



Lance Nacio  
Anna Marie Shrimp - Montegut, Louisiana  
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Interviewer: Rien Fertel  
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**Rien Fertel:** All right. This is Rien Fertel with the Southern Foodways Alliance. It is February 4<sup>th</sup>, a Tuesday, 2020. I am in Montegut, Louisiana, with Lance Nacio, and I'll have him introduce himself, please

[0:00:18.3]

**Lance Nacio:** My name is Lance Nacio. I live in Montegut, Louisiana. I'm a commercial fisherman.

[0:00:18.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And your birth date?

[0:00:25.5]

**Lance Nacio:** 4/27/71.

[0:00:28.1]

**Rien Fertel:** So tell me about Montegut, about where we are. Tell me about this place.

[0:00:35.7]

**Lance Nacio:** Well, Montegut is in lower Terrebonne Parish. It's one of the bayous. There's Bayou Terrebonne that runs down in front of my house. It's a coastal community where people traditionally make a living from the land, either fishing, trapping, oil and gas, not so much the things we used to do, but we still have people who live on the resources.

[0:01:02.7]

**Rien Fertel:** And you were telling me some stories before we had lunch, before we sat down to eat lunch, about your family and how they used to live on these resources, and in many ways you still do. I want to talk about your family, but before we get there, tell me where you were born, in terms of where we are now.

[0:01:24.6]

**Lance Nacio:** I was born in Raceland, which is part of Lafourche Parish, and I grew up in Larose, which is on the Terrebonne-Lafourche line, grew up in a trapping camp on Grand Bayou Blue. It's where my family pretty much lived off the land for over 100 years.

[0:01:46.9]

**Rien Fertel:** And when you say trapping camp, what is it? What is a trapping camp?

[0:01:49.4]

**Lance Nacio:** It's a camp that's only accessible by boat, and people used to live on these all over throughout South Louisiana to trap fur-bearing animals in the wintertime, but also the trappers, because the trapping season was only two or three months, they had to rely on other resources to make a living, so a lot of these people who lived in trapping camps also shrimped in the spring and summer months, they fished redfish, they fished crabs, catfish, oysters, whatever they can make some kind of living off of.

And my family was very diverse, because we did all these different things. We changed our living with whatever Mother Nature had to offer. If it was in season, we were doing it. It was a balance that we had back then that we lost. A lot of these resources have become privatized and exploited, and now we're kind of like limited to try and make a living on just one resource, and it's not as easy as it used to be, because you have to make your whole year's worth. Even though things aren't in season, you still have to try to make a living off of it.

[0:03:01.9]

**Rien Fertel:** And you were telling me about your grandfather. I want to get his name and what a year in his life would look like. And he lived with the seasons, you told me, but would he sell the stuff or was it just to feed and shelter the family?

[0:03:22.2]

**Lance Nacio:** He'd sell things also. It wasn't just things to feed the family. One of the things that my grandfather was well known for was carving paddles, so that was one thing he did, and he sold them to fellow trappers and different places.

[0:03:43.2]

**Rien Fertel:** What was his name?

[0:03:43.6]

**Lance Nacio:** I'm fixing to tell you, because my grandfather passed when I was two years old, and we didn't call him this, but his name was Narcisse Nacio.

[0:03:58.9]

**Rien Fertel:** So you don't really have—and he spelled his name with two Cs?

[0:04:04.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Just like I told you. [Laughter]

[0:04:04.9]

**Rien Fertel:** So let's talk about that. I'm guessing you don't have memories about him.

[0:04:09.5]

**Lance Nacio:** No, he passed when I was two years old, of cancer.

[0:04:11.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Tell me about his father. It would be his father, correct?

[0:04:15.2]

**Lance Nacio:** Mm-hmm.

[0:04:16.7]

**Rien Fertel:** The legend of that man and the different spellings of your family.

[0:04:23.1]

**Lance Nacio:** So my great-grandfather, my grandfather's dad, the thing I was always told growing up is that he was a Filipino who smuggled into this country on Fifi Island in back of Grand Isle, which was known as Manila Village. And I always thought that that was just a fable being told, but little did I know there was a documentary that was done by PBS that talks about the Filipino immigrants coming into this country in barrels into Manila Village.

[0:04:57.7]

**Rien Fertel:** And growing up, did you hear about Filipino culture? Did anyone in your family identify as Filipino? How did people identify? And also what language was being spoken?

[0:05:10.2]

**Lance Nacio:** You know, it was always like a Cajun French. Different bayous had different slangs of French. My grandfather, his name was spelled N-a-c-c-i-o, but my dad and his brothers have different spellings of their name. My dad was N-a-c-i-o, and one of my dad's brothers was N-a-z-i-o. But they were all born by midwives at this trapping camp, and I think just the way the name sound, that's the way it was spelled. People weren't educated, book-smart back then. I mean, they knew how to live off the resources. And I was told my great-grandfather, his name was Ignacio Calistro, so I think just making entry into this country, he took his first name and made it his last name, and

that's where our names come from. We're not the traditional Cajun, because we have a strange name and strange history, but we're about as Cajun as you can get.

[0:06:13.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And did your father speak French and Cajun French?

[0:06:18.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Oh, yeah, my father spoke fluent Cajun French. Being we lived in this trapping camp, it was only accessible by boat, and we had a house in Larose, and my grandmother lived next door to us and my grandmother raised me a lot when I was a baby. I was told that I spoke Cajun French before I spoke English, so growing up, I always spoke Cajun French to relatives who only spoke French, and since then, most of these relatives have passed and I don't have hardly anyone to speak Cajun French to, so I've lost probably more than I can remember in speaking Cajun French, but if someone's talking French, I know every word they're saying.

[0:07:00.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Because I like to get everyone's name on the record, what was your father's name and your grandmother's name?

[0:07:06.1]

**Lance Nacio:** My father's name was Noel Jerry Nacio. He was born on Christmas, so that's where the Noel comes from. My grandmother, her name was Marceline. We called

her Tante Leline. My grandmother's sister is still alive. She just turned 100 earlier this year. She still drives. There was a picture of her opening oysters just a few weeks ago. This woman is phenomenal. She trapped till she was seventy-five years old. You don't see people like that anymore. And she's a little lady. She might weigh 100 pounds. She battled colon cancer two years ago, and she's still alive and kicking.

[0:07:47.8]

**Rien Fertel:** And she's nearby?

[0:07:48.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah. She was one of these what they called a *traiteur*. She would heal with prayer and herbs. She didn't really believe in going to doctors. She says she pretty much never took any medicine her whole life, up until recently, but it was a different way of life back then.

[0:08:10.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Incredible. And tell me about your mom's side of the family, where they came from and their background.

