



**Garrett and Kelsey Kreuger**  
**Shell Game Seafood and Products**  
**Panacea, FL**

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Location: Boonedocks Oyster Processing Facility, Panacea, FL

Interviewer: Annemarie Anderson

Transcription: Diana Dombrowski

Length: One hour and nine minutes

Project: Saltwater South- Forgotten Coast

**Annemarie A.:** Okay! This is Annemarie Anderson recording for the Southern Foodways Alliance and I am in Panacea, Florida with Kelsey and Garrett Kreuger. I am—did I pronounce your name right?

[00:00:10.13]

**Kelsey K.:** Yes.

[00:00:10.13]

**Garrett K.:** Yes.

[00:00:13.19]

**Annemarie A.:** Okay, good. And it's Tuesday, May 25. So, I'll have you both go ahead and introduce yourselves for the recorder. Tell us who you are and what you do. Do you want to start, and then Garrett can go?

[00:00:29.25]

**Kelsey K.:** Sure. So, I'm Kelsey Kreuger. I am the, I guess, operator of Shell Game Seafood.

[00:00:38.03]

**Garrett K.:** Technically Boonedocks.

[00:00:37.26]

**Kelsey K.:** Technically Boonedocks, yeah. We have two. There are two family companies. We run Shell Game Seafood and my parents are actually the owners of Boonedocks and I'm kind of—we work all together. We're kind of running them together.

[00:00:52.17]

**Annemarie A.:** Cool.

[00:00:54.18]

**Garrett K.:** I'm Garrett Kreuger. I am also with Shell Game Seafood. Started that in 2016. Then, in 2019, we started Shell Game Products and we build tumblers and other oyster aquaculture gear. Starting.

[00:01:11.01]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great. Well, maybe we can start out, and if you both give me your date of birth for the recorder?

[00:01:18.14]

**Kelsey K.:** Okay, mine is January 22. Do you need the year?

[00:01:20.13]

**Annemarie A.:** Yes, okay.

[00:01:22.20]

**Kelsey K.:** [Redacted]

[00:01:22.29]

**Garrett K.:** April 29, 1986.

[00:01:27.01]

**Annemarie A.:** Cool. Well, could you all tell me a little bit about where you were born and raised?

[00:01:35.12]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah, sure. I was born in Colorado and we lived out there. My dad was a pilot at the time working out of the Denver Airport and lived there until . . . the end of my first grade year. We moved to Houston after that, since Dad got transferred over to the Houston Airport. Then lived in Houston, outside of Houston, for the next however many years until college, when my dad retired and then moved to Florida. So, I stayed at Texas A&M to finish up my degree, and then we lived in Texas, kind of jumped around between Austin and Bay City and Houston, Cypress, Lake City. We did that for . . . what, six years?

[00:02:19.10]

**Garrett K.:** Six years.

[00:02:21.05]

**Kelsey K.:** And then we decided to move to Florida, so here we are, yeah.

[00:02:23.24]

**Garrett K.:** I grew up in Blessing, Texas, which is not a blessing to be from Blessing. It's a really small town. We had about four hundred people. I lived there my whole life until I went to Texas A&M. Then, yeah, after graduation, then I started teaching. I was a high school science teacher for six years, and then we sold our house and moved to Florida to start an oyster farm in 2016.

[00:02:50.11]

**Annemarie A.:** Will you tell me a little bit about Blessing? Could you talk a little bit, maybe describe the town for—

[00:02:57.15]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. Blessing's about ten minutes away from a small shrimping community called Palacios. I actually just found out they're putting an oyster hatchery in Palacios now, as Texas comes online to start doing oyster farming, which is real interesting, kind of full-circle.

[00:03:11.12]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah, for sure. Cool.

[00:03:15.10]

**Kelsey K.:** You joke about it not being a blessing to be from Blessing, but you say that with, like, love in your heart.

[00:03:21.00]

**Garrett K.:** Yes.

[00:03:22.13]

**Kelsey K.:** Blessing is a real sweet little town. I think the thing about it is, it's just so small.

[00:03:25.18]

**Garrett K.:** You kind of get away with anything, because everyone knew exactly what you were doing. Our high school was actually made of three small towns put together, so it was real interesting in that regard, because you'd have the people from Markham and the people from Blessing, and they were always, like, these opposing factions. But then, at the end of the day, you're all one community, which is really nice.

[00:03:45.28]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah.

[00:03:47.12]

**Kelsey K.:** Then couple that with your mom teaching at the school.

[00:03:52.15]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, my mom taught at the school for thirty-five years, so—it may have been forty. It was a long time.

[00:03:53.16]

**Kelsey K.:** It was a long time.

[00:03:53.16]

**Garrett K.:** It was a long, long time. But yeah, she taught there forever, so she knew. She had taught some of my teachers when I was going through high school. She had taught them when they were little kids in kindergarten and first grade and second grade, so she knew everyone. I didn't get away with anything. [Laughter]

[00:04:18.15]

**Annemarie A.:** I bet not. Sounds kind of like here, a little bit.

[00:04:20.08]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, very much so. Very small, small town, fishing community type of thing.

[00:04:28.02]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. But everybody has your back, too.

[00:04:30.00]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah.

[00:04:31.06]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah. Well, tell me a little bit about, maybe, your relationship with outdoors and the environment growing up.

[00:04:36.23]

**Kelsey K.:** Man, I feel like I lived outside. We were, as kids, we always were on our bikes, riding around. Definitely different environment than our kids are experiencing today, being in kind of a bigger town, but constantly just—we had a couple little dirt, we call them the dirt hills in Colorado. It was an undeveloped lot across the street, so pretty much from the moment we got up in the morning, we were out on our bikes, riding around the neighborhood, going on the dirt hills. Then, when we moved to Houston, it was the dirt trails. That went all the way around our neighborhood, and we had little jumps that we had made. That was kind of our daily routine, and then we spent the summers—actually, a lot of the time, every summer we would come over here for our family reunion that happened with my dad's family. He's one of eight, so all the cousins and aunts and uncles would all descend upon the family beach house at Saint Teresa and we would have a lot of people crammed into a two-bedroom, one-bath house with an attic upstairs for the kids to sleep. Playing on the beach and just loving being on the boat, having fun outdoors, we always were fishing. You guys did more hunting than we did, but lots and lots of time out on the water and just playing outside.

[00:06:05.07]

**Annemarie A.:** What sorts of things would y'all fish for?

[00:06:07.27]

**Kelsey K.:** Well . . . we just fished. It was most of the time just whatever we could find for bait.

It wasn't anything major, and I wouldn't say that we had any pro fishermen in the family, we would just have fun throwing out a line and seeing what we would catch. So, it's varied throughout the years. I don't think that I've ever really caught anything that amazing, but we have fun doing it, so.

[00:06:36.20]

**Annemarie A.:** What was Saint Teresa—or, Saint Teresa, right?

[00:06:39.03]

**Kelsey K.:** Uh-huh, yeah.

[00:06:39.13]

**Annemarie A.:** What was Saint Teresa like in your youth?

[00:06:44.04]

**Kelsey K.:** Well, it's a lot of how it is today. Saint Teresa, I don't feel like, has changed much.

Except that now, as you walk down the beach, once you get past the old Saint Teresa, kind of the old-style Florida Saint Teresa, we're starting to see more South Florida-type developments—not developments, but houses being built in the place of the old ones. But

the side of the beach where we are is still pretty untouched, and I'd say the beach is practically the same. Alligator Point has sure changed. When I was as kid, there was—the land pretty much stopped where the trees are now, and it looked much more like an Alligator, not as much of like an elongated spit that's now up on, you can see it as land. But that's one of the things that I really love about Saint Teresa, is that it's kind of the untouched Florida. It's just . . . kind of rustic, old-style Florida. I feel like it's the authentic coast. I guess that's why it's called the Forgotten Coast, because it really is untouched and untamed, I feel like, as opposed to some of the other areas in Florida.

