

**WES BIRDSONG**  
**Caretaker, Deep Water Marina & Boat Yard – Apalachicola, FL**  
**[CLOSED]**

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Date: March 25, 2006  
Location: Marina office – Apalachicola, FL  
Interviewer: Amy Evans  
Length: 35 minutes  
Project: Florida's Forgotten Coast

**[Begin Wes Birdsong]**

0:00:00.0

*[Recording opens with Mr. Birdsong talking about Oxford, Mississippi, where the interviewer is from.]*

**Wes Birdsong:** William [Faulkner] would turn over in his grave, if you didn't know where Oxford [Mississippi] was.

0:00:06.2

**Amy Evans:** I know it, I know it. All right;, this is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Saturday, March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2006 and I'm in Apalachicola, Florida, at the Deep Water Marina with Wes Birdsong, who is the officially unofficial caretaker of the—the boatyard.

0:00:19.1

**WB:** The caretaker.

0:00:21.9

**AE:** All right. Would you mind introducing yourself and also saying your—your birth date, if you don't mind, so we can have it for the record?

0:00:25.8

**WB:** Oh, not at all. Wes Birdsong and born 21 October, 1948.

0:00:31.9

**AE:** All right. And you've been in the—

0:00:33.0

**WB:** So I'm an old guy. [*Laughs*]

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**AE:** [*Laughs*] Well you've been in this area a handful of years, correct? Can you talk about that?

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**WB:** My parents retired here in the early [nineteen] eighties, and so I've had that association so now some twenty-five or six years—a full-time resident only about two years.

0:00:48.3

**AE:** Where are you from, originally?

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**WB:** I was born in Atlanta [Georgia], raised in Nashville [Tennessee], and very shortly went to Minnesota and stayed—and married and logged up on the Canada Border for a few years and—and then I went back in the active service as a recall after the falling of the Vietnam era and remained on active service in the Army for twenty-one years and retired in oh-one [2001].

0:01:13.8

**AE:** And you were telling me a little bit about how you got to this marina and—and how you stuck around. Can you—?

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**WB:** Oh, it happens that my—other than the fact that my parents had bought a waterfront home in Florida when ordinary people could still do that, I, you know, had been in and out of Apalach[icola] quite a lot. We had a family crisis, and my son passed away shortly after we retired, and that precipitated pretty much a meltdown in the nuclear family. My daughter chose to come here from Atlanta and then—opened—and then opened a flower shop—bought an

existing flower shop in Eastpoint [Florida, across the bridge from Apalachicola] and has been doing—and has done well, has—and now we have a grandchild, hence the reason I'm still here and—and so my—my—I've been an observer of Apalachicola affairs from afar for twenty-five years or so and a much closer view for the last couple of years by having—you know, I'd like to—to not return to Panama City [Florida] because [boat] slips are at such a premium both for recreational boaters and for commercial boaters. And—and utter dearth of slips for boats. Oh, and the fact that—and I hope candor is permissible—other than the fact that speculative realtors have skewed the economy in Florida to such a degree that in my—in my estimation of the way the world works, it has long since been a detriment to the long-term health of all the little coastal towns.

0:02:50.4

**AE:** Well, and the reason I'm sitting here with you today is I came to visit my buddy Mike, who is working on his sailboat in the yard, and this boatyard is closing next week.

0:02:59.4

**WB:** Correct.

0:03:01.7

**AE:** And the Snug—the Snug Harbor Boatyard in Panama City already closed, which is what brought you—

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**WB:** That has closed, as has Tibbetts, as has Aqua Bay, as has Sun Harbor, leaving one working boatyard in St. Andrew's Bay, which is a—a huge boating community. There remains another yard to our east at Carrabelle, Paramoure's Boatyard. Paramoure's is occupied ground owned by the St. Joe Company; the St. Joe Company bought out his lease for two million dollars recently, and so Tibbetts will close in the next five or six weeks. In—in the St. Joe Bay area, there is a yard established, but apparently it is—it is so horrible that nobody will go there, so it—it gets to be—for boaters, it gets to be real tedious—commercial or recreation.

