AE:** What about what's coming out of the bay now? Do you think the fish and the oyster that's—that's out there, do you think that's been over-fished?

0:31:18.7

**AT:** Well that's—that's hard to say. I don't think it's—well let's put it like this. Certain times, maybe, the oysters have been over-fished, but shrimp, they're not really over-fished. I mean there's so many more boats now that, you know, it looks like they're being over-fished. Of course, some of them have quit even shrimping on the count of the price of the fuel. But you can have a lot of shrimp in the bay, and when you get some bad weather or a cold snap they're—they're gone. If you don't catch them before that, you won't catch them. They just go out, and once they go out in the Gulf [of Mexico], they're gone.

Fish—well take, for instance, like a speckled trout. They had a size law that they had to be something like twelve inches [long to bring in]. At one time, I can remember when that was

ten [inches]. And I was glad to see them go up to twelve [inches] because you couldn't sell that little fish. Everybody—unless you had a decent size fish, you just couldn't do nothing with them, and we'd get some of the trout that we wouldn't know what to do with them when we got them. And eventually we had to freeze some because we couldn't sell them. But they have changed the laws on trout to where you can't sell them when you can catch them. It just doesn't make sense. Now I haven't kept up with it lately, but the last time that—that I read it, I think you could catch them—you could sell them in June and July, and our best production is in September, October, and November, and you can't sell them [during the months that you can catch them].

0:33:31.1

**AE:** Why in the world would they do that?

0:33:33.0

**AT:** That's the State [of Florida]. **[Laughs]** I don't know, but it just looks like they're trying to put everybody out of business.

0:33:42.4

**AE:** Huh.

0:33:44.4

**AT:** I know—I know they don't intentionally do that, but that's what it looks like. But they take and they'll kind of have a quota, and we catch fish out there at a different time than they do down [in] south [Florida]. and I guess there are more people down there, so they go by what they're doing, instead of what we're doing [here along the Florida panhandle].

0:34:09.7

**AE:** Hmm. Well and somebody was telling me about a quota—is it with grouper—where there's that derby effect, where all the boats go out at once?

0:34:19.3

**AT:** Yeah.

0:34:19.4

**AE:** Can you talk to that a bit—a little bit?

0:34:21.2

**AT:** I can't tell you too much about that because I never really got into that stuff. They—well they closed the grouper season here—when was it—just a few weeks ago. And you can catch



one, I think, if you go out for yourself and—but commercial people can't catch them. But I think it opened again, but I don't keep up with the—with the grouper and snapper.

0:34:53.1

**AE:** Yeah, the snapper season started yesterday, right?

0:34:55.6

**AT:** I think it did, yeah. But the only time we ever bought grouper or snapper was maybe somebody would come in and have a few that wanted to get rid of them, and we would buy them and sell them. But we mainly—in the fish line [of business] we handled stuff like mullet and speckled trout and just small fish—croaker, flounder, and things like that, you know—not the real deep water fish, so I can't comment too much on that. [*Laughs*] I was around it a lot, you know, but I've never really kept up with the seasons on it, you know. If we ever needed any for a customer, you know, I could go down the street and buy 100 pounds—200 pounds and fill that order. I just didn't want to sell that to everybody.

0:35:51.6

**AE:** How old were you when you first started going down and really kind of working at the fish house?

0:35:56.1

**AT:** [*Laughs*] Probably eight or nine—ten years old, I don't know. I'd just go down with him. I remember one time daddy would buy fish, you know, all over, and we went over to Lanark Village [Florida, about twenty-eight miles east of Apalachicola]. Of course, it wasn't anything like it is now, you know, but this fellow that—he had a seafood place over there, and he caught fish and stuff, you know, and he caught a bunch of red fish. And I was just a little old boy, and my dad got me to go over there with him on evening or one night, you know. And, of course, I had school the next day. But he had a pickup truck, and we loaded that truck with red fish. Just—just laid them in there, and they were fish like that, you know [*Gestures to illustrate a fish to be about eighteen inches long*] just laid them in there like you would stack wood in the back of that truck and—had a truck full of them out there. Of course, they bought all they had. I remember that. And then—then I remember being so darned tired after we got through unloading, because we had to box them up and ice them, you know, and then I had to go to school the next day. But just things like that all the time.

And also, he'd send me down there when I got a little bit older you know, and I could drive, I'd go as far as Cross City [Florida], Steinhatchee [Florida] and places like that and pick up speckled trout and stuff and bring it back home. He knew people everywhere and, you know, he would buy stuff from everybody—anything he could sell. Well, Daddy would buy anything, and he would ship it to New York or do something with it. Sometimes he'd make money on it and sometimes he wouldn't—sometimes he'd lose. So that's the way it went. [*Laughs*]

0:37:53.0

**AE:** What was your mother doing at this time? Was she a housewife or did she—did she—?

0:37:58.7

**AT:** Well she—she was a housewife, but she also kept the books and whatnot and wrote checks for him and all this stuff. We lived right across from the hotel [the historic Gibson Inn in downtown Apalachicola], you know. I don't know what's in the building now but [we lived in] that two-story house right on the corner. And she just walked right through the alley down there and would go to the fish house. And it didn't take any time to get there, you know, if he needed any help. When we were small, she was there more so helping him do things, and she'd have somebody taking care of us—usually some black lady or something, you know.

0:38:44.6

**AE:** Is it just you and your sister, Dolores [Roux]?

0:38:47.0

**AT:** No, it was—well, my mother had seven children, but two of them died real young, and then there—there was five of us growing up. And the only ones left now—I have two sisters left; I have Dolores, and I have one sister in Georgia. There's three of us all left.

