

Interviewee: Karen Bell
Interviewer: Tina Bucuvalas
Consultant: Kristin Sweeting
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Transcriber: Kristin Sweeting

Abstract: The A.P. Bell Fish Co. Inc. has been buying and selling seafood for generations. Even before they arrived in Cortez around 1900, the Bell family fished and farmed in Beaufort, NC. Aaron Bell started the fish house in 1923, and later his sons ran it. Karen Bell's father started building grouper boats in 1970s to create an offshore fleet, completing one every few years. That was the main reason the family managed to stay in business after the 1975 net ban when most fish houses closed and much of the culture was displaced. In recent years, the company opened the popular Star Fish Company Market and Restaurant next to their warehouse to provide residents and visitors with fresh seafood.

Bell began working at her family's wholesale seafood business after finishing college in 1988. Her father did not want her to work there because he thought it was a man's industry and hoped for an easier life for her. But she's glad she did. Bell is not only an extremely competent and well-respected businesswoman, but she considers it an advantage to be a woman because she can control the male employees better through non-confrontational means.

All the A.P. Bell fishermen are subcontractors or operate their own business. In some cases Bell hires the captain and he hires the crew, but they also buy from small independent boats. Normally they work with about 75 fishermen every year, though the number increases to about 125 during mullet season. Cortez is known for mullet and mullet roe worldwide, and the mullet population is growing annually. Other seasonal harvests include shrimp, stone crabs, pompano, mackerel, and bait. Grouper and shrimp are year-round.

[00:00:05] **Tina Bucuvalas:** If you could say your name and where you're from, maybe the name of the company. Of course, we know you're from here but how did your family get here? When you talk about them, if you could give some of their names too, of your grandfather or great-grandfather or grandmother whether they were in the fishing business and background information.

[Edited – Production comment]

[00:00:43] **Karen Bell:** My name is Karen Bell. I live in Cortez, Florida. I was actually born in Bradenton, Florida, but today I'm part of a fishing family that is in Cortez and it's the Bell and Fulford families is who I, who I'm born into.

They came from the Carolinas in the late 1800s actually. My grandfather, which was Aaron Parks Bell, or who was Aaron Parks Bell, came in 18, he's born in 1895, and he came to Cortez in the early 1900s. And then my grandmother, Jesse Fulford, was born in Cortez in 1900. Those two wed in 1920.

And then there were seven children. My dad is one of them, or was one of them. He passed in 2012, but there were seven children. And I work basically at the company. They started many, years ago. AP Bell Fish Company, I manage it today.

[00:01:42] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Could you talk a little bit more about how they went into fishing here? What the early years were like what kind of fishing they were doing, the boats and so on and so forth.

[00:01:56] **Karen Bell:** Over the years, I've heard many, stories about how the family started. They came from the Carolinas, North Carolina, actually, Beaufort, because I was told the hurricanes had been really devastating.

And they farmed and fished there. And then they chose Cortez because of a number of reasons, one of which was the barrier Islands offered protection more so than the Carolinas the coastal region. So they thought Cortez would be safer. And the fishing was amazing. They said, they didn't farm as much here, although I always remember my grandmother having a, pretty large garden that she worked and fed the family with, but they, predominantly fished here. And that's what we still do today. Although we have people who fish for us also.

[00:02:42] **Tina Bucuvalas:** What kind of fishing did they do? Did they make their own boats? Did they make their own net? Back in the early 19 00s they didn't really make boats then, but they fish primarily in shore.

[00:02:58] **Karen Bell:** I actually have some old ledgers that show fish 3 cents a pound. They're all written in this beautiful calligraphy, and to me it looks like calligraphy. It was just really nicely done handwriting, but it'll say the fisherman's name and then it will say 40 pounds of silver mullet at 3 cents, 10 trout at whatever the price was then.

But it was more of an inshore fishery, I think, until maybe the sixties. And then they started targeting fish offshore, the reef fish grouper snapper. But that was a very, small scale until, I think it started in the late sixties. But then by the seventies my dad started building boats every other year, every few years for the offshore fleet.

Which is part of the reason we're even in existence is because they had the foresight to build the offshore fleet. When the 1995 net ban went into effect many, little fish houses closed so along Florida's coast, and we fortunately had those offshore boats and their production to keep us in business.

[00:04:09] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Can you tell a little bit about the, founding and development of the company itself?

[00:04:18] **Karen Bell:** One of my favorite stories about Aaron goes back to how much fun he was. I didn't ever have the opportunity to meet him. He died before I was born, but they said he was an awesome businessman. He was a lot of fun.

He was a little bit of a drinker, a little bit of a gambler, which we all partake in those still today. But he would partner with people in the twenties and thirties and a lot of times those didn't work out. For whatever reason, the other person would end up with the property or they sold it or the partnerships just weren't good.

So he started AP Bell Fish Company in 1940 on his own and his children helped him. And that seemed to be a better fit with no one to argue with at that point.

[00:05:01] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And how has the AP Bell Company fostered fishing or worked with the development of fishing in this area. I'm a, I'm making the assumption, and correct me if I'm wrong, the fishing has increased dramatically in this area over the years.

[00:05:24] **Karen Bell:** The harvest levels for Cortez have actually gone up and down, and a lot of that has depended upon, I'd say two things. Primarily, red Tide has had significant impacts over the years where they can wipe out the

entire inshore fishery if it's bad enough. My dad told me stories when he came back from World War II, there were no fish here.

He actually left, went to Campeche on a shrimp boat and didn't like it. Eventually made his way home. It was in I think 47, 48 came back. But the offshore fleet has probably more grown. It's consistently had more and more demand demands until now, regulatory things have made it so we are not able to produce probably what we could.

Even though people don't like that to be reigned in, it's probably good for the Gulf of Mexico because it ensures that the stocks are strong into the future. And for our own longevity, that's important. Fishermen always complain about that. But the United States really is very, [00:06:00] proactive on protecting the stocks.

I was on the Gulf Council for six years, so I really got to learn how that works. I wasn't particularly thrilled with it. It's a cutthroat way, to live If you're in politics and it's not my favorite, I was happy to give that seat up and come home.

[00:06:54] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Could you tell a little bit more about what is the Gulf Council, what government body is it associated with and exactly what were the things you were examining or regulating?

[00:07:08] **Karen Bell:** The United States has a system where there are eight fishery regions and each one has a council. It's made up by people that are appointed by the Department of Commerce. You have to be recommended by your governor. And then the Department of Commerce chooses who that is. It's a 17 member council.