[00:07:55.06]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:07:58.01]

**Kelsey K.:** Does that answer your question?

[00:07:55.18]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah! That's great. What about you, what was your relationship with outside growing up?

[00:08:02.07]

**Garrett K.:** I pretty much grew up outside. I had two older brothers who are nine and six years older than me. I was always following them from the time I could walk, just kind of follow them outside. Then I had a neighbor. We lived on ten acres outside of Blessing, so

we were, like, in the middle of nowhere. My neighbor moved in next to us, and they had a little boy that was six months younger than me. So, from the time that we were pretty much three, we were just traipsing around together, and we just had absolute blast. We'd always go to the beach and just kind of play out in the water, try not to step on stingrays, you know. [Laughter] Then, I guess, that kind of continued all the way through when I was in college. After I got my first job, I think one of the first things we bought was a kayak, and we would go kayak fishing a lot in Matagorda Bay, and we spent a ton of time outside. Then we bought a boat. That was a trip.

[00:09:08.12]

**Kelsey K.:** Uh-huh.

[00:09:11.25]

**Garrett K.:** That was, like, our first boat. We would go out fishing in Matagorda Bay quite a bit, run aground on some oyster bars here and there. Matagorda Bay is, I'm not sure if you're familiar with it, but it's . . . the water's like brown and murky, kind of looks like this table. When you look at the water, you can't see anything except for a few poles here and there marking the oyster bars. It's pretty much impossible to know where they are. [Laughter] And the tide doesn't change much, so it's not like you see a huge tidal swing. You see them come out to, like, "Oh, I can remember where that is." They're just there.

[00:09:55.17]

**Kelsey K.:** Kayaks were way more fun in Matagorda. We had a lot of fun on the kayaks and the boat was, maybe, a little bit just in that particular area where we were going. The intercoastal waterway goes right through. So, we had fun on the intercoastal waterway just driving and then the Colorado River we spent a lot of time on.

[00:10:14.11]

**Garrett K.:** A lot of time was spent on the Colorado River.

[00:10:15.25]

**Kelsey K.:** That was mainly watching our friends who had nice ski boats. We would go out on our boat and then we would tag team with them.

[00:10:23.03]

**Garrett K.:** We'd park our boat and then we'd hop into their nice ski boat and—

[00:10:26.14]

**Kelsey K.:** Watch people wakeboard and ski.

[00:10:25.18]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, and I would try it, occasionally. I'd usually end up flat on my face. That was really fun. [Laughter]

[00:10:37.08]

**Kelsey K.:** Good times.

[00:10:39.12]

**Garrett K.:** So, then since we moved here, we had our little boy in 2014. Since we had him, he's pretty much grown up on a boat. We moved here in [20]16, we're always outside doing stuff, and out on the Gulf, too. We now have two tandem kayaks and go out in those. It's fun to have them and let them experience nature with us and go fishing with them and really see that side of things, from the adult side, you know? It's so different from being a kid and going fish and you catch a fish and you're so excited. Then to be an adult, I'm just as excited as my little boy is. It's just crazy.

[00:11:22.05]

**Annemarie A.:** Well, what year did y'all move to Florida?

[00:11:26.28]

**Kelsey K.:** 2016.

[00:11:29.05]

**Garrett K.:** 2016.

[00:11:30.22]

**Annemarie A.:** I think you maybe already said that.

[00:11:32.13]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah, maybe.

[00:11:31.01]

**Garrett K.:** Maybe.

[00:11:33.06]

**Annemarie A.:** I forgot, thank you. [Laughter] Well, tell me a little bit about why you decided to move to Florida and maybe getting into the oyster industry.

[00:11:45.21]

**Kelsey K.:** Well, Garrett started coming with me. Actually, at the very—

[00:11:50.18]

**Garrett K.:** First time I was in 2008.

[00:11:52.02]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah, 2008, we were dating. It was spring break time, so we had a big group that came over for spring break. Not a big group, it was a small group.

[00:12:04.06]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah.

[00:12:06.07]

**Kelsey K.:** Garrett came over and we stayed at the beach house. Between that and a little bit at my parents' house. After that, after we got engaged, he started coming over to the reunions and being involved with that. Every time we came, there was something about Tallahassee and something about the beach at Saint Teresa that we just—every time, as we were driving home, we would say, "Do you think we could ever live here? I think we should move to Florida."

[00:12:32.29]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, it was always all, "Man, let's look at some jobs here and see if there's something we can do here." So, we'd go home and we'd look for jobs for a few weeks. Then nothing would ever pan out, so we were like, "Okay, well, I guess we'll stay in Texas for a little while."

[00:12:42.23]

**Kelsey K.:** So, we kept doing what we were doing. We were enjoying our jobs that we had, but it was that every summer, or every time—sometimes we would come over for Christmas.

[00:12:57.09]

**Garrett K.:** Spring break.

[00:12:59.05]

**Kelsey K.:** Since Garrett was teaching, he had the school schedule, still. So, we had the vacations of the schools. Every time we'd come over, it was that same conversation as we were headed home. So, my parents went to a . . . it was like a political dinner.

[00:13:10.23]

**Garrett K.:** It was an oyster aquaculture dinner. I think it was from Adam Putnam was putting it on.

[00:13:20.24]

**Kelsey K.:** Okay. So, he was talking in the dinner about the whole oyster aquaculture program and, specifically, what they were starting at the Wakulla Environmental Institute, where they were basically doing the class for . . . it was done as a grant at the beginning, and they were teaching people how to start growing oysters out in our gulf, out in the bay. The focus was specifically on this area because the water is just ideal for oysters based on the salinity and the algae blooms that we have here. So, at the dinner, he was talking about that. My parents talked to us a couple days later and said, "Yeah, we had this interesting dinner. Have you guys ever heard about this oyster stuff?" So, they started talking to us about it, which started conversations at home for us that was just kind of . . . "Oh, that sounds kind of interesting. I wonder if that would actually pan out." Fast forward a couple—I feel like it happened pretty fast.

[00:14:17.04]

**Garrett K.:** It happened really quickly. I think I remember looking online and couldn't find any information online about oyster aquaculture, nothing. I mean, this is spring of 2016, and there was nothing really about oyster aquaculture in the U.S. It was impossible to find any information out there talking about using this Australian longline system. So, somehow, I was able to click around and I finally found some pictures of that, but that was about it. There was just no information out there. So, we were like, "Okay. Well, let's list the house. If the house sells, then we'll move."

