Richard Lynn
Lynn Brother's Seafood
St. Marks, Florida
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Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson
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[00:00:00.27]

Annemarie A.: Today is August 9. It's 2021, it's a Monday. I'm in St. Marks, Florida. This is Annemarie Anderson recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance, and I am with Mr. Richard Lynn. Would you go ahead and introduce yourself, tell us your full name, and tell us what you do?

[00:00:20.20]

Richard L.: Hello. My name is Richard Lynn. I'm from St. Marks, Florida. I now am in the wholesale seafood business and the marina business. There are four—five brothers in the business, that own the business, and we have no sisters. It's a family operation, and everything you see here, we built. We've been doing it—my daddy started in the charter boat business in the [19]50s, early [19]50s, and then we moved towards the rental business for boats and then also started in the seafood business. We're stone crabbers and also groupers, snappers, and other reef fish is our main thing. Wholesale business.

[00:01:05.28]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Well, could you—for the record—give us your date of birth, please?

[00:01:12.05]

Richard L.: 12-29-1943.

[00:01:15.23]

Annemarie A.: Great. Well, let's start off and maybe tell me a little bit about what St. Marks was like. Were you born, were you raised here?

[00:01:26.21]

Richard L.: Yes.

[00:01:24.23]

Annemarie A.: Could you tell me a little bit about what it was like as a child?

[00:01:30.01]

Richard L.: As a kid growing up, there was probably thirty-something charter boats here when my daddy was in the charter boat business. It was a thriving town, in that you had the fishing, the recreational end of it which we'd call a charter and that kind of stuff, but it was commercial fishing, but also, it was a port for the import of oil. Most of the refined gasoline and diesel fuel for this part of Florida and South Georgia came in through this part here, by barge and tugboat, and then it was trucked north to be dispensed to different places. It was a thriving little town at that time. We have gone through a big transition. The pipelines took away the oil. Fishing has been, I guess you could say, on the demise because, number one, people went to buying their own boats and stuff like that, and also regulations have been the most stringent thing and the most harmful thing to the commercial fishing industry. But anyway, it was a good place to raise up as a boy. Outside activities, we didn't know what some of the other things that people in the cities experienced, but we knew what we had here: fishing, swimming, camping, and stuff like

that. Anyway, that's where I grew up. And went to St. Marks School till about the seventh grade. Then, I went to Crawfordville, which is the county seat here, to finish out. I graduated from Crawfordville High School.

[00:03:06.05]

Annemarie A.: Nice. And you said you had five brothers, what are your brothers' names?

[00:03:09.21]

Richard L.: Oh, W.A., the initials, well, actually, it's Walt Robert. It stands for W.A., which is after my favorite. He's the oldest. I'm the second oldest, Richard Lynn. The third oldest is Johnny Lynn. Then there's Allen Lynn and then Andy is the youngest, and there's five brothers, no sisters.

[00:03:32.03]

Annemarie A.: I bet that was fun growing up.

[00:03:32.24]

Richard L.: It was. This was a wonderful place to grow up. You know, now that I look back, I maybe didn't appreciate it then, but I do now, yes.

[00:03:41.14]

Annemarie A.: Well, you were talking a little bit about the fishing. What sort of things would you fish growing up, and maybe did you go hunting? Where would you do that, if you did that?

[00:03:49.10]

Richard L.: Hunting? Well, we have a refuge right across the river here. I've done a little there, okay. We had a management area that starts up there. I did hunting; I like duck hunting and squirrel hunting. I didn't do much deer hunting or turkey hunting. Anyway, duck hunting I like that, and there was quail in the wintertime, hunting season time. We did that. Of course, we liked to go camping, especially in that time of year when it was cool and that kind of stuff. But fishing was plenty, you know what I mean? From net fishing to hook and line fishing and stuff like that, it was plenty, plenty.

[00:04:28.23]

Annemarie A.: What sort of things did y'all like to catch?

[00:04:29.28]

Richard L.: Well, if you were net fishing—which most of these small communities, like St. Marks, which is an end of a road type of little town—net fishing was a mainstay, but that was banned in 1995 due to the constitutional amendment. But we had that. Of course, you had grouper fishing, hook and line. Like I said, my dad was a charter boat man. He'd go every day in the summertime, taking people out to catch groupers and snappers and other reef fish. We'd go on the boat. Then there was speckled trout, redfish in the wintertime

and speckled trout in the summer and the winter because they come up in these rivers. So, we did all of that, and some scalloping in the summertime, back when we could do it with a drag. We'd do it somewhat commercially as kids, you know, and stuff like that. What's that?

[00:05:24.00]

Annemarie A.: That makes a lot of sense.

[00:05:25.05]

Richard L.: Yeah. But anyway, that's what we did. That's what we did.

[00:05:27.06]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit about your dad. Tell us his name and tell us how he got in the charter boat industry.

[00:05:36.27]

Richard L.: Yes. My dad was W.A. Lynn. His nickname was Heck, H-e-c-k, that's what he was known as. He got in the charter boat business in the early [19]50s and the way he got in the charter boat business, he was what was known as a port engineer during the war. They didn't want him in the military; they were hauling aviation fuel across the Gulf, okay? And they needed him there. Then he got to be a port engineer, which meant that he wasn't necessarily on a particular boat, but if a boat got in trouble in Louisiana, he went there and worked on it. If it was in Pensacola, he went there; wherever. Then, he got to

work for a woman that owned an oil company, Mrs. Harden. He started—he didn't work for her, really, he would take her fishing on her private boat. He wound up buying her private boat and started his charter boat business. The *Greyhound* was the name of it. From there, he went into cottages as a fish camp and running the charters and that kind of stuff. Anyway, that's what he did. He was a tug boat man before that.

[00:06:43.14]

Annemarie A.: Okay.

[00:06:43.14]

Richard L.: Okay?

[00:06:44.21]

Annemarie A.: So, he grew up on the water.