There's the Gulf Council, South Atlantic Council, New England Council, Alaska Pacific. They're all over the, they are around. They surround our borders. And it's interesting because I wasn't very familiar with it, which is why I think they chose to put me on it. They were trying to get maybe some new ways of looking at things and very difficult process and that a lot of pressure from different sides. Whether it be the recreational versus the charter versus commercial, everyone's pulling for their share of the harvest. I remember at one point I asked the chair to please read the, our mandate, what our, we were charged with doing, which was basically to focus on the stock levels.

We're not supposed to, we do get into the, division of the resource, but the main key is for us to focus on the health of the fisheries. What's good for the fisheries.

Then you get into how you divvy that up. If they're not healthy, you're not really doing any good not focusing on that.

[00:08:32] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So when you were on the council and you were looking at the health of the stock issues, what exactly were you looking at and where did it go? Where did you have to go with it?

[00:08:50] **Karen Bell:** When I was on the council, probably the most troubling issue we dealt with were long lines, bottom long lines in the Gulf of Mexico.

It was difficult for me because we do that here, so I represented a lot of fishermen who were involved in the bottom long line fishery, but I was also getting literally yelled at by non longline supporters and very contentious topic. What finally came to be is they limited the number of endorsements.

To allow bottom long lining in the Gulf of Mexico to, I believe 53. It might be 52, but very limited for, to participate in that fishery. And that was the balance instead of eradicating it totally. Because had they done, that's the bulk of our production is from long lines. There's hook and line boats too, but they don't produce near what a long line boat does.

So some middle ground was, is where we ended up, which was good. But for me I, can be really emotional and people can be really nasty sometimes. And so it was grueling for me. I, cried and I was embarrassed because it's not a forum where you should be tearing up over, over anything really.

But it was just difficult for me because, I also discovered I had high blood pressure was when I was at a meeting. It was so funny because I thought, why is my head spinning? And I finally went to a, walk-in clinic. I was in Texas, and they told me I had high blood pressure. And I was like, really? I didn't, it was from 2000 to 2006.

And I, I just didn't know that. And so I had to learn to [00:10:00] to deal with it a little better realize, hey, this isn't personal. These people aren't trying to attack you, really. Although it felt that way at times. But anyway, interesting to learn about myself and also, what an intricate process.

The council comes up with these rules, then it's moved up to department of Commerce for, it's published for the public to have an opportunity to respond. Really impressive system. Just difficult and a little overwhelming for me.

[00:11:06] **Tina Bucuvalas:** For the benefit of people who may be listening to this in the future, could you just briefly explain what long line, hook and line and what kinds of are and what kinds of fish they produce or, harvested from them?

[00:11:24] **Karen Bell:** So the reef fishery has basically two or three or even four you could say types of gear that are used. Long line consists of bottom long line and then surface long line, two different things. Bottom long line is for bottom dwellers like grouper, some snapper. As the line goes down, snapper down there also amberjack jack, that those types of fish are caught on bottom long line. Surface, long line is Pelagics, that would be your swords, tuna, mahi, all of those fish like the currents and the upper systems of the water. So those lines are on the top of the water. They're buoyed off, but they're not deep, deep down, although there is deep set long lining too. So there's different nuances of all of them.

But then in addition to that, there's hook and line fishing, which can be bandits, meaning there's spools, little spools on the boat and they go up and down. It's vertical gear sometimes it's called, that's often used for structure on the bottom, be it a reef or maybe a sunken ship or something that they, where fish like to congregate around often snapper.

And there's also regular rod and reel. Those guys actually, some women do really, well with that. And then in shore, in Florida now we have more seine nets, which are small nets that after the net limitation bill or 1995 net ban we call it. We were left with gill net, not gill nets, it disallowed gill nets, but we had cast nets small, under 500 square foot and seines also under 500 square foot.

[00:13:08] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Could you, how long were you on that council and have you been similar state bodies that are involved with investigation or regulation of fishing.

[00:13:21] **Karen Bell:** I was on the Gulf Council for six years, from 2000 through 2006, and I told them I didn't want a third term. I was, I had two, three year terms. After the, after I got off that I was a little burnt out, so haven't been as, involved as I once was.

Also, the same thing happened after the 95 Net Ban. I used to go to Fish and Wildlife meetings. At the time, I think it was the Marine Fish Commission. Now they call it the Fish and Wildlife. But I it, you feel like when you go through something like the net ban, you feel it doesn't matter what you say, it doesn't matter what reality is.

People have their minds made up and you, from my own perspective, I didn't wanna participate anymore. I, felt it didn't make a difference. I still feel that what Florida did was terribly wrong to our little industry. We're not a very big industry and now we're even smaller. And so we got rid of gill nets, which honestly are such a good clean gear.

[Edited - asked to repeat in production conversation below]

But no I've, learned in all these years that I just do not like politics. I don't understand when people are disrespectful to one another just for having a different opinion.

I don't get that. I can talk to anybody, almost, and not be mad at them for them thinking differently than me. And I was raised to, to be able to have a conversation with anybody, whether they agree with me or not, and not be dismissive of them or rude. And so you have to be tough to be on those to be in those forums, I think, whether state or, federal. And I think I'm a little too emotional.

[Edited for production comments]

The gear that we use today, primarily in shore consists of cast nets and seine nets. They were a result of the, basically the gill net ban. Prior to 1995, the choice of nets here was gill nets, and that's such a good fishery and it's really upsetting that it's not in use anymore.

In fact, North Carolina continues to allow gill netting because they realized that it's a better fishery. They've just limited the number of people that are able to have gill nets, which is what Florida, I wish they had done. Instead, we're left with cast nets and seine nets. And when you throw a cast net over fishery, any type of a fish stock, they, it catches everything.

The cast net just ensnares, anything it's thrown over as opposed to Gill Nets would let the smaller fish, because it's mesh size is what controls the harvest, and if you have a larger mesh size, which at times that was there were rules that how big a net could be, the mesh size could be, but the bigger the mesh size, the small fish can swim through.

So you're only targeting mature fish. Again, like I said before, the cast nets don't do that and nor do beach seines or seine nets. They take everything and it's just really an indiscriminate way of catching fish, and it's not a healthy way. We would've been much better if they had limited the number of gill netters and

allowed them to either give those permits to their family or somehow a way to maintain a small scale fishery.

What we have today is just so many people in the cast net fishery, which I, have a lot of respect for what they do because it takes a lot of strength to use a cast net. But again, indiscriminate fishery, so many fisher are wasted today in the past. The gill Nets would let the male fish swim through today they just take so many male and female fish from what we want in the fall season is really the female fish. But that's a whole nother story with the, eggs that they produce and the various cultures that appreciate those eggs. Really southern people in the US appreciate mullet roe it's called, or Europe as they have a desire to purchase mullet row and Asia, Taiwan, primarily they like mullet row but..