0:39:09.6

**AE:** How many brothers did you have?

0:39:10.1

**AT:** I had—well, I had one that I knew, and I had one that was—well, he died [when he was] about six months old—something wrong with him. So I knew the one boy, he died at [age] seventeen. He had some kind of stomach trouble and ate something. Back then, you didn't really have the hospitals like you do now; they could probably save him now, you know. He was—he was younger than I was. Had one sister older than I was that I remember. One sister died young and—when she was about three years old. She had some kind of gland problem. Then my oldest sister, she was—I think it was fourteen months between us. And then I had another sister that's—I know you're not too interested in ages but [*Laughs*] I'm seventy-three, and my sister—my next sister is seventy, and then I think Dolores is sixty-seven, and she'll be sixty-eight in January. So we were kind of like stair steps, more or less, you know. Back then everybody had big families. You had big families to help work. [*Laughs*]

0:40:45.9

**AE:** Yeah. So was the fish house—was that a seven-day-a-week thing for your dad?

0:40:50.2

**AT:** It was with my dad, yeah. The only day he closed was Christmas Day. And then I can remember working all day long, I mean on something like the Fourth of July. Well you worked—if you had boats come in with a lot of shrimp, you had to do something with them, you know. You just couldn't just let them wait, that's all. And we just worked all day and partied all night. *[Laughs]*

0:41:22.2

**AE:** And what about when you weren't working, would you go out and cast nets or—?

0:41:27.7

**AT:** I never was much of a cast net operator. I did shrimp a little bit, you know, until he got where he needed me in there [in the fish house]. Because my daddy lost both of his legs and [was] in a wheelchair, so I had to get off the boats and start running the fish house for him. But, you know, other than that, I just stayed there and helped him all the time.

0:41:55.9

**AE:** How did he lose his legs, if I may ask?

0:41:58.7

**AT:** Well he was a diabetic. He—he never would really admit that. I mean we knew he was a diabetic, and he knew it. But he said his legs got froze one time and that's what [was] causing it, but really, it came from diabetes, I'm sure. And he had a sore come on his toe, and it wouldn't heal and, you know, it just got—and finally the doctor had to take [his leg] off just above the knee.

0:42:29.3

**AE:** Well and I hear that your father and you were into scuba diving?

0:42:36.1

**AT:** No, my father was, but me and my brother-in-law [Louis Roux, Anthony's sister Dolores's husband], we were in scuba diving for—had a diving company. There was three of us in it: me and him and a friend of ours and—.

0:42:50.4

**AE:** Is that Dolores's husband, Louis you're talking about?

0:42:52.4

**AT:** Yeah, Louis and this other boy, Morris Roberts. Morris is dead now. But we started working on boats, you know, and they would get nets in the propeller, and we'd take them out. The boat—well we got up a couple of sunken boats and sunken barges and all this kind of stuff, and for a while there, we were doing pretty good. Now this was a spare-time job. Still had to work and—but like if a boat would come in, and he would have a net wrapped up in his propeller. As soon as I got caught up unloading the boats at the fish house, I'd go unload—I'd cut it out for him or something like that and charge him so much. And we did that for quite a few years. We finally got out of that. Then we'd—you to go out sometimes and go spear-fishing and stuff like that, you know. It was—it was a lot of fun. **[Laughs]**

0:44:07.4

**AE:** What would you catch spear-fishing?

0:44:09.5

**AT:** Well, we'd shoot, you know, grouper or sheepshead—whatever you could see and get close enough to. Back then, we was all young and able to take it. **[Laughs]** I can't do it now.

0:44:33.2

**AE:** When did you retire from all that?

0:44:34.9

**AT:** From the scuba diving? Oh, I probably retired from that, well probably twenty years ago [in about 1986]. I retired from the seafood business about seven or eight years ago [in about 1998 or 1999], and also I retired from the military—the National Guard in [nineteen] ninety-two. I just—just started staying down here [in Apalachicola] full-time, and the military got to where you're always going somewhere and doing something, you know—go overseas here and overseas there. And I was just staying away too much. But I stayed until I get start drawing a retirement. Anyway, but—

0:45:26.1

**AE:** Well with the fish house, was that something that if you would have had—do you have kids?

0:45:31.4

**AT:** I got two: a son and a daughter.

0:45:33.9

**AE:** Okay. Do they not have any interest in the fish house?



0:45:38.0

**AT:** Well they were getting prepared to back then. My son now kind of sometimes thinks that—he works for the forestry [service], and the way seafood has gotten now, he—he won't go into it. It's hard to make a living in seafood now.

0:46:02.0

**AE:** Are you glad that he didn't take over the fish house after you, then?

0:46:05.8

**AT:** Yeah, I think so.

0:46:06.3

**AE:** And what are your children's names?

0:46:10.1

**AT:** Well my son's name is Joe or Joseph, and my daughter's name is Angela. And they both are married and got kids. Of course, they're young still, but my daughter has three girls, and my son

has two boys. Of course, they—I'll show you a picture of them in just a minute but they are—  
they stay busy all the time, that's all.

0:46:42.7

**AE:** Do they live here [in Apalachicola]?

0:46:44.2

**AT:** My son lives here. His wife teaches school out here at the ABC School. My daughter lives in Crawfordville, and she and her husband both work in Tallahassee. And of course, the girls go to school—two of the girls go to school. One of them is in daycare. She's just four or five years old—something like that. My grandsons, one of them goes to school, and the other one is out at daycare. And they're expecting another boy. **[Laughs]** I'm going to have three boys and three girls, and I hope that's all. **[Laughs]** That's enough.

