**ADAM MORLEY**

**Boat Captain**

**St. Augustine, FL**

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Interviewer: Anna Hamilton

Date: 10/18/17

Location: Genung’s Fish Camp

Length: 24:11

**[Begin interview]**

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:00:01] I'm going to start just to say that this is Anna Hamilton for Matanzas Voices. It is Wednesday October 18th, I think [laughs], 2017. I'm sitting with Adam Morley on the beautiful deck outside of Matanzas—sorry, of Genung's Fish Camp looking over the river, which is completely full of water. But it's a really beautiful day. A windy day and Adam, just to start, will you identify yourself, tell me who you are and what you do?

**Adam Morley:** [00:00:34] Yeah. My name is Adam Morley. I am a captain and a native to St. Augustine in the Crescent Beach area.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:00:43] Can you tell me a little bit about—sorry I'm just making sure you sound good. Tell me about your connection to this place.

**Adam Morley:** [00:00:53] So my connection, being a native here in the area, my brother and I would always come to the fish camp when Jack [Genung] was running it and we'd buy our bait and tackle and we'd go fish underneath the 206 bridge for hours and hours on end until we ran out of bait and had to come back and get more bait from Jack who would wrap it in old newspapers. He would weigh it out loose and put it on the scale and we'd say, "we need three dollars worth of shrimp" and he would weigh out three dollars worth of loose bait shrimp and wrap it up in old newspaper and we'd take it back under the bridge and fish for some more hours.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:01:39] What kinds of things did you fish for under the bridge?

**Adam Morley:** [00:01:40] So I learned early what we want to catch and what we actually catch are two totally different things. [Laughs] What we wanted to catch were the good things like the red fish, trout, flounder, black drum, sheepshead. What we usually ended up catching were catfish, stingrays, angelfish, stuff like that, under the bridge.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:02:04] That's awesome—stingrays.

**Adam Morley:** [00:02:05] Yeah, little like skates and different varieties of stingrays that we get out here. But yeah those were things that we didn't really want to [laughs] catch and try to keep as much of our digits away from them as possible. [Laughs]

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:02:42] So I wanted to chat with you because about a year ago today people were assessing storm damage from Hurricane Matthew and sifting through what was salvageable and what wasn't and trying to think about what that meant on a larger scale. You have the unique perspective of being here.

**Adam Morley:** [00:02:42] Yeah so it was definitely one of those "don't try this at home" stories but I'd never listen to those warnings. The thing about Matthew was that its greatest impact happened during the day. So the storm surge that the Matanzas River got—it was during daylight. I was just on the other side of the 206 bridge. The water was coming up so high it was coming up to the neighbor's driveway, the storm surge was. I decided that it would be a good idea to launch my kayak and paddle across to check out the island to see what was going on. It was a fun and exciting trip across the Matanzas River from the other side of the 206 bridge. Not even the 206 bridge up near where really the tree line all the way across. Luckily the wind direction was helping. It kind of just—I was really more sailing than paddling myself just trying to stay upright. And it ended up coming across and landing in the Green Road boat ramp, which wasn't there. It was just a river through Green Road. The wall on the south side of Green Road, the wall blocking the house, the fence, it had collapsed. It was a concrete wall that had collapsed in. And there was just so much water everywhere and having, again, grown up, lived in different spots here in Crescent Beach, Pelican Inlet, that's what I wanted to kind of check out because I spent ten years of my life in Pelican Inlet, just a couple of blocks south of where we are at the fish camp here. And just everything was under water. I paddled all the way to A1A to the public walkover, got out of the kayak, walked over, checked out the beach, got back in my kayak, paddled down A1A a little bit, paddled back over to Middleton [Avenue], paddled down Middleton all the way down to Cubbedge road, and then down here to the fish camp to check things out. The fish camp was flooded. You could see the lines on the doors on—the water line for the storm. And it was just amazing to see so much water in some place that I was so familiar with having always been high and dry, really. And to be under that kind of water was like—it was just—I was awestruck. It was amazing. You're torn between this feeling of despair because like everything you know and love is like being flooded and destroyed. But at the same time it's amazing how powerful these storms can be and how quick things can change. You can't help but just really be amazed by how fast things can change with just a single storm events like this.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:05:57] So I should clarify that you live almost right over the river.