It's okay. I don't know if, you should try it, if you've never tried it, but it's very fishy. It's caviar, salty, fishy, little bitty teeny eggs and an egg sack that anywhere from two to maybe eight ounces each. But it's, interesting what I learned about that.

[00:20:30] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Are you familiar with Tarama, the Greek kind of fish egg spread or anything?

[00:20:36] **Karen Bell:** I am not, no.

[00:20:37] **Tina Bucuvalas:** All right. Just an aside.

[00:20:38] **Karen Bell:** Similar?

[00:20:39] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yeah, similar. So just a question pertaining to what we were just talking about with these boards and stuff. Who was on these boards and where are the marine biologists? And are the marine biologists actually listening to the Fisher people?

[00:20:59] **Karen Bell:** The boards I was a member of did have some scientist participants, like the one chairman, she had a biology background, but how they're really, how the federal one works is there are committees that are made up of scientists and they provide information to help guide the members of the council. The council's really made up of, I think it's three people from Florida, three people from Texas every coastal state has three and then there are state representatives being one of those, I believe three. I have to get into like start adding it up. But I used to, I remember being on the council, I would love to hear the scientists talk because they're not biased.

It's not about who's doing what. It's about the fish stocks and the health. If I could understand them, they speak a scientific lingo and you have to learn all these different acronyms cuz they throw them out there like everybody understands it. But I remember it would be comforting to me. That even goes back to the net ban and Florida days because the scientific community didn't support the net ban.

But unfortunately their voices weren't really allowed to be put out there because it was so political. And it wasn't science backed. Half of the advertising that they had for that net band was pacific drift nets like and, turtles and spinner dolphins, we don't even have some of those things here, but the public, I understand why they voted for it.

It said limiting marine net fishing. If you don't know the whole topic you would think limiting is good, that's probably a wise thing. So it did pass. But I'm really, leery today when people walk up to me and want me to sign on all these constitutional amendments. Because what I learned from the 1995 net ban is you don't manage something as fluid as a fishery in your constitution, it's almost impossible to change your constitution.

It takes a lot of money, takes a lot of political power, and we are stuck now with something. Honestly, it's not good, and I don't care who you talk to. They could come and debate me if they wanted. It's not good what we have right now. It's not healthy for our fisheries.

[00:23:23] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Thank you. No one has ever talked about whether it's, this is before the scientists supported or didn't support.

[00:23:31] **Karen Bell:** I'm really happy to hear I don't know if it makes any difference or not but I that's just my view. It wasn't good. What, they did ultimately.

[Edited Production Comments]

No, but I that's like, what I said, they, if I had just read that without knowing the background, I would think it made sense. You want some kind of limitations probably on everything, but gosh, today people walk up to you sometimes in the parking lots and they want you to sign a petition for, to get an amendment on the count, on the ballot.

And I'm like, oh no, I'm not familiar enough with that at this particular time to to, sign that.

[00:24:51] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay. Earlier you alluded to the red tide and I was very happy to hear the memory about 1947, which actually is wiped out the entire sponge industry in Tarpon Springs for 10 years pretty much. We're interested to hear more about Red Tide incidents in the Gulf and how it affects the stocks and the water quality. All of the issues. But most people haven't gone much beyond 2018, 2016 and stuff like that. If you have any, information from your family's memories, we'd be interested in hearing that.

But if you could talk a little bit now about Red Tide and the effect it's had on fishing historically, in the present, what you think are the elements that go into creating red tide, what if there are any potential solutions? And so on.

[00:26:00] **Karen Bell:** The 2018, red Tide in Cortez was terrible. We had no stone crabs. Our boat, I don't know if the crabs died or if they buried, because the following year we were okay. And they, I've heard before from people that when there is a terrible red tide, crabs will do better the following year because they have so much food available to them. Everything's dead on the bottom.

But our boats had to go up north and I'm sure those, fishermen up there didn't appreciate that. But for our fishermen to have anything to catch trap wise, they moved up towards Hernando, Tarpon. But the interesting thing I do often say to people when they're talking about Red Tide, they keep talking about the nitrogen runoff, fertilizer and all.

But I always go back to that story of my dad told me about returning from World War II, and he said literally for two years there was, it was so bad here, nothing was being caught. And so I know there was fertilizer being used back then, but I don't think to the degree now. So I, think it's more what I've learned a little bit is that it's a natural occurring system that occurs way out deep in the Gulf.

There are undercurrents that bring it in. I went to an amazing presentation at the Florida Sea Grant. I believe they sponsored it in Palmetto at the fairgrounds or the Seagrass offices. And really, interesting because they spoke in a way that was easy to understand, but it is a naturally occurring thing.

But how they presented it was when it gets here, we feed it by what we've done to the water. There's also today the lack of the mangrove forest. A whole other story is the F.I.S.H. Preserve, which the community purchased back in, I think it was 2000, right around there, late nineties. That's sadly one of the largest mangrove Forest left on Sarasota Bay. I believe it's 70 acres that we bought for, we bought 93 acres for \$250,000 from this really wonderful woman named, I'm

trying to remember what her last name or first name was. But anyway, her husband was Karl with a K. Anyway, she sold us that 95 acres, 93 acres for \$250,000.

She let us pay for it over time. The festival supported that. But it's just amazing that Mangrove Forest is one of the few left. They just keep tearing everything down to build homes or develop hotels, whatever they're doing. But that's the base of our bay. That's what feeds and supports our estuaries and stock.

Thankfully for us, we were able to take hold of that. She was generous enough to work with us, and that's worth a fortune today but it's got a conservation easement on it. It'll never be developed, but, that also I think helps with Red Tide all these things that Mother Nature had to help balance.

We've lost a lot of it. Yeah I, think we're probably, no matter what, people keep trying to figure out ways to beat Red Tide. I don't know if that's really gonna happen unless you can figure out how to control the entire Gulf of Mexico. But maybe.

[00:29:25] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Is there one particularly dramatic memory that you have about encountering Red Tide or what you witnessed that happened because of Red Tide?

[00:29:16] **Karen Bell:** I, don't know if there's one particular instance that makes me remember about Red Tide incidents. I know it's just really depressing to look at my window and see. Literally thousands of fish washed up along the seawall. The, our neighbors, the Coast Guard, and they have a concrete seawall and really, disheartening because of course my perspective is those are fish that we would eventually catch or that keep our bay healthy so that we can process food and feed people.

And so that's, probably the, the worst thing I can think about it. The smell obviously is, bad, but I just think it's part of nature.