[00:06:47.29]

Richard L.: Well, yeah. See, his family came here. He came here when he was about thirteen from South Georgia. My grandfather was a fairly successful timber man in South Georgia, but during the Depression, that went out. He was fortunate enough to have some trucks, so he built himself one good truck together out of all the others and walked off and left the rest of them. He'd come to Florida. He had a truck. He would take the fish, mainly like mullet and stuff that the people could catch. They couldn't sell it. He'd take it, put it on the truck, and take that to Georgia and sell it, trade it. The meat, vegetables, and

all the people that put stuff on the truck and him would share in whatever they took in. So, that's how he got started. My uncles, which were my dad's brothers, started doing something similar there. One went into the grocery business. One built a place called Shell Island fish camp over there, and he was later lost in the Gulf in 1959. Anyway, my dad started his own place in the [19]50s. Anyway, it grew from there. In the [19]60s, we started into the boat storage business, and like I say, we are into that now. It's all that you see around here; we own and people rent slips from us, is a seafood business that went down. But during the energy crunch in the [19]80s, my brothers felt they needed something else, so we went into the stone crab business. We found out that was a little bit more money in that than there was in the boat business. [Laughter] Anyway, so we grew into the stone crab business. Eventually, we grew on up into the stone crab business that we've become purveyors all over the country to top-end restaurants on a day-to-day basis. Ship it this afternoon; it'll be in the restaurant in the morning. All over the country, from California to New York, even some to Alaska.

[00:08:44.28]

Annemarie A.: Wow.

[00:08:46.06]

Richard L.: Anyway, we've shipped some in the islands to the south of us, but most of it here in the United States each day. We're winding that down some with COVID, did a pretty good number on—all the top-end restaurants were closed, as you know, so that took . . . we were fortunate that we saved certain wholesalers that we would sell to, and we were

quite lucky in that way, that we was able to keep going. The net ban didn't kill us because we were in the stone crab business and the grouper and snapper business, so the net ban didn't destroy us much as it did some little places here in this country, like Spring Creek and area, they just had nothing else to go to. And you were prohibited, more or less, by finances and rules and regulations that you couldn't make a move. You know? It's even harder now. I don't see how any young person can get into the business if they not don't have somebody in it like us they can be handed to, it's virtually impossible to be in the business. With the regulation, you have to have all the license and you have to buy them. From quotas to be able to catch the fish, not counting the expenses of the boat and equipment, just other parts are astronomical. There's no way. In fact, I seen it on the national news one day this week: only fifteen percent of the seafood consumed in the United States is caught in the United States. Rest of it is imports.

[00:10:11.16]

Annemarie A.: How do you think that maybe we could help younger people get into this industry?

[00:10:18.19]

Richard L.: Well, I'm involved in some fishing organization, and I know people that are in other organizations. There's one program that is kind of interesting to me; I don't think it will ever fly, but I'm interested in it, where they're taking young people, trying to teach them a way to stand up to the government. I mean, people like me, I don't need to be speaking to . . . a committee of the Congress. I'm not a politician, you know what I mean? I'm not a

public speaker and that kind of stuff. So, we trying to teach them to stand up to the government for—I don't know want to call it rights or privileges or whatever you want to call it that we have. Anyway, that program. And I know a man that's running it, a very intelligent man. He's of an age like me, but he's trying to keep it where younger people, if they want to get into the business, they could do it. Do you know what I mean? The only way you can do it is start by being able to stand up to the government, being able to go to a meeting and at least tell them your name and what you stand for. You know what I mean? Most fishermen don't want to do that. He wants to be fishing. He don't want to be playing politics, you know what I mean. It comes down to politics. You can talk about conservation if you want to; it comes down to politics. The man I'm speaking of is a man named Bob Gill, and he sits on the council that makes the rules and regulations for the Gulf of Mexico on saltwater fishing, Bob Gill. He's running that program because he sees that it comes down to politics. He'll tell you that: politics. Doesn't have nothing to do with nothing else. They'll label it under that, but that's where it is. That's my side of the story, though. The conservation people tell you the other way. [Laughter]

[00:12:01.28]

Annemarie A.: Well, tell me a little bit about fishing or, I guess, harvesting stone crabs. Could you maybe describe that process, what it's like?

[00:12:04.13]

Richard L.: Sure. Well, first of all, I'm talking to you, now. You see these traps here? They're 16x16, plastic. 16 inches high, 16 inches wide and deep, with a concrete bottom in them

and an opening of about probably six inches at the top like that. Each one has a cork and a line to it. We go put them in a line. Generally seventy-five to a hundred traps are in a particular course. At the beginning of the system, we bait them with pig feet, frozen pig feet we buy from the big slaughterhouses up in the north and the Midwest. You put that in there, we set them out. We generally wait about six to seven days to start with before we revisit them. We go and the boat runs down the line picking up the traps. We got man pulling the trap, one man running the boat, and another one getting the crab out of the trap, putting the bait in, and putting the trap back over board. The boat generally never stops—hopefully never stops, just keeps going. We, ourself, try to pull six hundred of them a day to make it feasible, you know what I mean? Some days, with the weather bad, you know, you get five hundred and anyway, it varies. Anyway, that's the way it's done. We set them out from anywhere to eight to thirty-six feet of water and work it from east to west, going down the shore. We go down as far as Keaton Beach, which is below here, and as far offshore as probably twenty miles, twenty-two miles, with the stone crabbing. Anyway, that's the way it's done.

[00:13:51.00]

Annemarie A.: Wow.

[00:13:52.05]

Richard L.: And the stone crabs are landed every day. You don't ice them down. You go for one day: you go out, you catch them, you get a claw off of them. Anyway, you get a . . . it has to be a legal claw, so the claw has to be three inches. Now, the law just changed last year.

Used to be two and three quarter from this tip at the elbow to the underneath of the pincher, at the short end, in a straight line. It is now going to three inches. It went up a quarter of an inch, which is a drastic change. I'm not being negative about it, but it's a drastic change.

[00:14:34.07]

Annemarie A.: I'm sure.

