# DAVE SHEARER

**Great Salt Lake Marina, UT**

**An Interview by**

**Becky B. Lloyd**

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**THIS IS AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVE SHEARER ON NOVEMBER 10, 2013. THE INTERVIEWER IS BECKY B. LLOYD. THIS IS THE GREAT SALT LAKE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT, TAPE No. U-3239.**

**BL:** This is an interview with Dave Shearer at the Great Salt Lake Marina. Today's date is November 10, 2013. This is part of the Great Salt Lake Oral History Project that is sponsored by the Utah History Association and the Utah Humanities Council. My name is Becky Lloyd. This is tape number u-3239. So Dave, I want to start and get a little bit of background information about you personally. When and where were you born?

**DS:** I was born here in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1962.

**BL:** And what was your family doing here? Your family always—

**DS:** My parents came out here. My dad was always attached to Phillips Petroleum. He was transferred originally to New Mexico and then eventually to Salt Lake City, Utah—or Farmington actually. No, excuse me, Farmington, New Mexico, then he was transferred to Vernal, Utah, working for Phillips Petroleum. Eventually he ended up working for Litton Industries. Designed guided systems for missiles. And then worked for a company called Walsh Associates, and built that into a large company here in Salt Lake.

**BL:** Oh really?

**DS:** Yeah.

**BL:** Oh that's great. And so, when did you first become aware of the Great Salt Lake?

**DS:** I think it was probably when I was in second grade. We had a field trip out here. They took us out to the fairgrounds. We boarded the old train that went out to Saltair, the old Garfield train, open car train. And we got off at Saltair. They got us back on the

buses, took us out here to Great Salt Lake Marina, and loaded us up on Silver's tour boat. And we went out on the Lake, and collected brine shrimp in little Dixie cups.

**BL:** Really? Did you?

[break in recording]

**BL:** How did people get in touch with you if they're out on the Lake? Do you have a radio?

**DS:** Marine band radio, we monitor that twenty-four seven, plus the cell phone. Everybody's got my phone number. I used to try to keep my phone number quiet, and wouldn't publish it anywhere. I kept my number quiet for a long time, didn't want it anywhere. And everybody's got my number. I'm going, "How are you guys gettin' my number?" They said, "Well we're going up to your dog and gettin' it off the tag."

[both laugh]

**BL:** That's funny.

**DS:** That's a true story. 'Cause like I say, Taz has been out here, my dog before Taz, Shaman, all had my number on the tag. Anyway, hopefully we won't have interruptions. This is just crazy.

**BL:** Alright. So you said that you came out in the second grade and were catching little brine shrimp in the cups.

**DS:** Yeah, so we went on the tour bus, his grandfather's tour boat in the end. They took us out on the Lake. They sort of motored us out towards Antelope Island. And then I was on the second deck of the boat. And then they came up and gave us little Dixie cups and they had little brine shrimp in them, and they talked to us about brine shrimp. So that was my first exposure to the Great Salt Lake. And I sort of thought it was really cool out

here. It was the old, old marina, before it was the state marina. And it was a little rundown on the docks and stuff, but it had some real character to it. And they had a little hot dog stand, a little chandlery out here. I thought it was really cool.

**BL:** So then after that did you start coming to the Lake?

**DS:** No, we got into sailing some time after that. We got into sailing when I was about ten years old. And that happened by some family friends inviting us up to Bear Lake to go water skiing, and they had a little Star Dancer sailboat. And while my brother and I were water skiing, my dad got on the little Star Dancer sailboat. And being the engineer he was, he decided he was going to learn how to do this, that it had to be pretty simple. And he fought that sailboat all day. But he started figuring it out a little bit. And within two weeks later we bought a Hobie 14. And within a year we had a Hobie 14, a Hobie 16, and a little Hobie Cat, a twelve-foot Hobie Cat. And then a couple years later, 1976, we were down in Hawaii racing the first Hobie 16 World Championships. And we started racing all over the world ever since, very heavily involved in the sport.

And so I really didn't come back to Great Salt Lake until – other than coming out here for an hour or two once a year – I didn't come back to Great Salt Lake until a friend of mine invited me to come out here and start racing his sailboats. So we raced a summer back in the 1980s. But that was sporadic 'cause we were still racing on the world circuit. But I'd come out here to race sometimes with him. And then in 1995 I ran into another friend up at Strawberry, and he says, "Why don't you come out and race on my boat out here at the Great Salt Lake?" So I started racing on his. And then he was tragically killed in an airplane crash. I ended up buying my own Catalina 27 in 1998, and started living on it, and just ended up here, never left.