0:03:53.0

**AE:** What makes a boatyard not good?

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**WB:** Oh, nothing. You know, if it's just a lift, and it's unprepared ground, you know, a good boatyard looks like a Camp-Out America. It's a reasonably well- surfaced area that heavy things can be brought and put up on jack stands and have at-hand 220-power, 110-power, water, and compressed air, which is what drives all of the tools that the—are used in repairing and restoring

boats. So that's what a good yard looks like. The other essential element is a lift. Lifts can come in really essentially two flavors—or three, if you get to be up into the shipyard class of things. Small boats are very easily handled by—a couple of manufacturers produce things called Travel Lifts and Antenna Lifts that—or straps under the boat, the boat gets hauled up, the boat gets walked over and put down on—on the ground. And traditional way is, as I explained, a—a tiny little railroad cart that—and the rails go under the water, so it looks just like the boat dock or the, you know, the boat ramp at anybody's little local lake, say, that the boats come out on—on a rail or on rails and then can be directed to work stations.

0:05:20.1

**AE:** And you were saying there's something like that out at Scipio Creek Marina [in Apalachicola]?

0:05:22.1

**WB:** There was a big one here, yeah. And—and picking up on Apalachicola—the long history of Apalach—there wouldn't be an Apalach, except there was cotton. And it happened that there was cotton before there was railroads. And most cotton went to Europe, and so it was trans-loaded from river boats here to steam or sail—steam later, but sail earlier. They would transport all the agricultural products to—principally, to Europe. Some of it went to—actually didn't go any further than the Northeast—the US Northeast. The advent of railroads ended that as a mainstay of an economy in that it was much easier to ship [by] rail, in effect, direct from Central

Georgia or Central Alabama to the Northeast or to the East Coast ports, as opposed to making the Gulf run and trans-loading from river boats to sail.

Fortunately for Apalach, at about the time that the—the—you know, the—the warehousing of cotton, it was no longer the economic engine of Apalach. John Gorrie decided the ice machine would be a real good deal. So at this point, seafood became a commodity that—that had greater marketability nationally, as opposed to the local consumption because it would spoil before you could get it anywhere. So throughout the 1900s, Apalach was a major fishing port; offshore boats would call on Apalach and—and loads would be processed here and—and subsequently trans-loaded to rail.

More recently—and that would be the [nineteen] seventies and eighties and early nineties—the—all of it went out on truck. Trailer load after trailer load after trailer load of oysters and shrimp went from here to New York City just—and—and ports all over. And then loads were hauled up and down the coast from—to processing plants, and so there was a lot of seafood moved. With the decline in the fishery and most recently—the most recent economic pain with the competition with imported seafoods, pricing were extraordinarily depressed, operating costs have not diminished at all, and so the bay shrimpers of which, you know, Apalachicola—very few of the boats that I work on go more than ten miles offshore. Most of them work in the bay, most of the time. But because of the economics of it, it is a—it's an extraordinarily close-to-the-wire enterprise. It's purely the primary sector of the economy—loggers and farmers and shrimpers. None of them get rich.

0:08:18.4

**AE:** Well and this boatyard services a lot of the working shrimp boats that come out of the—

0:08:23.4

**WB:** Correct. Yeah, in Apalachicola there are probably two-and-a-half dozen shrimp boats that work regularly, another two dozen that work irregularly, and in addition to those bottoms, there are probably—at—what we refer to as pole-picker boats or bandit boats. It's hook and line fishing for bottom—for reef species—most popularly grouper and snapper, the most popular group, so—so the commercial fleet in Apalach is fifty boats of which perhaps a dozen or fifteen are bandit boats and another thirty-six or so are shrimp boats. There are more bottoms than that here, but many of the—of the older shrimpers don't go—go as much as they used to.

0:09:13.5

**AE:** So what will it mean to them when this boatyard closes?

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**WB:** Other than the fact that shrimpers are inclined by their nature to tear up their props routinely, the possibility of a relatively quick and easy quick-haul into the slings up untangled and back in the water is no longer—that will no longer be possible. It will be incumbent on them to get pulled to Miller Marine in Southport, Panama City. Seventy-nautical miles one way. They can't hire a sea tow, so one of their buddies will pull them. And so, what would have been a two

hour[s] and [the boat is] fixed [scenario], will become a week or ten days and [they] might be back. And that presumes that Miller will get them on the list. Miller, of course, is inundated [with this kind of business already], and for shrewd business [reasons], is less inclined to—to keep prices within a range that an essentially subsistent shrimper can afford.