[00:14:35.24]

Richard L.: Anyway, you get that claw. If the other one's not big enough, he goes back. People think there's a myth that you only got one claw; it's never been a myth. He can live without the claw. It's mostly for fighting. Now, he will use it for eating, but mostly it is plankton, from what I understand; you know, filtering the water. But anyway, we go and we do that. We land them that evening. The crabs are cooked where they're landed. We cook them out there. We're FDA approved. I have to have all the license and we're FDA-inspected. We drag them in, we boil them, we chill them, we ice them, and ship them out. Okay? Each day.

[00:15:16.11]

Annemarie A.: That's a whole system. How long did it take you all to get, kind of figure out the process?

[00:15:22.06]

Richard L.: Well, we had help in it, and we'd seen it. We saw the people that did it, and so we said, "We'll do that ourselves." It was easier for us and then it gives us another niche in the business. So, that's what we did. It took us probably two to three years to get it all worked out the way we wanted it, and the equipment built and stuff like that. You just don't go out and say, "Oh!" To somewhere, to Acme 2 Company and get a stone crab cooker. [Laughter] You don't do that; you go and have stuff built. Of course, it's all out of stainless steel. You'll see we have monorails to move everything around, to lower the crab down into the boiling water, and we don't steam them. We use steam to heat the water: high-pressure, high-temp steam boils the water. We boil the crab. It's no seasoning, no nothing put in, it's just the crab. That's the way they're done all over the state. Each place they're landed, they're cooked.

[00:16:21.23]

Annemarie A.: Fascinating. I did not know that.

[00:16:22.20]

Richard L.: Right. People think they're cooked at the restaurant. They may heat them up for you, if you want them warm. It's my understanding most are served at room temperature, stone crab. We don't do any blue crab, no blue crab. Just stone crab.

[00:16:38.23]

Annemarie A.: Can you catch blue crab out where you're—

[00:16:42.00]

Richard L.: Yes, but that's not the ideal trap, because he can swim in and swim out. You see one every once and a while, he's in and out, because it's just one big opening like that. The stone crab don't get up and swim like the blue crab. Blue crab can get up and swim. He's in and out, like a fish. Fish goes in; goes out.

[00:16:59.22]

Annemarie A.: Interesting. Well, I want to go back, too, and ask about . . . ask about the charter boat industry and maybe talk a little bit about your boat storage, as well. But I'm wondering, when your dad started in the [19]50s with the charter boat and fish camp, who were the people who were coming and using those charter boats?

[00:17:25.25]

Richard L.: It was mostly the working-class people from our part of the world, working-class people out of Georgia. We did them out of South Carolina, and my daddy did tremendous business, repeat. In other words, if you went fishing—today is August the 9, August the 9 the next year, you'd be booked that same day. You'd just go in the book and get a look at it that way. But anyway, that's how he got started. He built a business and he worked hard. He caught fish and, by no advertising, just word of mouth, and we stayed busy. Then we started in the cabin business, and my mother took care of the cabins. My father used to remark, "We make more sleeping than we do fishing." You know, sleeping the people at a dollar and a half per night per person. Then it went to two dollars—oh, that was all the money in the world. [Laughter]

[00:18:17.23]

Annemarie A.: I bet.

[00:18:19.04]

Richard L.: But anyway, my mother took care of it. She did. Every sheet was washed by her. All the pillowcases were ironed by me and my older brother; there was no dryer. They were ironed, folded, changed every day. You know what I mean? So, I can learn. I can iron pillowcases. I haven't done it in years, but I can do it. [Laughter]

[00:18:45.00]

Annemarie A.: I bet. After you do that for a certain amount of time, you get tired of it.

[00:18:48.13]

Richard L.: Yep. But it was an everyday thing, you know, the washing and getting ready, because these people were—as I say—most of them were the working-class people. They'd come and they'd spend the night before they'd go fishing, so they'd be here to get up to go on the boat. My daddy liked to leave at 6, no later than 6:30. Anyway, that cabin had to be changed, because the next crew was coming in for that night. Some of them stayed three, four, or five nights, because they'd do other fishing or may fish two or three days. But most of the time, my mama had to change that stuff each day to prepare for them, you know what I mean? For the new crew that night. So, that's the way we did it. We started them into the . . . storage business, marina, stuff like that.

[00:19:42.20]

Annemarie A.: What was your mother's name?

[00:19:42.18]

Richard L.: Jessie, J-e-s-s-i-e. No middle name. Last name was Vause before she was married, V-a-u-s-e. Sort of a prominent name in this area, in this county. Anyway, I say my dad originally come here when he was about thirteen years old.

[00:19:59.21]

Annemarie A.: And did your mom, was she born and raised here?

[00:20:02.28]

Richard L.: Yeah. She was born in this county, yes, in a little town called Crawfordville, if you're familiar with that. Crawfordville is where she was born and raised.

[00:20:11.23]

Annemarie A.: Nice. And tell me, did your mama ever cook for the men or the folks who came?

[00:20:17.25]

Richard L.: No. She had five boys to cook for. [Laughter] My daddy lived to be ninety-two, my mama ninety-seven, but she was about a year older than him. I never seen my daddy help

his own plate. My mother did it on the table. That's just the way it was. That's just the way it was, you know what I mean? But it lasted about seventy years.

[00:20:44.05]

Annemarie A.: What sort of things did she cook when she cooked?

[00:20:45.21]

Richard L.: The gamut, from . . . now, we didn't have pizza. There wasn't no pizza or nothing like that, but anything else, from fish to round steak to . . . any other thing that a southern person would eat. Fried chicken; fried chicken was a popular thing, because my dad liked it at that time. Anyway, but the full gamut. Well, not much pork. My daddy did not eat pork, and so, therefore, my mother didn't prepare it. Pork was not a thing. Now, he liked smoked sausage, but things like ham, I don't even eat it. I don't know why, I just don't eat it.

[00:21:33.03]

Annemarie A.: Just didn't grow up eating it.

[00:21:36.17]

Richard L.: Didn't grow up eating it.

