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Terry Howard (TH): Today is March 7th, 2019. I'm here on Chamberlain Boulevard at my home, with Shayne Revels. Shayne is 31 years old, and he is a commercial kingfisherman. He's a recreational sail fisherman and marlin fisherman. He has several areas of the fishery that he's involved in, mostly on the Atlantic Ocean, and this will be his story. Shayne, please state your full name.

Shayne Revels (SR): Shayne Martin Revels.

TH: Okay. Do I have your permission to use this interview for publications, books, articles, et cetera?

SR: Yes.

TH: Do I have your permission to archive this interview at the University of South Florida Tampa Library Digital Archives?

SR: Yes.

TH: Okay. When and where were you born?

SR: October 6th, 1987, in Vero Beach, Florida.

TH: Okay. Please give a brief biography of yourself and include your first experiences boating, fishing, and commercial or charter fishing. How did you end up where you are today? This is your biography.

SR: I grew up just recreational fishing with my family, dad and uncles, mostly bottom fishing out of Fort Pierce.¹

TH: Were your dad and uncles commercial fishermen?

SR: I have one uncle that is a commercial fisherman still today, but for the most part, they're all just recreational.

TH: That would be Lester Revels?

SR: Lester and Kenny.

TH: Kenny Revels. Okay. And your father mostly did recreational fishing?

SR: Yeah, he was not much into it like myself and his brothers.

TH: How did you evolve into making a living?

SR: My first memory of commercial fishing was with Lester. I went kingfishing with him, I don't recall how old I was—10 years old maybe, 9 or 10 years old. And then from there, just a little here and there throughout high school, and once I got out of high school, I started net fishing with Junior Harden's grandson, John Sickle. And that's where it started.

TH: What kind of net fishing—what were you targeting?

SR: Gillnetting Spanish mackerel and cast-netting Spanish mackerel and red mullet.²

¹ Bottom fishing refers to catching various fish commonly found near the sea floor.

² Gill nets are composed of vertical panels of netting that hang from a line. Cast nets, also known as throw nets, are circular nets with small weights distributed around the edges.

TH: Okay, and then somehow—then you started fishing with Lester? Kingfishing after that?

SR: Nope, I only went fishing with Lester one time.

TH: Okay. What did you like about fishing?

SR: I don't know, it's just natural, I guess. The water, surfing, fishing, diving, it's all I wanted to do.

TH: You were also a surfer?

SR: Yep, still do.

TH: You still surf and dive and shoot fish?

SR: Yep, I've done some commercial scuba diving for lobsters and groupers and stuff like that.

TH: Out of?

SR: Fort Pierce.

TH: Okay. Do you need a commercial permit?

SR: Yeah. I just go—have gone with the guys who have the permits just as a deckhand and a helper.

TH: Okay. Can you name some of the people you went with?

SR: Vince Randolph, mostly.

TH: Okay. So how did you evolve into kingfish and sailfish?

SR: When I started kingfishing, I don't know if you remember Lenny Schelin that passed away last year—

TH: Yes, I know Lenny.

SR: He was captaining the boat that I have now, the *Seaweed*, and he moved on to longlining with Joe on the *Gale Mist*, and he asked me if I wanted to start running the *Seaweed* for the guy that owned it.

TH: Who owned it?

SR: John Langfitt.

TH: You started kingfishing that boat?

SR: That's where I started.

TH: How did that evolve into sailfishing?

SR: I was on the sport boats probably before I started kingfishing, off and on, just doing freelancing, traveling, for trips here and there with people as a mate.³

TH: For who?

SR: Mike Brady on the *Cowpoke*, Taylor Hansen, Glenn Cameron a little bit. Just local Fort Pierce guys, mostly.

TH: So when you mated for these fellows, you worked the cockpit?

SR: Yes.

³ A mate on a fishing boat supervises the crew members and assumes command of the ship if the ship's master becomes ill or incapacitated.

TH: Can you describe what you do?

SR: Your job down there is obviously all the tackle and all the bait.

TH: What about all the tackle and all the bait?

SR: Tying and crimping a lot of hooks, mostly circle-hook fishing, because they are mostly just billfish.⁴ Whether it's here, it's sailfishing, or the Bahamas for blue marlins.

TH: How big of hooks and circle hooks?

SR: Pretty small. 7/0 to 8/0, 9/0.

TH: And why circle hooks?

SR: Easier on the fish, you know, you don't hurt the fish.

TH: Can you explain how and why?

SR: The idea with the circle hook is to hook them in the mouth rather than going down their throat and destroying them, killing them.

TH: They don't swallow the hooks as readily.

SR: Correct.

TH: All right. So you worked these cockpits with these different captains. You worked for tips, or did they pay?

⁴ According to the Billfish Foundation, "The term 'billfish' refers to various predatory fish species typically belonging to the taxonomical family *Istiophoridae*. Their biological characteristics include a spear-like rostrum or 'bill,' which is used for slashing at and stunning prey." Examples include marlin, sailfish, and swordfish.

SR: You normally get a daily rate, and if you're doing a charter, sometimes you get a tip at the end of the day, if you do a good job.

TH: And doing that, you learn how to manage the whole cockpit of the boat?

SR: Yes, a lot of it is just staying organized and staying ahead as far as having enough bait rigged and enough tackle built.