[00:30:18] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So to help diminish the red tide threat or occurrence. You've, hinted at it, the development and and how we're feeding it is the cause. What, kind of things might you put in place or want to see put in place to help protect us or diminish the threat of Red Tide?

[00:30:52] **Karen Bell:** I think we're I, believe there are things that people are trying to do already, whether they're minimizing fertilizer. I'm sure that has some kind of an effect because anytime you're adding things to the water it's,

got to make a difference. But I believe there's a lot of people trying to figure out how to deal with the, effects of red tide. One thing if the fish would sink faster, I don't know if that's ever a way to to deal with it. But that does, in turn, go back into the ecosystem and it feeds the crabs or fish or whatever's out there feeding.

But I don't really know what other types of things. There's people smarter than me, hopefully working on that. I know there's all kinds of organizations. Mote works on it. There was an organization called Start. Their focus was Red Tide. I worked with them a little bit. I just unfortunately didn't have enough time to continue working with them.

[00:31:34] **Tina Bucuvalas:** What, are there other problems in the Gulf do you see some people think that the water temperature is gradually increasing, maybe doing due to climate change or something, or have you seen any of that? Have you seen any water level rise? And if you've seen any of these, have they affected you or your business in any way?

[00:32:25] **Karen Bell:** I personally have not seen the water levels rising, although we did have a flood here, which was unusual. Some of the houses got water in them. It wasn't a huge flood, but still water to go into a couple of the houses. But I know as humans we try to grasp what is happening to the world, but I can only rely on what I learned from the fishermen and, for example, what they tell me about the Gulf Stream is there's a loop in the lower part of the Gulf.

Some years it goes really high up towards New Orleans. Sometimes it stays really low, and that has a huge effect on fisheries. The, especially fish, like the pelagics, they change their patterns based on that current. They might stay low and go into the Atlantic earlier or so they tell me. Again, I'm not out there, but I will tell you this, the information these guys have on their boats to give them tide, current temperature, they would be better suited to answer those questions than I, because I, just listen to them and I, pay attention because it's really interesting how in tune they are with the environment.

Gosh, they follow the moon, the tide, the sun, the, very, important in their lives. I can say I've witnessed different behavior on the moons. I'll be sitting here some days and things are spinning out of control. And I'll be like, is it a full moon? And I'll be darned it is. And because really they, they do, they're so tied to it that and I think you can even read that crime is up on full moons and things, but I, believe that so much, it makes a really big difference in people's lives, at least when you're connected to, nature.

[00:34:23] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay. And let's see.

[00:34:25] **Kristin Sweeting:** Can I, can interrupt real quick?

[00:34:27] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yes.

[00:34:31] **Kristin Sweeting:** So from some of the feedback we've gotten from other people. So red tide kills a lot of fish and you said back when you were talking about the Gulf Council, that there's like a lot of regulations and you see these and you think that they're good for the fisheries. But do you think with the amount of red tide that happens every year or other reasons. Do you think there's room to have more middle ground to reduce the regulations a little bit? Or do you think that they're in a good spot where they are?

[00:35:13] **Karen Bell:** An interesting thing with red Tide, I remember there was a local fisherman asked the Fish and Wildlife Commission to allow him to catch fish because they were going to die anyway. And I sent a letter in opposition only because he asked for himself. My point to the letter was if it was going to be opened, and I get that it, we are in a, non-static environment and, yes, take the fish if they're going to die anyway and we could freeze them or have them available for the market.

But when you do something like that, you have to be really careful that you're not favoring one person. So my point to, in my letter to the commission was, If you do this, you have to do it for everybody. And I don't, I think Red Tide had dissipated by the time, they didn't end up doing anything.

But one thing about regulations that are difficult is they are difficult to change. They're set in stone. The law is hard to go back and revamp. It takes a, an act of congress or an act of the legislatures, which is almost like an act of Congress. But again, fisheries change constantly. Our environment changes the temperature, the moon, the everything, and red tide events like that.

So it's unfortunate that there aren't ways to take those situations into account and be able to react to them more quickly than literally. I think laws take almost a year to really to, go full course. And that's doesn't really make sense with something like what we do.

[00:36:52] **Tina Bucuvalas:** That makes sense. Something we touched on before and maybe you can talk about the structure of A.P. Bell along with this, but cuz my understanding is that you you not only have your own boats and I think you contract with the captains, but you also are dealing with independent fishermen. But we're also curious as to how many fishermen are local, whether, people come in from outside and if it's only for certain times or certain fisheries

or certain seasons. And then a related, but another question is what can you go through the seasons of, what you catch when.

[00:37:44] **Karen Bell:** The fishermen of Cortez are made up of kind of two distinct groups in my mind. There's the offshore fishermen, a little more wild, a little more living on the edge. And then there's the inshore fishermen, the net fishermen, and they're the more traditional they, go out on day trips. The offshore boats, they stay out 10 to 12 days. That might be why they party more. They're, stuck offshore for a long time.

They come in, they're a little rougher around the edges. But both of them, both groups of fishermen target different fish based on seasons. Inshore, we've got, gosh, your spring mackerel fishery, your king fishery. Those are starting about now. Mullet right now, nobody's looking for mullet because they just came out of their spawning season, which is December, January.

Right now, those poor fish are worn out. The ones that are still swimming round out there, if they've spawned, they're really skinny. They actually refer to them as snakes because they, and the water, they just look really long and narrow. They won't start to be caught again that once they fatten up in like maybe June, and then as the year goes on, June, July, August, they get bigger and fatter and healthier and they get more delicious to eat because when that fat content goes up that's when they're the best to, eat.

That's when we like to take them and split them for smoking accounts. For restaurants like Ted Peters, they buy mullet from us. We freeze them. He is adamant, the gentleman that owns the restaurant adamant that we only use September, October mullet. Because they're at their best. They're at their peak.

But then other fisheries that are targeted inshore, there's gosh, lady fish in the fall when the weather cools down. And then you circle back around to January where, December, January, where mullet again are being harvested for their eggs mainly at that time of the year. The offshore boats, fish spawn at different times and therefore they don't, there's they don't like to catch them when they're spawning if they can help it, but so they might move into other fisheries.

There's different federal rules. What we deal with right now mainly is if IFQs, which stands for individual fishing quota. We were given so much by the government based on our historical landings, and you're able to lease and buy quota and or shares, or excuse me, you're able to lease or buy quota and or allocation, meaning the ability to land a pound of fish in this calendar year.

That's really made the fishery interesting because they've cut our quota away back this year because they felt that the health of the red grouper fishery was maybe in a little trouble. So they reigned us back in. They dropped it 22%. So as a result of that, I've been telling our boats I've reduced what they can catch per trip of that particular species.