[00:15:01.10]

**Kelsey K.:** Well, we did a little bit more research. We told my dad. We sent him on the journey to find information, so he went to WEI and was put on a list, which—he was three, it was three years out. So, they were basically putting peoples' names down on the list for who could go do the WEI class, and Dad was on the list, but it was going to be three years later that he was able to start. So, we asked him to get more information. He kind of gleaned a little bit here and there, and then we decided that—

[00:15:32.27]

**Garrett K.:** Well, he found out that, if we could pay our own way, we could be in the class, like, this next year. That started in September of that year, but we'd have to pay our own way, it wouldn't be the grant. So, we kind of hmed and hawed about that. So, we listed the house at that point and said, "Well, if it sells, then we'll do it." How did it go, Kels?

[00:15:58.10]

**Kelsey K.:** We had . . . I think we had three offers the first weekend that we had it listed. So, we thought, "All right. Well, I guess that's pretty clear." The contract that we picked closed in about three weeks, so we packed everything up, told everybody that we were leaving. A lot of people actually didn't even know, because it was—

[00:16:20.06]

**Garrett K.:** It was so quick.

[00:16:19.01]

**Kelsey K.:** It was so frantic and so quick.

[00:16:22.26]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, literally the weekend after, the first weekend after we got the offer, my brother and I loaded up my truck and a trailer full of stuff and we drove it over. We got into Panacea at something ridiculous, it was like 8 o'clock that night. Went and had dinner, and then literally got up at 5:30 the next morning to catch flights back to Houston. Then I did that same thing by myself the second week with a travel trailer, and drove that over. It was just absolutely jam-packed full of stuff. Literally got in. I think that time, I stayed Sunday here, and then I flew back on Monday morning. That was a trip. Then, the following week, we loaded up a U-Haul.

[00:17:08.06]

**Kelsey K.:** And the Penske truck.

[00:17:08.06]

**Garrett K.:** Oh, yeah, the Penske truck and U-Haul trailer, and we drove those over.

[00:17:14.21]

**Kelsey K.:** The U-Haul was the afterthought, because we didn't everything fit in the Penske, so we ended up getting the little U-Haul trailer for just the odds and ends that didn't fit.

[00:17:25.05]

**Garrett K.:** Then we pulled into Tallahassee and unloaded it into a storage unit, and we didn't touch anything out of there for, like, three years, four years.

[00:17:34.04]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah.

[00:17:36.14]

**Garrett K.:** So, kind of interesting, living out of a storage unit. We had, luckily, Kelsey has a lot of family here. So like she said, her dad was one of eight. I think all but three of the siblings live in Tallahassee still.

[00:17:58.28]

**Kelsey K.:** I think two.

[00:18:00.27]

**Garrett K.:** Oh.

[00:18:02.08]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah.

[00:18:03.17]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah.

[00:18:04.25]

**Kelsey K.:** Two or three. So, one of my aunts had a house that was vacant at the time, so we moved in there. It was furnished, so we didn't need to bring any of our own furniture. So, slowly, our storage unit—we would look at it and say, "Why are we paying this much money to have our stuff just stored?" We would go through it, clean it out, and go to a slightly smaller storage unit. Then, a year later, we said, "Okay, let's go look at the stuff and see what we're actually needing or think we'll need." It actually was really nice, because it was a good reason to purge quite a bit of stuff that we just weren't using or things that we had kind of accumulated that maybe wasn't our style anymore. So, that was kind of nice.

[00:18:48.29]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah!

[00:18:48.23]

**Kelsey K.:** But then we bought a house in November—

[00:18:53.27]

**Garrett K.:** October.

[00:18:55.20]

**Kelsey K.:** October, yeah. And have been living there. We love it.

[00:18:58.28]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah.

[00:19:00.04]

**Kelsey K.:** So, we're here. We're not going anywhere.

[00:18:59.10]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great. Are y'all in Tallahassee or here?

[00:19:02.01]

**Kelsey K.:** The house we bought is in Tallahassee, so my parents live right down the road here, so we kind of have best of both worlds where, when we come, we kind of the northeast, it takes—

[00:20:47.17]

**Garrett K.:** Two to three years.

[00:20:47.14]

**Kelsey K.:** —two to three years for an oyster to grow from being the size of your pinky nail to being a full-size, three-inch oyster. We, right now, are selling our oysters that we planted in August. So, they grow really quickly just because of the warm waters.

[00:21:04.16]

**Garrett K.:** And we use a much slower-growing system than a lot of the farmers around here.

[00:21:07.10]

**Kelsey K.:** Um-hm.

[00:21:07.10]

**Garrett K.:** Because we use Australian longlines, our oysters are coming out of the water twice a day, and so that actually slows their growth down a little bit.

[00:21:17.25]

**Kelsey K.:** As opposed to having a floating bag where they're in the water.

[00:21:21.25]

**Garrett K.:** Feeding constantly.

[00:21:22.03]

**Kelsey K.:** Only de-fouling when you flip the cages over, so. I think it was just, for my dad, he grew up with farming. His grandparents had a farm out in Nebraska, and that's actually where my parents lived when they first got married, was at the farm in Nebraska. So, they farmed, and he actually just retired from that aspect of farming maybe five years ago?

[00:21:45.05]

**Garrett K.:** Um-hm.

[00:21:46.26]

**Kelsey K.:** From farming the wheat and all that stuff up in Nebraska. Then, he is now farming. He does a Polo Hay operation with perennial peanuts, so he's farming that in Suwannee. So, the farming aspect has kind of always been a part of our family and our lives, and I think it was just kind of an interesting thing for him to hear, "Oh, this is kind of cool." It's the same kind of farming, but it's done on the water. It's not done on the land. A lot of the same principles applied, but it was just kind of new and interesting and different for him, so it really piqued his interest, which probably is what got the ball rolling in the first place, was that my parents—who have farmed—heard about this, and it was just so different and new that they thought it was worth talking about, at least.

[00:22:35.22]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, I think your mom was really excited about it. I think she was, like the environmental aspect of it, how these oysters are basically cleaning the water for us. When we started in 2016, the bay was dead. You go out there and you wouldn't see any signs of life; you wouldn't see dolphin, you wouldn't see mullet, hardly. Hardly you'd see any mullet out there.

[00:22:58.28]

**Kelsey K.:** We wouldn't even see crabs.

[00:23:02.29]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, it was just dead. There was no seagrass anywhere to be found. Now, since we've been doing it for five years, I guess, we're approaching five years—this summer will be five years, yeah. That's crazy to think about. [Laughter] But now, on our lease where there was nothing before, there's seagrass. We have crabs. We have these gigantic black drum that come every single day that we're out there. Just schools of fish and dolphin.

[00:23:32.09]

**Kelsey K.:** Manatees.

[00:23:35.26]

**Garrett K.:** Manatees.

[00:23:37.18]

**Kelsey K.:** Sea turtles.

[00:23:40.14]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah.

[00:23:38.21]

**Kelsey K.:** We see sheephead, we see everything out there. It's funny that pretty much the first thing, the first thing that we throw overboard—because we'll have the little chipped-up shells as we clean and scrape the oysters—we'll have a lot of kind of scrap from that. Then any dead oysters that are just the shell, we'll toss those overboard as we're working. The first thing that hits the water, you might see, like, a couple fish come after. Then, every time after that, every time we toss anything in the water, it's like a feeding frenzy. So, they know. They hang out. As soon as we're on the lease, it's like, "Oh, guys! Everybody come on! It's time!" So, they come and hang out by the boat and just wait for us to toss things overboard. The crabs, we were kind of all excited about the crabs. Everything that ends up on our boat, we will stop working to try to throw back in the water. If we see a little, baby fish flopping on the ground or a little shrimp, we always pick it up and scoop it out and try to get it back in the water as quickly as we can. The crabs have been kind of an interesting—I don't know. I wouldn't call them a dilemma, but it's been interesting to see the crabs, because we've always been so careful to keep the crabs alive. Just recently, we had a cage that we opened up that had little, baby oysters in it. They were all dead, and pretty much every shell had a giant hole out of it where the

crabs had basically broken the shell and then eaten the oyster. So, I'm not sure what we're going to do about the crabs, but I still like seeing them. The kids, when the kids are out on the boat with us, that's probably their favorite thing, is they collect all the little crabs that fall out of the cages or crawl out of the cages and they put them in buckets.