[00:21:36.07]

Annemarie A.: That's great. Well, tell me a little bit about what year did y'all get into the boat storage business?

[00:21:43.23]

Richard L.: We started in the—I'd say probably about 1960 or [19]61.

[00:21:47.10]

Annemarie A.: And—I'm sorry, go ahead.

[00:21:49.01]

Richard L.: Yeah, [19]61 or [19]62, started. Like I say, it wasn't just a phew, we build the section, build another section, build another section, build another section, over years.

[00:22:03.21]

Annemarie A.: Whose boats did y'all store? What kind of boats?

[00:22:05.20]

Richard L.: Oh, well, they would be private boats; yachts. You know, small boats that people like to go fish and play on and stuff like that, strictly for the pleasure industry, you know what I mean? The sporting, we call, industry. We didn't do commercial boats, we didn't do that. We built this seafood place, now we had some commercial boats, but that was a separate . . . in a sense, a separate thing. Where you're located here, that was the commercial end of it, as far as commercial fishing boats.

[00:22:33.17]

Annemarie A.: That makes sense. So, you're talking about a lot of—it seems like a lot of the folks who come and a lot of the industry in St. Marks maybe was based upon sport fishermen and the pleasure industry, but for the working class. Did that change? How did that evolve?

[00:22:55.00]

Richard L.: Yeah. That evolved. With the demise—remember when I told you one time about thirty-two charter boats here? Okay. That just began to die out, die out, die out. I don't think that all of it was the nature of the business completely changing. My father always had, as long as he was in it, he was just booked up. Now, he only operated in the summertime; he liked to start in April, and he actually finished at the end of September, even though he got where he had so much pressure put on him, he had to go into October. Anyway, but the people began to go in, like I said, to the recreational end of it. I think what it is, is not many people got into—younger people come into the charter boat end of it, so it, the two went together and it went down. Actually, when my daddy finally quit, I think there was one more after that, charter boat. Now, there's no big charter boat that can carry eight to ten people out of here and hasn't been one in years, since my daddy quit. It just . . . that's not a dead-end industry, but that industry, if you're in the charter boat business, you're in worse shape than a person in a commercial business. They have limited the season so much that it's like thirty or forty days for you to carry a charter to go fishing. You know? All it takes is one or two bad weathers, and it's always during

hurricane season. We're going to probably have one of them somewhere that's going to affect the weather, so that industry's went through one heck of a demise, especially in the Panama City area, where you have lots of charter boats. It destroyed it. It destroyed it. But anyway, that, and also like I say, the oil business is not here anymore due to the pipeline. You don't even see—St. Marks, at one time, had Florida's only refinery that took raw crude and cracked it and made oil products. Jet fuel was a big thing; asphalt and jet fuel. There was a company up here, and there's even no trace of it, except the land where it was at, all the tanks are gone. All that's gone. But anyway, all that, oil was rolled in by barge, popped off, raw crude. Then, of course, refined gasoline and diesel fuels, there's about three companies here that received it and dispersed it. Citizens Oil, to start with, then got to be Tenneco, then you had Ingram Oil. I'm trying to think of some of the others. Then, you had some of the asphalt that was the refinery, and then you got the city of Tallahassee has a generating station up here, and they had to bring in—their oil would come in by barge that they burnt to run the boilers. Anyway, that industry was pretty big in this small town. Anyway, a lot of people worked on the tug boats and so on and so forth. At one time, I think the refinery had sixty-something truck drivers.

[00:26:08.16]

Annemarie A.: Wow.

[00:26:09.22]

Richard L.: Truck drivers, not just the refining plant and the three or four tug boats hauling raw crude to them at one time. So, that was a pretty big industry, but it married well with the

rest of the stuff that's here. There was no adversarial situations with fishermen and them. All the same guys, you know what I mean? So, it went well. It went well. But now, it is strictly . . . it is strictly the recreational boats, as you see, as you walk down here. That's what's left. It's a very small area; it can't grow, because it's located between two rivers, and the government owns all of that over there. Actually, they own sixty-nine percent of our county, is in refuge.

[00:26:57.16]

Annemarie A.: Wow.

[00:26:56.13]

Richard L.: And I'm not saying that negatively. They own sixty-nine point something percent of our county is in refuge, and I think it's a plus, because you can go all the way from St. Marks going east to Keaton Beach. Nothing except what you see right over there, and tributaries and stuff that all goes up in there. That's a positive thing. Of course, it runs west some, but you have places like Shell Point, Spring Creek, Panacea. Their refuge wraps all around them. Anyway, it's a big area.

[00:27:33.06]

Annemarie A.: It is, and it's absolutely gorgeous.

[00:27:34.04]

Richard L.: Yes. Yeah, you said you spent some time in the refuge, didn't you?

[00:27:40.15]

Annemarie A.: I have. Yeah, in the past I have. I really enjoyed my time there with a dog that—he liked to be there. He loved to see the, he wanted to chase the birds, but I didn't let him. So.

[00:27:49.18]

Richard L.: The gators will be chasing, the gators will be chasing him.

[00:27:56.02]

Annemarie A.: Exactly. And he wasn't that big of a dog, so. [Laughter]

[00:27:57.12]

Richard L.: Oh!

[00:27:56.02]

Annemarie A.: Well, I'm wondering about . . . I'm wondering about maybe some of the other families who maybe fished or did some work. What sort of work did they do? I guess what other—you all, obviously, were kind of tied to the charter fishing business, but could you talk a little bit, maybe, about some of the other families or other folks and some of the work that they did that was related to the water in St. Marks?