**BL:** Really? So when you bought it, you brought it here to the marina and set up house?

**DS:** Yeah.

**BL:** That's cool.

**DS:** And I was running a sailboat shop in town at that time, and working here part time helping them with search and rescue until I retired from the shop in Salt Lake and started working here full time as the harbor master.

**BL:** When did the state take over the marina?

**DS:** The state took it over in 1979 if I remember right. It was 1979 or 1980, but I think it was '79.

**BL:** And so you started working there for the state when did you say?

**DS:** I started working for the state in 1998. They had a complete transition of employees out here, and basically a lot of employees retired or transferred to other parks. And so they really had a knowledge gap on sailboats and search and rescue, and they asked if I'd be willing to volunteer. And I said, "Oh yeah, but it's a full time job. If you want me to volunteer I'll help when I'm out here." So I volunteered to help do the search and rescue. And then we had a little incident out here where one of the park rangers got seasick and I ended up having to drive the boat. We did five search and rescues that evening. They called me up the next day and said, "We can't have you volunteer we have to hire you if you're going to drive the boat and all." And I said, "Well, I've already got my full time job, but if you want to hire me too that's fine." So they did. And when I retired from my other job they brought me on full time.

**BL:** Wow, that's cool. But all during the time now, since you said '98 was it that you moved?

**DS:** '98. I moved out here in '98. And I started volunteering in '98 also.

**BL:** Ok. And you haven't left.

**DS:** Nope.

**BL:** That's really great. So, tell me a little bit about the business of the marina. Do you know what I mean by that?

**DS:** Yeah. That's a good analogy. It is a business. We are a profitable park. We actually do make money here. We're one of the few parks that does, at this time, make money. And it is a business in the sense that it's like a hotel. And I think you can sort of equate the harbor master in one aspect as being the hotel manager or the concierge all wrapped in one. You've got all of these slip renters who are basically tenants of the hotel. You have all of their demands and their desires, their wishes. And so you're trying to make them happy. You're trying to manage the hotel for them and make sure their needs are taken care of. So in that sense, we manage the marina; we manage the docks; we keep the facilities up; and we try to enhance their recreational experience.

The good thing about Great Salt Lake Marina, is we're not like a lot of the other marinas in the state of Utah. We tend to be a community marina. We have the same people year in and year out. The boats don't really ever pull out; they stay here year round. Most of the other marinas they freeze over and the boats get pulled out during the winter, and the park sort of transitions to different functions. The Great Salt Lake, our function really never changes because the slip runners do stay here year round. We have the duck hunters and the brine shrimpers that come in in the fall and the winter, so we do

have that element. But we have sail boaters, kayakers, paddle boaters year round out here. And then of course we're also responsible for search and rescue on the whole Lake.

**BL:** So brine shrimpers use the marina to launch from when they're—

**DS:** No, actually there's ten marinas on the Great Salt Lake, which really surprises people that there's that many marinas.

**BL:** Ten. I thought there were two.

**DS:** There's two public marinas. There's Antelope Island Marina and then there's the Great Salt Lake State Marina. Then when you consider there's one other marina that's owned by the state of Utah, which is Little Valley Harbor. It's up on the north half of Great Salt Lake, but there's no public access to it. So it's not really used for anything other than the State of Utah and the brine shrimpers also have an agreement to be able to use it if they want to use the north half. And it's the only real way to access the north half of Great Salt Lake. But then there's also several small marinas, and one other larger marina on the Great Salt Lake at Promontory, which…they're all industry based, mainly brine shrimp use.

**BL:** Ok. So I didn't know there were that many marinas. That surprised me too. But, as you say, only two have public access. And so, your job is to run this one. Do you manage at all the Antelope Island Marina?

**DS:** I'm actually the harbor master for both marinas.

**BL:** Oh you are?

**DS:** Yeah.

**BL:** How does that work? I mean, do you have to go up there sometimes?

**DS:** Yeah.

**BL:** So tell me that.

[break in recording]

**DS:** So yeah, Antelope Island, I usually try to go up there on flat water days. Because going up there by boat only takes about thirty-five minutes, whereas by car it's going to take a little over an hour, plus you have to deal with traffic. So yeah I try to go up there on flat water days. And just basically check the marina, check what boats are in there, check the conditions, maintain the navigation buoys.

But we've got challenges right now with the Antelope Island Marina. It's not nearly as deep as this marina. There's a large reef outside of it, so, right now, on low water years like this, we have some challenges with it. Duck hunters can use it no problem. The paddle boaters, the kayakers, and the canoers can use it no problem. The deep or draft sailboats though, they can't get in and out of there right now.

