

PHIL CUBBEDGE
Matanzas River Clam Farm
St. Augustine, FL

Interviewer: Anna Hamilton
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Location: Matanzas River Clam Farm
Length: 48:36

[Begin Interview]

Anna Hamilton: [00:00:01] This is Anna Hamilton with Matanzas Voices. Today is Monday, September 19th, 2016, and it's about 4:30 and I'm with Mr. Philip Cubbedge and we're here to talk about his work. We have about an hour, forty-five minutes. I know he's got some work to do this evening so we're going to do it quickly. And with that I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself and tell me a little bit about who you are and what you do.

Phil Cubbedge: [00:00:27] Well my name is Phil Cubbedge. I've been here in Saint Augustine sixty-nine years so—I don't know—whatever.

AH: [00:00:43] And when were you born? Will you tell me what your birthday is?

PC: [00:00:43] 1/21/48.

AH: [00:00:47] Perfect. And tell me—I know your family has been in this area a long time. Will you tell me a little bit about them and how they came to this area?

PC: [00:00:47] My daddy and them they they they lived on Rattlesnake Island for two years way back, a long, long time ago. Their whole family lived on Rattle—on Point Matanzas.

AH: [00:01:07] Really.

PC: [00:01:07] Yes. They lived there for two years. They used to row across the river to catch the bus. The kids did.

AH: [00:01:18] Is there a home site still there?

PC: [00:01:19] They—I think they lived on a houseboat. I'm not exactly sure about that. They lived on a little houseboat. Anyway—and they lived on it for—they lived on the island for two years and then they moved back down to Crescent Beach and pulled back up on the bank there and that's where they lived. Yeah.

AH: [00:01:44] And what did they do?

PC: [00:01:45] They can clammed and oystered and fished for a living. They sold fish to the gator farm [note: Alligator Farm] and stuff like that.

AH: [00:01:51] Oh to the Alligator Farm?

PC: [00:01:52] Yeah, yeah.

AH: [00:01:57] Did they also sell to Marineland when Marineland was.

PC: [00:01:57] Well after the war, WWII, daddy was one of the first divers at Marineland. That's what he did after the war.

AH: [00:02:09] Really?

PC: [00:02:09] Yes.

AH: [00:02:09] Will you tell me a little bit more about that?

PC: [00:02:09] I don't know a lot about it. You know, just what my mother told me.

AH: [00:02:18] I see. And so—you weren't born on Rattlesnake Island?

PC: [00:02:18] I wasn't. No but his family—I don't know if one of the sisters or one of them might have been born on—I'm not sure I'm sure about that.

AH: [00:02:29] Did they own the land?

PC: [00:02:29] No. They they just pulled up there and lived there for two years. Yeah.

AH: [00:02:36] And did they move here to where you live now when they moved?

PC: [00:02:39] No they—my granddaddy and them they lived here all their life. And my mother and—my granddaddy and my mother and all of them. We've been here probably 200 years or longer.

AH: [00:02:55] Wow. Well I grew up on Cubbedge Road, and I'm sure that's your family—

PC: [00:02:57] That was a Cubbedge who lived in Elkton. He was a farmer out in Elkton. And I didn't even really know him till later on. They had Pomar's and we got to talking and I think he was like one of my granddaddy's brother's child, is what he was.

AH: [00:03:29] I see. So distant family. So I imagine if your family clammed and oystered and fished for a living, you've been doing that your whole life.

PC: [00:03:34] Entire life, yes.

AH: [00:03:43] Can you tell me about your first memory of being on the water on the Matanzas?

PC: [00:03:43] Well used to flounder and fish when I was a kid, little, real little. I mean that's kind of how we started. We used to have to—well we made money any way we could make it, you know. And we floundered and gig-fished back when fish were eighteen cents a pound. The Salvadors and Fazios. That's how we started. Then we—my dad went into the oyster business. He used to work for the Foremost Dairy in town and after the Foremost Dairy we opened an oyster house there on Lena Street in St. Augustine. That's where we started. Most of the oyster houses in town, they started from my daddy. They raised up from my daddy's oyster house.

AH: [00:04:34] I didn't know that.

PC: [00:04:34] Yeah.

AH: [00:04:40] And what year did he go into oystering? Do you know when that was?

PC: [00:04:40] Probably in the sixties, somewhere around in the sixties. He built an oyster house on Lena Street. Shaunders built an oyster house, then George Taylor built an oyster house. My sister's got one today over on Wildwood Drive. A lot of oyster houses come from my daddy's place.

AH: [00:05:11] And why do you think he wanted to do that versus doing something else?

PC: [00:05:11] There weren't no way to make no money.

AH: [00:05:13] Really?

PC: [00:05:13] Yeah. We didn't have a lot of money.

AH: [00:05:17] Who was he selling to? What was the market?

PC: [00:05:20] Well you sold to Beaver Street Fishery in Jacksonville, Publix in Jacksonville—a lot of fish houses in Jacksonville and stuff bought our oysters. We'd buy a semi load of oysters a week from the west coast—Cedar Key—and that's what—we shucked them every week. We shucked 300 bushels a week.

AH: [00:05:50] So they didn't come from Matanzas necessarily.

PC: [00:05:50] Not all of them, you know. Not all of the oysters. But yeah. Yeah, they came from there too. We bought a lot of them and shucked them.