TH: When you say rigging bait, can you describe what you do there? I assume you're talking about dredges?⁵

SR: For the dredges, yeah, for your teasers—mostly mullet.

TH: Well, describe a teaser and describe a dredge.

SR: A dredge is just an aluminum—six arms, just like we pull for the rigs for kingfishing. Instead of four arms, it's six arms.

TH: How big are they?

SR: I'd say two-and-a-half to three feet in diameter, with six arms and two baits per arm, so that's 12, and we normally stack two to three behind each other.

TH: So behind one another, not—

SR: Not beside, just in line.

TH: So just a line of them.

SR: Right. And it looks like one big ball of bait.

⁵ A dredge is a type of fishing tool used to attract fish that mimics a school of bait fish behind the boat.

TH: So there's like 12 on each dredge, and maybe three or four dredges in a line.

SR: Yeah, normally two to three.

TH: Two to three dredges in a line and it looks like a line, narrow—

SR: Yep, a big ball of bait.

TH: Ball of bait going through the water.

SR: Yep.

TH: Now, describe what you—in the old days they used to use plastic fish, or rubber fish, or artificial fish for the dredges. So can you describe how you rig the mullet—I assume it's mullet—for the dredges.

SR: Well, first you catch the mullet, or sometimes you catch them and cut them yourself, “cutting them” meaning you debone them, take their spine out, and you have to brine them in salt to make them nice and hearty and last all day. To rig them, you put a weight under their chin—three ounces is usually what we use—on a pin rig, we call it a pin rig. It's just a metal—a piece of metal wire that holds the lead in their chin, and then you just basically wrap around that with floss to hold the weight to their chin.

TH: Dental floss?

SR: Pretty heavy dental floss.

TH: Okay. A commercial—

SR: It's a product just for that.

TH: Okay.

SR: It's pretty hefty.

TH: And by cutting the bone out, it doesn't have—you still have the tail on them?

SR: Still have the tail, and taking the spine out, it just gives it the action of what a real fish is swimming like.

TH: So it swims, in other words. Okay. Why are dredges so important?

SR: It's just a teaser, it's just a big attractant—it looks like a big ball of bait swimming through the water to get their attention.

TH: Now, what do you troll to catch the sailfish on your hooks?

SR: Ballyhoos.⁶

TH: You use ballyhoo, and you put those out next to the—

SR: We normally fish four at a time, four hooks in the water.

TH: Four poles?

SR: Yep. And you have one right behind the dredge, so it looks like a straggler of the school of bait.

TH: Okay. And the dredge will be right in the center of the stern?

SR: No. Off to the sides outside of your prop wash, off the outriggers.⁷

TH: Okay, so you have two sets of dredges on the outside corners of the boat.

SR: Correct.

⁶ Ballyhoo is a fish typically used for trolling purposes by saltwater fishermen. Its aerodynamic body can reach high speeds.

⁷ Prop wash refers to a current of water created by the action of a propeller.

TH: And then outside of that and behind the dredges, you have your baits. You have any inside?

SR: Nope. Everything's right outside the prop.

TH: So you have two baits outside?

SR: Two on your outriggers and two right off the stern.

TH: Okay. And your target is sailfish?

SR: Sailfish.

TH: Do you use the same setup for marlin?

SR: Yeah. For marlin fishing, it's basically the same setup, just a little bigger. The mullets are a little bigger, the ballyhoos are a little bigger, the tackle's a little bigger. The hooks are a little bigger. Leaders are a little heavier, and it's basically the same concept.

TH: Interesting. Now do you—you say bigger mullet for the dredges, like what size mullet are you talking about for the sailfish and for the marlin dredges?

SR: For the sailfish, you would use the smaller ones. I would say, six to eight inches, six to nine inches, and for the blue marlins, I'd say 10 to 12. The bigger silver mullets.

TH: You never use black mullet?

SR: Not normally.

TH: Unless you can't get any silvers.

SR: Correct.

TH: Okay. So that's basically how you set up for sailfishing and marlin—that's a lot of work to get ready for a trip.

SR: Yes.

TH: How long does it take you to prepare for, say you're going out for—you're fishing in a tournament. You get all the bait ahead of time?

SR: You want your baits fresh as possible each day if you're fishing in a tournament. So you pretty much have to do everything every day, all over again.

TH: So how late at night are you up in a tournament before the next day?

SR: I try to get it done early as possible.

TH: But what time do you get to bed, is what I'm saying. Do you get to sleep?

SR: Oh yeah, I make sure.

TH: Okay. All right. So you're responsible for—is there one mate that's in charge of the whole cockpit usually, or—

SR: For fun fishing, not non-tournament fishing normally, one mate is fine. That's all you need to make it through. But during the tournaments you can—some guys will have two to three mates just to—

TH: Is one mate in charge of everything?

SR: I think everyone just works together and makes sure it gets done right.

TH: Okay. And you run a boat yourself now.

SR: Correct.

TH: So you captain your own?

SR: Yes.

TH: And what boat is that?

SR: It's called the *Sara Mar*. It's here at Pelican Yacht Club in Fort Pierce, but the owner is from Jacksonville. That's where he lives.

TH: Can you describe the boat?

SR: It's a 65[-foot] Hatteras, enclosed bridge.

TH: And you use that same boat—they go to the Bahamas for marlin fishing?

SR: Yep.