[00:28:26.04]

Richard L.: Sure. Of course, with fishing and so on and so forth, you had boat repair. So, we had two—we called them dry docks or waves—where you pull the boat and repair it. So, there's two of them that had repair. Then, other than the charter boat business, mullet fishing was a staple. That's where you fish with a net. That was a staple in any little community on this Gulf. When we started this business, it was somewhat of a staple, us having those mullet. Then it went away, but we had other avenues. We could go stone crabbing, and we were already in that, and also . . . deep sea fishing. You know what I mean? Catching groupers and snappers wholesale, commercially. A lot of the people did mullet fishing and then the selling of those mullet, trucking them and that kind of stuff, so they did all those kind of things. They had those oil companies in that refinery. They may do work at that refinery some; they do a little fishing on the side, as most people do. I think you spoke with a man that worked at the powder plant, you had a lot of that, where there was people doing some of both. To make ends meet, let's put it that way. We had that. What else did we have here? Also, the railroad used to come here. They used to can oil down here, like used to buy it in a round can to put in your car? They canned oil down here, put it on a railroad and go back to Tallahassee and disperse it, but then it got to where they'd put it on the trunks underneath them, the way they do it now. You know, two cases going to eight other guys, so on and so forth. But anyway, oil was canned here and so on and so forth, but that's all, all gone. There was a couple of fish houses here, but still just a couple. Just not the ones that were here at that time, you know what I mean? Because their main staple was mullet and groupers and snappers.

[00:30:21.22]

Annemarie A.: What were the names of those fish houses then?

[00:30:22.08]

Richard L.: Tucker's, Cutchin's, and Took. Took sons are still here. Shields had some of it, and also . . . let me think again. Alton Tucker, yeah. Oh, yeah . . . **Mrs. Verna Dore** was in it—that's when I was a little bitty boy—a lady, she bought and trucked. Of course, somebody did it for her. There was another family, I'm trying to think of it. I'll think of it in a minute, maybe, but anyway, McFaddens I think were in it. The McFaddens, that was the name I'm trying to think of, but that was many years ago. I was an itty-bitty boy. But all that just died away. I think a lot of it was just, younger people didn't want to get into it; wasn't a thing to get into. Or the person that was in the seafood business, fishing business, would try to steer their sons and their offspring: you need to do something else, this is too hard, or whatever. So, not a lot of people went into it. I know some of the smaller communities, like Spring Creek and Panacea, they had a better following with their people. Maybe they didn't have the avenues that were available here in this little community back in then days. If you have to drive twenty minutes or sixteen miles, that's a pretty good little trick. You know, it ain't like the cars we had today—if you had a car, right. So, anyway, that was part of the demise, too, of things, and so on and so forth.

[00:32:04.20]

Annemarie A.: Why did you decide to go into the seafood and boat storage business?

[00:32:08.09]

Richard L.: Well, I got to fess up. I worked thirty-one and a half years in the printing industry, and I retired in [19]94, but I was always in the family business. Had a brother younger than me, Allan, was an operating engineer for a power plant in Tallahassee. He retired in [19]95, but he was always in the business. We just went into it because it was fun. We liked the net fishing for the mullet, but they banned that in [19]94—or [19]95 it went into effect. But we'd got into the stone crab industry. It's fun to catch something and, if you catch it pretty good, it's fun. It does two things: I get pleasure out of it. Number one, it sustains me and maybe my family. But I thought that I'm selling something that the public likes and wants—there's a certain reward in that. Then, I'm creating jobs for other people like truck drivers and purveyors and other things. I enjoy that part of it, knowing that that part was going on. So, anyway, we started into it, really on the seafood part because of the energy crunch. My brothers thought we needed another avenue, so we started into it. But my father told us that we needed to be in the boat storage, we needed to start working that way. He had a vision. It was about twenty years, in my opinion, he had over everybody else. He says, "We need to start working that way." So, we did. That's how we wound up in it. All of everything you see here, we built. We built it. This used to be a jungle right here. [Laughter]

[00:33:56.28]

Annemarie A.: I believe it. Your brothers were in there working on some stuff when I walked up.

[00:34:01.19]

Richard L.: Yeah. They were working on—to be honest with you, I think they were working on the wood splitter. We have a wood splitter, that we all have fireplaces, and I hadn't done that in years. We're going to do some of that. Wood split, like I say, trying to get the motor running. Now, if you’re right here, my younger brother, Andy and his son, I helped him. We had just iced a boat. They'll going grouper fishing and snapper fishing in the morning. They'll leave out early in the morning and they'll probably run for about seven to seven and a half hours, because we don't run fast; we have to conserve fuel, it costs so much. Boat is much more efficient on fuel. It's probably less than half if you're running at a slower speed, by eight or nine knots instead of thirteen or fourteen knots. So, they'll leave in the morning. They'll probably fish for two, maybe three days, and then they'll come back in with their catch. But anyway, we just iced a boat out there, and we'll walk out and look at it in a few minutes.

[00:34:59.02]

Annemarie A.: Yeah.

[00:35:00.11]

Richard L.: They're putting stuff on it and getting ready to go. Loading bait, the last time I seen, and so on and so forth. But they're getting ready to go. My son and my brother's grandson own a boat. They do commercial fishing and stone crabbing also. Anyway, the brothers reduce it down a little bit in the fishing and the crabbing part—mainly the crabbing part. That's pretty hard work.

[00:35:29.29]

Annemarie A.: I can see that.

[00:35:32.04]

Richard L.: I mean, you spend part of your summer working on getting them ready. You don't just walk out there and say a blessing when they're ready to go in the water; you got to go work on them.

[00:35:41.28]

Annemarie A.: What's the stone crab season?

[00:35:46.06]

Richard L.: It starts—well, this coming year, it'll start on May 15. We take them out on May 5, you start taking them out. Your cultivation starts on May 15 and it'll go to October 15. It'll go to May 1. It used to go to May 15, they took fifteen days off the season this past year along with a size change. Those are the two things they did. Shortened the season by fifteen days and went up a quarter inch on length on the crab, to be a legal crab.

[00:36:25.09]

Annemarie A.: I see. Are you all the only group here who catches stone crab, or other folks do?