[0:08:14.9]

**Lance Nacio:** So my mom's side of the family is from Cheniere, which is right before Grand Isle. They were also people who were oyster fishermen and shrimpers. That type of living is what they made their living from, was from the resources, so it's something

you don't see nowadays anymore hardly, is people who can make a living just from the resources.

[0:08:42.1]

**Rien Fertel:** And do you have earliest memories of hunting, trapping, fishing? Did you take to it immediately? Did you not like anything or did you like one or the other?

[0:08:55.4]

**Lance Nacio:** No, I just loved being out there. When we were out there you had light by lanterns and you had heat by wood-burning stove. You were just totally disconnected from society. They always grew gardens, they always had animals, cows, chickens, pigs. They always had what they needed to survive living off of the land with.

[0:09:21.8]

**Rien Fertel:** So where did you go to high school? Did you go to college? What did school look like?

[0:09:27.9]

**Lance Nacio:** I went to high school at South Lafourche, and sorry to say this, but I quit school in eleventh grade, never failed, said, "I don't need a diploma."

[0:09:40.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Did you go get a job?

[0:09:41.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. Right away I jumped on a shrimp boat. That was my first job, on an eighty-foot shrimp boat.

[0:09:47.1]

**Rien Fertel:** And who was that? How did you get on the shrimp boat? Who was the captain?

[0:09:49.8]

**Lance Nacio:** It was just people, family. I had one of my cousins that was working on there, telling me all this money he's making. I was like, "Oh, I'm going." [Laughs.] So that's what I did. I kind of regret not finishing high school, but I made a decent living and I worked in oil and gas for a while, and I always wanted to be living off of the resources like my family's history. Since [19]97, I've been a full-time shrimper, commercial fisherman.

[0:10:19.3]

**Rien Fertel:** So you were in your teens, it was in 1980s when you go on the eighty-foot shrimp boat, where were you going? How long would you be out on the boat? What did the shrimping industry look like at that time?

[0:10:32.5]

**Lance Nacio:** So back then, when I got on a shrimp boat, it was good. We didn't have the amount of imports that we have nowadays. And when I got on that shrimp boat, we were paying about fifty cents a gallon for fuel and averaging about three or four bucks a pound for large head-on shrimp. It was easy to make a living back then. I started shrimping in [19]97, and it still wasn't too bad, because when I started shrimping, we were paying sixty to eighty cents a gallon for fuel, and we were still getting that three bucks a pound for large head-on shrimps, so the numbers worked pretty good.

[0:11:12.4]

**Rien Fertel:** When did things start to change both economically and—

[0:11:13.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Probably in 2001. So I wasn't in the business for too many years and things started to take a turn for the worse, and I think that's when imports really started to take hold in this country and the price of fuel started going up and the price of shrimp plummeted. We were getting less than two bucks a pound for the same large head-on shrimp, and we were paying probably close to two dollars a gallon for fuel, so the numbers didn't really add up. What most people don't understand is that because of globalization and the amount of shrimp that is raised in Third World countries using veterinary drugs, using chemicals and pesticides that are banned in the United States, it's become the number-one consumed seafood in the U.S.

We import more than we eat. And in 2018, there was 1.4 billion pounds of shrimp imported—with a “B”—and we only consumed 1.2 billion pounds, so there was a surplus of shrimp. The numbers for 2019 were 1.6 billion pounds imported. So we’re staying with this surplus of shrimp, but this shrimp is not stuff that if people knew where they were coming from, they wouldn’t even want to eat them. People come to South Louisiana to have our food and live with our culture, and nine times out of ten, when they’re eating shrimp, even here in South Louisiana, chances are it’s an imported shrimp from a Third World country that has contaminates that if you had a choice, you wouldn’t be eating it.

[0:12:51.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And beyond the antibiotics and contaminants—well, for those people who might be listening or reading this transcript and have never been to South Louisiana, have never seen a shrimp boat and that’s completely foreign to them, can you describe the differences between what you do, what Louisiana shrimpers do, and how shrimp are grown in other parts of the country where they command a much cheaper price?

[0:13:18.3]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah.

[0:13:19.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Other parts of the world, I should say.

[0:13:21.2]

**Lance Nacio:** Right, right. So in our country here, we harvest wild shrimp, which is an annual species. We have probably eight or ten different types of shrimp that grow here in Louisiana in the Gulf Coast, and these shrimp, their life cycle is twelve to fifteen months. They start in nature, they live off of the natural foods, and we harvest them as they're growing on our coast. But stuff in Third World countries, what they do is they strip the mangrove forest along the coast, they create these ponds, and they grow shrimp in these ponds, but the problem lies is that these shrimp—

[0:14:02.3]

**Rien Fertel:** The shrimp are contained.

[0:14:02.3]

**Lance Nacio:** The shrimp are contained in these ponds, and the problem lies is that they're growing more shrimp than the land can carry, so disease spreads rapidly, and what they do to grow all these shrimp is they use these different veterinary drugs, they use antibiotics, they use pesticides, they use all these different things to grow more shrimp than the land should carry. And what happens is, is they're only able to do it for about seven to ten years before the soil becomes contaminated to a point where nothing will grow, so they have to relocate and set up shop again. And what that's doing is destroying the natural ecosystems along the coast, because these ponds, these shrimp ponds have to be on the coast where they have access to seawater and stuff.

So it's a big problem in all these other Third World countries where there's no regulations. And everyone wants the U.S. dollar, so the stuff gets sent here, and a lot of

these countries illegally subsidize the shrimp growers. India is one of them that's really bad. I just recently learned that—and another thing, also, when this shrimp comes into this country, we're only testing about one percent of the shrimp coming into this country. And when the shrimp gets tested, they reject it, but they give it back to the shipper. So what they do is they do what's called transshipping. They send it into a different port and there's a ninety-nine percent chance that it won't get inspected.

[0:15:40.3]

**Rien Fertel:** It's the same shrimp.

[0:15:40.6]

**Lance Nacio:** Same shrimp. So what happened was, the European Union got tough on that. This has been going on for about five years. It's part of the reason why we have so much shrimp being sent to the U.S., because the U.S., it's easy to get it in. European Union requires the shipper to test for these chemicals and banned substances, and they won't let them in if there is some. And then they also, when they come in, the European Union does their own testing also, and when they find contaminants in shrimp that's supposed to be clean, they destroy the product. Each country has three times. Once they've tested and find it once, they up the testing to fifty percent, and then once they find it a couple of more times, that country gets banned from sending shrimp into Europe.