TH: Does he fish just tournaments, or—

SR: No, that guy that I work for, he's not much into the tournaments. We've done a couple of blue marlin tournaments in the Bahamas, but for the most part we're just fun fishing with his family and kids and friends, and that's about it.

TH: So he doesn't really charter the boat.

SR: No. Just personal.

TH: Personal. Okay. Tell me about kingfishing. How do you kingfish? Tell me about your boat first of all. The *Seaweed*?

SR: Yep. *Seaweed*. It's a 34-foot Webbers Cove, old lobster boat from Maine. It's slow, very slow, but it's very good on fuel, and that's what saves me.

TH: What kind of engine? What's the power?

SR: 210 Cummins.

TH: Okay, 210 horsepower.

SR: Two-hundred-ten horsepower. When I got on the boat, the motor was basically brand new. I've put all the hours on it, and I'm up to about 4,000 on it now.

TH: Okay. Describe how you kingfish.

SR: First, these days I won't even leave the dock without autopilot anymore, because that's like having another hand on the boat on the way out. You get to cut all your bait, build your tackle, and just get all your stuff set up on the way out.

TH: Build your tackle—how do you set up your tackle for kingfishing?

SR: I normally do two planers, two paravanes, with however much length of cable I feel I need that day.⁸ Sometimes it may be a 15-footer, a 15-foot cable, and a 30-foot cable, sometimes a 30-foot cable and a 50-foot cable, and behind the planer is your mono, which—

TH: Monofilament.

SR: Yep.

TH: What pound test?

SR: I use straight 200. Just one shot.

TH: All the time?

SR: All the time, at least here at home. Some guys will get fancy and use the fluorocarbon, and I refrain from doing that.

TH: Hm. I use 130-pound. That's all.

⁸ Planers are devices designed to help fishermen cover more area when trolling for fish. A paravane is a device towed behind a boat with a cable attached to it.

SR: I have used the 130, but I don't ever get into the fluorocarbon.

TH: I don't either. Interesting. Well, you use 200-pound test, so you can catch pretty good-sized fish with that.

SR: Yes.

TH: Explain—you don't use fishing poles for kingfishing.

SR: Correct. It's all hand line. You just set your two planers down, and they're well below the surface, and they're hooked to a chain and rope on the end of your outrigger, and when you see that chain come up, that's when you know.

TH: That's when you know a fish is on. Now, how many feet of line do you use behind the paravane?

SR: I do about 50 or 60 feet.

TH: Okay. And how big are your paravanes?

SR: I use the 16 ounce. Some people use bigger ones, the 24s and 32s, but I stick to the 16.

TH: Okay, and only 60, how many, 50 feet, 60 feet behind it?

SR: Fifty, 60 feet.

TH: Huh. And then you have two hooks? Or spoons?

SR: Well, ideally, we all like to use spoons because it's no bait and it's a lot faster.

TH: What size spoon? What kind of spoon?

SR: I use drone, three-and-a-halves, mostly.

TH: That's all I use. Nobody cares about me. Interesting. So you also say that sometimes you troll rigs, which are small dredges.

SR: Yeah, it's just a miniature dredge, in my opinion. Instead of six arms, it has four arms, and that's no bait either, that's all artificial rubber worms on it.

TH: Tubes, they call them. Rubber worms with hooks in them.

SR: That's it.

TH: And on the dredge with four arms, you just use one hook on each arm?

SR: Correct.

TH: Have you ever used spoons on the dredges?

SR: I have not tried that. I know some people that do that, but I have not done that.

TH: Okay. That's for kingfishing. What do you like best about kingfishing?

SR: Freedom.

TH: Can you elaborate?

SR: If I wake up today and say I don't want to go, nobody's going to fire me.

TH: Exactly. When you are fishing, would do you like best about kingfishing?

SR: Catching. Obviously, that's the best part of it, any kind of fishing gets boring when you're not catching anything, but for me hand-lining and catching kingfish—that's about as good as it gets, when you're actually catching them.

TH: Okay. You go from line to line.

SR: Yep.

TH: You haven't even talked about the bug reel.

SR: Yeah.

TH: There's a third line that you use fishing, sometimes.

SR: Yeah, the bug reel, that's—some people don't try to use the bug reel. I love it. Especially here at home. In the Gulf, not—that thing is more dangerous than it is useful.

TH: Why?

SR: Bigger fish.

TH: Okay. You haven't talked about the Gulf yet, but now, describe the bug line.

SR: It's just number-nine wire, it's electric reel, for most of us mounted to the roof, and it's pretty fast and powerful, and it will hurt you.

TH: If you—now, it has a switch that you operate. Different people have different switches. Do you have one you operate with your knee?

SR: I used to have one that I operated with my knee, and that almost got ahold of me.

TH: What you're talking about is when you pull the reel in, it's an electric reel, it's on, and at the end of it you've got hooks, your hook. It's either a float line, which is trolling a bait, or it's a feather, which is a—

SR: Just a single hook with whatever color hair you choose to put on it.

TH: And if the reel sticks and that's coming into the boat, that's—

SR: Get out of the way.

TH: That's where the danger comes into play. So now do you have a reel with a switch, with a hand switch?

SR: I have my switch on the roof, just a piece of cable that I pull, just a momentary switch—pull the cable, and let it go when you want to stop.

TH: I think I had the same thing when I used monofilament. Very good. Now how much—you say number-nine wire, how much wire do you put out? I know the wire comes in rolls and each turn is like three feet.