AH: [00:06:04] Is the season here the same as it is on the west coast?

PC: [00:06:05] Yes, it's the same season. It's just a different climate. The shelf life is a little different on your product.

AH: [00:06:14] What's the difference?

PC: [00:06:14] It's a little bit cooler over here than it is over there. Their water's warmer. You pull them out of that warm water, you know, they they don't have a shelf life.

AH: [00:06:27] I see. So you have to sell them faster.

PC: [00:06:27] Yeah. I think you do anyway.

AH: [00:06:30] I understand the harvesting technique is also different from the west coast.

PC: [00:06:35] It is. Most of the oysters there are underwater. They tong them with tongs and our oysters come out of the water. That's probably why ours has got a better shelf life.

AH: [00:06:46] They're used to staying—

PC: [00:06:47] Staying out of the water longer. Yeah.

AH: [00:06:54] So how do you—tell me how you would harvest an oyster.

PC: [00:06:54] The best oysters are around the grass lines around the marsh grass. What you do, you take a clump of oysters and you beat him apart and take the biggest ones off of it. You're allowed a three inch oyster and we try to go for a four inch. About a four. Little bit bigger than legal size.

AH: [00:07:19] I see. So three inches and under—

PC: [00:07:19] Yeah you're allowed ones, twos, and threes, you know.

AH: [00:07:26] What is the season here? When do you harvest?

PC: [00:07:26] I think you can start in—I'm not exactly sure, but I mean we have to go by the books. But I think it starts in October the first and it goes through May.

AH: [00:07:40] Through May.

PC: [00:07:41] Yeah. They give a month—let's see. They took a month and give a month or something. Took September, give May. I think that's what they did. Some of those months you don't have—you've got to be in your cooler—in your cooler by, say, 11:00 in the day.

AH: [00:08:03] In the mornings?

PC: [00:08:03] In the morning. Yeah. So that's the reason I wait till November. It's 10:00 at night.

AH: [00:08:10] Oh the regulations change.

PC: [00:08:12] The regulations change.

AH: [00:08:14] I see. But so other folks will open up earlier.

PC: [00:08:20] The other what now?

AH: [00:08:20] The other folks who are oystering.

PC: [00:08:20] Yeah. My sister and them most—you know they've got an oyster house over on Wildwood Drive, Price's Oyster House. And they—they shuck oysters. I don't shuck them. I get them in the shell and if you shuck you can use your green card and if you cook them, shuck them and cook them, you've got more time. They've got all day long.

AH: [00:08:51] I see.

PC: [00:08:51] Because they shuck them.

AH: [00:08:54] And what is a green card?

PC: [00:08:55] It's a green card. When you tag it—when you do you tag your oysters it means they've got to be shucked.

AH: [00:09:05] I see. And you're issued permits based on what your operation is.

PC: [00:09:11] And the ones they sell in the shell is a white tag.

AH: [00:09:24] Are there other classifications, other tags that you—

PC: [00:09:24] No not really. Well if you're aquaculture you can get bulk tags and stuff like that. It's different, a little bit different.

AH: [00:09:33] I see. Was this your father's business? Did you take this over?

PC: [00:09:39] Not this one. No. This is mine. I've been here I'd say thirty-five to forty years here.

AH: [00:09:45] Really?

PC: [00:09:45] Yeah. I mean my dad—we all worked out at his place. It goes back about sixty years, sixty-five years. Because one of my leases is sixty-five years old.

AH: [00:09:58] Really?

PC: [00:09:58] Yeah.

AH: [00:10:04] Did you inherit those leases or did you purchase those?

PC: [00:10:05] One of them I did. It's a perpetuity lease. OK. And I've got two perpetuity leases and I've got one ten year lease. It's for ten years. If you do right on it you can—do what you're supposed to, you know, you can get back for ten years. Keep renewing it.

AH: [00:10:30] So part of having those leases is you're supposed to take care of them a certain way?

PC: [00:10:38] You're supposed to, yeah. If you've got—say you plant clams and you—say you've got two acres, you got to plant 200,000 clams a year.

AH: [00:10:50] Wow that seems like a lot.

PC: [00:10:50] No, not really. No. It's not. It just sounds like it but it's not (laughs).

AH: [00:11:00] So tell me about starting your own business. Why did you decide to—

PC: [00:11:00] That's all I know. I quit school and that's that's all we ever knowed is oystering. I don't know nothing else.

AH: [00:11:10] Where did you go to school?

PC: [00:11:10] I went to St. Augustine High. Ketterlinus, Orange Street. Yeah.

AH: [00:11:19] So you were pretty young when you started your own business.

PC: [00:11:20] Yeah. When I first got married, when I was about nineteen, something like that. I built my house and I sold out in Moultrie and moved out here and we built this a couple of years after I got married, I think. Three years maybe.

AH: [00:11:38] Did you meet your wife in school?

PC: [00:11:38] Yeah. More or less, yeah. She kind of was in my daddy's oyster house too [laughs].

AH: [00:11:42] Really?

PC: [00:11:42] Yeah.

AH: [00:11:42] Will you tell me how you met?

PC: [00:11:42] We've been married for fifty years. I think about fifty years. Yeah.

AH: [00:11:55] So you knew her from working and—

PC: [00:11:56] Yeah. Forty years, forty-five years ago I used to see your dad all the time down in Dupont Center [laughs].