[0:16:30.7]

**Rien Fertel:** So have some countries been banned?

[0:16:32.6]

**Lance Nacio:** Yes. India is one of them.

[0:16:34.0]

**Rien Fertel:** In Europe.

[0:16:35.0]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, in Europe. And India is the reason we have such the amount of shrimp that we have here. India has sent in 500 million pounds of shrimp in 2018.

[0:16:45.4]

**Rien Fertel:** To the United States.

[0:16:46.0]

**Lance Nacio:** To the United States.

[0:16:47.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:16:47.4]

**Lance Nacio:** So we don't know the number in 2019 yet. Those figures aren't out yet. But India is one of the biggest countries that sends shrimp into the U.S.

[0:16:55.8]

**Rien Fertel:** So it sounds like the U.S. is definitely more lax when it comes to regulation of these imported shrimp, but what is Louisiana specifically doing? Is Louisiana doing a better job?

[0:17:09.6]

**Lance Nacio:** So what we've done, I've been on a shrimp task force for fifteen years or so, and this bill has been being introduced over several years, and we recently had it passed last year, which is a restaurant labeling law, where they have to label on the menu—and it's shrimp and crawfish that we did it with, because those are the two biggest violators—is they have to label if it's import or domestic crawfish or shrimp. So it actually gives the consumer the chance to understand where their food is coming from and take the chance if they want to eat it or not. Before then, it was always just sell, let's sell the culture, let's sell all these people out, exploit them, and sell them a lesser imported substitute.

Years ago, I was asked to be in that Popeye's commercial where they were in Lafitte, throwing the cast net from the dock, and the person who called me, I said, "I'd be delighted to be in the commercial if you can tell me they're using domestic shrimp." And I didn't get a call back. And if you look on Popeye's menus now, it's imported shrimp.

[0:18:15.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. They have to say that.

[0:18:16.5]

**Lance Nacio:** But, I mean, they always try to sell our culture, they exploit our livelihoods to sell a cheaper import.

[0:18:24.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Can you describe the life cycle of a Gulf shrimp and your participation in that seasonally, how they move, when you go out and catch them, what that looks like? And this is white and brown shrimp?

[0:18:43.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. We target three different—mainly two different—we used to target seabob also in the wintertime. It's a different type of shrimp. But it's brown shrimp and white shrimp, the main ones. In my business, I built it around white shrimp, because white shrimp live near shore, they're more of like a brackish-water shrimp, they grow very fast. Brown shrimp—it requires more salinity to grow brown shrimp, and brown shrimp only come into our estuaries in their larval stage, and they grow up a little bit and then they move offshore and they grow really big offshore, they move into Texas and Mexico, and that's where you get big browns, from deep water.

Brown shrimp are only around here for the months from April through maybe July, where our white shrimp are here year-round. So our white shrimp, they're

constantly spawning, they spawn offshore, the tidal currents bring the larvae in, and the larvae starts its life cycle in our estuaries, where it starts to grow and gets to a size where it can handle being out in the open water.

So most of our fishing is done in the Gulf of Mexico with the boat I have. My boat is sixty-five feet long. We pull two trawls. We pull big-mesh netting. We pull extra bycatch stuff that's not required. In my business, we want to catch a shrimp, and that's all we're after is shrimp, so we take extra steps. We do lose more shrimp by taking the extra steps, but we're producing a better-quality product, where being more environmental friendly when we're taking from the resources, and we're trying to leave as little of an impact on the ecosystem when we're out fishing.

[0:20:43.5]

**Rien Fertel:** Explain that again. How are you lessening the environmental impact?

[0:20:49.2]

**Lance Nacio:** So like turtle-excluder devices are required in the fisheries, so we do turtle-excluder devices.

[0:20:59.0]

**Rien Fertel:** And these are on the nets?

[0:20:59.5]

**Lance Nacio:** These are on the nets, but what we do also is we have closer bar spacing on our turtle-excluder devices. There's flaps that kind of cover the TED, where it just lets out like large stuff, but what we do is we roll the flaps back, we tie-wrap them open, and we put a piece of PVC pipe, a three-inch piece of PVC pipe crossways in front of the TED. And what people have found through trial and error is that this pipe creates like a swirling motion with the water, and it helps let out a lot of the smaller fin fish, and by the flap being open, they just escape real easily, to where the shrimp will dive down and they go into the caught end.

And another thing also we do is we pull fish IBRDs, they're called. It's a triangle device that is put in the caught end of the net. It's probably about eight foot from the end of it, and it makes an opening on the top of the net and it allows the small fin fish that can swim against the current another escape route. And then another step we do is we pull inch and three-quarter tail bags, so the tail bag is the end where everything collects at, and legal law size is inch and a quarter, and we pull inch and three-quarter almost year-round, and that also lets out juvenile shrimp, it lets out juvenile fish and stuff like that. So our whole thing is to try to catch as much shrimp as we can, but as clean as we can.

[0:22:28.1]

**Rien Fertel:** How rare is it? How many other shrimpers take these extra steps?

[0:22:37.3]

**Lance Nacio:** There's a few that do, but not too many.

[0:22:39.9]

**Rien Fertel:** It's not widespread.

[0:22:40.8]

**Lance Nacio:** No, it's not widespread. And my business has developed a method of fishing that we do. One thing that we started with our business—and we don't use skimmers anymore, but we started using TEDs and skimmers probably fifteen years ago.

[0:23:00.3]

**Rien Fertel:** What's a skimmer?

[0:23:01.2]

**Lance Nacio:** A skimmer is a different style of fishing. It's like a wing net that catches everything from top to bottom, and it's made for fishing at night. It's made for fishing in bayous and passes. It's a lot more versatile in places you can go with, and we've been using turtle-excluder devices in them. And we have issues with the skimmers. They have cownose rays, they're called. They're a type of stingray, and they swim in schools in the summertime. And I had an issue like back around 2000, and when we'd run into these things with skimmers, I mean, you'd fill up the net where you couldn't hardly pick it up. I had an issue where I was dumping out some shrimp one time and had about fifty rays in the net, and one of them stuck through into my big toe. [Laughs.] So that was—

[0:24:04.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Through your boot.

[0:24:03.5]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, through my boot. So that was the beginning of us pulling TEDs and skimmers, because it gets rid of ninety percent of the rays it gets rid of. But not only it's good for the rays, the TEDs, and the skimmers, it's good for crab, it's good for all kinds of other things. So when we started pulling the TEDs and skimmers, I said I'm never going back without doing it. A lot of fishermen have followed suit, are voluntarily doing it because it makes it to where you can fish clean and still profitable. True fisherman are out there to catch shrimp. They're not out there to just catch everything in the water. So if it makes sense, a lot of fisherman adapt, and over the years, a lot of fishermen have adapted to pulling TEDs and skimmers.