0:47:32.4

**AE:** Enough grandchildren for you, huh? Well now you say that you're renting out the—

0:47:37.1

**AT:** The fish house?

0:47:37.5

**AE:** —the fish house. But it really—from what you said, it sounds like you're just renting out the waterfront so that that boat can dock. How does—?

0:47:45.0

**AT:** Well, what's happening there, these boys, they've got several boats that work for them. I don't—they don't own the boat, you know, but several boys unload them and want to sell them their product. And all they do is go down there and unload them, and they'll close up and go back out. Amison [last name] has a place out here—Brownsville [Road], if you know where that is. Well it's out toward the Air Base—that old road—and he's out there. He's got a freezer and a place that he handles shrimp and grades shrimp and all this kind of stuff, and—so he needed a place to unload fish, you know, and—

0:48:36.9

**AE:** And he can't do that at that—at the Ten Foot Hole [marina]?

0:48:39.9

**AT:** No, not really. The Ten Foot Hole—you're talking about downtown—actually, it's really supposed to be for pleasure boats.

0:48:56.9

**AE:** Okay, so for commercial unloading he needs to have a private docking area.

0:49:02.6

**AT:** Some people use the other basin up there in Scipio Creek [Marina] to unload, but you just almost need a different place to do it, that's all. He also—he has a piece of property leased out there from the city that I don't know why he doesn't build a dock and just do it there. But it's probably easier down here, you know, and he just wants to be closer to town I guess—I don't know.

0:49:37.1

**AE:** And so that building down there, it—it kind of looks like it's falling down around itself a little bit. Is that just wear and tear, or did something happen to it?

0:49:47.2

**AT:** Just wear and tear. No, it's just wear and tear. Well, storms help a little bit, too, you know. I really don't want to rebuild it. The property values have gone up so high that I'll probably wind up selling it, you know. It's just not worth staying in business—at my age, that is.

0:50:17.1

**AE:** Well how about that? how about how Apalachicola is changing and—and all these property values going up and—?

0:50:26.6

**AT:** Well it's—tax-wise, it's hurting us, you know. Taxes are doubled—over doubled what they were last year on the business. Some places in town are not quite as much, I guess, because they got more people paying taxes, you know. But it's good and it's bad. I hate to get rid of the waterfront property, you know. I really—when you—when you stop and you look and see what the property is bringing, I know like over at Eastpoint, several people sold their property for 4,000,000 and 5,000,000 dollars, you know. And I don't know what mine will bring, but it would have to be up in the millions for me to sell, you know, and—and, you know, I could take that money, and if I just put it in the bank and lived off of it—off the interest for the rest of my life, anyway, and still have some left for the kids.

0:51:44.1

**AE:** Sure, but then what—what about the industry? Is it getting squeezed out?

0:51:49.8

**AT:** Well, the industry, I think, is gone. I mean I can see it going down; it's declining all the time. I—I think at the most, you know, you're looking at maybe twenty years, and it won't be very many in business in twenty years.

0:52:15.1

**AE:** Well and do you think—because to me, it seems like a combination of, you know, the waterfront property going up—a generational thing, where a younger generation isn't wanting to work in the industry as much. And then also, the bay changing. Can you talk about what you think that combination of—?

0:52:30.0

**AT:** Well the—the younger generation now don't want to work—not like what they used to have to work. The younger generation wants to be off on the weekends, and you can't blame them. Back then when I worked, I can remember going from daylight sometimes to midnight, you know, and not even stopping to eat at night because we had to get through, that's all. But people don't want to do this anymore. It seemed like—it seemed like the younger generation, all they want to do is make enough money to party and get something to drink or smoke some dope

or do something. You can just see how it's all happening. Back when we were growing up you, didn't know what dope was. And there just wasn't nothing around. Now that's all you hear; somebody getting caught with this and that and the other thing. And it's just—just different, that's all. People just don't want to do it. Back when I was growing up, really, if you wanted to go out and buy something, if you shook hands on it—you didn't even have to sign a contract. **[Laughs]** That was it. Nowadays, you can't depend on that, and I've—I've had to sign notes for people at banks, and I've lost money on that, you know, because I wind up having to pay it off. They just don't care no more. And money just don't mean anything, it don't seem like. It's just not a—it used to be hard to make a twenty-five-dollar-a-month payment, and now, you know, you can make a 500-dollar payment just as easy as you can make a twenty-five dollar payment. Just—just the money don't seem like it means anything anymore. And all the kids is this way, including mine. **[Laughs]** You know, they love to spend money.

0:55:02.2

**AE:** What about the bay? How do you think the bay itself has changed?

0:55:05.2

**AT:** Well the bay—I think sooner or later the—it's just going to be strictly used for pleasure. You know, I think eventually it won't be anymore commercial fishing. Commercial fishermen can't afford to go out and catch four or five fish; they've got to be able to catch you know 1,000—2,000 pounds. And if the—if they don't watch out, like one time I think the law on trout

was five—they're going to get it to where your sport fishermen can't afford to come out here and catch five fish. It's going to cost too much. And I think, eventually, it'll just get to the point where nobody wants to fish. I don't know how long this will take, but that's the way I see it.

0:56:16.2

**AE:** But then you have Apalachicola [Bay] oysters that have such a reputation. Do you think there will still be a demand for that that can be met with the local industry?