AH: [00:12:06] [Laughs] Small town.

PC: [00:12:06] It is, yeah. I knew them forever. I used to see him in there. They got their lease—they got their lease later on, I think. I knew they were into real estate and I said, 'Well

how are they going to oyster and real estate too?' They did good. They did a lot better—smarter than me.

AH: [00:12:27] Really?

PC: [00:12:27] Yeah.

AH: [00:12:29] In what way?

PC: [00:12:30] Well got an education and went—[laughs]. You can't hardly make if you ain't got a good education.

AH: [00:12:41] Well I think knowing the river is an education in and of itself, too.

PC: [00:12:41] Well it is but there's there's not—you've got to save your money all your life. You can't—you've got no insurance. No real good social security when you get older. You've got—you're way better off to do something different than oystering. Oystering is like a dying breed. It's a—it is phasing out. The way of life is fading away.

AH: [00:13:16] Is it?

PC: [00:13:16] Sure. They keep closing the river and keep closing and closing and you're history. I think you are, any way. In years to come there won't be no oystering and—they'll close all the rivers. Unless they can keep it open. I don't believe—they might for a few more years. Too many people.

AH: [00:13:38] Is that why?

PC: [00:13:39] Yeah. Sure. Yeah.

AH: [00:13:45] When do you think that started happening, that change in the river?

PC: [00:13:45] Oh my gosh. Well they're closing areas all the time, you know? Just like the Guana, the Guana River. I mean we used to oyster all the way to Pine Island. They closed all the rivers and we used to oyster Pellicer Creek all the way to Bing's Fish Camp. They've closed it over the years. Anything tied to Pellicer Creek—any creeks leading out of Pellicer Creek is closed.

AH: [00:14:16] Really?

PC: [00:14:16] Yes.

AH: [00:14:17] So what's the last stretch right now if you were to go out? What can you oyster?

PC: [00:14:21] You can go to like from where my lease starts in Marineland, lease 888—right there, from there to [State Road] 206. And not all that, just parts of it.

AH: [00:14:36] Oh really?

PC: [00:14:36] Yeah. Just parts of it's open. There's a lot of river shore which is nothing—there's nothing on it. You know, a lot of it. And when you get up towards Devil's Elbow, those creeks up in there you can, on the east side.

AH: [00:14:52] So that's really just a couple of miles.

PC: [00:14:53] There's not much left. And when it's gone is going to be gone. We're trying to keep—what we've got we're trying to keep it open.

AH: [00:15:06] Yeah. Let me shift really quick. This is making noise when I hit it. Sorry. So has that hurt your business, those closures? Or have you adapted?

PC: [00:15:17] Well at my age, you know what I mean? I'll be gone anyway. But for future people, yes. Sure.

AH: [00:15:28] But for your business, personally, have you felt the impacts of that or have you been able to—

PC: [00:15:32] I don't make a lot of money. You know. I mean I work hard for what little bit of money I make. It's just a way of life for me.

AH: [00:15:43] But do you enjoy that way of life?

PC: [00:15:43] Yeah. I do.

AH: [00:15:47] What do you like about it?

PC: [00:15:47] I just like everything about it. The freedom, really. Yeah.

AH: [00:15:53] Do you enjoy being out on the water?

PC: [00:15:55] Yeah. I crab, too. I crab and I oyster, you know. I plant clams and stuff like that. I do a little bit of everything. I just got through fishing for the state of Florida over in Lake George and Lake Apopka this summer. Gill net fishing.

AH: [00:16:15] Oh really?

PC: [00:16:15] Mm-hm.

AH: [00:16:15] What was that about?

PC: [00:16:15] For gizzard shad.

AH: [00:16:19] I don't know what that—

PC: [00:16:19] It's—they use them for dog feed—dog food and fertilizer and stuff like that. And most of them go to Louisiana for crawfish feed.

AH: [00:16:39] Really?

PC: [00:16:39] Yeah. They buy millions of pounds. Yeah. When I was—when I fished in Lake George a couple of months ago they were buying 30,000 pounds a day.

AH: [00:16:53] Wow.

PC: [00:16:53] Yeah.

AH: [00:16:54] What are they—will you describe the fish to me?

PC: [00:16:54] Well the gizzard shad is cheaper for the state, is what I'm told. It's cheaper for the state to catch the gizzard shad—let people catch them. There's not many people in the state of Florida that can catch them. It's just like twelve people, fifteen people at most.

AH: [00:17:18] Because of permits?

PC: [00:17:19] They regulate it. Yeah. Permit. Okay. And the people—it's cheaper for them to get the gizzard shads out of the water than to kill the hyacinths—I mean to kill the weeds. They put off nitrogen. There's millions and millions and tons of them things out there.

AH: [00:17:40] Are they invasive or—

PC: [00:17:40] Yeah.

AH: [00:17:44] They are invasive.

[00:17:44] Yeah. When you're pulling out a million, two million pounds of fish, it's like—that's a lot of fertilizer in the water.

AH: [00:17:52] Yeah.

PC: [00:17:52] They're putting off phosphorus and stuff, you know.

AH: [00:17:57] Have they killed off other species?

PC: [00:17:58] Well we take tilapia, which you don't catch many of them. You can catch gar fish and gizzard shad. You can—at Lake Apopka you can have 600 yards of gill net. And at one time, put out 600 yards—and in Lake George you can have two 300 yard shots.