My prognostication, for what it's worth, and you can come back in eighteen months and see if I'm right—my prognostication is that, if in fact this yard closes forever, then in eighteen months there will be at least half-a-dozen shrimp boats sunk in their slips at the Mill Pond [in Apalachicola, which is the commercial marina, also known as Scipio Creek Marina]. The—the shrimpers will recognize that it is no longer economically feasible, and they will walk away, leaving the city with the commercial basin full of sunks. There's two sunk there now, and nobody can afford to pull them [out of the water]. The—the city is unwilling to—the poor city is broke all the time, and so when a boat—when a boat goes down out of a federal waterway, out of the ICW [Intercoastal Waterway] and out of the—of a recognized navigable course, it is incumbent on the local jurisdiction to recover the vessel or to insist that the owner recover it. They've never insisted, and so you can just walk around town—I can think of six boats sunk that you can spit on from the—from the drag here, and they'll never go anywhere. I mean they—.

Yeah, so but—but back—personally, so I returned after [Hurricanes] Dennis and Katrina [in 2005]. I come down from—and note to my chagrin—and this is September, October last—that the thing [Deep Water Marina and Boatyard] is—is rapidly falling into the dumper. And because I am pugnacious by nature, essentially I just brow-beat Mr. Blair [the owner] into—saying all right, you're not doing it. I can't stand to be there because it's so trashy, and I'm not going to pick it up for nothing, so you're going to have to pay me to pick it up. And so I started running on October eighth of oh-five [2005], and today is, I guess, the twenty-fifth—.

0:12:11.0

**AE:** It sure is, of March.

0:12:11.9

**WB:** And I've pulled seventy-seven boats that have been up and down off this yard.

0:12:16.6

**AE:** Who was doing your job before you got here?

0:12:18.1

**WB:** It was—it was not being done. And it had closed for—they had pulled rowboats for about two months. *[EDITED FOR CONTENT-approximately thirty seconds.]* So the thing just—but there was one boat left. There was kind of a high-end sport boat that they contracted for a very high-end paint job. Anybody that brings a boat to this dusty yard to do a high-end paint job really needs their head examined because it's just nonsense. You know, high-end paint jobs are done in barns at high-end yards. The nearest one like that anywhere near here is [in] St. Pete [St. Petersburg], Florida. It's—it's just—what a bunch of nonsense. So this—this yard has—has always catered to middle-income recreational boaters and the commercial fleet.

0:13:43.8

**AE:** And so the kind of ripple effect of what it will mean for this boatyard to close is [that] there are also people who make their living painting and repairing the boats that come in?

0:13:51.0

**WB:** Correct. Yeah, in effect, I had been employed full-time and two—and two and sometimes three other people have been employed full-time and, in addition, there's half-times for any number of other kinds of folks. If there's a major engine hiccup, well I—I don't do diesel engines other than my own. You call the diesel mechanic, and he comes on the yard and works for two or three days or the welder or the—I mean, you name it. Specialists of all kinds come on the yard as subcontractors, so I—I would think, fairly stated, this yard produces perhaps six man-years of local employment that will vaporize. It will be supplanted—in the days of—in the days of the condo, it will be supplanted by a desk clerk and two cleaning ladies. So it's—

0:14:47.5

**AE:** But now Mike was telling me that there was a crew out here trying to, you know, set cement pylons in the land here but it's—they're not hitting anything.