[00:36:30.13]

Richard L.: No. There's another place. Remember the name Took that I throwed out just a few minutes ago? Right at the end of the road down here, it's called St. Marks Seafood. The Took brothers, they do stone crabbing. Used to, when the little guy was there, we probably had ten or twelve of them that we'd fish for us, ten or twelve of the smaller people. Remember when we were talking about regulations? Regulations took them out of it, because they . . . you had to qualify for a license and all kind of stuff. They may not have had the right paperwork to qualify because they hadn't done some paperwork or whatever. So, they got—it was the blue crabbers that liked to jump into it right at the beginning of the season, because the money was there then, okay? So, they'd get into it and we'd buy their crabs. So, we had a bunch of them that crabbed for us. But that pool has been reduced down tremendously, and you have to be licensed. I just had a license laying here a while ago. That's what is also a restricted species, you have to have qualified and all that kind of stuff to catch that particular product. A lot of them blue crabbers, they didn't. They didn't do it. They just done it a short period of time, right at the beginning of the season, and jump in and get the high spots and get out. Anyway, right now, I know about five or six or seven that crab all out here now. That's probably the most. Yeah, at the beginning of the season, it'll be twenty or twenty-five in it. That is a drop down, tremendously.

[00:38:16.19]

Annemarie A.: Interesting. Well, is there anything else that you want to add? Anything that we haven't talked about, about either Lynn Brothers Seafood or about St. Marks that you want to talk about?

[00:38:30.21]

Richard L.: I can't think of anything . . . St. Marks is probably going to be going through a little bit more of a trend here lately, in the future, because this is known as sort of a Forgotten Coast, you know what I mean? But growth is coming from south to north, the big-time growth. For instance, our place here, to be honest with you, is up for sale. You know, the brothers have done, they've got old. This part of our world, it hadn't seen the condos, but I think it will come. You know, maybe slowly, it'll come. But St. Marks can't grow very much, remember I told you because of the two rivers and the space and stuff like that. But anyway, that's, I think, going to be the trend here in the next few years. You don't see the young people coming into the fishing business. That's going to die. There's no room for them, there's hardly no way to have money that they want to throw away to get into it, in a sense, because you've got to buy your way in. It's not . . . you don't just go down and apply for a job. It's not that way no more. You have to buy your way in. It takes so much money to get in. So, I don't see that industry growing any to speak of. I see it being maintained because we have the product here to maintain it, if you can survive the rules and regulations. That is the big problem. That's the big problem. They want us out. I mean, there's no secret about it. They want this gone. I just don't see it going on for many more years. I think the product there, and the regulations having an effect, they should be. Them two things I mentioned about that: quarter inch in size, that should leave a bunch of crab in the water to multiply. I didn't speak of those two negatively. There's a one part of the rule that maybe I do speak of it negatively, that's what's known as a co-rig or thing they put in there for the small crab to escape. That's not a problem for us. That crab is

going to go back over—it's the first thing to go overboard. It's illegal. An undersized fish come on our boat, that's the first fish that goes back in the water. The big one's going to ride with me so it don't have to be in a hurry for him. Same way about the crab. They're going to cause us to spend lots and lots of money and lots and lots of work with an untested thing. They can tell you how many pounds of stone crab stays in the water, judging from—does a trip ticket mean anything to you? Let me show you. Every time a person goes fishing commercially, he comes in. This happens to be my brother, just picked it up. This has to be figured out daily. It tells them how many pounds you caught, the price you got, we paid you, and then it goes into the state. You get a copy; that goes into the state. They can tell us how many pounds of crab was caught from May 1 to May 15 over the last several years, so you can get an average of, what? By dogging it off right here the first year. I'm just picking a figure, one hundred thousand pounds will stay in the water. Okay? They go on up in the size limit, you can guess at it pretty close. I've talked to most people. They think it takes in thirty-five percent. That two and three quarters versus three inches takes in thirty-five to forty-five percent of what we call the medium crab. We do crabs in three grades: medium, large, and jumbo. Okay? Anything from medium, it stops at three ounces. Three ounces up to five ounces is a large. Anything above that is a jumbo. They can—most people will tell you, it's thirty-five to forty-five percent of the medium catch. You can look at the medium crab. Let's just look at one I just picked up. Okay? He had fifty-seven pounds of medium crabs that day. Twenty pounds of that crab stayed in the water. I'm not speaking negatively about it. And also, by shutting it off on May 1, it don't affect us that much, but it moves us away from the eggy crab—the crab start egging that time of the year. That's the reason it's closed then. In

South Florida, where the water temperature is warmer, they begin to see eggy crabs before we do. Anyway, that's not even taken into effect, but you're moving us away from the eggy crab, even though we're not supposed to break an eggy crab. You may injure it to the point that they say might abort the eggs, okay. So, that's a immeasurable thing, but we know it's a positive, okay? Anyway, that's two very stringent things, but the third thing is that ring, and I'm totally against that, because it's a crab I'm going to put back in the water anyway. In South Florida, the boys tell me they like them because it gets to where they don't have to handle it. Well, their problem is different than my problem, but it's a state law that we have in three years. One year's already gone. I have asked our fish organization to grant us one more year because COVID and the financial effect that it had on our crabber to make that investment. It's not just a flip of your BIC. Buying it if you can find it, and most of that stuff is produced in China, that's shut down. Okay?

[00:44:44.01]

Annemarie A.: That makes a lot of sense.

[00:44:47.09]

Richard L.: So, we're having to try to make it here and you can't find anybody that wants to make it because there's no money in it and so on and so forth. Some of the boys are scrambling and going to machine shops and trying to have pieces of stainless steel with the size hole, but you got to mount it in there and you got to cut your trap out and you weaken your trap when you cut it out. All those things have not been measured. I see a ring at a meeting that I went to. The state had put in a plastic ring that you mount in there.