SR: Right. So when I start out in the beginning of the day—when I was taught, I think it was 72 or 74 turns is what you normally want to start with, so that's about what I put on at the beginning of the day if I'm respooling it.

TH: And then as it gets kinked at the end, you cut off some.

SR: Yeah. Normally, as you're catching fish and wrapping your hands around it, bringing them into the box and hitting the dehooker, the wire will start getting "slinkied" and kinked up, and I try to straighten it out the best I can with my fingers until it gets too bad, and then you just cut it back a little and retie.

TH: Okay. So if you're fishing the bug reel, do you also fish the spoons or the paravanes?

SR: Yes. I can—for me, I'll do the bug reel and two planers, you know, one off the center of the stern, and one on the outside outrigger, which would be on the portside.

TH: And that leaves the inside—

SR: Clear.

TH: Clear to pull the fish in on the bug reel.

SR: Right.

TH: Very good. So you've described sailfish. You've kind of described marlin fishing. Do you have a favorite of all three of these?

SR: Kingfishing, hands down.

TH: You like kingfishing the best. Okay. Talk to me a little about—before we leave these types of fishing—fishing in Louisiana and the Gulf of Mexico. Can you describe how—you said you don't even use the bug over there. You just use mostly spoons, I assume?

SR: I would love to just use spoons, but sometimes it becomes a lot of bait. A lot of bait-cutting every day, and it's a lot of work over there, it's hot, it's the middle of the summer, and everything about fishing in the Gulf is against you.

TH: Elaborate.

SR: There's just a lot going on over there with the oil rigs, so there's a lot of traffic of the big crew boats and supply boats, all over the place, hundred-foot shrimp boats going all over. They're driving right through where you're fishing. Anchoring—sometimes you have to anchor out there in the middle of all that and just pray to God you don't get run over. And then just going up the Mississippi River is quite a task in itself, just going from the Gulf up the river, bucking the tide.

TH: How far up do you go to where you tie your boat up or where you unload your fish?

SR: I'd say it's probably 15 miles, 15, 18 miles, something like that. So that's four or five hours right there.

TH: So when you make a fishing trip, in Louisiana, you start 15 miles up the Mississippi and head down the Mississippi out the mouth of the Mississippi, and how far out into the Gulf?

SR: Sometimes it may be two miles, and sometimes it may be a hundred miles before you get a bite. I've seen both ends of it.

TH: How do you—do you follow the other boats? Word of mouth? The other captains? How do you determine which direction to go?

SR: You try to communicate with the other guys over there, but it's not like fishing here at home where everyone ends up at the same place. You kind of have to figure it out on your own more over there. That place will test you more mentally than physically, in my opinion.

TH: They don't have a sea breeze every afternoon like we have here?

SR: During the summer, the day is pretty flat and hot, very hot. The water's 90-something degrees, so it's just another job taking care of your fish the best you can. You burn through a lot of ice.

TH: So on a trip, how long's a trip?

SR: I'll normally come in on the end of the third day, just because of the ice situation.

TH: And how many pounds do you generally have on a trip?

SR: Everyone always asks me this question, and I've had trips where I've gone and caught two fish or no fish, and I've had trips where you catch as much as your boat can hold in a day two. So it's always different.

TH: I mean, like thousands, how many thousands of pounds? A thousand or two?

SR: The limit's 3,000. I've never put 3,000 on my boat. I've done as much as 25 hundred just because my boat is a little smaller than a lot of the boats there, and my boxes are a little smaller, but for me to catch 25 hundred, that's plenty for me.

TH: I got you. And you fish by yourself?

SR: Yes.

TH: Now, do you fish at Destin and Panama City and that area much?

SR: I spent a whole summer in Destin my second year I kingfished, and it was a struggle in the summertime. It was not very good fishing. The fishing gets better there later in the year, October, November, that's when fishing gets really good in the Panhandle.

TH: Okay. Let's go back to Fort Pierce. What do you like about Fort Pierce, and what's the fishing here at home? I know just the other day you caught fish within a mile of the inlet, I think.

SR: Yeah, I like going home at the end of the day.

TH: Sleeping in your own bed.

SR: Being at home.

TH: Yeah. Now, are you still living in Vero Beach?

SR: No, I live in Fort Pierce. White City.

TH: White City. Okay. So fishing out of Fort Pierce, what's the farthest you usually travel unless you go to fish out of Sebastian or Jupiter?

SR: If I have to go any further than what we normally fish, northeast grounds, then I'd probably just go ahead and go into Sebastian and get a spot there and stay there.

TH: Northeast grounds out of the Fort Pierce inlet is approximately—

SR: Fourteen miles, 15 miles max. Somewhere in there.

TH: And I guess east of the buoy, which would be southeast, about how far is that?

SR: To the south of Fort Pierce where we fish?

TH: Yes.

SR: Ten or 11 miles. Somewhere in there.

TH: Sounds about right. Okay. And in Fort Pierce, it's usually not flat calm. How high of seas do you fish in?

SR: I try not go unless it says five knots of wind.

TH: You have gone out in more?

SR: Yes. And thankfully I have a boat that's built for that kind of stuff.

TH: It's seaworthy.

SR: Very.

TH: Okay. So you target—what kind of fish do you target? You target kingfish, and you're hired full time to maintain—what's the name of the boat again?