0:14:54.5

**WB:** Correct. Now that would be—there was a gentleman named—I have his business card. In the history of ownership, as I know if it, of this property into the dim ages of the dark past, it was owned by a gentleman named—named Demo [George]. Demo was kind of a famous guy. In addition to this, at that point, fish house, the—two of the little store rooms have the great cooler doors [inside the marina's current workshop area]—

0:15:23.4

**AE:** Yeah.

0:15:23.6

**WB:** Those were cold storage. This was a fish house and not a boatyard in the early days and—and that was in the days of the big harvests. Often, the older people will—you know, the older men will come by here and say, *If I had a nickel for every pound of shrimp that went through this—this house, I wouldn't have to ever work.* So hundreds of thousands of pounds of shrimp came through this place in Demo's years. The shrimp harvest did, in fact, fall off, although interestingly enough, this year, the young men that are still shrimping tell me they're pulling shrimp out of parts of the bay that nobody has ever thought about dragging for years. There's a good harvest going on this year. But owing to the collision of high fuel costs, low wholesale value because we're trying to compete—you know, why are we competing with somebody from China, I don't know. Again, the whole thesis: shrimp must fall out of the sky in China. How do

they get them here for less than two bucks a pound, while my guys are just ten miles [out in the Apalachicola Bay] there?

0:16:29.7

**AE:** Catching wild shrimp.

0:16:32.2

**WB:** Go figure that [out] when you have an opportunity, and call me back. [*Laughs*]

0:16:37.0

**AE:** [*Laughs*] So how—

0:16:37.2

**WB:** I was going to write an article on it.

0:16:37.3

**AE:** How long has this been an operating boatyard, then, if it was—?

0:16:40.2

**WB:** Probably twenty-five years. You know, when the way succumbed—when the big way succumbed and owing to the decline of the—of offshore boats calling on here—because many of the—in those days, the boats throughout the Gulf [of Mexico] followed the harvest, and so it would have not been unusual at all for a Pascagoula, Mississippi, boat to call here and dump shrimp. Or vice versa, for an Apalachicola boat to be in Mississippi and dump shrimp. So the—the big offshore fleets moved up and down with the seasonal shrimp harvest. That is greatly diminished. There—there are very few offshore boats. If you read *Boats and Harbors*, which is kind of the class—you know, this is the eBay of—this is the eBay of boat stuff, there's lots of big shrimp trawlers on the market. Some—and some—well, the next door spot, Sea Quest Seafood [there] was a gentleman named Bruce Millender [who] owns that and did not choose to open this season, only to the fact that the processing plant that he had sold to the New Orleans area was destroyed by [Hurricane] Katrina, so he had nowhere to market his shrimp.

The same is in—I'm acquainted with a gentleman on the other side of the bridge who is—is a family member in the Miller trucking firm. Miller, his economic niche was hauling seafood essentially into New York City and did tons and tons of it. His—he would buy—he would buy from the boats here and haul his own product and sell. So for a short period of time, he was not only transporting but he was—he was wholesaling and distributing, and that has pretty much dried up. So the—so the harvest—again, owing to—you know there's—we can't meet the competition in New York, if there's Chinese shrimp going in New York, so—so that's over. And then, most recently—well, there you go. [*Distracted by a boat going by.*] There's—we might get

interrupted here. [*Wes notices a large boat that is going downriver.*] That's Randy Mims on his homemade gaff-rigged catch. And in a few weeks he's going to take that to Europe.

0:18:50.7

**AE:** Wow.

0:18:51.0

**WB:** Yeah, he's quite a guy, Randy is and—.

0:18:55.0

**AE:** So you and your wife live on your boat that's in a slip right out front?

0:18:58.0

**WB:** Correct. Correct.

0:18:58.0

**AE:** So where are you going to go when this place closes? Will you still be able to dock there or—?

0:19:02.3

**WB:** Oh, ostensibly the docks will remain available. Certainly there will be unpleasant—during the—the period of the construction, just access to your boat will be difficult, and it will be an extremely dirty environment. There will be no—there will be no shore-side amenities that, at the present, includes a bathroom and a shower, which is kind of nice. Those will be kind of intermittent, and for some period of time, it will be a port-a-john and no shower and—but mostly, just kind of dirty. And so I have—I have—I am fortunate to the extent that, since I am—have immersed myself in the local waterfront community, I found another slip. It's—it's a one only. Lots of folks would like slips that just can't get them, so—so we'll probably just move up the creek. [*EDITED FOR CONTENT-Approximately thirty seconds.*]

0:20:08.5

**AE:** Will you still work in the area when this place is—?

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**WB:** Well, there won't be a yard to work in and I'm—I'm doubly blessed. I don't need to work. I do this for fun. Yeah, this is too easy.