[00:25:19.12]

**Garrett K.:** Or the jellyfish.

[00:25:23.22]

**Kelsey K.:** The jellyfish, or the fish. They'll put them in anything they can find. Our daughter will put, like, ten buckets out on the ground and she has all her little tanks. She names them and feeds them. She gives them anything she can. She'll find a little piece of the shell and drop it in and say, "There you go, little fishy!" But they have a blast with all the little sea creatures that are in the cages. So, it's cool, because like here it said, it did start out completely. We didn't see anything. Now, every time we're out there, we spot something that's kind of cool. Then the same stuff that the crabs and things that are in all the cages. They're cool, too.

[00:26:06.22]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. Blown away with how many crabs we see. I mean, when we first started, I remember pulling up a cage and dumping it out and there were stone crabs, little, baby stone crab in there. There were thousands of them, like you pull up ten cages and you have a thousand of them. You're like, "Wow, this is amazing. Where were these guys

living before?" Like, they didn't have any sort of home. Now, you look out there, and there are cages and bags everywhere. It's like, "Wow, okay, we're getting a lot of artificial reefs for animals to really thrive." It's just really nice.

[00:26:43.07]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah, for sure. I was wondering if maybe you could talk about, a little bit, the very beginning in 2016 when you all got here. What was it like getting started in this business?

[00:26:59.25]

**Kelsey K.:** Oh, man.

[00:26:58.23]

**Garrett K.:** Slow.

[00:27:00.17]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. I think, if we could do things over, I think we would just go about it another different route. Because we didn't know anything about the oyster aquaculture at that point, because it was really new, there was the WEI class. At that point, I guess when we started, there were leases. There was the WEI lease.

[00:27:16.14]

**Garrett K.:** There was the lease for WEI and there were a couple leases by it, but nobody was doing anything on those leases. They had just opened up the Oyster Bay leases maybe six months prior to when we arrived, and so, they had started growing— maybe it was about a year prior, because I think they were already harvesting oysters. I think Tim was already harvesting oysters at that point.

[00:27:46.17]

**Kelsey K.:** That's true.

[00:27:48.23]

**Garrett K.:** But there wasn't much out there. I think the first time when we went out there, there was one lease that was pretty much built out completely, and then there were a couple other leases that had a fair amount of gear, but they definitely weren't built out completely. Then, in late 2016, they approved the Skipper Bay leases, which are another sixteen leases. Then, after that, we didn't actually get to move onto that lease until summer of 2017. So, it was almost a year of just waiting, just waiting for the state to check all their little boxes and say, "Okay, well, we did this. All right, now, we need to order the survey." It was a very slow and painful process, to say the least.

[00:28:41.27]

**Kelsey K.:** And we didn't really know, at that point, who we could talk to, to figure out the best route of doing things. So, we really relied on that WEI class, which was good, because it gave us a lot of information and kind of set us up with who to talk to for this kind of gear

and how we need to do this to get the lines on the poles and everything. So, that was a positive, but it really was a lot slower of a track than what we probably—if we could change things, that's what we would change. We would probably get right in and just talk with people who were doing it and get the information on how to start.

[00:29:15.22]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. I think, if I was to do this again, I would volunteer to work with anybody, anybody who's being—anybody who has had any sort of success. I would say, "Hey. Let me come work on your boat, two days a week. And see if I even want to do this." I mean, luckily, we found that we really enjoy it, but it would have been a really sad deal, and I think a lot of people have found that they got into it and they don't enjoy it. They don't enjoy being out there, and so they've gotten out. But we absolutely love it, so. [Laughter] I was telling Kelsey that I wish I could be on the water more. Right now, I'm kind of stuck in the shop, trying to build these tumblers for people. But I wish I could spend more time on the water. But I guess if that's the least of my worries, or the most of my worries, then not a bad deal.

[00:30:07.10]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah. Well, tell me a little bit about your tumbler business. When did you start building?

[00:30:13.22]

**Garrett K.:** The first one I built—it took me, what? Six months to kind of plan out. It took me a long time. We've quickly found, as soon as we got seed in 2017 and the first batch of seed we got, we had some little pans and we were hand-sorting and I . . . we did that for three weeks. I said, "I gotta have a tumbler." So, I started looking online at what was out there, it was twenty thousand dollars. Like, "Man, we just spent thirty thousand dollars just on gear and oysters. I don't want to spend another twenty thousand dollars on one piece of equipment!" So, I said, "I think I can build something." That, and there was no way it was going to fit on our boat. In Florida, the regulation is that you—unless you have a processing facility—you have to work everything on the water. So, it's like, "Okay, well, I guess I'm going to need to build something that's small." Like I said, we spent six months building the first one, just sourcing all the different parts was the most complicated process of the whole thing. You know? Figuring out, "Well, what size pulley do I need to get the tube to spin at the right speed?" Like, that was a lot, too. So, I bought a welding machine, and I had a lot of fun welding, learning to weld.

[00:31:32.05]

**Kelsey K.:** Um-hm.

[00:31:34.13]

**Garrett K.:** I'd done a lot of welding growing up, shop class, and things like that. We have a ranch down in South Texas that's been in my family since—it was a land grant from the late 1890s, so, doing welding down there and everything else. So, I had some experience welding, but I built the first one, and then we said, "Hey, we need a top for the boat. It's

too hot out there in the summers." Being out there and baking, and it was not, not fun. So, I talked to a shop in town and they wanted three grand to build a top, and I said, "Okay, I'll just buy the material and I'll just do it myself." So, that saved us a lot of money. It took me a lot of time, but it saved us a lot of money. So, then, I did that and then, about six months later, somebody saw our tumbler and they said, "Hey, I like that. Can you pull up one for me?" I said, "Yeah, sure." So, I built that second one. Then, it was about that time that three other people asked, "Hey, can you build one for me? Can you build one for me?" I was like, "Okay! Well, I guess we're building tumblers now." So, since then, we've really grown. I think we did four the first year in 2017 and 2018, and then, since then I think all told we just shipped out our seventieth unit.

[00:32:58.06]

**Annemarie A.:** Wow.

[00:32:59.17]

**Kelsey K.:** They go from Maine to Alaska.

[00:33:04.03]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah.

[00:33:05.14]

**Kelsey K.:** So, it's pretty neat. The ones that he gets shipped, he builds a big crate and puts them in the crate for—the ones going to Maine or Virginia, places like that, are just in the crate

and they go on a truck. The ones going to Alaska have been in the crate, being trucked over to—

[00:33:20.26]

**Garrett K.:** Seattle.

[00:33:20.26]

**Kelsey K.:** —Seattle, and then they get on a boat and go up there. So, one of the, it's the eastern most?

[00:33:33.00]

**Garrett K.:** I have the easternmost farm in Alaska and then I have one in the westernmost farm in Alaska. So, there's one on Kodiak Island, and then there's one . . . where is Tommaso? I can't remember where he is, but he's on the eastern side of Alaska, so it's real interesting. Then I have one more in between. Maine has been the big push lately. We've had three go out to Maine in the past two months, and then Virginia, North Carolina. I think North Carolina has, I think there are fifteen units just in North Carolina.