**BL:** Oh, so they're just stuck?

**DS:** They're just stuck.

**BL:** Until they get a high water year?

**DS:** Yeah.

**BL:** Wow. Does that happen here often?

**DS:** I've got about twenty percent of the boats in the marina right now trapped in here. So they sort of just look at their boats as their little cabins on the Lake. But eighty percent can still get out. Three years ago it was much worse; we had probably close to fifty percent of the boats trapped in the marina. And then we had an incredible winter the next year and the Lake came up a record five feet.

**BL:** That's interesting. So, I kind of took you off from when you were talking about the business of running the marina. Did you finish everything you wanted to say about that?

**DS:** Well like I say it's a lot like running a hotel. You've got a lot of recreational people coming in here, you're trying to enhance their recreational experience, make sure that it's a safe experience for them too. But a lot of the job is maintaining the facilities. We have a visitor center now, which we've not had here at the Great Salt Lake Marina ever. So we have a new visitor center and gift store. We've added camping, which we haven't had since the 1980s before the floods came in and washed all of that out. And then we have three hundred and twenty slips. And we're about seventy-five percent capacity right now. So it is, it's mainly—you're running a marina but you're also in charge of search and rescue and all the boating aspects for the whole Lake.

**BL:** That sounds like a huge job.

**DS:** It's a huge job considering it's also a year round marina, unlike the other marinas.

**BL:** Yeah, right. And people can go boating three sixty-five if they want to.

**DS:** Year round. And they do. About the only time they're not out there is in the bad storm days.

**BL:** And you hope they're not out there on the bad storm days.

**DS:** We hope not, yeah.

**BL:** So, tell me about the particulars of your job. I mean, you talked sort of broadly about running the business. Do you have people who work for you then?

**DS:** Yeah, we have two full-time employees right now, and we have three seasonal employees, part-time employees. The two full-time employees we stay here year round

and work, running on the day to day aspects. My seasonal employees run the visitor center gift store—or man it, I should say man the visitor center and gift store. And then I have one person that's a two days a week maintenance person.

**BL:** So, now, the gift store, the visitor center gift store is seasonal? Is that summer?

**DS:** No actually we're going to keep it open year round.

**BL:** Oh really?

**DS:** We base one of our full-time employees over there at the visitor center gift store. But their duties are not just to run the visitor center and gift store. Their duties are to help with all the aspects of running the Great Salt Lake Marina, from the financial end to whatever else, whatever projects we have. But, since we have another full-time employee why not at least base them over there in the office there so they can also keep the gift store open and the visitor center open and answer questions of the people that come in here.

We have a pretty strong tourism base that comes in here all year round. We don't have necessarily a lot of locals coming here during the winter, but we certainly have a lot of international tourists. Being ten minutes from the international airport and fifteen minutes from downtown Salt Lake, the fact that the Great Salt Lake is world renowned we keep that tourist base going all year. And it's funny, the Great Salt Lake sort of has a bad reputation with the locals. But the international tourism base, the Great Salt Lake has a very good reputation, and it's very well known.

**BL:** Right. About how many tourists do you get here a year do you suppose? Do you track that or is that hard to—

**DS:** We do track it. It's hard to track it very accurately. We sort of try to keep a handle on it. Our tourism base is probably just shy of three hundred thousand people a year.

**BL:** Is that right?

**DS:** Yeah.

**BL:** Wow. That's not counting people who have slips out here?

**DS:** They're probably close to being mixed in that number. It's probably pretty close to three hundred thousand on the tourism base, between the locals and international tourism. From the first of May through October we will average, of the large buses, the sixty-five person buses, we will average ten to twenty-two buses in here a day.

**BL:** Wow. I had no idea. I'll tell ya, I worked at the Utah Travel Council one summer. It was a summer job at the Capitol Building, at the Tourist Information Center. And that was—almost the first question everybody asked was, "Can I get out to the Great Salt Lake?" or, "How long will it take me to get to the Great Salt Lake," 'cause like you say it is world famous, and people really want to see it. I mean, it is a huge—that and Temple Square were the two big spots.

**DS:** And actually Antelope Island is very popular now too. And our tourism base is about the same as Antelope Island. Antelope Island probably has more car traffic going in now than we do. We have a lot more bus traffic going in and out.

**BL:** Wow. That's incredible. I didn't know that. So how have you survived this long without a visitor center?

**DS:** Ya know, it's one of those things that we have been trying for and trying for for years. It's been something I've actively been trying for for at least seven or eight years, because it's a need that we've needed. It's a need that we've finally figured out how to

fulfill. But it wasn't easy. We ended up actually getting the visitor center, the old visitor center that was on 7200 West. Remember that building there on I-80, 7200 West?