0:20:25.9

**AE:** But you've taken on the responsibility of maintaining it. I mean, it—

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**WB:** Oh, yeah. Well, yeah—

0:20:30.6

**AE:** It's—it's a profound connection that you've made here to keep this working.

0:20:32.3

**WB:** Oh, correct, yeah. No, there was always—and that is the—that is the joy of retirement. If you can—if you are no longer—if—if the nature of your employment is not such that you care about the money and that you work for pride and it's much healthier to just—I do this, well, because it needs to be done well and not because, geeze, I need—well, I've got to pay the light bill. You know, I don't have to pay the light bill. I just work for—so and I don't want to sound too altruistic here because I'm not, but in—through the fall, it was extremely apparent to me that, absent this boatyard, the local commercial fish community will—will collapse. And so I said, *We just can't close it. We—we just can't do this; it's morally repugnant to do this.* So I just brow-beat [the owner, Mr. Blair] into opening it, and he did. And of these eighty boats or so [that I have serviced since October 2005], forty have been commercial boats—some in for very minor kind

of things, and some in for major work that would not—. We pulled one shrimper that was sinking in the way—they got it in just in time, and we saved the boat.

0:21:39.0

**AE:** So what do you—what kind of thing do you hear from the shrimpers about this place?

0:21:42.3

**WB:** Oh, they're very perplexed. They—they appreciate it, and it's—the economic burden of—of getting boats to the nearest lift will, for many, be the straw that breaks the camel's back. They—they—it just won't be doable anymore. And at that juncture, that's when people will essentially abandon their boats. That is—were we in a position to take a boat ride up the—the Apalachicola River Delta, which is unique with your home state [of Mississippi] —the Mississippi and the Apalach Delta are the only true Deltas in the contiguous United States. If we could go into the Apalachicola Delta pictured over there [in the poster hanging on the wall], I can take you to five shrimp boats that have just been pulled up in the creeks and—and jammed into a hole and—and motored away from—abandoned, gone forever. And—and that will become very common. That will become very common.

Now this discussion could rapidly become political. And I approached the City [of Apalachicola] formally, at about the first of the year with a memorandum—the City—and I'm most happy to negotiate the—the economic reality owing to the skewed real estate value of speculative monies entering—of the speculation of real estate in Florida, deepwater access

waterfront is so precious that a—a small operation of this nature is not economically feasible. It cannot be done. I can't pay two million dollars for this acre-and-a-half [of land] and push enough boats through to pay the bank. The city, fortuitously, owns river—or creek-front lots. They flat own them. [They are] city property. The one north of—just up from B-9 [Marine], that's just been recently cleaned up, well, that's a city lot. Interestingly enough, it has a sunk shrimper in front of it. I don't know what that's about but—but they seem very recalcitrant to seriously entertain making ground available—of—of the city—of city ground available to run and to be a boatyard. A boatyard is a painfully simple enterprise. It's painfully simple. There's the work stations and the weigh and the lift and a little bit of a building with some tools in it, and that's it.

0:24:11.0

**AE:** So what will happen to this lift. Will it be just—

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**WB:** I have no idea.

0:24:15.6

**AE:** —scrapped or—?

0:24:17.2

**WB:** Initially, Mr. Blair wanted to sell it to the city. His good idea was that, well, we'll just sell this to the city, and the city will run it. The city doesn't seem to have gotten off a dime on that. Some cities establish port—Clearwater is a good example. Clearwater has established a Port Authority, and they run a—a public marina—not a boatyard. A boatyard is—is a dramatic leap. But [they] run a public marina that runs very well. A boatyard is—is—city employees can't do a boatyard. It's [working from] seven in the morning 'til dark and—and they're just—they ain't going to do that. And then the—this poor city can't keep its sewer running, so trying to keep this collection of old machinery going—no, it's not—that ain't going to happen.