AH: [00:18:28] Will you describe what a gill net is for somebody who doesn't know what that is?

PC: [00:18:28] The mesh on it gills the fish. You just shook him out of the net.

AH: [00:18:39] So it catches him by the—

PC: [00:18:39] Yeah it catches him around the neck. Yeah. But they regulate it. They got the—what do you—let's see. I'm trying to think of what the people's names are [laughs]. Anyway, the people that regulate it, they come to your boat just about every day, every couple of days and they take a count on your good fish and your bad fish, you know. And they make sure that you're not catching too many good fish and you're keeping your net—and you don't keep your net in the water but two hours. And you've got to put them right back. You can't—they regulate it pretty strong.

AH: [00:19:34] I see. So that was a contract job for you?

PC: [00:19:34] Yeah, yeah. More—Well the state buys them back, the people that the state—I say the state, whoever's working for the state. They buy the fish.

AH: [00:19:49] I see. Do you do a lot of contract work like that?

PC: [00:19:49] Mm-mm. I just did it this year. I fished over in Lake Apopka. Then I fished in Lake George this summer. People kept running over my nets so I quit [laughs].

AH: [00:20:10] Really?

PC: [00:20:10] Oh they'll run over your nets, tear your nets to pieces. I lost two nets in about two weeks. Yeah, you can't hardly afford that.

AH: [00:20:24] How much does that set you back, to lose a net?

PC: [00:20:24] You probably got \$700, \$800 in a net. You know, you get whooped like that too many times, it isn't worth it. So I haven't been back but I may go back. I'm not sure.

AH: [00:20:40] Is there a way to like rope off your area?

PC: [00:20:40] Well you got it marked off with floats, like contrast colors. I think what it is people think they are crab floats and they run in between them and whoops, they whop you.

AH: [00:21:03] I see. Well so going back to your business here, you sell oysters—

PC: [00:21:04] Yeah I sell most of my—the biggest—most of my product to Johns Seafood [note: St. Johns Seafood] in town on Riberia Street. He buys most of my product.

AH: [00:21:17] Most of everything?

PC: [00:21:18] Yeah yeah. Then I sell to retail around here too.

AH: [00:21:21] So it's oysters and crabs and clams?

PC: [00:21:26] I just started growing clams again.

AH: [00:21:28] Oh really?

PC: [00:21:29] Yeah.

AH: [00:21:30] So that's not something—

PC: [00:21:30] I haven't been messing with clams for quite a while. The conchs eat me up. The conchs are so bad down there where I'm growing clams.

AH: [00:21:45] Will you tell me about the conch situation for somebody who's not familiar with that?

PC: [00:21:50] The invasion—the conchs, they eat up all the oyster beds and all the clams and they'll eat your clams through the bags even. Every one of them have got like a tube that comes out of them and they can just stick it right down in there and pull him right out of your bag.

AH: [00:22:07] And drill through it all?

PC: [00:22:07] Yeah yeah.

AH: [00:22:13] I knew they were a problem with oysters. I didn't realize they were a problem with clams.

PC: [00:22:13] Oh my gosh, yeah. They killed a lot of clams of mine.

AH: [00:22:16] How many do you think are affected by—

PC: [00:22:16] Clams? They'd probably eat the whole river down. I mean, you know, they eat them all. That's all they do. They eat oysters. And when the oysters spawn and spat back, they eat the spat.

AH: [00:22:34] Oh my gosh.

PC: [00:22:34] Yeah. They just destroy the oyster beds.

AH: [00:22:45] When did you start seeing conchs as a problem?

PC: [00:22:46] I think kind of when the river closed in down there at Summer Haven. About that time.

AH: [00:22:52] So it's been several years.

PC: [00:22:52] Yeah. They've been there quite a while.

AH: [00:22:57] Have you noticed if they've gotten better or worse?

PC: [00:22:58] No, they're moving right on north.

AH: [00:23:00] Really?

PC: [00:23:00] Yeah. You know that awhile back, last oyster season, we were right there at a dock right there at Devil's Elbow, and my grandson was supposed to meet me at the dock and he picked up two double handfuls right off the bank there. So they've already come up to Devil's Elbow, I know for sure. And I think the crabbers spread them too.

AH: [00:23:24] Really?

PC: [00:23:24] Yeah.

AH: [00:23:25] How is that possible?

PC: [00:23:25] Well I mean if you crab to the north and you've got some stuck in your trap, they don't shake them out, they get shook out down at the other end. It isn't too hard to spread them.

AH: [00:23:46] Have you talked to the crabbers about that?

PC: [00:23:46] What good would it be? They could dump them out at the ramp, the Green Street ramp, you know? I mean I'm sure they do.

AH: [00:23:59] Has anybody tried to market the conch meat?

PC: [00:23:59] I did. I shucked them for a while and tried to get a market for them. I just never could—They're good to eat. But I mean I just never could create a market for them, not like I wanted. I can piddle around and sell a few. I could probably shuck a few and sell them to Johns Seafood and little places, but you can't make it like that.

AH: [00:24:24] Are they hard to shuck?

PC: [00:24:25] No. They're real easy. You can just heat them and open them with a fork. Pop them right out.

AH: [00:24:33] Seems pretty simple.

PC: [00:24:33] Or you freeze them. You can freeze them too.