**BL:** Yes.

**DS:** They called it the loneliest job in Utah.

[both laugh]

**DS:** Now a funny story about that was that was really intended to be the park entrance and visitor center for the Great Salt Lake State Park, back in the 1970s when they put it out there. The Great Salt Lake State Park was originally slated to run from Black Rock over here, all along the south beach, include all the wetlands and the bird refuge and Antelope Island. In fact, if you look at some of the old maps it shows Great Salt Lake State Park as encompassing Antelope Island, all of that. So they put that headquarters out there. That was going to be the headquarters and visitor center. And they couldn't gain access to the south end. They couldn't get the easements to get to the south end of the island. So they eventually abandoned the project, and they just turned that into a visitor center, a state visitor center. And as they said, it was the loneliest job in Utah. They finally closed it down and turned it over to another company that used it for their offices. And they actually abandoned it, and finally donated it to us. We moved it out to here and put it back to its original intention.

**BL:** Oh really? So you physically moved that building?

**DS:** Yeah. Just moved it. So it's back to its original intentions. We've had a great staff on Antelope Island and they've been working on the interpretive signs for us. We just finished the deck around it, and got the visitor center open in July, and the gift store opened in August.

**BL:** Nice. So I know somebody works here in this office every day of the week. Is your gift shop open that too, or is that more of a Monday, Friday—

**DS:** Today it's closed. Well, the visitor center's opened but the gift store's closed. We're short staffed right now. But starting Monday we go back to the gift store being open seven days a week. So it's just sort of this October time. Long story short, it's not necessary for the interview, but we've gone through a real transition on employees. I was the one full time for most of the summer. And a lot of it was because Parks went through a real transition; they lost a lot of employees. And so they pulled a full time employee out of here and sent him to East Canyon. Again, this is not important for the interview, it's sort of just to flesh out. And it took them a while to be able to find another full time employee position they could bring back here for the intended need, so we've been short staffed this whole summer. That is not going to be the case next summer. I mean, even with two of us it sometimes feels like we're really short staffed. But just one of those quirks of Parks. All of the parks have been really short staffed. Plus we had some pretty big emergencies at the park that really—not at this one—in Parks. A good example is the Willard Bay oil leak. That pulled a lot of staffing out of other parks. We also had some other park employees that had some pretty serious injuries, which also pulled some staffing out. We had one park, East Canyon, where all the employees left, whether they quit or whether they got transferred to other parks or whatever. They didn't even have a full-time employee, and that's where our full-time employee was pulled out here to go up there. Again, nothing important for the interview, that's just sort of why we've been sort of shorthanded and had to close the gift store aspect for October. Just didn't have the manpower to man it. And I can't man it. I tried to man it for a little while, but I had to

keep closing it out and shooing people out of the gift store during search and rescues. But yeah, we're back to the full-time, a full complement of employees starting Monday, tomorrow.

**BL:** So how is that living here and working here? Is that hard to separate your life?

**DS:** I'll be blunt. During the summer it sucks [laughs].

**BL:** Really?

**DS:** Yeah. It's hot for one. It's when all the bugs and spiders are out. Which you get used to. They don't bug me. But you also don't get a lot of privacy, and you are getting called all the time. But it's no different than other parks. There's a lot of other parks that have live-in staff and campgrounds. And so you are constantly—you get interrupted a lot even when you're off. You've been off three or four hours and then all of a sudden you get called out for a search and rescue, or you get called out because there's a problem on a dock or whatever. So summer's tough. And you ask any park ranger or park employee that lives on staff they'll tell you the same thing, at any park. It's tough. You keep your smiley face and all that and you're still happy to be here and have a job, but you're also looking forward—as a live on site person, you're really happy when September comes and things start to slow down. At this park it doesn't slow down really at all. It starts to moderate come October. But in October the temperatures get really pleasant out here. The wildlife comes out here starting October through all of the winter. I just love it. Living here, the storms that come through here, even though they're very violent storms, they are just absolutely awesome to watch. And so, as a whole, I look at summers that are tough to get through and I look at winters that are very cold, and spring and fall, and I just absolutely love it. We have several people live out here in fact.

**BL:** I was going to ask you, about how many people live here?

**DS:** We have as many as twelve to thirteen people living here at one time. We're down to about six or seven people living here right now. And if you ask any of them, this is where they want to be. They love it. You get to the point where you get very passionate about the Lake. And that's the other thing you're going to find out about, just about everybody that has boats here, they're very passionate advocates of Great Salt Lake. Nobody's here because this is the only place they can be; they choose to be here. This is the place they want to be.

**BL:** That sounds great. Well tell me about, roughly, maybe, I don't know, a weekly measurement would be best, but how many rescues do you do on average a week, or a day, or a year? What's a good measurement?