**Adam Morley:** [00:06:00] Yeah I—Correct. I live—currently I live just on the other side of the 206 bridge on the mainland and paddled across during the peak of the storm.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:06:22] And I imagine—I mean I know you have a family.

**Adam Morley:** [00:06:22] [Laughs]

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:06:22] I imagine that was an interesting conversation. Did your family stay?

**Adam Morley:** [00:06:24] No. So my my wife actually had a bad evacuation experience. I think it was during Floyd, where she decided that if she was going to evacuate she was going to evacuate long before anybody even talked about it. So she took my son Elon and she went to visit a childhood friend in Alabama like a week before they even started talking about evacuation. So it was long before I ever ever had the bright idea to go kayaking in the peak of a hurricane.

**Adam Morley:** [00:07:05] And how did you decide to stay?

**Adam Morley:** [00:07:06] So I decided to stay because I wasn't going to evacuate alone. I was still going to be working. I was still on call for the days leading up to the storm for tours and people were booking. It was still beautiful weather before the before the storm came. And so I had to stay and work. And I was fine with that. And by the time the storm was here I was safe and confident in my structure that I was in and the elevation that I was at, where I didn't really have any concern. So staying wasn't a hard decision.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:07:52] Did you sustain any damage?

**Adam Morley:** [00:07:53] We lost a flimsy little screen enclosure that—we ignored the warnings and said, "take it down if the winds are projected to get over 40 mph." We ignored that and found out why we're supposed to take it down. Matthew took it down for us. [Laughs]

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:08:18] So when you got over here—it's hard to imagine when the islands kind of alive and people are going to work or going home or whatever and are in their cars. It's hard to imagine what that looks like. What was the first thing you thought when you got over here and you realized you were on the island?

**Adam Morley:** [00:08:18] Technically I was above the island, floating above the island, not on it. I realized how quiet it was. Again, Matthew wasn't a huge wind event, especially when once you got onto the island there plenty of structures and barriers so there wasn't a lot of wind. It's just a lot of water. Very little rain. And it was in the middle of the day so there's plenty of daylight. It was just really kind of eerie to be there in the middle of the day, sitting on top of the water, being able to touch the second story balconies in the two story Pelican Inlet condominiums to the south of us, seeing some people that stayed on the island. Like they just—you could see them looking out the window at me, shaking their heads, and I'm smiling and waving and they waved back and I paddle on. But there were more people that stayed than I think a lot of people realize. And there's just so much water and it's such an amazing thing to see. But it was very quiet. That was that was what really kind of struck me as interesting was middle of the day. Everything was under the water but everything was still quiet. There wasn't that hustle and bustle there wasn't that traffic. There's no cars. Like you could see the antennas from the cars sticking up out of the water. But it was really amazing. I made it all the way up to Treasure Beach, paddled down A1A all way to Treasure Beach and then paddled through the Treasure Beach neighborhood there until I finally got back out to the Matanzas River, where I tried to cross back over to the mainland after having spent a couple hours paddling around and taking some videos and photos of the area. I paddle out of some of the canals and Treasure Beach and I start making my way across, but by that time the storm had moved farther. The winds had shifted and so I was going to be paddling back against the wind. I made it about 100 yards out away from the island and—I have a lot of experience kayaking. I've been doing that for quite some time. But the experience was not—never in the wind. And the wind out there in the open water away from the island was so intense and the swells, the white caps that were coming in that—are really what caused a lot of the damage on the island side, the protected side of Anastasia Island, was the storm surge and the wave action washing up against the island and that wave action was pretty intense because it was at the peak of one of those swells that I got hit by a gust of wind and I was leaning into it and it blew me off of the kayak and the kayak went flipping like a like a feather. Just off all the way back to the island. And I have my I held onto the kayak paddle and of course I'm wearing a life jacket. I'm crazy, I'm not stupid. And so with my life jacket and my paddle and the line that I was carrying with me in case I needed a line—it would have been smart to have tied the line to the kayak and to myself so that I didn't have to swim the 100 yards back to the island to retrieve my kayak. But I eventually got back to the island, got my kayak which was up in someone's yard [laughs] on the Treasure Beach waterfront side and got back in the kayak, decided that I was just going to paddle back to the fish camp, put the kayak there and walk back across the bridge. So it was an amazing adventure. And to see the island under water, to see the 30 foot cabin cruisers that were up on what's normally high and dry ground like beating up against houses, and to see small skiffs that were normally on boatlift sitting up on top of the handrails of the docks—there's really just no way to describe seeing that kind of devastation while everything is technically still happening during during the peak of the storm. We can get into areas after they've been devastated and see the aftermath. But to be there and witness it as it's happening—it's just a super strange feeling.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:13:44] Was there any point in your excursion where you were like, "Um, maybe this was a terrible idea?"