[0:24:49.5]

**Rien Fertel:** When you do catch some fish and bring them on the boat in a shrimp net, do you just toss them over?

[0:24:56.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. First and foremost, we try to minimize what we bring on the boat, but what we also do is whatever we can retain and sell at a later date, we process it on board. We have a plate freezer, so we save all the flounder, all the squid, all the whiting.

It's called channel mullet. We save all those things and we have a sale at home for them later on. So when we pull that stuff up, we look at it and try to make the most that we can make out of what we're pulling out of the water.

One of the things that I've done and we created a good market with is soft-shelled shrimp, so we save all of our soft-shelled shrimp and we're able to get ten bucks a pound for our soft-shelled shrimp.

[0:25:43.4]

**Rien Fertel:** But you're pouring out thousands of shrimp on deck. How can you pull up a soft-shelled? Are they mixed in with— [Laughter]

[0:25:49.0]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, they're mixed in. They look like other shrimp. They look a little tired sometimes. They look a little different because they're not hard and shiny. And when we're taking the bycatch out, we're pulling through these shrimp, so we try to pick out as many of them as we can. Because what we process and put in a box to freeze, as far as the whole shrimp versus a soft-shelled shrimp, we get two and a half times more the money for it sometimes, so it's definitely worth the effort of pulling them out.

[0:26:23.4]

**Rien Fertel:** And this might be a good time to ask. I read a recent *New Orleans Advocate* story about more exotic fish that you're selling just like in ones and twos to different restaurants in New Orleans.

[0:26:37.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Right.

[0:26:38.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Are these the bycatch?

[0:26:40.1]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. Well, wait, let's take a different approach on that. So that story you're referring to is—I have two boats, and both of them were shrimp boats, and one of them two years ago I converted into a reef fish boat, where we're targeting offshore reef fish: red snapper, grouper, those types of fish. But when we're out fishing with that boat also, we're pulling up all kind of other things, and most people don't bring all this other stuff to their dock, but if we're catching it and if we throw it back and it has a ninety percent chance of dying or a shark eating it, we'd just as soon bring it in and make a market for it, and that's one thing we've been able to do. So whatever fish we're catching on that boat in that operation gets brought up here, and I send out a text list to all these different chefs in the city. They all chime in and say what they want, and between a day or two, we deliver it to them.

[0:27:42.9]

**Rien Fertel:** And what are some of the more exotic fish species that you—

[0:27:46.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Recently we brought in a couple of conger eels, so I just brought one to Marjie's Grill the other day. It was seven feet long.

[0:27:56.2]

**Rien Fertel:** And he bought the conger eel?

[0:27:57.1]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah. It weighed thirty pounds, the conger eel. But, I mean, we catch scorpion fish, we catch lion fish, we catch almaco jacks, which is not a typical fish in this city. We catch pink porgies, we catch vermilion snapper. We catch all these other different fish species, and these chefs love it. They want something different.

[0:28:26.9]

**Rien Fertel:** And is it lucky that we're at a moment when we have chefs in restaurants who want to play around and serve a single fish? Would it have happened ten years ago or twenty years ago?

[0:28:39.5]

**Lance Nacio:** Probably not as easy. You have more environmentally-conscious chefs in the city, and you have people who are starting to take a value to the resources and not looking at the Gulf as just a place that we're going to exploit red snapper or one or two

different fish species. There's so much more stuff out in the Gulf, and it's edible, it's really good, and why not let's eat it. There's times when my fish boat'll come in that we'll have twenty different species of fish, and we have no problem moving them all.

[0:29:16.4]

**Rien Fertel:** Do you sometimes get fish that you can't identify?

[0:29:20.0]

**Lance Nacio:** We have two books on the boat that help us identify, and then also we have a fish biologist that comes when we do the offload, so he's very helpful in helping us figure out unidentifiable fish.

[0:29:34.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Is that law that he has to be there?

[0:29:36.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Well, yeah. National Marine Fisheries has these fish biologists that come out, and he don't come every time. He comes probably eight out of ten times that we offload, and what he does is he measures fish, weighs them, and takes the ear bones out. The ear bone it's kind of like a tree. They can cut them and age the fish.

[0:29:55.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Right. You can tell the health of the fish.

[0:29:57.0]

**Lance Nacio:** Not only the health of the fish; the health of the stock of the fish in the Gulf.

[0:30:01.8]

**Rien Fertel:** So do you dock your boats—

[0:30:03.7]

**Lance Nacio:** Across the street.

[0:30:04.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Across the street. What's the names of the two boats?

[0:30:07.5]

**Lance Nacio:** One's named the *Anna Marie*, which is my shrimp boat. I have three girls. The shrimp boat is named after my two older girls. Their name is Breanna and Savanna, and their middle name is Marie. And then my fish boat is named *Marisa Jolie*, and she's my younger—she's fourteen years old. So my boats are named after my girls.

[0:30:29.5]

**Rien Fertel:** That's really sweet. And how long from across the street to where they drop their nets, what's the distance?

[0:30:37.4]

**Lance Nacio:** So the shrimp boat, when he leaves, during the summer months we fish the inshore shrimp season around here, and that's typically three to four hours they're able to drop their nets. Now if he's fishing in the Gulf, maybe five or six hours to get out to the Gulf, and depending on where in the Gulf, he may run for eighteen hours before he starts fishing.

But the fish boat is a whole different thing. When he leaves here, he's running eighteen to twenty-four hours before he even puts any gear in the water to catch fish, because he's fishing way out beyond the oil and gas structures. He's fishing anywhere from 300 feet to 1,000 feet of water, he fishes in.

[0:31:24.0]

**Rien Fertel:** So because you have focused your energy, your business, on white shrimp, and white shrimp, as you told us, live closer to the shore, does that make you more susceptible than brown shrimpers to the things that Louisiana is facing and has been facing for decades? That's land loss, that's due to storms or the oil and gas industry, whatever we want to call it. But is the white shrimp industry more susceptible?

[0:31:57.3]

**Lance Nacio:** I wouldn't say just the white shrimp industry. I'd say shrimp in general is more susceptible, because brown shrimp need to have higher salinity, so when you have high rivers, it really affects the brown shrimp population. White shrimp can withstand some of that. And that was another reason for us diversifying the business, is not only because consumer demand we needed fish in our business, it's also the uncertainty of the future of South Louisiana. You take the massive sediment diversions they're proposing. We don't know what's going to happen to these estuaries.