It'd been in the water two weeks, it was almost eat up. If the same pressure was put on it, in the next two weeks, it wouldn't even be there. The ring would be totally—because they're big and strong. They can reach up. When we had the wood traps, they'd eat the wood slab that's three quarters of an inch thick, too. Reach up and bite it, twist it, throw it at you. Anyway, so that plastic ring would not list, so they're working on other ways, but they don't even have it available in commercial quantities. But yet that time is ticking on us. I got a bunch of conservationists that wants me out of business that's going to pass a rule. There's one commercial fishing interest after some time here coming up in November or December, one commercial fishing industry person on the Gulf council. And the Magnuson-Stevens Act requires a fifty-fifty. There should be an equal balance. There's one that will be left. Bob Gill, I mentioned his name a while ago, the guy that's teaching the people to try to get in, so and so forth. On the state of Florida, which handles the regulations on stone crab, the state of Florida handles the regulation of the Gulf, federal government relinquished their part that we go into the federal waters. They gave the state of Florida the right to regulate it. There's none on that route, no commercial fishing. We're regulated by lawyers, insurance industry, construction industry, and no fishermen. It'd be like me being on the funeral association that makes the rules and regulations for the funeral parlors. You know? Me, a commercial fisherman. Or on the citrus commission. Instead of having growers and truckers of fruit and greenhouse people that raise it, huh-uh. Our industry is regulated by no fishermen. Politics.

[00:47:14.24]

Annemarie A.: Interesting.

[00:47:13.24]

Richard L.: And we're the weak link. We're the weak link. You know, they are mostly the ones that's left, and even before that, it was not the most educated but the most talented people you've ever seen. They could be a mechanic, they could be a carpenter, they could be a fisherman and so on and so forth. Some of the most talented people, especially working on a shrimp boat. They had to be hydraulic people, engineers engineering out the way to pull it and all that kind of stuff. But anyway, that's gone. I didn't mean to spill on you about the regulation, but it's just the way it is.

[00:47:48.05]

Annemarie A.: You're not the only person who's talked about the complexities of trying to be a commercial fisherman still. That's something that people have—people have talked about it.

[00:47:58.15]

Richard L.: Right. I want to show you something else. I'm going to stand up for a minute. Voila. A boat comes in like that boat that we're outfitting out there now. They have to call before they go fishing and get a number, to go fishing from the federal government. On our boats are tracking devices, just like an ankle bracelet they would put on you if you were some kind of a criminal. We have to pay sixty dollars a month for that thing to track us. Okay? Before we come in, we have to notify them three hours before we get to the dock that we're coming in. We have to guess at how much fish we got, each species.

Then, when we land, generally they'll have an officer come and watch us unload. Supposedly, before you roll it in the cooler, you have to come in on that thing and punch it in. Excuse me. On the computer. This is—we have to punch in one for the state. Just looking at this one, this is the one for the state. Tells us the species and certain codes and how much you got a pound for it, okay? Let me get to a federal one. There's a federal one which is the same thing. The boat and all the stuff about that, okay, it tells price per pound, how many pounds you had or whatever. Okay, so you see how far? That's where that fisherman has made three percent right up front of his catch to the government. Up front. You're taking eleven, two, and thirty-seven, and that small catch, he had to pay whatever—it's three percent, whatever, to the federal government for us to go fishing. That doesn't have nothing to do with income tax or anything or your boat expense. Another thing. We have to sit down and—I'm going to pick this up because it's open. Tell how many fish we discarded, have to fill that out. You miss one of these, you don't get your license the next year. And another one is identical to the one I showed you on the computer, Southern Coastal Fisheries trip ticket report. On it, you have to—again, label out your first and, also, you have to go in with the price. You have to put down how much fuel you burned, how much this, how much that, how much you had in fuel, your labor cost, and so on and so forth. You know what they need that for? What they're going to do with it is when they get ready to totally eliminate us, you can say, well, for instance, like the Shields Marina, the marina right down there. We go down there and we buy some electronics from them, okay? We may buy something else from them or just like today, I picked up a bill. Okay? Don't mean to spill on you. [Speaks to someone off recorder]

This is a bill I got today from a fisherman supply place with two reels to go on that boat there.

[00:51:45.21]

Annemarie A.: Wow.

[00:51:46.28]

Richard L.: Okay? Let's say they were ready to put us out of the business. Ended up having testimony. And the man that owns this business, on his representative up there and say, "Hey, you mess with these people, they spend money with me this year and that's going to affect me. And I'm in Tampa, Florida." "I'm Shields in St. Marks, I sold them a radio, I sold them a depth finder. You're affecting my business." You know what they'll say? You got lucky. It's not that much; it's not going to hurt you. I mean, we know it, but we can't do nothing about it.

[00:52:25.07]

Annemarie A.: Well, I—

[00:52:27.03]

Richard L.: Huh?

[00:52:24.19]

Annemarie A.: Well, I was going to ask you, where do you get your crab pots from? Where do you get your equipment to go stone crabbing? Is that local?

[00:52:33.07]

Richard L.: Yeah, we buy, probably. Andy, where do we get the stone crab traps? Atlantic and Gulf like everybody else?

[00:52:36.22]

Andy: Yep, yep.

[00:52:38.28]

Richard L.: That same company or another company, where they're sold. We buy them. Those things are . . . shoot. What, Andy? Twenty dollars apiece now?

[00:52:48.10]

Andy: At least.

[00:52:50.16]

Richard L.: At least. Not put together.

[00:52:53.18]

Andy: Not put together.

[00:52:56.16]

Richard L.: If you're a crabber and you want to get in the stone crab business, you have to be **RS** certified. There you go. I was just going to show you. I don't have it here. I don't have it open. Anyway, here we go. Let's look at this. That's my brother, Andy, the younger one.

[00:53:26.15]

Andy: How you doing?

[00:53:24.21]

Annemarie A.: Hi.

[00:53:25.10]

Richard L.: Okay. In here are tags that go on in stone crab traps. We have to put a tag on each one of them. That's a little thing like that. Anyway, we have to pay fifty cents apiece for each one of those each year. Okay? Me and my brothers, we have certificates for ten thousand of them.

[00:53:48.16]

Annemarie A.: Wow.

[00:53:51.12]

Richard L.: Anyway, let me show you here. Is this it? I think it is. Application for my federal reef permit to sell them.

[00:54:06.26]

Annemarie A.: That's important.