**DS:** It depends on what you call a rescue. We have our own classification of what a rescue is compared to what a simple vessel assist is. What the average person would call a rescue, we probably average about five a week. But, what we would call a rescue we average about one a month.

**BL:** Ok. So, in the five a week we're adding any assists, any time you have to go out on the Lake?

**DS:** Any time we have to go out because somebody's boat is in peril or somebody's boat has just broken down. We would call the boat in peril or somebody lost, literally lost, where we have to go into more of a search mode, we would call that a search and rescue. Where the boat is just broken down and the conditions are not rough and they're not in jeopardy or something like that, they might call it a rescue, we call it a vessel assist.

**BL:** Oh I see. Ok. And what do you do in a vessel assist? Do you have tools and equipment or do you just bring them back?

**DS:** We obviously have the rescue boats, and if we can get their boat up and running we much prefer to get their boat up and running, and then let them get themselves in. I mean, this is a big lake. It's seventeen hundred square miles. It's the largest lake west of the Mississippi. If I have a boat that's out there eight miles, that's about two hours of towing. And two hours on a rescue boat going at five miles an hour is pretty tedious.

**BL:** [laughs]

**DS:** So if they're just off—most of the calls that we get are not broken down boats; most of the calls we get, especially in shallow water years, are boats that just didn't know where the reef was, and ran aground on the reef. And so it's just a matter of pulling them off the reef, giving them a little instruction and saying stay here and they can get themselves in. So it's not very involved. A lot of other times we'll have boats that are broken down. We've had boats that have been out there eight, ten, twenty miles, and snapped rudders. And so we've had to pull them in for long periods of time.

Then we've had some pretty bad search and rescues. We lost two duck hunters last year that got… They had an inexperienced level on a boat that should've never been on Great Salt Lake. One of them survived by swimming to the beach; the other two succumbed to hypothermia and then eventually drowned. And that search took about five hours to find them, even though we knew where they were within a fourteen square mile area. When you get into low light conditions such as dusk with snow and rain squalls and ten to fifteen mile an hour winds and the winds that that can create, it can take a long time to search just a fourteen square mile area. And, ya know, you look at it also, a fourteen

square mile area of Great Salt Lake, that's an extremely small spot on the Great Salt Lake, extremely small, considering it's seventeen hundred square miles. But that's bigger than most lakes.

Like I say, most of our stuff is very simple. We have a very good track record. Our search and rescues, we have a very good track record of finding people. The fatalities, that's the first two boating fatalities we've had in probably thirty years. Most of the fatalities we have on the Lake are from plane crashes.

**BL:** Is that right? How frequent is that?

**DS:** We average about one plane crash a year. Not all of them are fatal. Most of the people can do controlled landings, and it's just a matter of going and getting them. But we've had some pretty big fatality crashes out here. We've had a UH-60 Helicopter that killed twelve people. And then the last one we had a lot of fatalities on was the King Air skydiving plane that crashed on the Lake and killed nine people. And then we've had a couple other crashes where it was just a single occupancy plane. But again, another characteristic of Great Salt Lake, the water's so dense, we've actually had plane crashes on the Lake where they've been able to do controlled landings on the water. The water's so dense it's like landing on cement for a quite a while. You can actually skip across the surface for quite a while until the plane slows down enough and then it just sort of nosedives and catapults upside down and then you can get out of the plane and come out without a scratch.

**BL:** Wow. That's amazing!

**DS:** It's [a pretty cool body of water ?].

**BL:** Right. So, even though it's a plane crash you get involved because they're on your lake, so you have to go pick them up. You don't tow planes?

**DS:** No.

**BL:** Ok. You pull the people off and then—

**DS:** Correct. We even have situations where we won't necessarily get the boat right away. We're not tasked with getting the boat, we're tasked with saving people and getting people. So we've had occasions where it's five to eight foot seas, we're not necessarily going to tow that boat. And we will have them anchor the boat and we will pull the people off the boat, and then wait for the conditions to calm down. And then we will take them back out to the boat the next day where they can either bring it in on their own or we'll pull it back in.

**BL:** I see. That makes sense, people over boats. And so how do you go about finding somebody in a—you know they're in this fourteen square mile thing, do you just do a sector search or how do you do that?