And then also you take the Morganza-to-the-Gulf levee system. Since Katrina, they've come in and leveed all these estuaries just south of me here, and what that's going to do is going to lessen the amount of area that these juvenile species have to come in and start their life cycle. They pretty much drew a line in the sand, and the estuary got cut in half. You don't have the infiltration of the larvae that you used to have. And then all these levees, they all have gates on them, it's all flood gates, but they're proposing a lock system on all of them in the future, and what they're going to do is they're going to make a freshwater side and a saltwater side, and we're going to lose that balance that we always had that created—seventy percent of the life in the Gulf gets its start in Louisiana's estuaries.

[0:33:36.5]

**Rien Fertel:** So I want to ask about all the task force and all the commissions that you're part of, but first, in your dream world, what would Louisiana, what would the federal government do for Louisiana, for its coast, for its Gulf? For the shrimping industry, what does that dream world look like in terms of water, freshwater, saltwater?

[0:34:00.2]

**Lance Nacio:** I know where you're going with this. So really what we need to do is Louisiana needs to restore their barrier islands, put the passes back the way they once were. And these barrier islands, not just put sand on them, we need to shore them up with rocks or whatever it takes to shore these barrier islands back up. We need to figure out other ways for the Mississippi to have drainage in other places where you don't have to have these massive freshwater influxes here, all these different things. And I know we need the levees to have people places to live, but you need people on the front lines to control when the water is shut off and when it's open to let the larvae infiltrate inside the levee system, because if it comes in, it has a pretty good chance of growing if the environmental conditions allow it. Everything wants to grow here. Our water is so nutrient-rich and it has the beginning life cycle of a lot of things, and I think the people who's been around long enough, who know how the cycles work, need to be the ones calling the shots when they're opening these gates and when they're closing them. We need to make sure that science is involved, because it's not just as easy as building a levee and putting a gate to protect the people. You need to protect their livelihood too.

[0:35:26.1]

**Rien Fertel:** Terrebonne Parish—remind me—we're outside the levee system.

[0:35:30.3]

**Lance Nacio:** No, we're inside the levee system.

[0:35:31.1]

**Rien Fertel:** So we're inside the post-Katrina levee system.

[0:35:32.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah.

[0:35:34.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Have you seen a change in how water has flown in and out of these bayous in the past over fifteen years since the storm, since Katrina?

[0:35:42.7]

**Lance Nacio:** So when they built these levees here, we have on the bayou in Chauvin, when the tide goes out now, it flows north.

[0:35:55.7]

**Rien Fertel:** And it used—

[0:35:57.2]

**Lance Nacio:** It flows a different way to get out.

[0:35:58.3]

**Rien Fertel:** [Laughter] So it used to flow towards the Gulf, south.

[0:35:59.3]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah.

[0:36:00.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And Chauvin is down the bayou, right?

[0:36:01.6]

**Lance Nacio:** Chauvin is like one bayou over and down the bayou. So all these different bayous—I want to give this analogy also—

[0:36:08.3]

**Rien Fertel:** So where's the water going if it's going north?

[0:36:08.3]

**Lance Nacio:** It's going to Lake Boudreaux, but it's just going a different way.

[0:36:13.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, gosh. Oh, Lake Boudreaux and then to the Gulf.

[0:36:15.2]

**Lance Nacio:** Then to the Gulf. It's still going to the Gulf, but it flows north now when the tide goes out.

[0:36:18.9]

**Rien Fertel:** And do they want that to occur?

[0:36:20.8]

**Lance Nacio:** I don't know. I think that's something that just kind of caught them off guard, the water's flowing a little different. But just let me explain. All these different bayous were all built about 3,000 years ago from the Mississippi River, and all these bayous are kind of like fingers. And if you live on the bayou, the elevation is pretty high. You get away from the bayou, your elevation is really low. Where I live here, I'm fortunate enough that I must have been on top of a ridge, because my ground elevation is eight feet where I'm at here.

[0:36:53.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Your home, you're talking about.

[0:36:54.4]

**Lance Nacio:** My home, yeah. My home is actually ten feet because it's on pillars, but the ground elevation is eight feet where I'm at, above sea level. And you take all of New Orleans, you have places that's eleven feet below sea level, so it's almost a twenty-foot difference in where I live and some of the folks in New Orleans.

[0:37:10.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Have you had—does this flood?

[0:37:12.6]

**Lance Nacio:** No.

[0:37:14.0]

**Rien Fertel:** It doesn't flood.

[0:37:13.1]

**Lance Nacio:** No, no, no. I bought this place right after Katrina and Rita brought a lot of water down here, and it just had water in the backyard. It never even come up to the house. So if we flood here, most of South Louisiana is going to be underwater.

[0:37:31.5]

**Rien Fertel:** So I want to ask about all the task forces and the committees that you're part of. I mean, your phone is constantly going off. [Laughter.] I've been here for about an hour and a half, two hours. You're in demand and you're in the media a lot, you were on *Dr. Oz*, and even reran the *Dr. Oz* piece. You fly around the world. What was the first contact you made with whoever it was, whatever task force or committee, or who called you up and said, "I want you to be a part of this"? Or did you call someone and say, like—

[0:38:04.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Well, one of the things that really put me on the map and kind of got me involved in some things is I did a PBS thing probably in about 2002 with John Besh.

[0:38:18.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. So even before the storm.

[0:38:20.1]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah. This was a long time ago. We did a program called *Chefs A'Field: Kids on the Farm*, and we took his son Brendan out fishing on the water. He's like twenty years old now, and he might have been seven or eight back then.

[0:38:39.0]

**Rien Fertel:** So that got you a bit of exposure.

[0:38:40.7]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, and we liked each other, and he took me and done several things with me. We did a thing with James Carville called *Eatocracy*.

[0:38:51.6]

**Rien Fertel:** What was that?

[0:38:51.8]

**Lance Nacio:** That was a dinner we had at James Carville's house, him and his wife, and Leah Chase was there and Poppy [Tooker] and a lot of the people in the know in the city. We did that probably in about 2004. After John Besh kind of put me on the map, other

people started calling me up. In my business, we need all the free marketing that we can get, so whenever someone calls, if we can fit it in, we do it.

One piece that I missed, though I told you about earlier, is that in 2001—so I bought a wooden shrimp boat in [19]97, did it for a few years, then I built the shrimp boat I have now, the *Anna Marie*.

[0:39:40.9]

**Rien Fertel:** What was the name of the previous shrimp boat? I just like names of boats.

[0:39:43.2]

**Lance Nacio:** [Laughter] That boat was called the *'Tit Galop*. It was from Grand Isle.

[0:39:47.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Like a horse, right?

[0:39:48.6]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. And I bought it from a family that I grew up shrimping with in Grand Isle.

[0:39:55.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And it was wooden. Does that mean it was—

[0:39:57.6]

**Lance Nacio:** It took a lot more maintenance and it was very fragile, because it was probably thirty years old, a wooden boat. Wooden boats, they're almost like a thing of the past now, because they have so many issues with them.