0:25:02.7

**AE:** So what happens here in a typical day?

0:25:04.1

**WB:** Well, let's just pick a typical day. *[Looks at the calendar hanging on the wall.]* Well, tomorrow a little boat from Panama City is going to come in, and I'll pull him on Monday. And I'm going to move a sailboat into the weigh and use that cherry picker to get up to the masthead to do some—do some work on the masthead of that boat, and I'm going to splash that boat and—and—and the boys and I are going to work on a rudder for that boat.

So yeah, the shrimpers, with one exception, do all their own work. Invariably the—they're like truckers; they fix their own boats. So we haul and block it, and that's the extent of our

connection, other than I take advantage of—of wholesale outlets with which we have accounts to get the materials for them at substantially less than retail. And so a lot of—a lot of bottom paint and a lot of zinc and a lot of those kind of widgets come through this office. Graham, the UPS [United Parcel Service]—I call and the next afternoon Graham drops them in the inventory, and I walk them out to the boats. And so a lot of stuff is sold—for three of us—it's me and—me and two illegal Mexicans are just the happy crew here, and they're just wonderful guys. And we do bottom jobs. We—we do our own bottom jobs and some paint work and some of that kind of stuff but—but a typical day is splashing and pulling boats and that kind of stuff and it's just—I wish it would just follow me around. It's amazing, you know. **[Laughs]**

And the—the shrimpers get it, with one exception, the Creamers, that became—got extraordinarily rich during the good days and on Scipio Creek—Quentin, one of the brothers of the—Eldon [?] Creamer has a—a new shrimp boat. I didn't know there were any, but they still build them in Louisiana, and he's got kind of a new-ish shrimp boat and he came out. And we did his boat, but that's the exception. You know all—most of the shrimpers do their—their own except for Quentin. The—the pole-pickers do their own except for Quentin.

0:27:08.7

**AE:** So what does it cost to have a boat in here that you're working on? Like a rental—?

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**WB:** Oh, the rates vary. We defer to commercial boats—a commercial haul and block, which is—out on jack stands for a period of time, you need it, and then back in is six dollars a foot. If it's going to be a—if we're going to do the work, it's seven dollars a foot; if the boat owner is going to do the work, it's eight dollars a foot, with the exception for commercial. Then, in addition, there's yard days—what we refer to lay days. There's a modest fee—ten or twelve bucks a day that we get just for having the boat in one of our parking places. And beyond—and that's it, essentially. This yard is essentially a landlord with a few exceptions. I—because I have—I have a huge list of waits, I'll pick and choose and always have one yard job on the yard and—and that's not because I'm concerned about Curtis' bottom line [owner, Curtis Blair], but I'm—the two young fellows, Jorge and Manuel, I want them to always have work because they want to pocket a big wad of cash and go back to Mexico and buy a house and get married, and they should do that. **[Laughs]** If we—as soon as we can do that for those men, we should do that, and so I make sure that they're gainfully employed and so that's—you know, that's the motive. So that the hombres can work and—and the shrimpers can work.

And so I approached the city to no avail—to no avail or whatever. That was—they were obsequious at best, you know. And so I—you know, if—if there's an agenda, you know, behind the veil that I'm not aware of—no local man to my knowledge has expressed an interest in—in doing this.

**[EDITED FOR CONTENT-Approximately twenty seconds.]**

[S]o Demo had this and Demo had that. He sold to a guy named Rudd, and Rudd converted the—the shrimp house into a—a working yard that's—how many slips he had, I don't know. He did all this [land] fill secretly. At night he would just bring on—a truckload at a time and—and did the fill which even in the—this was done in the [nineteen] seventies, and even

in the seventies it was, you know—and we were—we were much more environmentally conscious. And we completely raped South Florida, and we were beginning to get environmentally conscious. And so this was kind of done surreptitiously and without permit. And he created a little bit of a footprint that's here that's reasonably hard. All of this, except where this building sits was swamp. And—and well, just look, you know, just beyond Mike's boat there, that's what it was.