Red grouper, I've got them on 5,000 pound trip ticket or trip limits. I have the grouper fishermen on 5,000 pound trip limits for red grouper. And then the other fish, I've told them they can have more of those because we have enough quota for that. Most of these offshore boats that we own are I think we have eight long line boats and two or three, let's see, two or three hook and line boats.

There's a purseseine boat, a shrimp boat, a sword, tuna boat. We own 18 boats all together that are offshore boats. And we hire the captains for those boats. And then the, captain, it's his job to hire his own crew. I'm not allowed to tell those captains who they can take according to the Jones Act, which is interesting.

It goes back to Admiralty Law. But how I get around that is I tell them who can and cannot be on the dock because I could go on and on about this, but there's, drug issues and the, in the fishing industry, primarily the offshore industry, part of the playing hard but fortunately we don't have that problem too much in Cortez.

Mainly because they're not allowed here. This is my home, this is my neighborhood, this is our business. And we're not going to tolerate or enable people to hurt themselves, at least not if we can help it. But in addition to our boats, we have independent boats that sell to us. Or go across the dock, meaning they offload their catch.

We just offloaded a boat named Eagle Eye. It's out of Boston. It's a sword, tuna, pelagic boat. All of that product was primarily shipped back to Boston. It was sword and tuna, Yellowfin tuna. We charged them so much a pound to use our facility. We bought a little bit, maybe a few hundred pounds just for local use.

But it's an interesting mix. The offshore guys and the inshore, a couple women involved in the offshore, but and inshore. Anyway, it's an interesting, life to watch and to work with these people. They're amazing.

[Edited for production comments]

[00:43:09] **Kristin Sweeting:** Can I interject with a quick question?

[00:43:11] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yeah.

[00:43:13] **Kristin Sweeting:** Did you ever want to be a fisherwoman when you were a little. .

[00:43:17] **Karen Bell:** I never wanted to go fishing offshore. In fact, today, it's funny, I will go hook and line fishing a little bit, but I much, rather, I would much, rather go into the cooler and get a fish.

And they stay out for 10 to 14 days. And I love being near the water. Like I feel my most comfortable by the water, but I don't need to be out on the water for extended periods of time. I'm happy to be here.

[00:43:45] **Kristin Sweeting:** What about any inshore fishing?

[00:43:46] **Karen Bell:** I've done a little bit of that, but again, the same thing. I would just much rather get a fish out of the cooler, take it to star, have them cook it, or I'll cook it myself.

[00:43:58] **Kristin Sweeting:** Do you have, so it sounds like your attachment to the fishing industry is not a result of loving fishing, which seems to be the case with many people, when many of the guys who were fishermen is that they grew up loving fishing and so they wanted to be a fisherman are, but do you have memories of wonderful times as a child fishing?

[00:40:17] **Karen Bell:** No. I never fished. We had horses when I answered that wrong. Sorry.

[00:44:30] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay.

[00:44:30] **Karen Bell:** I do not recall ever when I was little wanting to go fishing. We had horses, we spent our time at the barn. We didn't wanna be here. They would force us to come out for family time, of course, years later. You appreciate that. But I think I am just I, think I am just drawn to the water because I did grow up out here.

We would play on the net spreads, but I never had that pull to really be in a boat or to go fishing. I love the water though, but I think had things not gone the way they went. My, my brother was older than me and he died when he was 16. And honestly, I often feel like he, he should have my job. He should be here running this place. And I think that's what would've happened had he not passed. And then it was a motorcycle accident here at the Fish house. But I've spoken to

people before about why I came back, which I was in college. I was interning at IBM. I had a job with them in marketing and mergers, acquisitions, and I loved it.

But I was over in Boca Raton, Florida, but I really, missed home. I missed this coast. I missed the friendliness of Manatee County, of Cortez the, beaches here, even though I don't ever go to the beach, but I still like to be around it. And I just decided I really, wanted to work with what I remember growing up in, which is the people here, mainly, the place here.

The idea of what we do. I think I'm really drawn to that, that we feed people and just so how very important that is. I've talked to others before about this, like I tell the fishermen they are ambassadors to not just this business but the industry, our county, our state, and what they do is so, important.

At least I feel it, is that they feed people.

[Edited for production comment. Asked to repeat.]

There's not a whole lot more important than what we do that these fishermen do and that selling these fish across the country, it gives your life meaning.

There are stations that were funded by the Florida Humanities Council, one of which is, I love the definition. It's work and their, work, music, harvest, and the definition for work it says something that gives your life meaning. And I love that because again, it goes back to, we're part of the earth, we're part of the environment, and we bring to people and put on their tables or make it so that it's able to go on their tables, fish that they don't have a means to get, whether they're in the middle of the country, Chicago, New York, wherever we provide fish for them, we provide a something for them to eat.

And I just think for my own purpose, sense of what do I do? How do I contribute to the world? To me it's really important. So I love what I do. I enjoyed IBM. They were amazing to work with, but how important really is it if there's a storefront with an IBM distributor? It's probably really important, but in my own sense of self-worth, I believe what we do here just really, takes on more significance..

[00:48:04] **Tina Bucuvalas:** That's really a great statement. Earlier you were mentioning about a time when your father told you not to come back. Could you talk about that story? What happened then?

[00:48:18] **Karen Bell:** I'm trying to write a book of some of the things my dad and I used to talk about because I just, I'm so impressed by who [00:44:00] he was.

He was born a fisherman, but yet he was kind, he was a good businessman. He would share with me and not in a pedantic way. He would just say to me why he would think the way he did or why he did things the way he did. And in fact, as I got older, I'd say I think it should be like this. And he'd say why it wasn't going to be like that. First of all, it was he and his brother's company, but still he was really good at explaining. And I remember when I called him and said, I wanted to leave IBM in Boca Raton and I wanted to come home and he really, was opposed to it, not the nasty way, but he felt that it was a difficult life, especially for a woman.

He said it was like a man's world. He felt that the regulations were getting tougher and tougher every year. I just think you as a parent want more for your children and I think that's just what he was thinking for my best interests. But I love, again, what we do. I love that that actually being a woman I think is a huge advantage because I have a great rapport with the fishermen and not that you can't do that, have that also as a man, but I just think it's easier coming from me than maybe sometimes discussion might be man to man. But I'm glad I came back. I think in the long run, he was glad that I was here. I took a lot of pressure off of him. I learned a huge amount from him.

I wish I were as good a person as he is. I saw him so many times, be taken advantage of by people, usually money. And one of the things he taught me, I loved one of his sayings was you, only need enough money to pay your bills. Then I would laugh and say people's bills are different.