[00:34:05.12]

**Annemarie A.:** Wow.

[00:34:05.12]

**Garrett K.:** So, one of those was real interesting. Last year, there was a hurricane. In the beginning of the year, I think it was Hurricane Ellen, does that sound right?

[00:34:18.17]

**Kelsey K.:** I'm not sure.

[00:34:17.07]

**Garrett K.:** I'm not sure. It was in the beginning of the year, and the guy had on his boat and he wedged his boat up in the grasses, and the wind and the waves flipped his boat over with his tumbler attached to it. So, the tumbler was on the seafloor for at least a week before he was able to get out there and get the boat flipped over and get it dredged up. He pulled it up and he said, "You know, it leaked saltwater for a couple days . . ." And he plugged it in and turned it on and it started working, so, it had virtually no damage and survived a week in the water. The motor was fine. I was blown away. [Laughter]

[00:34:55.03]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah, that's crazy.

[00:34:57.20]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. So, we just got rid of our first one, the first one that we built. We just sold that a couple months ago to a farm around here. It's still out there! [Laughter]

[00:35:10.12]

**Kelsey K.:** Yep, the very first one, the prototype.

[00:35:12.08]

**Garrett K.:** Yep.

[00:35:14.05]

**Kelsey K.:** Still being used.

[00:35:09.05]

**Annemarie A.:** Well, how did those folks from Maine to Alaska hear about your tumblers? How did you market those?

[00:35:20.09]

**Garrett K.:** Mostly through Facebook. We do a lot of marketing through Facebook and Instagram. We just recently started TikTok and have a lot of fun doing the marketing for that. It's just Kelsey and I. We'll come up, we'll sit there and say, "Hey, what's a good idea for a video?" So, we'll kind of sit there and brainstorm. We don't do many, but I think the ones that we do are pretty good.

[00:35:42.08]

**Kelsey K.:** Are fun.

[00:35:43.29]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, they're a lot of fun to do. So, yeah, we went to the Oyster South symposium in North Carolina two years ago. They obviously didn't have one this year because of the pandemic. Then . . . let's see here. I guess we're also a . . . like a supplier member for the Alaska Shellfish Growers Association and Florida Shellfish Growers Association. Mostly, it's been word of mouth. People buy one and someone else says, "Hey, where'd you get that?" So, we've had a lot of referrals. It's always fun. When we get referrals, we usually send out a twenty-five dollar Amazon gift card to whoever referred people, so it's really fun to, "Hey, what's your mailing address? I can send this gift card out." That's always fun and people get excited about getting their gift card.

[00:36:41.11]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah, I think word of mouth has definitely been the biggest thing. As Garrett said, the tumbler options that were out there, at least when we started, were so expensive. They were so big. So, for the people who—especially for the small farmer, who maybe doesn't have, like, investment, a bunch of investments or investors that can plunk a bunch of money into it, the skiff sorter that Garrett built is affordable and it's reasonable for people, especially starting out, when you have all the other expenses. You can afford something like that or, at least, save for a couple months and then afford it, and then have something that works. It's smaller-scale, so it's easier to maintain.

[00:37:25.28]

**Garrett K.:** Runs off a battery, so you don't have to have a big generator out there burning gas. You can have a battery with a solar charger and it pretty much will run itself. I mean, the

motor draws very little power. So, a standard marine battery, the charge will last two or three weeks. So, for a small farmer, up to three hundred thousand oysters, it's like, the perfect size. So, we started off with that one and had a guy here who said, "Hey, I have this longer tube. Can you build a sorter to match it?" I said, "Oh, yeah, we could do that." So, then we started marketing that one. Then we actually had built two of the ten-foot ones like what we have here in here and what Tim Jordan has. Those are slightly different between the two of those, because ours has three, like three different hole sizes, and Tim's just has two. But we didn't want to have to change the tube out ever, so that's why we did that. It's really nice, because it's basically our farm. We have babies, we have middle-sized or bigger babies, and then we have kind of our pre-market and then our market. It's really nice. It's really, that's really improved our efficiency. I mean, to the point that this is the most caught up we've ever been in May. I think Kelsey's mostly been doing it three days a week.

[00:38:58.01]

**Kelsey K.:** Um-hm, three or four.

[00:39:02.12]

**Annemarie A.:** That's amazing. For people who will never be able to experience a tumbler, you can hear it in the background. [Laughter] Could you kind of describe what it looks like and how it works?

[00:39:11.25]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. It's basically all aluminum frame, and then it has an aluminum tube. The small ones just have a forty-inch long tube that has a diameter of fifteen inches. Then, it has different hole sizes. The small things fall through the holes and the bigger ones go out the very end. So, if you're using a three-quarter-inch hole, then whatever falls through is smaller than three-quarter-inches and whatever goes out the end is bigger. So, it just spins. A lot of people call them a trammel. So, it's just interesting. I've had a lot of conversations with people in the mulch and composting industry.

[00:40:03.08]

**Annemarie A.:** Interesting.

[00:40:05.04]

**Garrett K.:** Because they want a trammel to basically sort out the smaller, finer dirt, and then have the big parts go out the end. So, kind of been working on trying to develop something for that market, too, which is really—I never would've thought it. It was just, I don't know, interesting, I think.

[00:40:25.16]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah.

[00:40:30.06]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. What falls out, we have different-sized baskets out on the farm. So, we have the baskets with the small holes, the three-millimeter holes, and then we have a six-mill

and a twelve-mill. So, based on where the oysters fall out at which point in the tumbler, whichever tube you're using—if you're switching out your tubes—you know the ones that fall through the bottom have to go back in the three-mill cage. The ones that go out the end, you can put in the six mill. Then you can run them again, as they grow, and then the ones that go out of the end of the six-mill tube end up in the twelve-mill cage. So, you're constantly—that was why we named the company Shell Game, because it's like one big shell game. You have all these different shells that you're sorting—

[00:41:06.22]

**Garrett K.:** And you're constantly moving the cages from here to there and back and forth.

There's a lot of movement of oysters. [Laughter]

[00:41:17.29]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. We touch each of our oysters probably, I don't know, fifteen times by the time that they're—as we work them, as they grow, by the time that they're ready to sell, it might even be more than that. It would be interesting to actually track and see, count how many times. Obviously, some of them are going to grow faster than others, so those, we might touch less. But the slow-growers that we're constantly babying along, those we touch a ton of times.

[00:41:42.28]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, probably closer to twenty.

[00:41:43.25]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. It's been a lot more work than we anticipated. When we got into it, we were told you could go out three half-days and be able to—

[00:41:55.23]

**Garrett K.:** Two half-days. [Laughter]

[00:41:55.23]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. Be able to just go out there and let the oysters grow, and you don't have to do anything, and then you go collect them. That's definitely very far from the truth. But luckily, we've enjoyed—I enjoy—kind of the manual labor side of things. I feel like I'm a lot stronger now. I definitely have a lot more upper body strength. I feel like pushing through some of those tough days where it is really hard work, but pushing through, there's just a sense of accomplishment that I feel at the end of the day. Then, seeing what we're producing, I think they're very nice oysters and we can keep on top of it. They're clean and they're delicious. So, it's really fun to be especially be able to supply our friends and family with fresh oysters. It's pretty fun.