SR: *Sara Mar*.

TH: Sara, S-a-r-a—

SR: M-a-r.

TH: So you're on call for the *Sara Mar*. If the captain calls or the owner calls you, you go get the boat ready for whatever trip he wants to do.

SR: When he calls, I drop everything.

TH: Tie up your kingfish boat.

SR: Yep.

TH: Okay, type of bycatch. Now, both on the sailfishing trips, on the marlin trips, and—let's start with kingfishing. What's the bycatch? Bycatch being other fish you catch when you're targeting kingfish. The other fish that sometimes get on your line.

SR: Barracudas, which are not worth a whole lot to us. Some people keep them, and we are allowed to sell them. I normally just throw them back. Cobia, here and there, which is nice, you can either take it home for dinner or we can sell those as well, and they pay pretty good. Mahi here and there, or wahoo, or a blackfin tuna.

TH: Okay. Those are the main ones. How about the junk fish?

SR: Lizard fish.

TH: Lizard fish I was thinking of, and bonito.

SR: Bonitos, which we like those too, for bait, or we can sell them.

TH: So how do you use bonito for bait?

SR: You basically fillet it like you would if you were going to eat it, and then just take it and basically strip most of the meat off to where it's a quarter-inch thick or somewhere in there, and you just cut strips out of it.

TH: Strips—it looks like a fish shape?

SR: Yeah. Long, thin, less than an inch wide.

TH: Strip bait. Okay. And they like that about as well as mullet?

SR: Yes, I think they do.

TH: I kind of skipped over that. So mullet, bonito, and there's a third—

SR: Pogies.

TH: Pogies, which are menhadens, not to be confused with yellowtail.⁹ Okay. Those are the main three baits you use for kingfishing and sometimes for—now what are the bycatches when you're sailfishing?

SR: About the same. Mahis, wahoo, blackfins, barracuda, bonitos—

TH: Kingfish.

SR: Kingfish. But you normally don't even get those, because they just bite your mono.

⁹ Menhaden (*Brevoortia tyrannus*) belong to the herring family.

TH: Okay. Let's see. Procedures, methods, involvement, types of fishing, we've covered that. How's fishing changed during your time on the water? What are the biggest changes in all three types of fishing?

SR: For the kingfishing, from when I started—I think this is nine or 10 years for me—I think the fishing is just as good as when I started. I mean, obviously we go through times where we don't catch anything, and you start to rethink what you're doing, and then you get on a roll and start catching them, and it's the best thing ever.

TH: Okay. So you started—let's go back to Fort Pierce. We are a different EEZ zone, economic—I'm not sure what the acronym means, but we're in a different zone than in Louisiana, and there's different catch limits in every zone around the East Coast and the Gulf Coast of the United States.¹⁰ So in our zone here off of Fort Pierce, how many fish can you catch?

SR: Depending on the time of year and our quota, it's either 50 fish or 75 fish.

TH: Okay. I don't know if you remember the day when you could catch as many fish as you could.

SR: I don't think I was—

TH: Okay, well how do you like the 50 fish and 75 fish?

SR: I think they should leave it the way it is. I've heard people talking the last couple of years about they're going to give us a poundage limit instead of a number of fish, and I think they should leave it the way it is.

TH: Why?

SR: What do they say? "If it ain't broke don't fix it." I think it's just fine. I think there's a lot of people these days, and that's to me one of the issues, is there's a lot of people—a lot of people that want to be out there kingfishing to make a paycheck.

TH: There's limited entry into the business now, though. Not everybody—you can't get a license unless somebody's selling their license. Is that correct?

SR: Correct. And I wish they would take away more of these permits from the guys that don't use them.

¹⁰ EEZ (exclusive economic zone) refers to a state's hold over a body of water and marine resources.

TH: Okay. So with 50 and 75 head—limit of 50 to 75 head, as opposed to like 3,000 pounds in the Gulf of Mexico, off Louisiana, how does that affect the price here, in Fort Pierce?

SR: I think it—when we're catching fish in Louisiana and they're catching fish here at home, I still don't think it kills the price. I think it keeps it around \$2 a pound, which is good, in my opinion. I always tell myself \$2, when I add up how much I just caught, I just say, "Okay, if I get \$2, that's great. Anything more is a bonus."

TH: Good. I guess what I'm looking for, or what I'm fishing for, is when you only have—when all the boats are stopped at 50 head of fish or at 75 head of fish, not as many fish are caught, and the price stays a little bit—

SR: A little more stable.

TH: Yeah, and a little higher.

SR: Right. And I'd rather not have to catch and kill more fish to make the same amount of money.

TH: Exactly. I agree, wholeheartedly. Okay. Other changes on the water during your time, 10 years of fishing, what other changes you've noticed? You think the fishing has stayed about the same?

SR: I do.

TH: Okay. Other changes?

SR: The thing I'm noticing now is just more people. Why that is, I'm not sure, but it seems to just be more and more people every year.

TH: Okay. It seems that way, but I don't know.

SR: I don't know—I mean, I know there's only a certain number of permits and there's no more that are going to be given out, but somehow it seems that there's more and more people all the time.

TH: What I'm noticing is that on the East Coast, the fishermen in Sebastian, the Jupiter, Fort Pierce, and Cape Canaveral fishermen all converge on the same spot, and then there's—the East Coast fishermen seem to migrate up and down the coast, wherever the bite is. That's where it seems like a lot of boats out there, if the fish show up, it seems like all the boats converge on that one little area.