**DS:** It's a sector search. You sort of pick a box, a sector, and then you will do search patterns in that box, and eliminate that box as a potential where those people are. We have three different patterns we'd use. The two primary patterns are a parallel search, and the other one is an expanding square search. Depending on the conditions is what you choose, what pattern you choose to search. So in that case, we knew where they were in the fourteen square mile area, we would pick probably fourteen squares, search a square mile and then switch to another square mile. In the evolution of that one we actually didn't know they were in trouble but we went out to look for them anyway, 'cause somebody reported that they were worried about them. And so we did a hasty search,

couldn't find them, came back in here, drove down the road, because a lot of times when duck hunters get in trouble they'll just beach their boats and walk out. And so I drove down the road and I found the survivor on the road, and he told me they'd capsized. And at that point we knew where they were within two square miles, 'cause where I found him—we basically said, "Ok, we know the duck hunters are over at the Goggins." And so we came back in, and at that time we did a very concentrated grid search. And it still took about three hours to locate the boats and the two bodies. So it takes a time.

**BL:** Yeah, no kidding. Do you end up going out on all the rescues? Do you yourself usually?

**DS:** Yeah, I've done probably ninety-nine percent of the vessel assists and search and rescues out here, or have been involved in them since '99.

**BL:** Is that right? Wow. Well that one this last year had to be probably a pretty tough one.

**DS:** It was. I've gone out there and… That one was tough because I've gone out there knowing people were dead, and now you're just retrieving the bodies and bringing closure to the families. Even though as mangled and as tragic as those are, the mangled bodies or whatever it is, as bad as that is, you're not quite as personally involved. The one where the duck hunters—you're going out there and you know they're alive when you start searching for them. And you can sit there and watch the clock run out on you. And you're going, *we're no longer doing a search, we're doing a recovery.* And you haven't been able to solve this puzzle quickly enough to save these people. And so, even though the search was a very good search, it was really tough to sit there and watch the clock run out on you and just go, "They're dead." The only hope is that they had swum to the beach

and were on the beach somewhere. And we were doing also a beach search; we were doing a boat search; we were doing an air search. But the conditions that night were just so tough, that even the helicopter took hours to find them. So yeah, that one in that sense was tough 'cause that was the first time we'd actually gone out searching for live people and knew that—just basically watched the clock and watched it run out on them.

**BL:** I guess other really tough ones are when you have a high sea – do you call it a high sea?

**DS:** Rough conditions. We usually just call it rough conditions, yeah. Heavy seas.

**BL:** Ok. Do the rescues tend to happen during those times when the sea is really tough?

**DS:** They can happen just about any time.

**BL:** Ok. So it's not really weather dependent necessarily?

**DS:** Not necessarily. The good thing about the sailboats when they go out there, the sailboats are really—basically they can handle the conditions out there, much better than the motor boats can. The duck boats out there, that go out on this lake, none of the duck boats that go out on this lake are built for Great Salt Lake conditions. They just weren't. They're built for flat water conditions. And so, in that case we try to really get out to the duck hunters, educate them, make them aware of how rough this lake can be. We try to learn their patterns, where they're hunting, so if they come up not showing up at night we know where to go to start looking for them. But basically educating them, getting to know them personally, and just saying, "Hey, ya know, it is a dangerous lake. Are you prepared for this?" and letting them know please pay attention to the forecast, to watch the forecast. If it looks like a weather front coming, don't go out, it's not worth it. The

interesting thing is, right after these two duck hunters died, it was very publicized, and everybody in the duck hunter community knew about it; but yet we almost lost three other duck hunters after that 'cause they went out and a front came through, and two of the boats ended up swamping. Luckily they were able to get back to the beach. The third one barely got back to the marina, but he was taking on water. And so you just really try to educate people: Watch the weather forecast. Pay attention. This is not like any other body of water.

**BL:** Yeah, right. Was there much transition for you when you went from sailing on oceans in your competition to this lake?

**DS:** Not really. The density of the water was a little bit of a transition, although I'd been sailing out here before I got the job out here. So I was used to that. It is different out here. It takes a lot more wind to kick up the waves on the water. But once the waves kick up they're very violent waves. They can really beat you up. But, what people think is they think the Great Salt Lake is a lake, like Utah Lake or Bear Lake. It's not. It's really an inland sea. And it's a tough inland sea. The density of the water, the fact that you've got forty miles of fetch for the waves to build up. On a day like today you could get eight to ten foot waves out there. When the water's higher, like it was in the 1980s, you can have fifteen to eighteen foot waves out there. You don't have those anywhere else in Utah. So yeah, you've got to sort of change your mentality to not think lake, think sea.

**BL:** So it is more like the ocean than a lake is what you're saying. And you were used to sailing on oceans. But we're all used to these nice little lakes around here.