[00:42:50.29]

**Garrett K.:** It's always fun to see the person's look on their face when we give them one. They're like, "Oh, wow." It's funny. Every oyster farm will say, "Oh, well, I gave an oyster to this person; they said it's the best oyster they've ever had." I'm like, "Yeah, these oysters are amazing. These are a cut above the wild oysters that we had." I remember eating a wild

oyster from Texas when I was seventeen or eighteen, and thinking, oh, man, you gotta load this thing up on a cracker with lots of hot sauce on it and hope—whoo! That's a doozy. Then we get here and, I think the first day we were out, maybe it was the third day we were out on the boat, another farmer came up and said, "Hey! You know, you want to try a couple of these oysters?" I was kind of like, "Uh, okay." So, I popped one open and I ate it. I was like, "Okay, wow. That's a really good oyster." It's just amazing, the quality. All the farmers here are producing some really, really amazing oysters, which is really cool.

[00:43:56.20]

**Kelsey K.:** And they all taste different. They all have kind of a different flavor profile, even though we might only be—

[00:44:01.04]

**Garrett K.:** Five yards.

[00:44:05.18]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. You a little bit of ways. You could throw a rock and hit another lease, but the oysters are going to taste different, just because of the changes in the water column from Point A to Point B.

[00:44:14.28]

**Garrett K.:** That, and also the growing methods. So, an oyster that's constantly feeding, that's going to have a little bit different of a texture and a profile than an oyster that's coming in and out of the water. If you talk to some of the old guys, some of the old tongers, they'll tell you that the best-tasting oysters are the ones that come in and out of the water. So, that's why we really chose the method that we did for our grow-out method. We like it because it's a lot more user control. We control how fast our oysters grow and, because of that, when they come out of the water, they have to close up. When they close up, it helps build their abductor muscle. So, the bigger the abductor muscle, the basically more meaty the oyster is inside, and it gives the oyster its sweetness.

[00:45:01.25]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. It's funny, because as we moved over here to do oysters, neither one of us were oyster eaters. [Laughter] And neither were my parents. I remember, as a kid, I went—at one of the family reunions—we all went out to Carrabelle for lunch. It was my uncle and whoever could fit in the Yukon and then another car. So, we all went out, and were treated to lunch by my uncle. He ordered oysters for us, and I remember going home and telling my dad that he had eaten an oyster. He said, "Oh, Kelsey, why did you do that? Oysters are just—you shouldn't be eating oysters. They're just not very good." So, I don't think I had another oyster from that point on. Then, we decided to grow oysters. Eventually, after a little bit of farming, we tried—I tried, Garrett tried them a lot earlier and loved them—but after a certain point, I tried them again, and now I'd say that they're on our menu at least monthly.

[00:45:59.04]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah—

[00:46:00.21]

**Kelsey K.:** Multiple times a month. Kids love them. They love them cooked and raw and any way we make them. But yeah, it's constant. Whenever I say, "Hey, do you guys want me to bring some oysters home?" They both cheer or I'll say, "I brought some oysters home!" And they'll cheer.

[00:46:15.15]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. They do a little happy dance about the oysters.

[00:46:19.15]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah.

[00:46:20.26]

**Garrett K.:** Our little six-year-old, he'll eat two dozen oysters and it's just no big deal for him.

"Oh, man, I wish I had an appetite like that. I wish I could get away with eating two dozen oysters." But we usually only bring back the rejects. [Laughter] It's like four dozen oysters and he eats half of them. It's like, "Well, I guess I get six oysters tonight."

[Laughter]

[00:46:45.02]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah, that's hilarious. Well, maybe tell me a little bit about a typical day on the water for you all.

[00:46:52.04]

**Garrett K.:** Well, it depends. We basically have three different days that we have. Kelsey can tell about, like, most of the days. [Laughter]

[00:47:01.19]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah, since I've taken over recently. Since we have the oyster processing facility, that's changed things a lot, because now we're able to do our work somewhat inside. So, there's definitely stuff that we still have to do out on the lease where we're raising and lowering lines or cleaning up the lines that are out there, getting barnacles off of them.

[00:47:19.06]

**Garrett K.:** Putting in new lines.

[00:47:19.00]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah, installing new lines. We have that stuff that has to be done out on the lease. But the rest of it, we pretty much can do in the building. So, we'll go out and collect eighty cages and load the boat full of cages, bring them into the building, unload all the cages onto some carts that Garrett just built—you probably saw them as you walked in. Those have made a huge difference for us, because before, we were having to carry each individual cage in and out and loading and unloading was just back-breaking. Now, we

load the carts up and we can roll 'em all in. Then we start running them through the tumbler. Right now, since we have the tumbler that has the multiple sizes and holes, we don't have to worry about changing a tube out. So, we can bring in three-, six-, or twelve-mill cages and work them all back-to-back, because everything will be organized and sorted based on size. So, we'll run the cages, run the oysters through the sorter, put them back in fresh, clean cages that we've left out in the backyard for a period of time so the barnacles and everything can die on them, so we're not just carrying barnacles back and forth. But we scrape all the cages off so they're clean, or clean-ish, and then we fill those back up, load them back out onto the boat, and then take them back out. So, a lot of times, it's actually my mom and myself going out on the lease, which has been an interesting learning curve. I grew up around boats and driving boats and things like that. My mom has been on boats forever, but she always had someone else to drive her around. So, I'm pretty much the boat driver and the boat backer. I back the trailer down to the water. Then, she launches the boat, and we head out there. It's definitely interesting when you have tides and winds and everything impacting it. There have been a lot of days that have been very windy, and it's been interesting. [Laughter] As a nice word. When it's just the two of us, we're not as strong, and when you get close to the line, sometimes we're hanging on just by a couple fingers, hanging on for dear life, trying to pull ourselves over to the lines. But yeah, it's been fun. I feel like both of us feel like we've accomplished something when we're able to go out just the two of us and work through a bunch of oysters for the day. So, we have those days. We have the days where we have to have Garrett and my dad out there to install new lines. We need Garrett's muscle and my dad's muscle to do that part.

[00:49:58.28]

**Garrett K.:** Sometimes, the help of a couple buddies. Usually pay them a six pack and some oysters. [Laughter] You know.

[00:50:10.04]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. So, we have line installations—

[00:50:12.26]

**Garrett K.:** And the harvest.

[00:50:12.21]

**Kelsey K.:** Oh, and harvest. That's the most fun. That's the most fun day, because you've worked all the oysters and you have everything out there, ready to go. So, we go out and we wash the oysters out on the water. So, we're washing them with salt water and they're clean when we bring them into the building. Then they go straight into the cooler. There's a whole lot of rules—there are a lot of rules and everything that we follow to make sure that the oysters are safe for eating raw, even the months during the summer, which has been kind of interesting for kind of the old-timers of Florida and pretty much everywhere. They're the rules that you can only eat oysters in the months with r's, so, don't oysters, essentially, in May, June, July, or August. Since we have such strict rules and criteria that we follow to make sure that we're getting the oysters in at an appropriate time and that they're chilled in an adequate amount of time, they're safe to eat year-round. So, that's

been kind of fun to educate people on and let them know that oysters are no longer just a cool-weather activity. Some people like them more when it's cool; they'll say that they taste better then. But yeah, they're safe anytime, as long as . . .