SR: Yeah. It gets pretty congested. Then people get aggravated, and I understand why.

TH: So when you're fishing a group of fish, the standard method in the Fort Pierce area is you get a bite, and you put your boat in a circle, and that's your spot.

SR: That's your spot.

TH: And how big a circle do you claim usually?

SR: It all depends [on] how many boats and how close together everyone is. You know, if everyone's close together where you're almost touching outriggers, you have to drive it in a pretty tight circle, and you better drive pretty well or there's gonna be some angry people and stuff may get torn up.

TH: Okay. Do you ever have recreational boats come into your circles?

SR: Yes. Absolutely.

TH: Is that a problem?

SR: It can be. I've gotten a little aggravated a few times.

TH: Okay. So the style of fishing—so you might see a whole host of boats, maybe 50 or a hundred boats circling in an area where fish are biting and they each have their own space.

SR: Everyone claims their own spot.

TH: Okay. Fishing methods changed during your time on the water in general for you personally. How has anything changed, thinking about technology?

SR: Electronics are pretty impressive. The bottom machines, the autopilots, stuff like that, is pretty impressive and makes life a lot easier out there.

TH: Everybody's an expert now because of the electronics?

SR: Electronics and social media. Everyone thinks they're an expert.

TH: Now social media, talk to me about that. You mentioned that early on.

SR: I think that's a lot of the issue, why there are so many people out there.

TH: How so?

SR: Just the pictures and everyone giving a daily report on what's going on in the ocean. So if someone catches something, they feel like they have to put it on the internet, and the next day there's a hundred boats.

TH: Everybody knows.

SR: Everybody knows.

TH: You can't sneak in with a load of fish and not tell anybody.

SR: Correct.

TH: And just the kingfish network itself—

SR: That's bad enough.

TH: Everybody knows. Have larger commercial corporations or operations impacted your fishery? I guess you don't bottom fish much. You have a grouper/snapper license?

SR: No.

TH: So [have] any large commercial corporations affected your fishing?

SR: Not that I can see, unless I've missed something that I don't know about. But I don't think so.

TH: Okay. Major weather occurrences you've experienced on the water. Storms, lightning, high winds, seas, waterspouts—let's start with any times where you were scared.

SR: Mostly on the Gulf, but I think I've been pretty fortunate as far as the weather thing goes, but I have had a few where I've been in the middle of the Gulf traveling and on each side of you there's lightning popping and thunder, and there's nowhere you can go when you're going seven knots. Can't run from it.

TH: What's your cruising speed?

SR: Seven, seven and a half.

TH: Okay, so it is slow. With a 200-horsepower Cummins, it's—

SR: Mm hm.

TH: That gets your attention, I guess.

SR: Yeah. At that point, you just roll the dice and it is what is.

TH: Do you have any storms in particular that come to mind?

SR: Just this past year, in 2018, I left Louisiana with a couple of other boats to bring the boat back home. The very first day I left Louisiana to head towards the Panhandle, it got pretty ugly, of course, right about at dark. There was—just coming over the bow, over the windshield, breaking stuff. Windows—not broken, but busted loose, leaking in the cabin. Broke the antenna for the VHF. Just not a very fun ride.

TH: So the waves were so large and the seas were so—

SR: Close together.

TH: Close together. That's when it's really nasty. When the seas are close together, and it's just one pounder—

SR: One after another.

TH: They're just pounding your boat for all it's worth, and you just hope everything—

SR: Yep. You just hold on.

TH: Okay. Ever been caught in a waterspout?

SR: No, I've seen a handful in the distance, but I've never been real close to one.

TH: Okay. Memorable big fish and big catch stories. Now, you have some pictures. Think back through those pictures that you're sending me.

SR: A handful of big blue marlins. One in particular was in Cat Island in the Bahamas on the *Sara Mar*, and we were actually fishing a tournament this day. We did not catch a fish during the tournament hours, and they called lines out at 3:30 in the afternoon. But when they called lines out at 3:30, I called the marina and said, "I can't come in yet because the tide is low, and that boat I run draws a lot of water."

So I told her, "My lines are out of the water, but I can't come in yet. I'm just letting you know." And about the time I told her that, it was 3:33 or 3:34, we hooked a fish. And of course it didn't count for the tournament, but we ended up catching it, and it was probably a seven- or eight-hundred pounder, and that was the biggest one I've ever seen.

TH: How long did you fight it?

SR: I'd say an hour and a half. I didn't do anything. I just drove.

TH: You were driving the boat, you had a mate.

SR: Yep.

TH: Who was on the pole?

SR: One of the owner's good buddies, older guy, probably in his 60s.

TH: And it took over an hour? Did the fish sound?¹¹ What do they do when you get a big marlin?

SR: It stripped every bit of line off the reel, and I told the mate to go ahead and push the drag all the way up.

TH: To keep from losing—how heavy line?

SR: Fifty pound.

TH: Oh my goodness. So he—how much line did you have on a reel like that?

SR: I'm not sure exactly how much it holds, but it was a lot, and it took it down to the very end.

TH: And then you just kept backing down on it?

SR: Just left it in reverse and told him you better reel as fast as you can.

TH: You finally got it up to the back of the boat. Was it worn out?

SR: It was still pretty hot.