0:56:25.5

**AT:** No, I don't think so. I think as they take more water away from us, you know, and the river and stuff like that, it's going to wind up destroying the oysters. I don't think it will continue to be like this. I can't see how it can keep on. I hope I'm wrong. You know, I don't eat oysters. I'll eat them fried, and they got to be fried crisp. I don't eat raw oysters. I don't like them in a casserole. I don't like an oyster stew. I was the only one in the family that just didn't acquire a taste for them. Everybody else loves them. But that's the way it goes. [*Laughs*]

0:57:11.8

**AE:** What about eating at home growing up? What kind of food would your mom cook? Or did your dad cook at all?



0:57:17.9

**AT:** Well, my mom cooked most all the time. Well, like when we were just kids, you know, these people she had taking care of us were blacks, mostly. We just felt like they was Mama. They cooked all kinds of food. Mostly everything that you were raised on was fried foods, that's all. Now I don't hardly eat much fried food anymore. I can't handle it. But every Sunday at the house we had spaghetti and meatballs. That was a standard thing. Friday, us being Catholic, back then, you didn't eat any meat on Friday. Now the church rules have changed where you can [eat meat on Friday]. *[Laughs]* But—but we'd have fish and, you know, mullet or something like that or shrimp or something. I can remember my dad taking home way more fish than we needed, you know, and then we'd all eat, and there would still be a lot left over. And my mother would take and pick all the bones out of it and save that fish. And then the next day or the day after, she would make it up into fish cakes, and they tasted completely different, you know. Nothing was wasted; you ate everything. And just like nowadays, our kids are just as bad. *[Laughs]* My daughter doesn't like this, and she doesn't like that, you know. And they don't eat any leftovers. They throw them away. Well we got a refrigerator full from Thanksgiving, where when the kids were down here, you know, I kept telling my wife, *Don't cook all this; don't cook all that.* *[Laughs]* And we tried to eat it before it goes bad, but I was raised on leftovers, that's all.

0:59:20.6

**AE:** Would you as kids ever go fishing and pluck something out [of the bay] for dinner, or did your dad just usually bring home stuff?

0:59:26.0

**AT:** He usually just brought stuff home. If my mother needed something, well she'd send me down to the A&P maybe, to buy some butter. And give me a dime, and they had a big old hoop of butter, you know, and they'd—they'd cut off so much of it and wrap it up, and I'd take it home. You bought a lot of stuff like that back then, you know. Cheese used to come in big hoops, you know, and they just cut a piece off for you and—. My grandmother—I don't remember her too much, but she used to bake bread. And my mother told me that she told her—she said that she would sell the bread for a nickel a loaf, and she made good money on it.

1:00:23.7

**AE:** This is your mother's mother?

1:00:26.0

**AT:** Yeah.

1:00:27.6

**AE:** Like I say, I don't remember too much about her, but I do remember her, you know, but— but she would—would sell that bread like that, you know. And I don't see how you could make

any money on a nickel a loaf. And a nickel was a lot of money back in those days, you know. I guess if you made two pennies, it was a lot of money. But they all lived in the same house—we did—and my grandmother and grandfather lived in the back part of it, and we all lived in the front part.

1:01:03.7

**AE:** Was there a large Italian community here at that time?

1:01:05.8

**AT:** Yes, and—a large Italian community then and a large Greek community. Most of all them are all dead now and gone.

1:01:16.5

**AE:** Was your father here when—were they still—in the early days, were they still diving for sponges?

1:01:19.7

**AT:** Most of your sponge-diving—they did some up there, but most of them are done in Tarpon Springs and some over around Carrabelle. And there was a little bit of it out here, but I don't

think he ever dove for sponges. Now I have some friends in Tarpon [Springs] that used to dive for sponges, but then later on they quit and got into the shrimp business and started catching shrimp. But that's another dying industry, though. You go down there now—you ever been to Tarpon Springs? You ought to go; it's quite a little place and—and they've got all these sponge boats. They'll still take you out on the boat, you know. You look at them catching sponges. But they've gone out there and put some sponges down where they can pick them up, you know. It's—we go down every so often just to buy some black olives or something and bring them back. And now, we're not Greek, we're Italian, but I still have a lot of Greek friends down there. But it's—it's quite a little different place down there. It's changed. It's all tourist attractions on the waterfront. It used to be quite a few businesses there, but it's not anymore. It's part of other stuff out there.

1:02:49.8

**AE:** Well what would you say might be your favorite memory about growing up here on the [Apalachicola] bay?

1:02:54.4

**AT:** That's hard. Well I used to like to go out on the boat and just go fishing. Not to sell stuff, you know, just bass fishing and freshwater fishing. And then duck hunting and squirrel hunting and stuff like that. They were some of my favorite moments. And most of the time we'd just worked, you know, and had to help out and had to do something. I can remember I'd

help my dad all week after school, and usually on Saturdays they'd give us a quarter, and we'd go to the movie. And we'd stop at a drugstore and buy a fountain drink and a pack of cheese crackers and still have a dime left. Now it costs you five dollars to go to a movie, and the popcorn costs more than the movie. **[Laughs]** And—but later on, you know, that was when I was young, you know, and me and this friend of mine, well we had to—we were altar boys and served on the church. And sometimes on Sunday nights they would have what we'd call a benediction or something, or we'd have to go there. And after church was over, which was probably seven o'clock, we would head to town. **[Laughs]** And they had a bakery down there, and we'd go in that bakery, and between the two of us we'd get up enough money to buy a pie, and we'd go sit down on the—the steps of the newspaper office and eat that pie. It was still hot; it had just came out of the oven. I remember that. And then a bunch of us kids, we would get in the boat back on Friday night, maybe you know, and go out of the channel going out toward the [St. George] island, you know. And there was some sand flats on the right-hand side. There would be five or six of us, and we'd go out there, and we'd go floundering in the night with a lantern, you know. And then whatever fish we caught, we'd cook out there on the sand flats before we came home. Well we could stay out on Friday night because we didn't have school. So we'd get in eleven, twelve o'clock. And now then, of course, Saturday—Saturday I had to go to work. But we all enjoyed that, you know. It was a lot to do. Of course we didn't have any cars; we had to walk, or you had a bicycle, and we just all went around. Everybody went together. You hardly went anywhere by yourself. It was always five or six of you that went somewhere.