[00:51:30.00]

**Garrett K.:** As long as you make the safeguards, yeah.

[00:51:31.20]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah.

[00:51:33.04]

**Annemarie A.:** Yeah. Well, I only have a couple more questions for y'all, because I know you have a busier schedule. [Laughter] But I was wondering about maybe the community of growers here in Panacea, some of the people that you maybe developed relationships with, who you taught or they taught you, or that you sometimes work together with?

[00:51:50.19]

**Kelsey K.:** It's an awesome group of people.

[00:51:56.24]

**Garrett K.:** When we got started, Tim Jordan was always there to, "Hey! Have you looked at this? Hey, are you looking at that? One thing I notice, your oysters are really deep. What are you doing to do that? Are you tumbling your cages? Are you tumbling your oysters?"

Are you shaking your cages?" Then, I think the first year when we had a big . . . barnacle bloom, brought oysters in, he's like, "Hey, make sure you scrape those barnacles in." He said, "You'll get an extra five cents at the market for it." I'm like, "Oh, okay. Well, that's interesting to know." Then Ben Wiggins was another one, and Bob Bruggner, when we first started. They really . . . I don't know. I think, when we first started, I was talking to Ben Wiggins every week, like, "Hey, this is what we have going on." He was really nice about helping us along. Just bouncing ideas back and forth and, obviously, you have . . . Phil and Beth Walton up in Auburn. I'm sad that they're going to be leaving us and going up to Virginia, because they have just been another resource. Like I know any time I have a question about, "Hey, what's this going on with this oyster? Is this normal?" Take a picture of it and send it to Bill. He's like, "Oh, yeah, that's fine. That happens quite a bit." So, it's really been really fun to cultivate these relationships and get to know the oyster community, because the oyster community is awesome. I mean, there are so many people that are just . . . they're awesome people, and they're out here to really change the world. Having that many people with one collective goal is really kind of amazing, in and of itself. I don't know how else to say it. [Laughter]

[00:53:51.14]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. Everybody's been super just friendly and supportive. At first, I kind of was nervous; you know, coming into a new industry. I was nervous that it was going to be cutthroat and people were going to be kind of out to get each other, you know? Like I don't want to help them because they're competing against me to sell my oysters. But it has been everything but that.

[00:54:10.05]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. There's a little bit of that, but not much.

[00:54:15.01]

**Kelsey K.:** I feel like everybody really is helpful, and if they know something that has helped, they're happy to share it. It's been—the people who are actually doing the oysters, I feel like, have all been supportive and really just generous.

[00:54:31.15]

**Garrett K.:** I think there was a little bit of the cutthroat stuff in the very beginning when it was really in its infancy, and I think that's kind of gone away as the people who have continued to do the oyster aquaculture have really developed those relationships. I think the people who were really cutthroat in the beginnings have . . . they've moved on to something else.

[00:54:54.20]

**Annemarie A.:** That makes sense. Well, I was wondering, maybe, what are some challenges or happy surprises that you learned about this work or yourselves since 2016?

[00:55:07.29]

**Garrett K.:** I'd say the biggest challenge has been the weather.

[00:55:12.20]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah.

[00:55:14.00]

**Garrett K.:** Which is why getting this oyster processing facility up and running was so important to us. I think, when we actually started working on the oyster processing facility was probably June of 2019. Then we didn't actually have it operational until September of 2020.

[00:55:31.10]

**Kelsey K.:** November.

[00:55:29.11]

**Garrett K.:** November of 2020, okay. So, that was a huge labor of love to get this building out from where it was to what it is now. What that does is it, it allows us in the summertimes—because sure enough, every day in the summer about one o'clock, you're going to have thunderstorms. It seems like you can set your watch by it. I think we've had a few scary boat rides in where there's lightning striking literally within a hundred yards of the boat with a giant, aluminum top on it. You know, that took a couple years off my life. I think the building's getting it back, which is really nice, because we can go out first thing in the morning and grab the oysters and bring them in and work them. Then after the thunder storms have cleared off, we can go back out and drop them off, which is

going to be huge this summer. So, this is going to have our first summer to have the building. I think battling the weather, battling the elements—

[00:56:32.22]

**Kelsey K.:** Weather and tides. There have been a lot of days when . . . there was a night that Garrett and my dad were out on the lease, and they came in and got grounded.

[00:56:42.20]

**Garrett K.:** No, we were stuck on the lease. North wind, it was the middle of June. The lease went bone-dry at seven o'clock. We didn't leave the lease until ten o'clock that night. That was when we finally had enough water that we could float the boat off the lease. So, since then, we now have some lights on the boat. [Laughter] I think what I did that time, we didn't have any lights, so I held up one cell phone with the red light and one cell phone with the green light. I think that was what we did to get back in, and had to rely on the G.P.S.

[00:57:19.11]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah.

[00:57:20.26]

**Garrett K.:** Because it was pitch-black at night. It was crazy. Kelsey and her mom and the kids were all in town, and so it wasn't like we could call anybody. "Hey, come pick us up." The only other option would have been to wade out across the bay to Bottoms Road and

walk back into town, but I don't think either one of us wanted to do that. [Laughter] Then, other challenges or surprises, what's something that's really shocked you about this?

[00:57:51.16]

**Kelsey K.:** I would say, probably . . . the amount of work and the price of the oysters. So, before, I think a lot of people have the idea of oysters just being cheap bar food. With the amount of work that we put into them, I have no qualms about paying for oysters now. Like if I go out to a restaurant and I see that the oysters are a couple dollars, or three dollars an oyster—especially if they're being prepared—I know how much work goes into each one of those little guys. So, that's been kind of a surprise, just knowing what goes on behind the scenes to get that oyster to the table has been pretty interesting to kind of learn and be involved.

[00:58:41.20]

**Garrett K.:** It doesn't just stop when we drop the oyster off at the restaurant. It's crazy, because then they have to prepare the oysters, too. So, they have to have someone there on staff who's shucking oysters and cooking oysters or making all the toppings to put on the oysters themselves. So, it's really been interesting to see what happens in that regard, as well.

[00:59:02.03]

**Kelsey K.:** I think a surprise, too, is how much fun shucking is. [Laughter] I have so much fun. For a long time, I didn't do it. Like I just let Garrett or my dad shuck the oysters. Then,

one day, I kind of was like, "You know what? I'm going to do this. I'm going to figure it out." So, I grabbed the knife and started doing it. Now, whenever we have oysters, I feel like I'm the first one to start because I enjoy it. It's a lot of fun. It's something that's so simple, but it's really cool to be able to do it. It's really fun, I think, to look at the tray and know that, not only did I grow them, but I also opened them up. [Laughter] It's fun.

[00:59:35.29]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah. Remember where you were at Landlocked—

[00:59:41.06]

**Kelsey K.:** I know.

[00:59:42.25]

**Garrett K.:** We shucked about three hundred oysters for Landlocked in Atlanta. I think it was about an hour and a half or two hours, and I was beat after that. Kelsey was just playing with the kids, having fun.