So in 2000, I built the shrimp boat I have now, and things were pretty good. And in 2001, when the imports really started coming into this country, the dockside prices crashed. We were getting as low as thirty cents a pound for shrimp, we're getting a dollar a point now for them.

[0:40:31.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And did this happen overnight? Like, were you aware that the wave was coming?

[0:40:35.8]

**Lance Nacio:** No, I wasn't aware of it.

[0:40:36.9]

**Rien Fertel:** No one knew?

[0:40:36.7]

**Lance Nacio:** No, no, I mean, we kind of suspected, but we didn't know the magnitude it was going to be, because when I started shrimping, the domestic shrimp industry was probably forty percent of market share. Right now we're five percent.

[0:40:50.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, my god. But did you immediately know that it was because of the foreign shrimp?

[0:40:55.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. We knew it was because of foreign shrimp. But in 2001, when the dockside prices crashed, what we started doing was direct marketing and selling our shrimp however we could. We would fish during the weeks and come in every weekend and sell shrimp off our boats or haul it wherever we can haul it to sell it.

Probably late 2002, I made a connection with Rouses Supermarkets. So a local grocery store here called Cannata's invited fishermen to come in their parking lots and sell shrimp. Then Rouses followed suit, and when Rouses did it, I took them up on the offer and I went to Covington to sell shrimp. And when I was there, I made a connection with their PR guy, and they brought me in and said, "We want to develop a head-on shrimp program in our stores." So we had a really good working relationship. They only had eleven stores at the time, and we was doing really good business. For five years, I was their only shrimp guy, so we developed this program with me supplying them fresh shrimp during season, frozen shrimp out of season, and it was a good working relationship we had.

I was fortunate enough to participate in the Manning Passing Academy, where I boiled shrimp for them. We boiled 500 pounds of shrimp.

[0:42:28.3]

**Rien Fertel:** This is the Manning football family?

[0:42:29.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah.

[0:42:30.4]

**Rien Fertel:** In New Orleans. They have a summer camp.

[0:42:31.5]

**Lance Nacio:** Well, no, in Thibodaux. It's in Thibodaux. So my friend Tim, who was the PR guy for Rouses, his son was going to college, so they decided to throw this party, and we did it for like three or four years where I'd boil 500 pounds of shrimp, and one year I cooked alligator sauce piquante, I cooked soft-shelled shrimp. We fried alligator. We did all kind of stuff for them.

[0:42:56.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And when was the first time it moved from kind of promoting and selling your product to a more kind of activism?

[0:43:09.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Probably around the same time.

[0:43:11.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And what was the first committee?

[0:43:15.4]

**Lance Nacio:** I was appointed to the Shrimp Task Force when it got put in place. I was part of the Louisiana Shrimpers Association when it started back then also, but then the governor enacted a Shrimp Task Force, probably in 2004 or [20]05, and I was on it from the beginning.

[0:43:34.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And what was the purpose of the Shrimp Task Force?

[0:43:36.2]

**Lance Nacio:** Just to try and help figure out ways that we can better sell our products and compete with foreign imports.

[0:43:43.0]

**Rien Fertel:** And what did that work look like?

[0:43:47.7]

**Lance Nacio:** We'd meet every two or three months. We actually have a meeting tomorrow going on here in Houma. We just recently went to D.C. and talked to congressional staffers about our issues and our plight. So tomorrow we're having a meeting to kind of recap on what came out of Washington, D.C. But, yeah, I've been on Shrimp Task Force for quite a while. And then for about six years now, I've been on

National Marine Fisheries Shrimp Advisory Panel, so it's more diverse than just Louisiana, you know. It's the whole Gulf. It's the whole southeast region. So I go out next month to Tampa. Every six or eight months, they fly us out to Tampa and we meet and talk about bigger issues with the broader fisheries.

[0:44:41.0]

**Rien Fertel:** And how about more national and global organizations?

[0:44:45.2]

**Lance Nacio:** Well, I was a delegate for Slow Food in Terra Madre in Italy, twice. I'm not sure the years, but one was, I think, 2016, one of the years, and then it was probably 2014 or [20]15 before that.

[0:45:07.1]

**Rien Fertel:** And did you bring shrimp all the way to—

[0:45:09.3]

**Lance Nacio:** Just a little, yeah. I brought like a carry-on of shrimp.

[0:45:12.9]

**Rien Fertel:** To Italy. [Laughter]

[0:45:13.6]

**Lance Nacio:** So another thing also I'm a part of, and it's happening next month, March 19<sup>th</sup> through the 22<sup>nd</sup>, it's a spinoff from Slow Food, it's called Slow Fish. So we had our first meeting in New Orleans in 2016, then last year in 2018—every two years they meet—and in 2018 we went to San Francisco, and this year we're doing it in Dover, New Hampshire.

[0:45:41.7]

**Rien Fertel:** And do you like—I'm guessing you're meeting, you're talking, but you're on panels.

[0:45:48.1]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah.

[0:45:48.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Do you like that? Do you like being on stage and talking about what to do?

[0:45:52.6]

**Lance Nacio:** I get a little stage fright when I'm on the spotlight in front, but I like to talk with like-minded fishermen and sit and have true talks where you can actually make a difference in the future of what the fisheries should shape into. Because most of the time these fishermen are looked at as like lower-class people who just have to bring in the

product for someone else to make more money than the fishermen are making. So I like to speak as a fisherman, because it helps give us a voice and helps show fishermen that we can figure out solutions. We can do things better than we did in the past. We don't always have to do it the way our father or grandfather did it.

[0:46:44.0]

**Rien Fertel:** What do you think the previous generations would have—or do you even know old-timers who—like, what do they think about the fishermen-slash-activists? And do you consider yourself an activist? I mean, that's a whole other question.

[0:47:03.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, I feel like I speak for a lot of fishermen who don't want to get up and speak. But what's happened in this industry is because of imports, because of exploitation, a lot of these fishermen, if they weren't old enough to just kind of like finish weathering the storm and retiring from fishing, they moved into oil and gas, they moved into something where they made more money, so a lot of fishermen worked themselves out of business and did other things. It's not near as profitable as it used to be. Everybody's looking to make a buck, and when you're competing against the imports the way it is, pricing and stuff like that, and these other countries subsidized their processors there, so we don't have a fair playing field. Most fishermen, they're not just fishermen

anymore. This is their part-time job. They have a more full-time job doing something else.

[0:48:06.3]

**Rien Fertel:** So I'm guessing you have a lot of friends or people you knew who got out of the business.

[0:48:09.6]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah. You know, at one time we had 20,000 licenses in Louisiana, shrimping licenses. Now we're down to less than 5,000.