**Adam Morley:** [00:13:49] No, actually. And that—even when I was out in the middle of the river without a kayak holding onto a paddle and some line I remember thinking to myself the only thing that concerns me right now is the fact that I'm not that concerned. I just felt so calm and like I was wearing my life jacket. I was confident in my abilities to keep my head above water and all of that. And I remember chuckling to myself as I'm swimming back thinking, "people would be freaking out right now. Why am I not freaking out? What is wrong with me?" [Laughs] It was just it was just super funny looking back on it and realizing how I wasn't concerned at all and probably should have been. But it still wasn't that concerning. [Laughs]

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:14:56] I'm going to have so many disclosures about like, please don't try this at home. And please actually evacuate. [Laughs]

**Adam Morley:** [00:14:56] [Laughs] Here allow me to help you with that. Folks, don't do what I have just described to doing. It was a very bad idea. It was a lot of fun. It was very bad idea. [Laughs] And don't do it.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:15:10] But you're right, though. That being said, you have footage of the island being underwater. And that's a rare—

**Adam Morley:** [00:15:16] Yes. There was—I've looked for other documents. I've seen some still photos of people that were on the second story of their homes that took video or footage. But to actually be out and getting footage from multiple areas from a single source—there wasn't a whole lot of that, I noticed. And I think that's actually kind of, to tie it into today's world, I think a lot of that has to do with social media and the ability to share that kind of stuff now. Unfortunately I do see the potential for a lot of people doing more risky things in order to get documentation, get footage of this type of stuff just so that they can post it, not realizing the risk that they might be putting themselves in. I didn't do that for the footage. I did that because I am an adrenaline junkie in a sense and I thought that it was going to be just a lot of fun which it was and I brought my camera along just in case. And and it worked out. I got a heck of a rush and I got some good footage of areas that I knew all my life and now we're underwater.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:16:43] It's amazing you didn't lose your phone.

**Adam Morley:** [00:16:46] Yeah it's absolutely amazing. It was an iPhone in a LifeProof box in my pocket. And I would—before I even capsized as I was just reaching the Matanzas River from the Treasure Beach neighborhood, my wife calls from Alabama and I'm out there and there's just like the very tips of some mangroves sticking up out of the out of the water and so I grab on to one of those and I answer the phone and I was like, "Hey, how are you doing?" I'm like, "Oh I'm good." She's like, "What are you doing?" I'm like, "Oh I'm kayaking." She's like, "You better take some selfies and send them to me." [Laughs] I'm not sure if she wanted to use it for like life insurance policy or if she just wanted to see if I was telling the truth or not.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:17:35] Probably a little bit of both.

**Adam Morley:** [00:17:36] A little bit of both, for sure. [Laughs].

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:17:45] What was the most shocking thing you saw while you were out?