[00:59:57.20]

**Kelsey K.:** Yep.

[00:59:58.29]

**Annemarie A.:** Where do y'all sell the oysters?

[01:00:00.13]

**Garrett K.:** We sell most of our stuff through Tim Jordan. He supplies them to Evans Seafood, and then they go up to Kimball House and a couple restaurants in Atlanta, Birmingham. We see them on the menu sometimes in Nashville. It's fun. We have friends in those parts of the country, so it's kind of fun to be like, "Hey! If you want to get some of our oysters, go check out this place and go check out this place." So, it's really fun to do that.

[01:00:33.21]

**Kelsey K.:** We started shipping them. So, we can ship them now for people who want to—in different states that are not getting them. We're trying to get them into Houston, because we have several restaurant owners over there that have asked for them. The transport over there has been challenging. We haven't figured out how to do that yet. But then, in town, they're routinely—I think pretty much every week—they're at Cypress Restaurant in Tallahassee. We've had them at Sage before. Several other of the Tallahassee restaurants, here locally, they're kind of rotationally through Seineyard and—

[01:01:10.05]

**Garrett K.:** Angelo's.

[01:01:10.21]

**Kelsey K.:** Angelo's. So, they're kind of a little bit of everywhere, but it's not a consistent—the consistent place to get them in town is definitely Cypress. Then they kind of rotate through some of the other places.

[01:01:26.18]

**Annemarie A.:** Nice. One final question for you, then I know you guys have to go get some work done. But that's kind of the larger question and that's, what do you hope to see for the future of your business and for oyster aquaculture in Florida?

[01:01:43.17]

**Kelsey K.:** I hope it continues to thrive, for sure. The whole industry as a whole. I think that it's been a really neat way for people—especially, I've seen a lot of families get involved. There are a couple companies kind of in Florida that it is a family operation, kind of like we are, where my parents are involved. We're involved and our kids are involved. Learning to love the sea—and the land, too—

[01:02:12.13]

**Garrett K.:** Yeah, the outdoors.

[01:02:14.18]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah, the outdoors. I hope to see it just continue to thrive and grow and become something where people can make a living. It's been kind of slow-going there, just because everything started out so slow for us. Then it is so much work. Sometimes, you look at the bottom line and you think, "Man, is this worth it?" [Laughter] For us, it is worth it, because we love what we're doing and we're seeing progress. But I hope that other farmers will continue to stay the course and not throw the towel in with some of the

challenges that have come up. It seems like, specifically, over the last couple of years, we had Hurricane Michael which really devastated the crop. Then we had COVID, which we were kind of set up before COVID to really have a great summer. Then COVID hit and we didn't have anywhere to sell our oysters. So, we had . . . that was a pretty big challenge, just with COVID and then the year before Michael.

[01:03:14.22]

**Garrett K.:** Two.

[01:03:13.10]

**Kelsey K.:** Two years before. I know a lot of people have thrown the towel in from things like that, where they had these unanticipated acts of God slash—

[01:03:25.29]

**Garrett K.:** Natural disasters.

[01:03:25.13]

**Kelsey K.:** —yeah, come up that you just can't do anything about. You have to be able to weather the bad with the good. But I hope it continues to thrive and families can have this as kind of a way of life. It's a pretty awesome way to do it. I hope, for our kids, that one day, they'll be able to continue on if they decide they want to keep going with the oysters. I would hope that it would be a big enough business that they could potentially support their families, as well.

[01:04:02.04]

**Annemarie A.:** That's great.

[01:04:01.22]

**Garrett K.:** I think one of the things I'd like to really see: more of a push from the state of Florida is more oyster gardening. I know it's really big in Mississippi and Alabama, and people have docks. So, underneath their docks, they go out and put a couple oyster cages. That's completely against the rules here in Florida. To me, it seems counterproductive, like you would really want that here because we have so much coastline. Let's utilize it and let's get people out there on a really small scale, helping to repopulate the oyster population and allow them to clean up the water. I really want to see that grow, and I'm really excited about the growth that I'm seeing across the whole U.S. in terms of oyster aquaculture. It seems like I talk to people all the time and there are more farms starting up in Rhode Island. Where is the other one? Massachusetts and Maine. There are all these new farms coming online. It's really exciting to see. I'm going to be surprised if, in the next five years, there aren't two thousand different oyster farms across the U.S. It wouldn't surprise me if we're getting close to that number already.

[01:05:21.22]

**Kelsey K.:** Um-hm.

[01:05:20.08]

**Garrett K.:** I mean, you obviously have the big names, but then you have so many people that are small, that are growing two or three hundred thousand oysters, and that, I really like to see. I like to see that diversity of farmers instead of just the big guys who are trying to grow ten million a year. It's really nice.

[01:05:41.07]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah. The oyster stuff is really cool, because it truly is a sustainable—it's a sustainable, farmed product. You're cleaning up the water, you're producing something that is . . . I don't know, I don't know how to explain it. It's very cool.

[01:06:02.07]

**Garrett K.:** And it's not like most farmed seafoods. Most farmed seafoods, you know, they're in a tank or a pen. It's not in the same water as they would be, like shrimp farming, for instance. Where I grew up, there were a couple big shrimp farms. You know, what they do with those is, over generations, they breed the shrimp so that they can handle less salinity, lower-salinity water, so it's easier for the farmers to provide them water that has a lower salinity than to have straight saltwater. We're not like that. We're literally growing in a bay five hundred yards from where an oyster bar used to be, but has been so decimated between the black drum that go out there and they will eat an oyster whole. It's amazing. You throw a shell in there, and they're down there, scooping it off the ground and they're crushing it up into nothing. You can walk along the bars where oysters used to be, and see that's pretty much what's happened there. That, and the oyster drills.

[01:07:09.09]

**Kelsey K.:** And over-farming.

[01:07:06.27]

**Garrett K.:** Over-harvesting.

[01:07:09.17]

**Kelsey K.:** Over-harvesting, yeah.

[01:07:13.15]

**Garrett K.:** So, it's . . . it's really cool to see.

[01:07:19.24]

**Kelsey K.:** I don't know what the number is in Florida, but I was talking with a farmer in North Carolina the other day, and I think the number he said was twenty percent, that North Carolina—North Carolina produces about twenty percent of the oysters that North Carolina consumes. So, if we can get to the point where we're producing enough state-by-state to supply the state with what they're eating, and it's fun to get oysters from other areas, too, so there's going to be kind of the trading between the states of product. But it would be neat if we were able to farm the oysters that we're consuming, and let the natural oysters that are out there in seas kind of come back and take their place again. Because there are a lot of areas where, for various reasons, the oysters have been just kind of decimated. So, if we can just take the strain off of the sea and off of the Gulf—

[01:08:11.29]

**Garrett K.:** Off the wild harvest.

[01:08:15.04]

**Kelsey K.:** Yeah.

[01:08:16.16]

**Garrett K.:** And put more of that burden on the farmers, and maybe make it more incentives for the farmers, as well. I think that would be really exciting to see.

[01:08:28.27]

**Annemarie A.:** That's super interesting. Well, is there anything that we haven't talked about that you'd like to add?

[01:08:35.12]

**Kelsey K.:** I don't think so. Is there anything you can think of?

[01:08:38.04]

**Garrett K.:** Not that I'm aware of.

[01:08:38.29]

**Annemarie A.:** Thank you so much for talking to me. I'm going to get a little bit of room tone,  
so if we could be quiet for, like, twenty seconds.

*[End of interview]*