**DS:** And the good thing about it too is that the people out here, they've learned to respect Great Salt Lake. What I sort of like to equate Great Salt Lake to is when you first

come out here your first time and you want to go try it, you go try it on a nice calm day and then you think, *ok, this is a big body of water. I want to go do an adventure*. I can almost guarantee you Great Salt Lake's going to kick your ass, until you get to learn to respect her. Once you learn to respect her she'll treat you pretty well. She likes to punish you the first time just to say *look, I'm the boss out here.*

**BL:** [laughs] That's interesting. So do you look at the Lake as having a personality?

**DS:** Yeah, it does have a personality. It's a very unique personality. I've sailed the Indian Ocean, the Pacific, South Pacific, North Pacific, Atlantic. I've sailed on lakes all over the nation, the North Sea. And this lake has more character than anywhere else I know. Name another lake anywhere in the nation that has a living growing reef… Doesn't exist.

**BL:** Wow. I didn't realize that.

**DS:** Yeah. Living growing reef. Name another lake in the nation that has a substantial current. Three named currents. You got the Goggins Current out there, you got the Jordan Current, and you got the Bear Current, all named for the sources of water that feed them. The brine shrimpers depend on those currents. Without the currents the brine shrimpers would have a much harder time shrimping out here. The currents actually collect the eggs into huge slicks. And that's what makes it possible to brine shrimp out here.

**BL:** Oh, right. That's interesting. So where are your favorite places on the Lake? I guess, have you been around pretty much all of the Lake?

**DS:** Oh yeah.

**BL:** I would assume that you have.

**DS:** Gunnison Island is a really unique place. You can go out to Gunnison Island. It's a bird sanctuary so people aren't allowed to go on there, which means that the historical artifacts that are out there are pretty well preserved. So you can go out there and look at Howard Stansbury's triangulation station he built in 1849 and see it as he built it. It's still intact. Or you go down there and see the remnants of the guano farmers' camp. Or you can see a little bit of the remnants of Alfred Lambourne's cabin where he lived. The door to his potbelly stove is still out there on the beach. And then of course during the summer you got the pelicans out there and the seagulls and you got the bird life out there. So that one is really nice.

Eardley Spit, it's just a dagger spit of land out there on the west shore of Great Salt Lake. But you go out there and it's like being in the Caribbean. Beautiful sand, well-protected anchorage, nice, what we call an onshore breeze. It's a great place to go anchor in a well-protected area.

**BL:** Cool. So do you go to those places—I mean, I guess you can go to Gunnison Island, right?

**DS:** Well, yeah, it's part of our job. We go out there to support DWR. They go out there and tag the pelicans. So we're going out in the capacity of our job to go out to Gunnison Island. It's not like we're encroaching and doing something that's not—

**BL:** Do you take them out there? Are you the ones who take them out?

**DS:** They've got their own boat. But they usually go out there in large groups and they need more boats. Plus they like us to be there to make sure nothing goes wrong. The north end of the Great Salt Lake is about as isolated as you can get in Utah. If you get in trouble on the north end of the Great Salt Lake help is a long way away. So when we go

to the north end of the Great Salt Lake, we're usually taking an extra boat, making sure—having good communications, all that kind of stuff. You really have to think about the north end.

It scares me a little bit that the boaters are starting to discover the north end of Great Salt Lake now, and figuring out how to get into the north end and do things. Like we had the lady that paddled up in the north end this year. She paddled the whole length of the Great Salt Lake on a kayak. And she was camping out along the way. And we were more than happy to help her and support her and educate her on where to go and the currents and what to do, what not to do as far as trying to stay out of trouble. But it's the same thing. We told her, "You got to really plan this out, because if you get in trouble, help is a long, long way away." And so she did everything right. She did it very smart. She had a GPS tracker; we were actually able to sit here on my computer and watch her the whole time. And she had the ability, the way to communicate with us if she did get in trouble, and communicate with a third party, even though they weren't search and rescue guys.

So, like I say, it just does worry me the fact that some of these guys are discovering the north end. It's really cool up there. It's a beautiful place. The water's actually pink. It's like boating in pink lemonade it's so pink. But it is concerning because they are getting to areas where it's tough to get to them, where it's going to take a lot longer to get to them.

**BL:** Do you have some interesting search and rescue stories that really stand out in your mind for one reason or another?

**DS:** There's a lot of them.

**BL:** Well let me ask you this first: If you go out do you feel in peril yourself?

**DS:** No.

**BL:** You don't. Ok.

**DS:** I have never gotten into conditions on the Great Salt Lake. I've been in some extremely rough conditions. Whether it's been on my sailboat or whether it's been on the rescue boats I've never felt in trouble on the Great Salt Lake. I feel beaten up, bruised, and all that kind of stuff. And again, that's just because of the steep waves and the density of the water; it just beats you up. But no, I've never felt in peril out there. Most of the other people that I've gone out there to rescue, they felt like they were in peril, but they were actually just fine. I have a lot of that, where people just get scared, mainly new boaters. And yeah, they'll just think they're in peril but they're just not. They sort of look at us as the security blanket. Once we're actually attached to their boat and have the tow line you can see the relief and the stress melt away and all of a sudden they're relieved. But really their boat's, the sailboats going to ride through it just fine.