AH: [00:24:36] And now they're different than the queen conch?

PC: [00:24:41] Yeah. They're different. I don't know what the difference would be in them. I imagine the queen conch is bigger, got more meat in it. You know a lot of these are small. I mean they get pretty good sized but they're small and you got—there's a lot of work to them.

AH: [00:25:00] What did you—when you cooked with them what did you do with them to see how they would do?

PC: [00:25:01] Well people make salads out of them. They—you could cook chowder, do a lot of things with them. You could fry them. You know, just like a queen conch really.

AH: [00:25:15] Just smaller.

PC: [00:25:17] A lot smaller and I don't know what the taste would be between each one of them. I never got into eating conchs. Not too much.

AH: [00:25:27] Do you remember seeing them when you were little?

PC: [00:25:27] Never. No. That's all new. There never was none. Nope. It might have been down south. You know, I mean they've always been down south around Ormond Beach, down that way. But never up here. Never. No you never seen them. No they they came in the last fifteen years, twenty years. I don't know.

AH: [00:25:53] Is anybody studying them that you know of?

[00:25:53] Yeah I think they are down at Whitney Lab. I think they're studying them but I don't know how or what. There's a lot of them. A while back we had some sold at a dollar a pound. So we went out, we picked up a thousand pounds right there at Marineland, right off my lease. They were eating those oysters down right there. Anyway, we picked up a thousand pounds, about three of us. You know we went out there and we picked up a thousand pounds. Then people didn't want them so we threw them in the woods [laughs].

AH: [00:26:30] Really?

PC: [00:26:30] Yeah. They're no good for nothing.

AH: [00:26:36] Do you ever go to collect them just to get rid of them?

PC: [00:26:36] I got a lot of shells when I was shucking them. I got a big shell—I sold some shells one time. They've got a pretty shell.

AH: [00:26:48] Were people interested in those?

PC: [00:26:49] Yeah. Yeah, they were but it's like anything else: they want them for nothing.

AH: [00:26:58] How have you seen the river change in other ways? That's a pretty dramatic change. What else have you noticed.

PC: [00:27:02] Well the conchs. And the red mangroves are moving north. There never was no mangrove—red mangrove. Never ever. There wasn't any. I don't know where they come from and I still don't. You know, unless they come from Marineland, Whitney Lab. I don't know. Could have come out of that lab there. I don't know. But we've got red mangroves anyway, which is good. They're a good mangrove to have. Oysters grow all over them.

AH: [00:27:35] Really?

PC: [00:27:35] Yeah. They create a better environment. They're better than the other ones really.

AH: [00:27:41] I didn't realize—

PC: [00:27:41] Oh they build a structure almost like a big house [laughs]. And the oysters grow in there and you can knock big oysters off of the roots. Oh yeah. They're good.

AH: [00:27:55] So it doesn't—

PC: [00:27:55] I'd rather have those.

AH: [00:28:00] That's funny. Because I've wondered—

PC: [00:28:00] Oh yeah. Even the little fish and all live in the roots. They get up in there and hide. Yeah.

AH: [00:28:07] That's neat.

PC: [00:28:08] Oh yeah they're good to have.

AH: [00:28:11] So you're not worried about them crowding out other—

PC: [00:28:12] No. I'd rather have them than the other ones. Yeah.

AH: [00:28:16] That's interesting.

PC: [00:28:16] We just haven't had a freeze in years. At one time when I was younger—I don't know if I was married or not—I was younger. There'd come a freeze and kill them all. It killed everything. There was no mangroves. It killed them all and they've come back strong. you know.

AH: [00:28:40] It's remarkable.

PC: [00:28:40] Yeah it is.

AH: [00:28:43] It seems like an awfully fast change to the river.

PC: [00:28:43] It is. It is. Yeah. Well and also the river is filling in. You know there's no doubt about it.

AH: [00:28:51] The entire river or just—

PC: [00:28:51] The whole river is filling in. Sure.

AH: [00:28:57] Really?

PC: [00:28:57] Well sure. I mean those big boats that go down the inland waterway, those great big boats, there's more and more of them. Okay? You can't even park on the river shore without one of them flipping—they'll flip you over if you don't look out. And they throw such a strong wake that they—you know what a shell mound is? You ever seen shells built up on the side of the river banks? That's how they get there. They boats put them up there. Okay. When they get so high they tip over and the boats push them over and then they fill in the flats. That's how you get the oysters on the river shore. It fills in around the oyster beds. And it's filling in all the time just like—if you put a stick out there on one of them shell mounds, just a few months later, you come back it'll be ten feet—the stick will be covered up ten feet.

AH: [00:30:04] So—and you're talking about the oyster mounds.

PC: [00:30:04] Yeah.

AH: [00:30:05] Where you would harvest.

PC: [00:30:05] Yeah.

AH: [00:30:08] How has the impacted—

PC: [00:30:08] It's covering up the flats. Then when it covers up—you know what flats and oyster beds is? Okay. When it pushes the river shore—it pushes the river shore, okay, and then when it covers up an area the mangroves take over. Then you've got no riverbank no more. It just keeps filling in and filling in and that's where the mangroves come from. All your mangroves—if you went inside the mangroves, went out there in the mangroves and you dug down, it would be nothing but oyster beds. That's where they come from. The boats fill them in.