[00:54:06.26]

Richard L.: Got to have a wholesale and retail in the state of Florida. Here we go. Each one of them is an entry, and that stands for seventeen hundred and fifty dollars. That's just some of the licenses that me and my brothers have to buy, anywhere from saltwater products license—now, that WD-1221, that's our wholesale state of Florida license. That's my personal license, my brother's personal license. This is where we bought tags, so you can save $1750 twice, that's what, thirty-five hundred? Yes. Not thirty-five hundred dollars, but will be $1750 for him to get, but that's thirty-five hundred tags and you divide it by fifty cents. Anyway. That's just for you. Lots of fees, but worse than the fees is the nuisance of pure paperwork.

[00:55:11.10]

Annemarie A.: I bet.

[00:55:12.21]

Richard L.: We're fishermen. I'm not a computer person. I don't want to know nothing about that thing. I don't want to even have one. I don't have one at home. I can't be hacked,

whacked, or jacked, because I don't have one. I do mine on paper. I pay you with a check or cash.

[00:55:29.18]

Annemarie A.: Since you have so much office work, it seems, to do, how often do you get to go out on the water?

[00:55:35.00]

Richard L.: I don't go. I went one time this year fishing, I went a couple times stone crabbing. But that's not just paperwork, ma'am. That's . . . age, fixing to be seventy-eight. I'm closer to seventy-eight than I am seventy-seven, okay? And also other parts of the business of daily shipping and stuff like that. I could go more. I should go more. I'm going to start doing some more fishing, some more fishing going out with them. My brother and his boy—Andy—will go tomorrow. I went with my son about two weeks ago. But I'll start doing more. But paperwork does bog you down. If you keep up with it—we don't do a good job of keeping up with it. You know, but I think we're better than most. The people coming in and auditing us may be trying to impress me or something like that, you know, telling me that, but we try to keep up with it, but it's impossible.

[00:56:31.13]

Annemarie A.: It seems like you have a good system.

[00:56:35.07]

Richard L.: Yeah. Well. I call it the stack system, we just stack it up. [Laughter]

[00:56:40.29]

Annemarie A.: Well, I'm wondering—this will be kind of my last question, but I'm wondering, you talked a lot about maybe some of the challenges of working and owning this business at this time, but what are your hopes, maybe, for St. Marks and for maybe Lynn Brother's Seafood?

[00:57:00.02]

Richard L.: Well, I would hope that someone, if we sell this place, would—and I think it would be a selling point for them and whatever business they do. For instance, they want to come in and take our property and leave this as a commercial, back in 1995 when the net ban went into effect and there was a lot of little Mom and Pop places around the state of Florida that were into net fish, that property becomes valuable. But it becomes valuable because of the picturesque buildings, condos next to haven't been able to—[Telephone rings] No, huh-uh. I done put him off a couple times today. But anyway, because it's picturesque to have a commercial business next to that, that you can look out and see that fish being landed. That was popular for a while. I don't know if it still is or not, but I think it would be. But I think it's a niche here for this. There's two or three fishes left: the stone crabbing is left, the grouper and snapper fishing has been good, especially snapper fishing here in the last few years. Grouper's been on the demise, but it's coming back. Anyway, there's a niche here for that, if you can find the people to do it. It's hard to find someone to work in this industry. It's long hours, not good pay. You know what the work

situation if you watch any of the news and anything as far as firing people, you can't compete with the government and what they can pay, you know what I mean? They'll pay not to work or whatever you want to say. The most educated person don't come and work in this industry. I've seen lawyers work in it. I've seen guys with college educations work in it. A guy that heads up our fishing organization has a college education. He's a stone crabber lobsterman in the Keys, loves it. His daddy is. Wouldn't do nothing else. But he spends two-thirds of his time fighting for us to be able to stay in the business. But anyway, I think there's a niche in here for the seafood industry. Number one, fish—when I was a boy, when you went to a seafood restaurant, you probably was not going to order fish. You're going to order shrimp. That world has changed. Not that they don't want that, still, but that fish come just as popular because of the health and so on. People find out that it's good to eat to start with, okay? That fish have really caught on. 5-7-2-2-9? 2-2-9. Yeah, that's this same man.

[00:59:45.06]

Annemarie A.: Should you get it?

[00:59:46.28]

Richard L.: No, I didn't need to get it. I've got an answer for him, but I've done told him about two times. He's wanting my brother, Andy, about repairing a boat and Andy doesn't want to get involved in it because he let it get halfway destroyed before he messed with it. But I will talk to him tomorrow. He rents an apartment, a little fisherman's apartment we have in the marina up there. From Georgia. Been with us for forty years. But anyway, what

was I saying? I think there's definitely a niche that this could be—could be, and it can, yes, you can make money if you work. If you work, make money. Me and my brothers did well, especially in the [19]90s—since it's 2010, yeah, in the [19]80s and [19]90s, we did well. In fact, when my brothers got into stone crabbing, they were boat repair—three of them, full-time boat repair, all they could do. Yachts. But they thought, with the energy crunch, that was going to die, so they got into stone crabbing, about three hundred traps. We found out there was more money in that than there was, perhaps, where we were at, so we began to build on the side. We didn't give up the other one, we just took on another responsibility, if you will. Like I say, I retired in [19]94. My other brother retired in 1995. It put all five of us here. We got hot-headed with it. We done good.

[01:01:05.15]

Annemarie A.: Y'all are a talented bunch, being able to just shift and do all these with the camp and stuff and fishing.

[01:01:13.13]

Richard L.: Yeah, yeah. You gotta be somewhat of a mechanic. You gotta be a plumber. I ain't no electrician, but anyway, you got to do some of that and some of everything, in the marina and the boats, so.

[01:01:27.16]

Annemarie A.: Well, that's all the questions I have for you.

[01:01:25.09]

Richard L.: Good! I hope I didn't drag you out too long.

[01:01:30.11]

Annemarie A.: No, you didn't. That was great. I'm going to, if it's okay, if we can be quiet—silent—for thirty seconds so I can get just the sound of the room to help with cutting and splicing.

[*End of interview*]