Different people have different levels of expense, but he just got taken advantage of. He'd loan people money for a motor or something and they would just leave, and he would just years later help them again. Just really a gentle, kind, generous person. So I hope I had even half of the goodness in him.

I've also got the the, New York side of me as my mother came from Buffalo, New York, and I think that makes me a little bit more tough Maybe.

[00:50:44] **Tina Bucuvalas:** You mentioned earlier there were a couple women captaining boats, I'm assuming. Could you talk a little bit more about women fishing or in other parts of the industry?

[00:50:59] **Karen Bell:** There are women who work out of here, most of whom are crew though. One is offshore Stefania. She's awesome. Interesting story. I won't go into great depth, but she's had some struggles in her life. Came here, seems to have found peace fishing. Occasionally, struggles a little bit still, but a good person always trying to do better.

And there are some net boats that have women on them. And there is a shark boat captain who, was a woman who they are no longer working out of here. I had some issues with what they were doing and I, asked them to leave. But I'm always impressed to see women in the industry because I think we're, in general to profile, we're often levelheaded.

And if we really want something, we go for it and committed and calm. And so I, really seeing women get involved in the fishing industry.

[00:51:58] **Tina Bucuvalas:** I don't know if this happens before, but maybe we could just have a sentence. Did you ever say your father's name? Maybe you could just say, my father was or did you say his name before?

[00:52:10] **Karen Bell:** I don't think I did. I think you asked me to at some point to go into the names and I only said Aaron and Jesse.

[00:52:16] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay.

[00:52:16] **Karen Bell:** But I can speak to that.

[00:52:18] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay. Yeah. If you could just say that in case they need to edit it into the bit about your, dad.

[00:52:24] **Karen Bell:** My father was the second born child to Aaron and Jesse. Walter was his name. They called him Bub them. Their first son was Aaron, who, oh, excuse me. Their first son was Warren, who died in World War II. He was hit by a I think he, he was in the Navy, I believe, and they were hit by bombs and that he was lost at sea. The other children were Chester was the third, Calvin was the fourth, Jesse, a k a, Buster was the fifth, and then Betty Alice, their only daughter. And the last one being uncle Doug, who is still with us as is Chester (*passed shortly after this interview*). Doug is now 80. He probably won't want me to tell people that, but he's the baby of the family. He's 80 gosh of that generation.

[00:53:19] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And just to go back about some family and stuff, what is it like living in Cortez? Do you still feel like it is a fishing village and

there really is a sense of community? And is daily life here different than in other places, do you think?

[00:53:37] **Karen Bell:** I think the daily life in Cortez is still very different than most places. It's very slow, it's very easy. Lots of walking traffic, a lots of just waving. There's good things to it, which are the ones I just mentioned. There's also some maybe negatives where everybody's in your business, everybody has an opinion about what you do. Typically not afraid to share that opinion, but I also feel a sense of change. Of late, we've had a lot of property owners renting their homes on short term rental programs, and I struggle with that a little bit because I'm real big on property rights.

I believe people should be allowed to do with their property what they wish. But I also see where I don't think it's good for the community. And I, I sometimes I feel badly about saying that because the ones I've met that are here really are here to learn. They love what Cortez is about, but I also see it as almost a threat to what we are about because it's taking that interwoven community and it's, to me, it's splintering, it's displaced some of the, old families, they've sold their homes. Many sold them after the net ban, which was tragic. Now they're selling cuz property values have gotten so high, they're being bought and then they're being rented short time. So you don't have that cohesiveness in, your community anymore?

I don't know them. I, see people walking by and they're not threatening or anything. They're, nice but it's just, it's a scary thing, I believe for the village. There aren't many places like this left. I don't believe in Florida and I hope we're not on our way out.

At one of the F.I.S.H. Meetings, one of the board members fish stands for Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage. It's a local nonprofit. One of the board members mentioned that she wanted to try to figure out how to disallow short-term rentals. Again, you have to look at people have rights to their property.

We're under the county. We're not a city. The county doesn't have an issue with people renting their houses, so I don't know where that will go. I mentioned before that my family and myself, we own quite a few houses here and we have in them fishing people are people who support AP Bell or Star and try to rent them reasonably because we help them, they help us. That at least helps keep the village in my mind, fishing oriented, [00:52:00] fishing supportive. Even though we haven't had a lot of gentrification, I've had people call me complaining about the ice machine running and were that one of our original people, they would never complain about that.

But it's people who don't know what we're doing, they just don't like the noise. They're not from here, so that's a little disarming. We're still strong enough that they can complain all they want. It's really not gonna get them anywhere. We're gonna blow ice .

[00:56:58] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Let's see. How do you see the, future of Cortez as a town, the fishing industry here in Cortez, fishing in the Gulf generally?

[00:57:16] **Karen Bell:** I have concerns a little bit about the industry in Cortez only because what we do is hard work, and I'm meaning everyone, the fishermen, the fish house, dock laborers, the, even the paperwork we're required to do. It's hard. It's time consuming. It takes patience and commitment and I don't know if people today want that.

I've talked to different family members asking them, and I see strengths and weaknesses in them. And honestly, the amount of paperwork we do, every single pound of fish that comes through here is reported both to the state and the federal level. The boats every single thing that they do is documented through logbooks, and I have concerns that we're, pretty good at it.

We have a system for it, but I also know it can fall apart really easily if you just even get a little bit behind. And that worries me about the future. But I will say this, we are a very ,what's the word I'm looking for? We are very, I can't think of the word, not committed, but where we stick, intuitiveness, what's the word I'm looking for? I can't think of it. But...

[00:58:43] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Persistent.

[00:58:44] **Karen Bell:** Persistent resistant or what? What did you say?

[00:58:46] **Production crew:** Resilient.

[00:58:47] **Karen Bell:** Resilient. That was the word I was looking for. Thank you. Yeah, so we are extremely resilient here. And even though like I'm getting older and even though I worry about can they do it, will they do it, what it takes to keep this going because we're on our third generation now. It, would probably work itself out as things always do.

They, always something always comes through to make it work or, not. And maybe it wasn't meant to work, but I probably worry about it more. And honestly, I don't sit there and worry. My personality isn't to worry. I just, that's not who I am. I'd probably pass out if I had to think about things too much and

worry, but hopefully it'll go be here a couple more generations, if not three or four.

[00:59:35] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And, the fish and the Gulf, do you think that's doing well? Generally, the environment?

[00:59:41] **Karen Bell:** I believe the stocks are healthy. And again, I contribute that or excuse me, I believe the stocks are healthy and I attribute that to our government as much as we might not like it at times. They really are looking out to make sure the fishery stocks are sound, they will slam a fishery shut if they deem it necessary, even at the, cost of an entire industry, they will shut it down if they think that the stocks aren't healthy.