0:30:21.2

**AE:** So it sounds like that is going to frustrate some builders out here.

0:30:25.2

**WB:** One would have reason to believe. It's going to be more in the order of bridge building technology than—than just standard footings, and it's going to be tough. I—I don't understand. You know, the economic feasibility of this as a hotel falls into that category of—of beyond the veil. Like do shrimp fall out of the sky in China? I don't understand how anybody comes out on this. I—I—it is apparent to me that any buyers owing to the constraints it's a condotel. I read a *New York Times* article that explained that post-9/11, big banks en masse were no longer financing big hotels. Travel is—is in the dumper. We're not going to do that, hence a traditional financing for these properties became unavailable. So they—they resorted to a very common trump card in Florida: pre-sale or pre-construction prices. Well pre-construction prices tells the buyer they can't afford to do it without you. So, you know, so they'll use my money to build the

place that I'll ultimately pay for. Because of the zoning peculiarities in Apalachicola, condominium—permanent-resident is not—this is not zoned for full-time residencies. The riverfront is zoned light industrial, to include restaurant and hotel kinds of things, not permanent residencies. If it's a hotel, you circumvent that. So for a mere 597,000 dollars, you too can own a hotel room. You can't occupy it but two weeks a year, or you'll lose your tax advantages as part-time resident but—or the second home. But you can have a hotel room—a beautiful spacious—I think it's about 1,000 square feet with hardwood floors for 600,000 dollars. It causes me—this has nothing to do with food, but in Florida, any fool can make money building. If you attempted this in Chicago, you'd be bankrupt in three weeks flat because in Chicago, you have to know what the hell you're doing. Down here, the profit margins are so huge that any fool can pretend that he's a builder. And that's—and we've just been—and we're just overrun with fools—just overrun with them.

And—and yeah, half-a-dozen man years [this marina is responsible for]. A lot of economic activity. The—the yard will always, you know, if—tit for tat, if I could put thirty boats on this yard it—those thirty boat owners will create more economic activity than thirty beach goers and thirty knick-knack buyers and thirty restaurant meal consumers. Thirty boatyard guys are going to be buying some stuff, you know. And they also eat, by the way. So at the end of the day, they're going to go eat at the restaurant, too.

But the city is more of a—the city doesn't care or doesn't seem to care—have property available and have a significant interest. I really thought I could just move them with gentle persuasion and common sense. That proved to be undoable. I'm going to quit on or about the tenth of April, or [when] the last boat will be back in [the water]. It wouldn't surprise me—it wouldn't—it will not surprise me on or about [the] tenth [of] July, when I get a cell phone call

because I'll be in Minnesota, and it will be Betty Webb, the poor City Administrator, asking if I'm still interested. Because that—that's when the pressure—the pain will go up enormously when shrimpers start sinking. And if you have the allegiance—and I have been fortunate, I've earned the confidence of the shrimpers, and it is a tight little community. If you have six shrimpers in a bad way, you've got—you're—those six shrimpers are related to sixty-percent of the voting adults in the City of Apalachicola, so I think, you know, when the pain is real—because now I've just served as a Band-Aid, and they've sort of been able to kind of push it aside. It's a Band-Aid. But after two months in closure—and particularly since the spring shrimp—the spring shrimp run is coming up. And if you're broke, and you miss the run, that's your year's wages. So we will see.

0:35:06.7

**AE:** Yeah.

0:35:06.8

**WB:** Yeah.

0:35:08.2

**AE:** Well I hate to wind this up but—

0:35:11.5

**WB:** But you've got to go, and I'm boring you.

0:35:13.4

**AE:** No, I've—I've got to go [to make another interview appointment], but it's, you know, a great series of coincidences that brought you—brought me to you this afternoon, so this is—this is huge for me, and I appreciate it.

0:35:21.1

**WB:** Right. Any other cogent—?

0:35:25.5

**AE:** Well, final thoughts?

0:35:27.9

**WB:** Come back in eighteen months.

0:35:28.6

**AE:** Okay.

0:35:30.6

**WB:** Come back in eighteen months.

0:35:30.7

**AE:** Thank you, sir.

0:35:31.2

**WB:** You bet. Thank you. But that is the reality.

0:35:33.7

[\*NOTE: As of May 2006, the Deep Water Marina & Boatyard is closed and ground has been broken for the new development.]

**[End Wes Birdsong]**