TH: So how do you wear a fish like that out?

SR: It depends how hard they fight, how hard they're jumping, and stuff like that. That one still had plenty of life in it when we got it to the boat, and it didn't last long when we got it next to the boat.

TH: What do you mean it didn't last long?

SR: The mate—

¹¹ When a fish "sounds," it dives deep while hooked and is typically pulled up dead.

TH: When you say it didn't last long—

SR: Of us holding it, onto it next to the boat.

TH: Was that the picture of you?

SR: That's a different one. I don't have any good pictures of the big one.

TH: This particular one.

SR: Yes, because it didn't last long. It didn't hang out long enough for us to get any good shots.

TH: It broke the line right there—

SR: It broke the line right at the corner of the boat. And I actually had to go down there and leader that fish. I had to wrap my hands around the line because the mate that was there, he didn't have much experience with it, and he didn't want anything to do with one that big, so I had to do that, which was pretty fun.

TH: Cool. Is that your biggest—how about any contest winners? From the blue marlin?

SR: No, we had one die on us, unfortunately, and we brought that in to the marina just to give it away to the locals, and we hung it up with the crane and got pictures, like a 430-something pounder, but no winners or nothing like that, really.

TH: When you say they die on you, they just fight until they just die?

SR: Yeah, and that one—the line got wrapped around his tail, so—

TH: He drowned.

SR: He drowned.

TH: Now when they wrap around the tail, they can't—

SR: They can't swim, and when they can't swim, they can't breathe.

TH: Got you. Okay. Big kingfish catches? Memorable kingfish catches?

SR: Two thousand eighteen in Louisiana was my biggest catches I've had, mostly because of the modifications to the boat and a bigger fish box allowed me to do that.

TH: How many pounds?

SR: My biggest was 25 hundred.

TH: That's a lot of fish. I don't think I've ever had anything like that. Any rescues, or sinkings, or near sinkings, inlet tragedies?

SR: Same year, 2018, in Louisiana, one of the other kingfishermen, he's actually from Naples, west coast [of Florida], fishing out of the same marina as us. He was coming up the Mississippi in the dark, and he went head on with a big barge, and he's lucky to be alive, in my opinion. I got to witness that in front of my face, not the actual crash, but we all hopped in our boats and ran down the river to rescue him, basically. His whole wheelhouse was pinned down on him, and he couldn't move, and the boat was sinking pretty fast.

TH: The barge just ran right over him?

SR: Yeah, the barge had no idea they even hit him. They just kept going and just kept pushing him down.

TH: And his boat rolled underneath the barge?

SR: It was pinned underneath the bow of the barge, and it kept just getting pushed down.

TH: Did they get the barge to finally stop?

SR: Luckily, the guy, the kingfisherman, was able to get his mic on his radio, and there was another kingfisherman a little ways behind him, and thankfully, that guy had a very fast boat and was able to get right next to him and get the barge's attention.

TH: The driver of the tugboat.

SR: Right, to stop. That's—I think the guys on the barge and the other kingfishermen jumped on there and peeled the wheelhouse off of him, and at that point the water was already over the gunwales.

TH: The boat was gone.

SR: The boat was just about gone. We actually—I say “we,” I didn't do much myself, but some of the other guys, they helped pump it out and bail it out, and we got it back to the marina.

TH: Oh, you did get the boat back to the marina?

SR: Yeah.

TH: Did it take a while for the barge to stop?

SR: Once they backed off of him.

TH: How long did it take the barge to stop? Because I know once they get moving, they have that normal forward progress—

SR: Yeah, they're going with the tide down the Mississippi.

TH: They never do stop completely.

SR: They're probably going 10 or 12 knots, while we're going five or six knots up the river, and I think once they got the barge's attention, they backed off and helped peel him out of the boat. But then they just kept going. They just left. Kept going down the river.

TH: Okay. But you got the boat untangled from the front of the barge.

SR: Right.

TH: Other kingfish boats pulled it out?

SR: Yeah, there was a handful of us that got next to him, and everyone—handful of guys jumped on the boat and started bailing it out. And we hooked another boat to it to drag it up the river into the marina.

TH: So he did salvage his boat?

SR: He rebuilt it right there in Louisiana and finished out the season.

TH: You're kidding me.

SR: Nope, got his motor running after it was completely underwater, hauled the boat out, fixed everything right there in Louisiana, and went back to fishing.

TH: My goodness. Now how did he end up underneath the—did he just not see the barge?

SR: I wonder the same thing. I mean, I'm sure, obviously, it was a freak accident, but he said he was on autopilot like we always are, and he said he was going downstairs to get his phone to call his wife, and by the time he got his phone and sat back in his chair, it was—that was that.

TH: Gosh, you just can't—you have to watch all the time.

SR: Yep.

TH: Any other sinkings or near sinkings, or inlet tragedies, or ever have any problems going out any of the inlets?

SR: Only problem I've ever had is the Sebastian inlet.

TH: It's a very narrow inlet.

SR: Very narrow, and the current there is pretty fierce. I didn't have a problem where it was too rough, I just had a problem where I didn't have enough power to buck the tide—

TH: Seven knots is about—

SR: Yeah, I remember it was 4:00, 4:30 in the morning, and the tide's coming in and I'm trying to go out, and I'm looking at my machine, and I'm going one knot, half a knot, and asking myself, Do I have to turn around? Because I can't even get out of the inlet.