[01:00:11] **Tina Bucuvalas:** I, have two unrelated questions, but I better ask them now before I forget them.

[01:00:15] **Karen Bell:** Only ask one at a time because I'll get confused.

[01:00:17] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay. One of them is I understand you have a lot of Latino people in your workforce at AP Bell. Whereas we've noticed there are a lot of Haitian workers over at Cortez bait and seafood, and we're just wondering are they from a particular group? Is there a particular reason or is it just like word of mouth and they come and apply? Or, why do you anyway? Who is your workforce?

[01:00:55] **Karen Bell:** My father Walter died in 2012 and at that time we employed probably eight Hispanic gentlemen, and I believe almost all of them still work with us today. They came from one, the primary one came from the Ocala area. He had been on a dairy farm. Angel is his name. Angel can do anything. And I don't know how we were lucky enough to have him come to us, but he's worked with dairy, he's worked with fish. You could give him a task and he can just go do it. He's awesome.

When something is if there's nothing to do, he finds things for the crew to do. I believe we have five Hispanic people working with us right now. And they're just, they're awesome workers. They get the job done, they're friendly, they don't steal. They're just good, work ethic people. I was not familiar with with Haitians that, I did not know that there were some here working. I, I wasn't sure another part of the village. I didn't know that.

[01:02:06] **Tina Bucuvalas:** It was interesting to me because at this, when I interviewed you a couple years ago, I also was down in the keys at and at a fish

house where a lot of their workforce was Haitian and I didn't know that. Again, they're a good workforce.

[01:02:20] **Karen Bell:** Yeah. I didn't know that.

[01:02:21] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yeah. But, and I'm curious about the, Latin people you have here, are they Puerto Rican? Are they Mexican? Do you have any idea? And I'm asking this because like Puerto Ricans and Cubans and Dominicans are island people.

[01:02:36] **Karen Bell:** These are from Mexico. All of our work people the ones in the side of the building, the dot crew are from Mexico.

[01:02:44] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay.

[01:02:44] **Karen Bell:** One New Mexico. But he had a lot of connections with Mexico. He is born in New Mexico though.

[00:58:22] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yeah. You, you touched on this, but is there, do you see a problem with getting young people. To come into the industry fishing at this point,

[01:02:49] **Karen Bell:** It has been more difficult to get people in the fishing industry. A lot of that I attribute to drugs and that we're not tolerant of them being here. And just you, if you're just, if you have a serious drug issue, you can't work here. But what I have seen lately that's been very positive is some of the hook and line boats, the captains that have been hired are 25 to 30, young guys.

And they are good at what they do. They're, persistent. They go fishing, they take care of the boats, or at least most of them do. There's one I have to stay on top of a little bit. But that's been nice to see because I've been worried about the offshore boats a little bit. It's a hard life, especially for a young guy.

You're gone 10 or 12 days if you've got a family. That's a tough way to live. And Some of the crewmen are able to move up to captains, but a little bit harder to accomplish the day boats that go out for maybe three days, that's attracted the younger people and that's been nice. Net fishing, we've had a pretty good amount of, I think mostly children of some of the net fishermen that have joined their, fathers to go fishing.

So we're not down and out yet. We've still got [01:00:00] quite a few people who, wanna do this. Again. Most of them are tied to the water in some way already, whether they grew up fishing or with their friends fishing or they just really, are drawn to the water.

[01:04:41] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Overall, is there anything else that you would like people to know about any of the topics that we've covered, whether it's fishing generally your business I don't know, fishing in the Gulf or is there something that people don't talk about but you feel is an important thing that they should know?

[01:00:35] **Karen Bell:** I was thinking about a conversation I had with my cousin Louise before she died, and it was just interesting the perspective because what she said or what the discussion was, I had told her how I always felt my life was very charmed. I felt like things came very easy to me, whether it was school or working with people or just being generally happy and satisfied with what I was doing.

And I remember Louise had cancer and she ended up dying from cancer. But she looked at me and she said, are you serious? And I said, yeah I, do that. And she said, she started, she, it made me laugh even though it wasn't funny. She, listed all these terrible things in my life, and one, my brother dying at 16.

My mother had a, lot of manic issues depression and just mentally not well. And some family, squabbling issues matters that just, so she starts listing, my husband left me. She lists all these horrible things. And I remember looking at her and what I got from that is it, to me, one thing I have learned in life, it is so much how you look at it and what you make of things.

And I remember watching a fisherman, a boat owner whose boat went down and I thought, wow, this could break somebody. People died on the boat. And I thought this could mentally kill someone or just suck the life out of them. But he, when lifted himself, went about doing whatever those steps were to retrieve the boat.

Just coping with that. But it goes back to it's, I swear it's the half full, half empty thing. And it's unfortunate that you can't take people and make them look at things differently because I, swear it guides your life. It can make you a happy person or it can let you be the most miserable person out there, depending upon how you do that.

So I think that's something, I don't, it, it's not obviously unique to me, but it's something that I value now more I've learned that I have a gift to, to see good. And I'm not saying I always do, cuz there are times when I'm so mad or upset. I occasionally I, have a tantrum and I scream and yell.

And I hate when I do that because I pride myself on maintaining control because I think, I really think control is power. When you're dealing with people if, I have the power to let a situation escalate or I have the power to keep it level, don't engage in a that goes back to how people interact anyway.

I'm lucky to have been blessed with that ability to see the good and to, take advantage of that, I guess is what I'm doing because I try not to let things pull me into a dark spot.

[01:08:30] **Kristin Sweeting:** Are there any misconceptions about the commercial fishing industry that you haven't touched on that you would like to touch on?

[01:08:41] **Karen Bell:** One of my favorite stories about the impressions that people have of commercial fishermen is back in the eighties and nineties, nobody would come to the village because they were terrified of us. They thought, not me per se, but I was in school. But they wouldn't come out here because of the reputation of the fishermen.

There was smuggling here in the seventies. The fishermen, part of why I love working with them is their independence, their spirit. They will tell you what they think, but it was almost to our advantage because people avoided the village. They were afraid that they'd get beat up or something would happen if they came out here.

So we were our own little quiet enclave of crazies, I guess you might say. But I don't consider it crazy. I just consider it awesome personalities, strong-willed and stubborn and hardworking and kind of salt of the earth. But I believe those television shows like *Deadliest Catch* and *Wicked Tuna*, they've made people be more aware of what we do.