**Adam Morley:** [00:17:45] Just the volume of water. The volume of water was just shocking. There's no other way to put it. To to see waves coming over the Crescent Beach ramp as you paddle down Middleton and get to Cubbedge Road and you look out to the beach and you see the waves washing up and then the excess washing down across into A1A—growing up here my entire life really having seen nor'easters, having seen high water events, all of that stuff and always remembering, "Wow, look how high the water is! This is amazing. This is like the highest I've ever seen it." I can't say—like the water right now it's like really high. We've got a nor'easter. Water levels are super up. We've got a little bit of flooding but. It seems so insignificant compared to what I have witnessed at this same exact location in the past with Matthew.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:18:55] Did you have a sense of where the water was coming from? Or was it just kind of ubiquitous and everywhere?

**Adam Morley:** [00:18:55] I—no, it was it was clear that it was coming via a storm surge through the inlets and then flowing in with the tide. The reason it was so—the reason Matthew was the devastating event that it was, we were something like three days away from a full moon. So we already had exceptionally high tides. We had a nor'easter before that that was pushing a lot of water back here into the Matanzas River and then that storm passed at peak high tide and brought another seven and a half something feet of water as the storm surge. And so it wasn't like standing stagnant water not flowing like Houston where it's a bowl with all the water was just sitting for a long time with nowhere to go. This water came in and it went out with the tide. Had it been low tide when Matthew passed, we simply would have had high tide all day long and little to no damage. But that's not how the how the storm went. It came at peak high tide and it brought the largest storm surge you could imagine with it at the highest tide that you could imagine. And that was just super devastating for the for the island.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:20:23] You mentioned seeing boats knocking around and people's cars. What other kinds of debris did you see while you were out?

**Adam Morley:** [00:20:23] Oh everything. Like anything that wasn't secure. Like paddling down Middleton, there are several kayaks just adrift down Middleton. Like I saw AC units that were were knocked off their foundation. You'd see water at the window line of homes as you paddle paddled down the street and just—if it floated and wasn't secured, that's the type of stuff that you're seeing. Any piles of wood or lumber like dock debris that was broken off from the Matanzas River and then washed back into the streets. Garbage cans full of garbage that just were there. Unfortunately you could still go down Middleton now and see in some of the ditches some of the paint cans and five gallon buckets full of things that you know shouldn't be in the river just floating in the ditches that drain right into the river. So that's one of my biggest unfortunate concerns with these flooding events is the amount of waste that is now entering into the waterway because of it because this stuff wasn't secured, properly stowed, put up high. It was just left in little $99 special vinyl sheds that washed away and everything that was in them gets spread out into the waterways.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:22:05] Yeah that's super frustrating. How did you—when you were—backing up a little bit. When you were setting up to come kayaking over, what did you bring over with you? How did you prepare for that journey?

**Adam Morley:** [00:22:19] [Laughs] So it was pretty simple. Went with a sit on top kayak instead of a decked boat because I knew that I was going to be getting a lot of water and did not feel like bailing. So went with the sit on top kayak. I wore my life jacket. Obviously had a paddle. I did wear a bicycle helmet, which I'm sure looked pretty silly for anybody that was out there. Luckily I was videoing everything except for myself. So you never get to see the bicycle helmet in that because I'm pretty sure it was a little bit too small for me as well.And a line. Just about a 50 foot run of marine line. So if I needed to tie off to anything I'd be able to. And that was about it. Other than than my phone.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:23:18] Nice. Keeping it simple.

**Adam Morley:** [00:23:19] Actually I did take my driver's license and make sure that my driver's license was on me so that I could be identified.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:23:29] That's the kind of—[laughs] That's smart.

**Adam Morley:** [00:23:29] [Laughs] You know, just in case.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:23:37] [Laughs] Yeah. Those are my main questions, is really to get a sense of what it was like. Is there anything you want to add or something we didn't talk about that you want to touch on?

**Adam Morley:** [00:23:48] Not really. Just that I hope that we don't see it again. And the fact that Irma happened just recently, less than a year after Matthew, I'm just hoping that the inevitable trend is not the inevitable trend.

**Anna Hamilton:** [00:24:09] I'm right there with you. Well thank you. I appreciate it.

**Adam Morley:** [00:24:11] Thanks for having me.

**[End interview]**