AH: [00:30:53] Has that made it hard for you to—

PC: [00:30:53] You just—you lose more ground. Pretty soon it'll be all land.

AH: [00:31:05] Has that affected—the river filling in—I wonder about—

PC: [00:31:05] The boats are causing a lot of it.

AH: [00:31:07] The boats are.

PC: [00:31:07] Oh sure. Those big boats. They need to slow them down.

AH: [00:31:15] Have you noticed more salt? More saline water? As a result of—like the river not being able to flush out where it's been filling in?

PC: [00:31:24] Well down at Summer Haven it can't. It's all going—it's pretty well all going north now. You know, the flow of the current. Well they've pumped the river back there. It's going to change things. It'll get more water back in there. And it might help for the conchs. The salinity might go up and they might leave.

AH: [00:31:48] Are you in favor of them dredging? Or pumping out the sand?

PC: [00:31:48] Well sure. It never should have got like it is. Should have never let it fill in [laughs].

AH: [00:31:53] Yeah.

PC: [00:31:54] Yeah. You don't want to lose lose ground. I know you don't, where you come from [laughs].

AH: [00:32:05] That's true. Can you tell me where your leases are?

PC: [00:32:05] I got one at the Guana at the dam. It's—you can't harvest up there. But I think I can grow seed up there a certain size, you know, and bring them out. And I got one at the Guana. It's a perpetuity lease. And I've got one down by Marineland, the Whitney Lab. That's like a nine point something acre, a ten acre lease. I got there. It's a perpetuity lease for life. And I got that one right in the mouth of the Summer Haven River, three acre lease.

AH: [00:32:40] And that one is for ten years?

PC: [00:32:42] Ten years at a time. I've renewed it one time I think.

AH: [00:32:51] And so what are you doing on each of those separate leases? Are you doing all the same—

PC: [00:32:51] I've got some—I'm not doing anything on the perpetuity leases. I don't think I have to if I don't want to. They're grandfathered in for life, as long as I pay for them. But the one—the aquaculture lease I have to plant some clams on. I have to keep it going. I've got some sunray venus clams planted there right now.

AH: [00:33:17] And what are—those are different from the ones we normally have.

PC: [00:33:17] Yeah.

AH: [00:33:17] What are they? Will you tell me about them?

PC: [00:33:21] They're more of a flat clam. In fact I'm getting ready to harvest. Yeah.

AH: [00:33:30] And how are they different from the ones we have?

PC: [00:33:30] They're flat and stripped.

AH: [00:33:31] And do they get bigger?

PC: [00:33:34] They will get bigger but they don't like to eat them bigger. They got—I think they get—they're tougher when they get bigger. But they want them about three inches long. You've got to purge them longer because they've got a lot of sand in them.

AH: [00:33:50] And why have you decided to start messing with those recently?

PC: [00:33:55] The conchs don't bother me with those. I don't know why.

AH: [00:33:58] Oh really?

PC: [00:33:58] Yeah. And they grow fast too. I bought them like at four millimeter and in, I think nine months, they're three inches long and they're ready to sell. Yeah. Grew real fast.

AH: [00:34:13] That's fast.

PC: [00:34:13] Mm-hmm.

AH: [00:34:15] And there's a market for them.

PC: [00:34:15] Yeah. There's only me and Mike Sullivan, which is opening a the hatchery and all down here at Devil's Elbow. Me and Mike and the man that we got the sunray venus clams from—I think he's down south or something. We're the only ones growing them in the state of Florida.

AH: [00:34:38] Really?

PC: [00:34:38] Mm-hm. Nobody else grows them.

AH: [00:34:42] Why—I wonder why?

PC: [00:34:42] Because of the red tides and the stuff over on the west coast and all. They say that's what they have a hard time with.

AH: [00:34:51] Wow. So you guys have like a monopoly on them.

PC: [00:34:51] Well we don't. But I hope maybe we will [laughs]. No. No. I'm getting ready to sell some now. That's where I'm going this afternoon. I've got to dig some for Johns Seafood.

AH: [00:35:07] And how much do they sell for?

PC: [00:35:08] Well they're wholesaling at twenty cents.

AH: [00:35:11] Apiece?

PC: [00:35:11] Yeah. In restaurant I think it's fifty cents. People have got to get more educated with them though.

AH: [00:35:26] Learn more about them.

PC: [00:35:28] Yeah yeah.

AH: [00:35:29] Walk me through the lifespan of each harvest. Where does your seed come from and how do you grow it and what does it take to do all of that?

PC: [00:35:44] Well right now, the sunray venus clams, I'm getting them from—I don't know the man's name. I think it's 'MacGruben,' 'MacGruger' or something. Anyway I'm buying seed from him and I put them under a net. I got them under a net. Just plant them right in the ground. Instead of in bags I just stuck them right in the ground. They like to bury deeper.

AH: [00:36:07] And so with other clams you'd put them in bags and—how does that work?

PC: [00:36:14] Well the other clams, people like to grow them in bags because you can just pull the bag and you've got your clams. But you can plant them in the ground too.

AH: [00:36:25] So if they're in a bag do you just put them in the water or—

PC: [00:36:25] Now you've got to lay them—they've got to bury up. They won't grow if they don't bury up.

AH: [00:36:34] And you also sell crabs?

PC: [00:36:35] Yeah. I crab.

AH: [00:36:36] And will you tell me a little bit about that side of your business?