1:06:20.5

**AE:** Would say pretty much all the kids you grew up with, their families were in the seafood industry for the most part?

1:06:25.3

**AT:** Well it—most all of them were connected with it. They might not have owned the business, but they either shrimped or oystered and sold it to somebody, you know. Just about all of them. It was quite a town. **[Laughs]** Most all of your stores downtown would be open 'til nine o'clock at night. You could walk downtown, and there were benches all over the streets, you know, and all the people would be sitting down and just talking and having a big time. Now you go down there at nine o'clock and it's—everything is closed. There's nothing down there.

1:07:08.6

**AE:** Do you remember some other cafes that were downtown that maybe aren't there anymore?

1:07:14.4

**AT:** Well, the only—the only one I remember really [is] The Grill on the corner. It was about the only one actually right there in town, and then there were—on the waterfront as you went on down, there was one called Riverside Cafe. But I was real small. I just barely remember that. I went in it with my dad a couple of times. And then going out west of town there was—well, the Red Top Cafe but it was—it was a different place than it is now—just a little old building. Then

as—as you go on out toward The Hut [a restaurant that closed after Hurricane Dennis] just before you got there—well, you know where that big two-story house just before you get to The Hut? Right across the street was the original Red Top Cafe. And the storm kind of got it and washed it away, and then they moved down to another place. And then, of course, The Hut was built in the [nineteen] forties, I think, and the storm [Hurricane Dennis in 2005] finally got it now. There was a place—well kind of behind The Rancho [Inn] here, but down on the water called—called The Belvedere, and it was kind of a—juke joint and cafe and stuff altogether, you know. And I don't remember much about it. I remember seeing all of the lights, but I don't think I could go in there because they sold liquor. **[Laughs]** And then later on they—they had another one or two out west of town, but they're all closed now, too. Then across the bridge where that—what is it—Navigator Realty—have you been across the bridge yet?

1:09:19.4

**AE:** Yes, sir.

1:09:20.5

**AT:** Well it's just as you get off of the bridge, as you go up the hill there on the left—they tore the motel down there now, but it was a place there called The Guard Station. It was quite a little place there in its—in its day, you know. And then on down in Eastpoint there was another place that was more or less a liquor joint or juke joint or whatever you want to call it, you know. That was Joe Sarvis's. Of course, as you went on to Carrabelle, there were a few more places, you

know, and there were a lot of places to party and drink back in those days. Of course, now it's not hardly anything left. But they just—they're gone. That's all—but we'd start off somewhere and, of course, finally I got up—old enough to get a car and this, that, and the other, you know, and we'd start off at one place and stay there 'til that closed and go to another place and another place and just keep on going like that.

1:10:30.7

**AE:** Well then, you mentioned storms. I know [Hurricane] Dennis left a big mark here over the summer. Growing up, were there some big storms that you remember?

1:10:39.5

**AT:** Yeah. I don't remember the names, but one of them pretty well tore up all of our dock down there and tore up a lot of the seafood places. And they've always had storms that were bad. We've had where my building is—up until [Hurricane] Dennis, the highest I had seen water go through the building was about sixteen inches. I think Dennis it was—was deeper in there, but I don't know how deep it was. I didn't go down and look around because I wasn't able to get in there. I had some problems with my back and everything, and I decided it would be best if I didn't go in and, you know, fall down or slip down or something—just stay out of it but it's—it's going to always be like that on the water, you know.

1:11:42.8



**AE:** Well and you're—so with the industry you're so, you know, dependent and then also at—Mother Nature is such a force to be reckoned with, when the hurricanes come and then to work through with the red tide [which is a bloom of dinoflagellates that causes reddish discoloration of coastal ocean waters, which is often toxic and fatal to fish] and with all these things that change up the industry. Is that—you just get used to it or is it—?

1:12:04.1

**AT:** Yeah, that's about all you can do is just do the best you can, you know. Now I can remember in the [nineteen] fifties we took some scientists out on the shrimp boat to check the red tide in this area. You know, [we] went out probably twenty miles out offshore and—maybe more than that, I don't know. And they never did find any [red tide]. There was red tide everywhere else, and it just seemed like it didn't come in that area back then. But now it's started coming there.

1:12:37.7

**AE:** Hmm.

1:12:39.8

**AT:** It doesn't seem to bother the shrimp like it does the fish and oysters and stuff like that.

1:12:47.9

**AE:** Are there other things that interfere with business like that besides red tide and—?

1:12:53.8

**AT:** Well like with oysters, if the bay gets too salty or something, they claim that these conchs will move in, and they just kill the oysters, if they bore into them. But it's always something, though. If the water gets too fresh coming down the river, the bacteria count gets up and that interferes. Shrimp, just the weather does something with it. It seems like every time—what's so funny about shrimping, you can have a storm and just almost immediately right after the storm, the shrimping gets better. It stirs the bottom up or does something—gets more food out there for them. So it's just **[Laughs]**—got to the point you don't know what to do anymore, you know.