[0:48:20.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow!

[0:48:21.0]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah.

[0:48:22.4]

**Rien Fertel:** So after the crash in 2001 and the two punches that came after, Hurricane Katrina, and then the oil spill of five years after that, did you ever feel threatened enough economically to perhaps call it quits?

[0:48:42.4]

**Lance Nacio:** My business, we've been able to be diverse enough that we can kind of like pretty much weather—as long as there's shrimp out there, I think we're going to stay in the business and make a living at it. If we ever get to a point where the estuaries don't produce the shrimp they produce, then I'll *have* to figure out something else. But I saw a lot of my friends leave the industry, and that's all they've ever done for generations and they just couldn't make it anymore. They didn't want to change. They wanted to just make it on hauling shrimp into the docks and competing against imports.

[0:49:18.8]

**Rien Fertel:** What other ways have you explored diversity? We talked about reef fish, but I think I read an article about—do you also do alligator? Do you have an alligator license?

[0:49:18.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So this land where I grew up in this trapping camp, my family, they trapped there, they hunted alligators, they fished there. Whatever resources was available there, they used to make a living. And that's one of the things that—but it's also threatened the alligator situation with domestic aquaculture, so there's not as much a demand for wild alligators anymore.

[0:50:01.0]

**Rien Fertel:** And what's the difference between wild and farmed alligator?

[0:50:03.4]

**Lance Nacio:** So a farmed alligator—when farming of alligators first started, their technology and their ways of growing them wasn't as efficient as it is now. They used to make cement ponds and they raised them in there, and they had problems with the leather from those ponds. What they've done now is they have raised tanks, plastic tanks in heated buildings. They keep the temperature proper. They have gator chow by Purina, they feed them, that probably has growth hormones and stuff.

[0:50:35.2]

**Rien Fertel:** In Louisiana they did this?

[0:50:35.6]

**Lance Nacio:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:50:36.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow.

[0:50:37.6]

**Lance Nacio:** It's domestic, yes, domestic alligator production. So they can raise an alligator that's ready for market in one year, so they raise them to four to five feet in one year because they're controlling the food they're eating, they're feeding them constantly, they're keeping the temperature at the optimum where they'll grow the fastest. They're also incubating the eggs, where they're making more males. So temperature determines

whether they're male or female, so the males grow faster than the females, so they hatch more males. So they're doing all these different things to grow them faster.

[0:51:11.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And they keep them in cages, it sounds like.

[0:51:13.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. They have them in buildings, in plastic tanks.

[0:51:14.9]

**Rien Fertel:** My god.

[0:51:16.2]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah.

[0:51:20.0]

**Rien Fertel:** I've seen alligators my whole life. I'm from Lafayette. I have no clue. I knew they farmed alligators. I didn't know they do it in, like, factories.

[0:51:25.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah. I'll point you out a building on your way home. I'll tell you where it's at. There's one you passed right on the side that you never would imagine is an

alligator farm. It's a *massive* alligator farm. They raise 30,000 alligators in there every year.

[0:51:37.8]

**Rien Fertel:** I had no clue.

[0:51:40.0]

**Lance Nacio:** So they harvest the eggs out in the wild. I hear they're starting to figure out how to have them lay in captivity now, but they've always just harvested the eggs in the wild, and they helped the domestic population come back, because the Cajuns almost hunted them to extinction. They closed the alligator season for like twenty years. So when I was a little kid, there was no alligator fishing going on.

[0:52:00.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Legally.

[0:52:00.7]

**Lance Nacio:** Legally, yeah, yeah. I get seventy alligator tags now, but I haven't fished them in the last three years because the price is so depressed that we're not even fishing them.

[0:52:13.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Because of the farmed alligator.

[0:52:15.3]

**Lance Nacio:** Because of the farmed alligator and also—

[0:52:18.1]

**Rien Fertel:** It doesn't even pay to go bring your boat out.

[0:52:21.0]

**Lance Nacio:** No, no. So let me just give you a price point example. So the highest price I've ever seen in alligator was when I was fifteen years old, so that's like thirty-four years ago, we got \$72 a foot. So if an alligator measured ten feet, that was \$720 we got for that alligator. Nowadays, that same alligator is only going to bring \$100, so it's \$10 a foot around right now.

[0:52:50.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow. And how long does it take—you said it takes a year to grow these adult alligators. How long have they—

[0:52:56.2]

**Lance Nacio:** In the wild?

[0:52:56.6]

**Rien Fertel:** In the wild.

[0:52:57.1]

**Lance Nacio:** It might take ten years.

[0:52:59.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow! Oh, wow.

[0:53:01.2]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah, yeah. Because in the wild they have to fend for themselves and the conditions aren't always proper. They hibernate in the winter months. The temperature drops below seventy degrees, they don't feed, so there's all kind of—

[0:53:12.7]

**Rien Fertel:** So they're not growing, yeah.

[0:53:13.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah. So there's all kind of things that keep them from growing in the wild.

[0:53:17.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, wow.

[0:53:19.4]

**Lance Nacio:** Where in these farms—and another thing I didn't get—the point I didn't get to with these aquaculture, so you take like a Gucci and these high-end people who make watchbands and belts and wallets and purses and all that, so a farm-raised alligator that's one year old, it has the proper thickness of the leather for it to be tanned and put into something. Where you take a wild alligator that might be eight or ten feet long, the thickness of the hide has to be cut so many times to get it the right thickness to make something out of, it's not as economically viable as farm-raised alligator, to where these ones grown in tanks, they all like a cookie-cutter alligator. They all the same. You take the wild ones, the wilds ones have battle scars from fighting in the natural processes.

[0:54:08.1]

**Rien Fertel:** Like a cut around the—

[0:54:09.1]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, missing legs and they have issues when they're growing in the wild.

[0:54:14.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow. Is there anything else besides alligator and the reef fish that you've diversified beyond shrimp?

[0:54:23.3]

**Lance Nacio:** Well, what we've done is we do eight farmers markets a month and we've been doing that for like sixteen years. And the farmers market, when we do it, people want things that's convenient, so what we've done here, and it's three years, maybe four years now, we've created a processing facility where we peel and devein and pack one-pound packs of shrimp, and we also cut our fish and put it in four- to six-ounce portions for the consumer to have portion-size stuff. So that's another part of the business where we diversified. It just helps us sell our product in different forms and fashions, where it's consumer-friendly. And it's easier to sell a portion of fish than a whole fish.

[0:55:14.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And aren't you also shipping more shrimp?