PC: [00:36:37] Well in the summer—this summer I gill net fished out in the river. But usually I crab out in the St. Johns, usually is where—out to Riverdale. I didn't crab too much this year.

AH: [00:37:02] You didn't. Just because you were busy with other things? Do you ever crab in the Matanzas?

PC: [00:37:02] Yeah I do. Yeah I crab in the flats mostly. I don't usually crab in the river too much, just in the flats.

AH: [00:37:13] I'm assuming it's blue crabs—

PC: [00:37:14] Yeah. Blue crabs, stone crabs.

AH: [00:37:15] And is it the same for each of them? Do you set out a—

PC: [00:37:15] Yeah it's the same pot. Yeah.

AH: [00:37:35] Yeah. Okay. I'm trying to think of what other questions I have and we'll wrap up soon. I guess I should ask you what your favorite part of this job is?

PC: [00:37:36] Just going down the river I guess [laughs]. Just riding down the river every day, you know. I don't ever get in a hurry. If I don't want to go oystering or clamming I don't have to go. I stay home [laughs].

AH: [00:37:52] You're your own boss. Do you have family members that go with you? Or people that work for you?

PC: [00:37:52] I got my grandson, goes with me some. Yeah. And I've got a few helpers when oysters get here. My brother helps me some too.

AH: [00:38:04] And how much will you harvest, on average, per day?

PC: [00:38:09] Usually on a day, you know, we get about— I bring home—I usually get about eight bushels a day myself. Then my other help—you know from eight to fifteen, something like that, usually. I don't know exactly how to tell you that.

AH: [00:38:38] And that's just for local seafood places and—

PC: [00:38:43] Johns Seafood. I sell mostly to Johns. He sends a truck by here. You've got to have a refrigerated truck. And I don't have one so I just let him—sell them to him. He doesn't care if there's two bushels or fifty bushels. He comes by with his truck.

AH: [00:38:55] That's good.

PC: [00:38:55] Yeah.

AH: [00:39:01] And this is your—we're sitting in your processing plant.

PC: [00:39:01] Well it is, more or less, yeah. You've got to have a bathroom, you've got to have a cooler, you've got to have a place outside, you know, to tumble your clams—I mean oysters. Wash them and clean them stuff like that. But this used to be a shucking plant. When I first got married we had a shucking plant and we shucked oysters.

AH: [00:39:26] I see. And how long did you do that?

PC: [00:39:26] I don't know. We shucked I'd say ten years or something like that, in here. But first part of my life, when I worked for my daddy, we did it for years and years before I come out here.

AH: [00:39:50] Do you do it by hand?

PC: [00:39:51] Yeah.

AH: [00:39:51] How many can you—how fast is—

PC: [00:39:51] You can probably open a gallon in forty-five minutes. Something like that. Yeah.

AH: [00:39:57] That's fast.

PC: [00:39:57] Yeah. My sister and them, they open a lot of oysters. They open a lot.

AH: [00:40:02] Really?

PC: [00:40:02] Mm-hmm.

AH: [00:40:04] And they still do it by hand?

PC: [00:40:04] Yeah. You can go buy them over there.

AH: [00:40:10] We'll keep that in mind. What's the technique for shucking?

PC: [00:40:15] I guess knowing the—you aren't supposed to, I don't think—the limit on how long to leave them in hot water and what temperature and stuff, that's the whole trick of shucking. Makes them easy to shuck. They just fall right out, more or less.

AH: [00:40:38] So you put them in hot water for just a little bit?

PC: [00:40:41] Mm-hm. Got to know exactly how long.

AH: [00:40:43] And they'll open on their own then?

PC: [00:40:44] Well yeah, they do open on their own but it's not that simple. You still got to shuck them out.

AH: [00:40:55] Right.

PC: [00:40:55] You've got to shuck him out without cutting him. If you cut him he's nothing. Got to get him out whole.

AH: [00:41:01] Was that something it took you a long time to learn or was that—

PC: [00:41:05] We didn't have no choice. We were shucking 300 bushels a week [laughs]. That's how we started.

AH: [00:41:16] I see. That's a lot.

PC: [00:41:16] That's a lot.

AH: [00:41:17] Why did you decide to open your own place instead of stay with your family?

PC: [00:41:17] I don't know, you just get out on your own. You know, get gone. Just like you [laughs]

AH: [00:41:26] [Laughs] I do know.

PC: [00:41:46] That's right. I mean you want to do your own thing. Kids anymore, they don't want to do stuff like that. I wanted to get out and make my own. I didn't want my mother and daddy raising me all my life. I wanted to do my own. I wanted to raise my own kids.

AH: [00:41:46] I do understand. And will you tell me what the hardest part of your job is?

PC: [00:41:46] I guess bending over out there to get them. You know, you have to bend over a long time. I guess that'd be the hardest. Then you've got to come home—then you've got to come in and then you've got to wash them and bag them and tag them and get them in the cooler and—it's pretty hard.

AH: [00:42:14] A lot of steps.

PC: [00:42:14] You've got to like it. It isn't for everybody. I carried a lot of people in the river. They don't get many. There's a lot of difference.

AH: [00:42:29] So it's a skill that takes you a long time to get good at and use to.

PC: [00:42:29] Yeah build a technique. You just build a technique.

AH: [00:42:37] And what is yours? What is your technique?