TH: Oh my goodness. Okay. Any other calamities that you can think of on the ocean? Falling overboard, collisions? Do you ever—taken on water that you didn't know where it was coming from?

SR: Yeah. I've had a couple incidents with water. I've been overboard myself one time.

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H: You fell overboard?

SR: Yep.

TH: By yourself?

SR: Yes.

TH: Where was this?

SR: In the middle of the Gulf.

TH: How did you get back on your boat?

SR: Well, I was going to dump extra fuel in, while I was on autopilot, and I just had a five-gallon jug, and I stepped up on the gunwale and went forward on the boat to the fill to pour diesel. But before I did that, I pulled it back to idle speed, but I left it in gear, on autopilot, and I had to use two hands to tip the five-gallon jug up. And when I did that, a wave hit the boat and I went overboard.

TH: By yourself—were there any boats around?

SR: No other boats, no one on the boat with me.

TH: How did you get back onboard?

SR: Luckily, I grabbed almost the corner of the boat—

TH: In the stern?

SR: In the stern.

TH: You could do that from the water?

SR: I did. I was probably pretty full of adrenaline.

TH: Oh my God. And you were able to pull yourself back into the boat?

SR: I think I did it one-handed, I was so—I knew what the situation was.

TH: And there was no one in the middle of the Gulf—daytime? Nighttime?

SR: Early in the morning, the sun's just coming up. I was traveling back from Louisiana. I was probably a hundred miles from the west coast of Florida.

TH: Oh my gosh. I don't think—maybe when I was younger, maybe, but I don't think I could pull myself up anymore.

SR: I didn't have a choice.

TH: Yeah, I know, but I mean even—I don't think I could do it if I didn't even have a choice, I still couldn't do it. But you know, it's great being young and strong. That's pretty serious.

SR: Yeah, and I got back in the boat soaking wet, cold, and realized what happened. I puked.

TH: Yeah.

SR: I was pretty shaken up.

TH: Because that would've been it.

SR: Oh yeah.

TH: Somebody would've found your boat out there.

SR: Yeah, my boat would have hit the beach on autopilot a couple days later, and I would have been long gone.

TH: Were you talking to other—

SR: No, I was alone.

TH: That's the worst fear—

SR: Worst-case scenario.

TH: Yeah, for a fisherman that fishes by themselves. My goodness. Drug-, alcohol-, people-smuggling stories you've heard or experienced? No names, of course. You see any bales?

SR: I've seen a drug bust in the Bahamas, I didn't see the—what the story was, was the guys dumped a bunch of bales while they were getting busted, basically, while they were getting chased, they dumped a bunch of stuff off, and I just got to watch the Bahamian law enforcement escort these guys into the marina—

TH: Police?

SR: Yeah, and they had them shackled up on the dock and seized the boat and all that.

TH: Who picked up the bales?

SR: I'm sure all the locals did.

TH: You didn't see that?

SR: No.

TH: People-smuggling—you ever run into any boats loaded with people?

SR: No, I never have.

TH: I one time, at the old Hudgin's Seafood, was getting ice early in the morning, and there were some people behind these boxes. And I was a little frightened at first, but I think they were more frightened than me—

SR: They were probably a little more frightened.

TH: Yeah, and somebody dropped them off right there, I assume. They didn't speak very plain English, and I just left well enough alone and went on, but I'll never forget that. Humorous, funny stories you've heard or experienced on the water? And I know—[if] you can't think of any now, you will when you leave.

SR: Yeah. To me, I just think the group of guys that I get to fish around that are mostly my really good friends is just a constant laugh. Some way or another, it's just comical all the time.

TH: Okay, and you would be with, like, Denny—

SR: Denny I look up to more than anyone, I'd say, in kingfishing, and just as a person in general.

TH: Denny Galespi?

SR: Yeah.

TH: And, of course, there's Jarvey.

SR: Jarvey, he's special.

TH: You know that boat he fishes has probably caught more kingfish than—

SR: Than all of us put together.

TH: Yeah, and the history of that boat—that boat pulled me in from the inlet one time when my engine quit right in the inlet. I forget—I think it was the Blacks that owned it back then. Anything else you wish to share about life as a fishing captain?

SR: I like the lifestyle and the freedom the most. I like the freedom the most.

TH: You know you get a lot of respect, especially you with running the various boats and being captain of several boats. Two boats, anyway.

SR: Yeah, I feel I agree with you there to a certain point. Some of the kingfishermen that are full-time kingfishermen probably don't respect me as much. They call me a "job fisherman" or "sporty" or whatever the case may be, but I'm still fishing.

TH: I don't know who would do that.

SR: I've heard it a few times.

TH: Don't pay attention to that.

SR: But that's fine with me. I like to break it up and do different stuff.

TH: Would you want to do anything else than what you do?

SR: No. My only concern is, if they ever take this away from us, is what I'll do then, because I don't have a clue what I'd do.

TH: Well, you could still recreational fish. I don't think it's gonna happen.

SR: Yeah, that doesn't do it for me like kingfishing.

TH: Okay. Anything else you would like to add?

SR: I'm just thankful that this is what I get to do and that Lenny got me started on this. Lenny and Denny and Jarvey, they all got me into it.

TH: They're good. Very good. Well, with that, thank you very much.

SR: Yeah. Thank you.

End of interview.