[0:55:16.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, we do ship some. I'd say shipping is probably ten to fifteen percent of the business. It's not a big, big part of our business, but it's still part of it. And another thing I didn't bring up also is that by us processing these shrimp onboard, we're also able to sell into the bait market. So there's a lot of bait shrimp that gets used on these bayous here for recreational fishing, so our winter months, we sell probably, on average, 1,000 pounds a week of bait we're able to sell, and that brings at least two times what we can get dockside for it.

[0:55:57.9]

**Rien Fertel:** So as we wrap up, I want to talk about the future of sustainability. I know you told me that your son and your nephew now run the two boats.

[0:56:06.3]

**Lance Nacio:** Mm-hmm.

[0:56:06.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Well, first, how often do you get out on the boat these days?

[0:56:10.7]

**Lance Nacio:** I went shrimping once last year, and I plan on going—

[0:56:14.8]

**Rien Fertel:** [Laughter] That's great.

[0:56:15.3]

**Lance Nacio:** —more, but the job that I've created on land is so demanding, it does not slow down. So when I'm not here managing things shoreside, I'll lose out on sales, I'll lose out on deliveries. I don't have quite all the infrastructure I need to handle all aspects of it. But this coming year, I'm getting another boat. It'll be a third boat, and I plan on me and my guide that works with me here, we're going to go shrimping at the—

[0:56:49.5]

**Rien Fertel:** And it'll be a shrimping boat?

[0:56:49.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah. We're going to shrimp at opportune times for the openings, and when it's really good, we're going to go shrimping and add that to our shrimp.

[0:56:58.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Do you miss it? Do you miss being out on the—

[0:56:59.6]

**Lance Nacio:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

[0:57:00.8]

**Rien Fertel:** I mean, you can still go out on the water, I imagine.

[0:57:01.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah.

[0:57:03.1]

**Rien Fertel:** Do you have a smaller boat?

[0:57:03.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah, I have my alligator boat here and I go recreational fishing all the time. I have some crab traps out. I go run crab traps, so I get a little bit of that every now and then.

[0:57:15.3]

**Rien Fertel:** Okay. So how do you—I know you're speaking, you're talking to other fishermen, you're trying to, like, change their minds, but with your son and your nephew, what are you trying to pass along? Like, how are you—

[0:57:33.1]

**Lance Nacio:** Well, what I'm trying to do is take all the knowledge that I've had over the time and forging a path where they can just pick up where I leave off and have it a lot easier than I did. A lot of the things I've done, I had to learn through trial and error.

Couple of other points I want to get across to you on this, is one thing we've done recently with Sea Grant is we traveled to North Dakota and we went looking at a potato grader that we're putting on my shrimp boat to grade shrimp.

[0:58:07.4]

**Rien Fertel:** How does that work?

[0:58:08.4]

**Lance Nacio:** So it's just a table with spacing that has a roller-type system, and shrimp fall in and they fall through in there properly graded. They use it in the crawfish industry.

[0:58:17.8]

**Rien Fertel:** Yeah, yeah, I actually saw it at an oyster farm, too, recently.

[0:58:19.9]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, we're putting one of those on the back deck of the shrimp boat.

[0:58:23.6]

**Rien Fertel:** And grade just different size shrimp fall in different boxes.

[0:58:26.0]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, because we're catching a wild species that's born at different times, and our biggest challenge is having uniformity in grading. We're hoping that this grader will solve those problems for us.

Another thing that I was able to do, and I didn't bring this up to you earlier, and I don't know how my name got put on there, but I hardly ever turn anything down when I get asked to do something, but in 2016, I was asked by the United Nations to go to this thing in Cancun called COP13. I don't know if you're familiar with it.

[0:59:03.3]

**Rien Fertel:** No.

[0:59:04.1]

**Lance Nacio:** It's a gathering of all these different delegates from the world, and I went and I talked to a group, and it was about the business plan, like how I created this business. And they were looking to replicate this with some fishermen who were struggling in the Baja, Mexico, because they lost their traditional fishing gear and they had to try and develop a business, and that's why I was asked to go talk there.

[0:59:32.6]

**Rien Fertel:** Wow. So, I mean, do you have hope for— [Laughter]

[0:59:40.1]

**Lance Nacio:** Yeah, as long as the resources will be there, I have hope. I think better management practices that we could great better shrimp, where we don't harvest the shrimp too young. We need to harvest shrimp that is affordable for us to make a sustainable living, and that's what I keep pushing for, is better management and not so much exploiting it for certain individuals. We need to make it where we can have a sustainable future in fisheries where people can make a decent living at it.

[1:00:19.8]

**Rien Fertel:** And what message do you try to get across to consumers? Because most of the people in this world are consumers rather than fishers. So what do you try to tell us?

[1:00:30.9]

**Lance Nacio:** The message I like to get across is, “know where your food is from.” Slow Food’s motto is “good, clean, and fair,” and that’s how everyone wants to be treated. If you’re a food producer, you want to be treated fair. You want to be put on a level playing field. And that’s the message I always try to get out there, is ask where your food is coming from, because not all food is equal.

[1:00:54.7]

**Rien Fertel:** Just one or two more questions, but looking back, could you pinpoint—the person you are now, right? So trying to change people’s minds and changing the way we eat and you are—I mean, you’re well known in the Louisiana fishing industry for sure, but also just in what we think of the larger food world along the Gulf. Looking back to, like, when you were a teenager, could you imagine yourself becoming the man you are?

[1:01:28.0]

**Lance Nacio:** No, no.

[1:01:29.3]

**Rien Fertel:** And can you pinpoint, like, when that happened, like when it was like, “I have to change, or things have to change”?

[1:01:38.8]

**Lance Nacio:** Probably around 2001, because I was fully vested in the fisheries and it was like, “If I’m going to make a living, I’m not going to do it like this. I’m not going to just constantly struggle to make a living.” And we do have struggles. It’s just a different type of struggle we have. But I wanted it to where I can make a living and put my kids through college, and I didn’t want to just get by.

[1:02:07.8]

**Rien Fertel:** So what do you think the teenage you going out on the shrimping boat for the first time would think of the you in your forties?

[1:02:13.9]

**Lance Nacio:** I mean, I’d be proud that I’m out there trying to make a difference, but back when I was a kid I never imagined that it would have to come to this.

[1:02:25.9]

**Rien Fertel:** Well, I think that’s a good place to end. Is there anything else that we didn’t cover? We covered a lot. [Laughter]

[1:02:33.9]

**Lance Nacio:** I’m going to show you these pictures. I want you to see how my family lived, because I have some black-and-whites from the [19]40s and stuff.

[1:02:40.0]

**Rien Fertel:** Oh, good. Good, good, good.

[1:02:42.2]

**Lance Nacio:** It'll give you an eye-opening experience.

[End of interview]