AH: [00:42:40] Great day. You ask me something I don't—I don't know, you know? I guess picking them up. You've got to have a knack for picking them up. You're picking one up, you're seeing another one at the same time, then you go to it—in other words, you just keep going. I mean you don't never stop. You go from one to the other, you know. But you don't just pick up one and beat on it. You've got two or three more spotted and you go to them. And that's your technique. And you've got to know—you've got to know where they grow and where to go at the right time and—there's a lot of knowledge in something like that. People don't realize. Most people that go out there can't make it. They can't—you know, they don't like it. They can't make it. We just go out there, it's just natural. You know, we just do it. Yeah. It's not that—you know, you learn how to bend and all. There's ways.

AH: [00:43:51] Is there a next generation that you're teaching?

PC: [00:43:51] Yeah, my grandson. But I mean they keep taking your rivers from you and closing areas, there won't be anything anyway. That's what I was trying to say to start with.

AH: [00:44:11] But your grandson, is he interested in—

PC: [00:44:12] He's interested in it but—people—I don't know. The generation today don't work like the generation years ago, is what I'm saying. I go every day. I go out there every day, he might go once a week, twice a week. You know, he might not want to go for very long. He wants to go home. I'm working all the time. I like to work.

AH: [00:44:47] What is your average day like?

PC: [00:44:47] What do you mean?

AH: [00:44:47] When do you get up to go out? What is your average day on the—

PC: [00:44:51] I usually—I don't usually go by the tides and all. I usually go when the tide gets down off the oysters. I know little place I can go ahead of other people and stuff. I just know where to go. You learn.

AH: [00:45:10] How long is your day?

PC: [00:45:13] Long. We go out there eight hours probably, eight or ten hours. Yeah. It's a pretty long day. Yeah.

AH: [00:45:31] That sounds like a long day.

PC: [00:45:31] It's according to how good you get it in—I mean if you get what you want to get, you go back home. That's what you do [laughs].

AH: [00:45:39] Yeah. Well I know you have work to get to and it's been forty-five minutes. Thank you. Is there anything else that you want to add?

PC: [00:45:42] No not really. Just—well—nah. Does this help you any?

AH: [00:45:54] Yeah.

PC: [00:45:56] Oh it does?

AH: [00:45:58] This is really helpful.

PC: [00:45:58] OK.

AH: [00:46:02] Yeah. I mean like you said, there aren't many people who still work on the river.

PC: [00:46:03] No not really. Unless they were mullet fishing or crabbing. There's a lot of crabbers and stuff.

AH: [00:46:10] Are there?

PC: [00:46:10] Yeah, mullet fishing—they mullet fish and all. A lot of the young boys, that's what they are doing now. And a lot of them shrimp and stuff.

AH: [00:46:20] Is it—is mullet fishing commercial or—

PC: [00:46:21] Yeah. You've got to have a RS license to mullet fish.

AH: [00:46:29] I wasn't sure there was a market for mullet.

PC: [00:46:31] The roe is what they sell. That's what they sell, when they're roeing.

AH: [00:46:35] Do you mullet fish also?

PC: [00:46:35] No. No, I never could make no money doing that. You've got to throw the big nets, big heavy nets and stuff like that. That's too much for me.

AH: [00:46:52] I should also ask, do you all eat a lot of the seafood that you harvest?

PC: [00:46:52] No, not really. No but I like it. No, I just don't want to eat it. Yeah I do. I like it. I like oysters and clams. I was raised—that's what I was raised on.

AH: [00:47:04] And you're not tired of it.

PC: [00:47:04] No, not really. No. No. We were raised on clam chowders, fried oysters and stuff like that. You've got to be raised on stuff like that.

AH: [00:47:14] I agree. Is your family a Minorcan family?

PC: [00:47:17] Not a Minorcan, no. No. But they've been here—I imagine the Cubbedges go 200 years or longer. A long time. We're not Minorcans. Minorcans are different.

AH: [00:47:32] I just wondered.

PC: [00:47:32] I think they come from the Minorca Islands or something like that. Yeah. But I know—I raised up with them though. You know, around them. They were—nah, I'm not going to say [laughs]. They did things a lot different a long time ago, believe me.

AH: [00:47:53] What do you mean?

PC: [00:47:53] Well they ate turtle eggs, you know, and gophers [note: gopher tortoises]. It was a way of life. That's the way it was.

AH: [00:48:02] Living off the land.

PC: [00:48:02] Yeah. They lived off the land. I didn't eat stuff like that.

AH: [00:48:05] Really?

PC: [00:48:05] No I didn't care for it. But Minorcans did. They loved them.

AH: [00:48:13] So that's not something that your parents ever cooked.

PC: [00:48:13] Not really. No, not turtleneck and stuff. No, we didn't. I can't say—I think we've probably eaten somebody's cake before, you know? Or something.

AH: [00:48:23] Yeah.

PC: [00:48:23] Yeah. But stuff you can't do no more.

AH: [00:48:29] That's true. That's for sure. Well I don't have any more questions.

PC: [00:48:34] OK.

AH: [00:48:34] Thank you very much.

PC: [00:48:36] I hope I helped you at all.

AH: [00:48:36] You did.

PC: [00:48:36] Okay [laughs]

AH: [00:48:36] This is great.

PC: [00:48:36] I think you learned all my life.

[End interview]