Because, like I say, my life is just about over with, anyway—as far as working, anyway. You know, I mean I can live without having to worry about the business, and I might not do everything I want to do but I—I can live, anyway. **[Laughs]** So it makes a lot of difference. It used to be hard to, you know, make all your payments and just kind of hard—didn't have any money left over. Thank goodness right now I don't owe nothing. So— **[Laughs]** Well I take that back. I owe for my car, you know, but—but anyway, it's just different than it was. You—you could go buy a lot on St. George Island thirty, forty years ago for 500 dollars. You could have bought a Gulf-front lot for about 2,000 dollars. Now, if you can find a Gulf-front lot, it's going to be 2,000,000 dollars. It's—money is not worth anything. And when you go buy something,

what's so discouraging about it, a lot of the products you're buying aren't any good. **[Laughs]**

You pay money for it, and it's just not worth a darn. That's like I'm running into—

1:15:33.3

**AE:** Yeah.

1:15:36.1

**AT:** But really, I think—hate to say it, you know, but I think that this bay is just about gone.

1:15:45.6

**AE:** And fishing is a way of life. Working the bay is a way of life, you know. [There's] so much independence and—and honest—honest day's work in nature that it seems like—I don't know.

1:15:59.5

**AT:** Well the State [of Florida] came in after a lot of this stuff and sent all these boys to school. Most of them went [in]to corrections, and some of them learned how to be carpenters and all that other kind of stuff. You know, they're trying to get them off the water. The few that's left can make a good living, if they want to get out and do it, but it's costly now. I mean, you can buy a boat, a decent-sized boat—I'm talking about a thirty-five, forty-foot boat that you can work in the

bay. You can't do too much outside of it, but you could buy one of those probably for 8,000 or 10,000 dollars a few years back. Now you're going to spend 150,000 to 200,000 dollars. And a lot of the boats had to tie up this year because the fuel was so high, they couldn't make a go of it. It just cost too much to produce. Then the imports that came in, you know, from China and everywhere. They were so cheap that they undersold everybody and they—you'd go catch shrimp, it would cost you three dollars a pound to catch them and then they're selling this for two dollars. And, you know, you can't hardly compete with them.

1:17:32.8

**AE:** Do you think there's any way to make it work?

1:17:36.4

**AT:** Yeah, put some kind of tariff on all these imports. Yeah, you know, where the people here can make a living—that's—that's about the only way. And charge somebody, you know, to send stuff in. It's got to the point now where most of this stuff is—like shrimp is all pond-raised, you know, and in fact we do [some pond-raising] a little here, too, and it doesn't have the taste that the local shrimp does. I don't care what anybody tells you. But I don't know if you've tasted it or not, but it just don't have the taste [of wild-caught shrimp], that's all. And until we start doing something like this and really—it's just—it's not just the seafood industry. Look at your cars and all these foreign companies are building cars here in the United States. And it's to the point now where GM [General Motors] is having trouble, Ford is having trouble, all of them is having

trouble, you know. And all these companies are just getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and they're going to take over the United States before it's over with.

1:18:54.5

**AE:** Well you—you mentioned a while ago about them trying to start a—like a co-op but it was hard. The shrimpers didn't really want to do it. Do you think there's a chance that maybe that trying—it being tried again?

1:19:06.2

**AT:** I don't think, now. I don't believe because I don't think they've got enough of them that are really into it anymore. One of the biggest ones I had seen was out in Texas—Aransas Pass. They had a lot of boats in that co-op. You know, they unloaded in a place, and this fellow that run it for them, he sold it all. And then at the end of the year, if they have any money left, they all split it up some way or another. You always—with the fishermen, it's a different breed. They're always thinking that somebody is getting their money, you know, that [thinking that] *I'm not getting everything I should have got.* **[Laughs]** So that's—that's just the way it's always been with the fishermen. And I can remember my dad and my mother telling me about that. My mother telling me a lot of times—she said—you'd see some of these fellows, and they'd be walking down the dock, you know, and they'd get to talking to another one and telling him, *How much did you get for your shrimp?* Well back then, you could buy jumbo shrimp for ten-cents a pound. *Oh, I got ten cents. You ought to come down here, he said we're—we're going to get*

*twelve-cents or fifteen-cents*. Just to stir up trouble. Nobody was doing it, and he'd go in there, and he'd tell whoever unloaded it, *Hey, they're paying this much down there*. So he'd have to go up [in his price], and the price never had gone up. **[Laughs]** But eventually—it kept on like that until they got it on up and—I don't think a co-op would work here, that's all. Now they tried one over at Eastpoint with oysters, but it didn't do too good and didn't stay in business too long.

1:21:04.9

**AE:** Hmm.

1:21:05.5

**AT:** It could work if—if you could get everybody to trust and—but like I say, most of them over there now have sold out. It's not hardly anybody left. And the prices they got [for their land], I can't blame them. If I could get that kind of price, I might do that too. I've had several people looking at my business, but nobody has come up with anything yet.