And I think they've also made us not so scary because they get into the personal lives of some of those people and they, they've made it more real. And I think it's helped us to a degree. Maybe not in that more people come because is that really good? Yes and no, but it's made us not to be these rapists of the ocean, and it's also allowed people, I think, to take time to, to talk to them. Like I love seeing over at Star sometimes, because people will share tables. You might have

a fisherman who just came in. You might have a business person and you might have a European tourist. And just to see them interact and, people love that.

And I'll say, yeah, I pay them to wander through here, which I don't. But it's just such a cool mix and I think people, they like the idea of what they do and they like meeting them, so I like that.

[01:10:45] **Kristin Sweeting:** Okay. Next question is so you touched on it in different parts of your story, but have you, you're in a different role than like the commercial fishermen, but have you faced that type of angry judgment before from the public and general people who maybe don't understand what's going on here and can you tell us a little bit about that?

[01:11:18] **Karen Bell:** I wouldn't say that I have faced angry judgment from anybody because again, I'm pretty easy to talk to.

So most people, I'm able to have a pretty reasonable conversation. But I do remember one specific incident which sticks out in my mind.

[Edited - Production crew interjects]

Prior to the vote for the net ban in 1995, I would go and speak. I would go to any club that would have me or any fair, I would just go sit and talk with people about it, trying to educate them about what we did or do the commercial fishing industry. I remember one incident where I was at a school over in Northwest Bradenton and I had my little vote no on amendment three, sign on the on my table, and a girl came up to me who I knew who she was.

She was an adopted girl into an extremely wealthy family, and they lived on the river, and I remember her walking up to me saying they didn't like to look out their backyard at our nasty boats. That's what she said to me. And I remember thinking, how can you be so callous? Because first of all, you're adopted, you even more by chance than birth are, in this extremely wealthy household, big, huge mansion type house.

But to be that shallow or that selfish, or however you wanna define that, she doesn't like that in her vista. I just remember thinking, you're a terrible human being, is what I thought to myself. But I remember instead I went home and I cried that night because I knew it was maybe three days before the election and I knew we were gonna lose after that engagement with her.

I just knew, it was all for not. Because people exist in the world like that, that are so selfish and so it wasn't really, maybe it is a judgment. She didn't like our boats. Maybe she was judging the boats. Maybe she was judging me because I was connected to the boat. But there was another incident where not the, oh, it deals with on the north side of the village.

So Cortez is comprised of really like the historic section, which is to the south. And then the north side is more newly developed, really high end homes. Historically, we have always moved our offshore fleet into the canals over there. Because it's safe haven for hurricanes. We, wanna get them out of the southwest opening to the past where the wind pummels the coast and it damages our boats.

So we've always moved the boats over into those canals. Number of years ago, one of the communities over there sent a cease and desist letter. They had hired an attorney in Orlando. The attorney was out of Orlando, and it said we were no longer allowed in there. Now, being from Cortez, we ignored them and we continued to go in there.

But recently I bought a house over there with a really large frontage on the deepwater canals. So they can't tell us they can't go over there anymore. But there is you can have the debate about Safe Harbor. Are you allowed to go anywhere? And you can honestly pay a lawyer to say anything you want, so that letter they sent me, eh, I didn't really pay any attention to it, but it will be interesting to see how they respond to us going for storms. We'll be using, it'll be property we own, so we of course can be there, but I'm sure I'm gonna hear some complaints. But it's sad that I even felt the need to do that, but I did as a protective measure to make sure that we won't be booted out because maybe they don't like to look at our boats. I think our boats are beautiful. Apparently the whole world doesn't share that, view.

[01:15:59] **Kristin Sweeting:** Okay. And last question, I was here when they were unloading the shrimp that was confiscated, and I'm just so curious about how that works. Is that something you can talk to?

[01:16:16] **Karen Bell:** The law says if the Fish and Wildlife is confiscating fish or seafood that was illegally harvested. They have to contact three dealers and get three offers for that product, and it goes to the highest bidder. About a month or six weeks ago, I got a call saying they had a shrimp boat with about 10 to 13,000 pounds of shrimp, head on, frozen on the boat, shrimp.

They weren't licensed properly. It was a Texas boat. And so I bid low because it would be a lot of work. We're not really a shrimp house per se. We're perfectly capable of it. But, so I bid low. Thirty minutes later they called me and they said you won, you win the bid. And I, they said, come and get 'em.

And I was like, oh gosh. So I found out where they were and it was at the Tampa Shrimp fleet and oh my gosh, it turned into such a circus because, or circus. Oh my gosh. It turned into such a circus because the two dealers up there, what I think they did, I'm not sure, but I think they got together and bid crazy low and they lost the bid because they probably didn't think who was close enough by that could come and purchase those shrimp.

So we got these shrimp and I ended up sending them up to be processed in St. Petersburg to have the head removed into IQF, freeze them, because in today's market, that's pretty much how they're sold. And five pound bags, IQF they're loose in the bag, makes it easier for the person cooking.

They can take a pound out and put the back in the freezer. But come to find out, those other dealers were mad at me, right. Now, one, I didn't know the boat was there. I didn't know it was normally selling to them. , but it caused some angst on my part because they called and yelled at me, but I didn't know it was them.

And I'm not gonna yell back because I'm not a yeller, but they're older than me and I have a lot of respect for them. It's a couple shrimp dealers up there, nice people, but that particular day wasn't one of their best maybe. And sure they lost out on that boat's production because he wasn't licensed properly.

That's not on me, that's on that fish house. Or not the fish house, excuse me, that's on that boat. They don't come to, you shouldn't come to Florida waters without being properly licensed. But anyway, there's been a few times, another funny story about confiscated fishes. They called me at home one night, like 4:00 AM and they said, we have some Pompano here.

Would you bid? I bid? I they, call back, you win you won the bid. You're the highest bidder come down. So I come down, a couple hours later. I look at the fish and I go, those aren't Pompano. And they said, what? And I said, those are not Pompano. And they go, what are they? And I said, they're Permit, it was maybe 500 pounds of Permit.

This is 10 plus years ago. And anyway, Permit are not nearly as valuable as Pompano. So we had to revise the, bid because I couldn't pay what I'd pay for

Pompano for Permit. But anyway, they are difficult in their defense, they are difficult fish if they're not beside each other to tell the difference.

Permit have really long fins. Pompano are shorter stubier fins, but other than that they look very similar. Golden colored with white, golden gray. Pretty beautiful fish, both, but that was a funny confiscation story too.

[01:19:49] **Tina Bucuvalas:** 4:00 AM they called 4:00 AM ?

[01:19:52] **Karen Bell:** Yes, they did call me at 4:00 AM .

[**Edited - Production comments**] [01:19:58]