1:21:33.2

**AE:** Can I ask you a silly question and ask you why it's painted pink?

1:21:36.1

**AT:** Huh?

1:21:36.4

**AE:** I said can I ask you a silly question, and ask why you that building is pink?

1:21:39.8

**AT:** Why it's pink?

1:21:39.5

**AE:** Uh-hmm.

1:21:40.4

**AT:** [*Laughs*] I think that was because my wife wanted it.

1:21:49.1

**AE:** Okay. [*Laughs*]

1:21:50.4

**AT:** It was green. [*Laughs*] But—

1:21:54.5

**AE:** I know you said your father got out of oysters because he had some troubles with it. Did you start up with oysters again when you were running [Taranto's Seafood]?

1:22:00.1

**AT:** No, I never did have them.

1:22:02.4

**AE:** Because the building says oysters on it.

1:22:03.9

**AT:** I know.

1:22:04.1

**AE:** But people just know that you stopped doing that?



1:22:05.9

**AT:** Well now, I did handle oysters, but I bought them from another oyster house.

1:22:11.6

**AE:** Oh, okay.

1:22:12.3

**AT:** And then resold them. I didn't try to shuck any. If you're going to shuck oysters now, you've got to have all these inspections by the State and everything, and the room has to be all painted white and everything real sanitary. Your oyster skimmers that they put the oysters on have to be stainless, which we had a stainless skimmer—anyway but—just too much, that's all. They always are coming in all the time checking this and checking that.

1:22:53.2

**AE:** When your father did have his shuckers in there, how did he recruit that labor? Did it—did he have regular people coming in or just whenever somebody needed to pick up work?

1:23:01.6

**AT:** Well most of them were black, you know, and they would just—one would tell another one, you know, and they'd tell another one, and then they'd all just come down and see if there was any work. And usually he knew about what was coming in, and he'd tell them—one or two of them and they just would gather a bunch of them up, and they'd just come down there.

1:23:29.0

**AE:** And then you said they collected those tokens that they had been exchanging for the pay. Is that what—?

1:23:33.3

**AT:** Uh-huh.

1:23:32.8

**AE:** Do you remember what those tokens looked like?

1:23:36.3

**AT:** Yeah, they were round, and everybody had a different kind. Daddy's, the ones they had was—had on it “Reliable Fish and Oyster Company” and they were made out of kind of

aluminum or pop metal or something. And they were just about so big around *[gestures to illustrate something about the size of a half-dollar]*. Now some of them had real fancy ones.

They were made out of some kind of brass, you know, and were bigger. I did have some. If you want to see one, I'll see if I can find one.

1:24:16.9

**AE:** I would love to see one, yeah.

1:24:17.9

**AT:** I'll see if I can find one. I'll see if I can find it. Just—just a minute.

*[Recording is paused for approximately five minutes as Mr. Taranto goes into another part of the house to find an oyster token.]*

1:24:24.0

*[Recording resumes]*

**AE:** Well I wanted to ask you something that came to mind while you were looking for that token—was if there was some fishermen superstitions that you remember or know of or still hold stock in?

1:24:37.2

**AT:** Yeah, well one of—one of the things a lot of them are real superstitious about, if you mention the name “alligator” they are real superstitious of that. Of course, I don't never remember my dad being superstitious, but some of them were scared of a two-dollar bill and said they're bad luck, just sayings like that, you know. But I don't remember too much superstition other than just something like that, you know. A lot of them, they don't want a black cat to walk in front of them; they'll go around, you know, or something like that. But that's about all I remember.

1:25:29.0

**AE:** Is there anything regarding the weather? Like if it's a certain kind of wind or certain kind of sky that—?

1:25:37.5

**AT:** Well, probably. You know, a fisherman can just about tell weather—what the weather is going to be the next day or the day after. I don't remember too much about that, but I—I can feel it sometimes in my bones, you know, and I know something is going to be different tomorrow or something. Just like today. I saw the [wind] blowing this morning, you know, and I could tell last night the weather was going to be kind of bad. Thank goodness it's not rain. [*Laughs*] But that's about all I remember. I can remember going out on the boats, though, and one time there—you know, being out on the boat and you see all this fire running up and down the—the rigging, they

call it—St. Joe fire, you know. All it is is static electricity running back and forth. And then you'd see some lights out in the water, and there's a big glow. It's just phosphorous gas is what it is. Things like that, and it'd scare people. Nothing real drastic. That's about all I remember.

1:27:00.4

**AE:** Well is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think I'm missing out on hearing?

1:27:06.3

**AT:** I don't think so, really. I mean I—I forgot a lot of that stuff, you know. It just don't stick anymore. I—I just remember working a lot, you know, and we—we had to work because there wasn't nothing else to do. My first—I started shrimping—well, what I used to do during the summer, I'd get one of Daddy's little boats and go out on the bay and—shrimping. And then, of course, I didn't shrimp too much but just a little while. And then later on, we built some big boats, and I worked on there for a while. And then finally Daddy got sick, and I just had to get out of the boat and let somebody else take the boat. But we was traveling on the big boats. We'd go to Key West during the winter months because that's where they caught shrimp. And they'd catch them there, and then by June or something we'd go out to Mississippi and on out to Texas or something like that—Louisiana. Places—just had to follow the shrimp around the [Gulf] coast, you know, to get any real production. But they always caught some here, you know, but it just wasn't enough to—for these big boats to stay here. They had to go somewhere else.

1:28:41.4

**AE:** Did your father ever visit Sicily after he came here?

1:28:43.2

**AT:** I don't remember him ever going back. I don't know why he didn't, but he never went back.

1:28:52.1

**AE:** Did he talk about it much?

1:28:54.6

**AT:** Not too much. He told me a few things about it, you know. He would comment on this or that or the other, you know. And my father wasn't a drinker at all. Daddy, he—he told me his brother used to drink a lot, and he said one time that—he drank mostly wine, you know, and he'd just get drunk off of that. And he said he never could find out where he was. And he said he finally caught him one time, and he said he had him a tube going down in this barrel of wine and had it buried. And he said he took it and filled it up with pepper [*Laughs*] and he said he had to leave home. He said it about to kill him.

But he had been—Daddy had been all over the world, you know. And he had been shipwrecked one time, and they all thought he was dead. And he was walking home and said his

mother—he knocked on the door, and she wouldn't let him in. Something, you know—I guess they were superstitious and said—told her—said—his name was Joe also and she said, *Who is it?* And he told her and she said, *No, Joe is dead.* That's the word that got out, you know, because back then, they didn't have radios. They had telegraph and, you know, stuff like that. But anyway, he finally got in the house, and he had made two or three trips back there [to Sicily] when he was young. But after he married, of course, when we were born and stuff like that. I don't ever know if he's gone back. He had talked about it once or twice but—. I never have been over there. Dolores went two times.

1:31:21.3

**AE:** Did she?

1:31:21.9

**AT:** Yeah. She—she enjoyed it, she said. Louis [Dolores' husband] didn't go with her; she went with—one of her friends, I think, went with her.

1:31:34.6

**AE:** Did she look up some family over there or just go for—?

1:31:37.9

**AT:** Well she looked up what she thought was family, and she went by to see some of my mother's cousins or something, but they weren't home. But then she left a message or something, and the next time she went back over there—and this old lady had died, so she didn't see her, but she took some pictures of the grave and different things. And over there, they put pictures on the grave and all this that and the other. But she found where, you know, the family was buried and stuff like that. We have a cousin that lives out in Texas. It's my dad's nephew, and that was daddy's sisters—one of his sisters, so they go over there every year, and they've been going every year. And now of course he's—he's probably eighty-seven now, maybe a little over. He told me, the last time I talked with him that he wasn't going back no more. He had some problems and couldn't get the medical attention he needed over there. But he's got three boys, and they all got family, and they love to go. You know, they go over there all the time every year.

1:33:05.0

**AE:** Did your parents speak a lot of Italian growing up—while you were growing up?

1:33:08.8

**AT:** They—they spoke a lot of it. When—when we were growing up, it seemed like when my grandmother was living, we were learning it, but after she had died, they kind of got away from it. But most of us now, we—we just can't speak it. I can understand a little bit of it, you know, but I don't speak it. I wish I did. And that's one reason, I'd—I'd like to go over there. And



probably one day, if my health stays where I can, but if I can talk [in Italian], it would be a lot better. What I thought I might do if I went over there is see when one of my cousins out in Texas is going and try to get there the same time, you know, where they could talk for me. **[Laughs]**

1:34:03.9

**AE:** When you were growing up and the Italian community and the Greek community were really thriving here, when—when you would walk down the street, would you hear those languages being spoken?

1:34:11.8

**AT:** Yeah, you'd hear it all the time.

1:34:15.7

**AE:** Yeah?

1:34:16.5

**AT:** Yeah. You'd hear people talking sometimes—it's like they're arguing, but all they're doing is just talking. That's the way some of these foreign languages are. And now I have some friends that, you know, their mother doesn't hardly speak any American, and they grew up able to talk it

and understand it, and they can't write it, but they can talk it. My mother, she could—of course, she was three years old when she came over, but she could talk and write. And she would translate letters for everybody. And she could speak two or three languages, and she would always translate for somebody. So—but the only other one that was around here that would do stuff like that was the ex-Mayor, Jimmy Nichols, and he's got—well, he's getting feeble now. I don't even know if he's still in town. I know he's got his house up for sale. But he would write for people, you know, and interpret for them and decipher this that and the other. A lot of people would bring Mama letters, and she would translate or write it for them, you know, and they could read it. Then we had some letters that came after she had died, and my cousin's wife out in Texas, I tried to get her to read them, you know, because she's from Italy, too. But something was different about the way they were written. It's a different dialect or something, you know—a different town—and she just didn't quite understand it. She could tell me some of it, but she couldn't tell me all of it. *[Laughs]*

1:36:21.0

**AE:** Well I believe we've covered a lot of this town's history.

1:36:22.4

**AT:** Well I hope it's helped you some.

1:36:23.7

**AE:** Yeah, it's all very fascinating. I appreciate you sharing so much.

1:36:28.0

**AT:** Well I'll try to—I had those tokens. I had them in a little can about so high [*gestures to illustrate a can about five inches high*], a few of them anyway. And I'd like for you to see one—show you what it looks like. It's just about the—the size of a quarter—maybe just a little bit larger, and it's stamped on there what it is, you know. And I'll get up there with you one day or something. What room are you in [at the Rancho Inn]?

1:36:57.1

**AE:** One-fourteen.

1:36:59.1

**AT:** One-fourteen?

1:36:59.2

**AE:** Yes, sir.

1:36:59.6

**AT:** If I can remember that. I'll knock on the door and show it to you.

1:37:02.9

**AE:** Or you can—I have my cell phone number.

1:37:05.9

**AT:** Okay, I'll just call you on that.

1:37:09.5

**AE:** All right. Well thank you, sir.

1:37:10.0

**AT:** Okay. Well, you're welcome. I enjoyed talking with you, and I hope I've helped you some.

1:37:16.7

**AE:** You definitely have.

Interview of: Anthony Taranto  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Interview Date: December 2, 2005

March 6, 2006

1:37:17.9

**[End Anthony Taranto]**