**BL:** So maybe just more experience would give them confidence.

**DS:** Yeah. And you'll find that, you'll see the experienced sailors out here, because when it's rough they won't go out. And it's not because their boats won't handle it, it's because they don't want to have the expense of things breaking.

**BL:** Sure. That's interesting. In some of the old stories that I've read people say that they have seen a Great Salt Lake monster.

**DS:** Yes.

**BL:** Have you ever seen something like that?

**DS:** No. In fact, I have my take on how the Great Salt Lake monster legend probably started.

**BL:** I want to hear that.

**DS:** That was back in the 1800s when the railroad was going across the north end of the Great Salt Lake. And there were some people working at a little town called Kelton up there. They claimed to have seen this big monster, and the monster crawled out of the Lake and chased them up into the hillside. I'm guessing more likely they were drinking a little bit the night before and were late to work and so they had to make up a story why they hadn't shown up to work yet.

**BL:** [laughs]

**DS:** And so the legend of the Great Salt Lake monster was created.

**BL:** Oh, that's funny. What about, somebody said that they saw fireballs on the Lake. Have you heard that story?

**DS:** Yeah. And, you can equate that either to lightning out here. Lightning is just incredible to watch. And when it hits the Lake it creates some interesting things. But also we have a lot of false calls of flares out on the Great Salt Lake. The military's very active flying on the Great Salt Lake. And the F-16s and the F-22s, they'll shoot off flares before they get across the bombing range. And so you'll see these green balls going across the sky. And we will have people call in from the freeway saying that they're seeing these flares out there. Turns out it's just the military jets shooting their flares across Stansbury Island. So we get a lot of that.

In fact, one of the funniest search and rescues – talk about memorable search and rescues I've been on – we had the King Air skydiving plane crash out here, killed nine people. That was in the winter, January in fact. That summer we had another plane go down on the Great Salt Lake, and that one was one of the controlled landings with three people on it. We were able to pull them out just fine, without a scratch on them, 'cause they were able to do the controlled landing on the water. Then later, that fall, we had a call of another plane crash going down on the Lake. Somebody on I-80 had seen a plane crash, or actually saw the plane go down into the Great Salt Lake as they were driving down I-80. Right after that we got a call from Salt Lake International Airport saying a pilot had flown over the Lake and saw an oil slick. So we've got a plane crash, we've got an oil slick. So we go out there and we started doing search and rescue. And we searched for a couple hours. Fire department was out here. Everybody was out here. Kept searching and searching and searching, the only thing we saw was a brine shrimp slick. Well from the air a brine shrimp slick is going to look like an oil slick to the uneducated person. Turns out, after searching for several hours, what we were looking for was somebody that had been flying a remote controlled airplane off the beach over by the old Saltair side. They'd lost control of it and it had crashed into the Great Salt Lake. That's what the person on I-80 had seen.

**BL:** [laughs]

**DS:** So we spent all that time looking for a model airplane [laughs].

**BL:** Oh that's funny. So when you have an emergency like that, more people get involved than just you? You said the fire department came?

**DS:** The County has jurisdiction on the Lake. There's five counties that have jurisdiction on the Lake. There's Box Elder, Davis, Salt Lake, Weber, and Tooele. And so technically, if there's an incident out here, they have command structure, command control. But we have an agreement with all five counties that – and this happened several years ago – that parks, because they have the trained personnel that know the Lake, and they have the expert equipment like the boats and all of that, that parks would be the lead on search and rescue. Even though, again, let's take the duck hunters for example. We're the ones that get the first call, even though we didn't get called on that one, we're the ones that are going to get the first call. And we're the ones that initiate the search. And if the search elevates to a certain level then the county will start getting involved wherever the search is being held. So in this case Salt Lake County came in. They would bring their search and rescue team in. Unified Fire would come in. We also called Department of Public Safety; they launched their helicopter. AirMed and LifeFlight might even get called in using their helicopters for a search. So it'll be a coordinated effort through an incident command structure. And we will actually break the search into different areas, such as in my case with the duck hunters, we were the primary searching for them on the water; the helicopters came in later and they were searching the surface from the air. We had also sent several teams looking at any exit point those duck hunters might've swam to the beach and tried to get out of the water. And so yeah you bring in quite a few elements. But it's rare that you have that many elements brought into a search. Most of them we solve before it has to get to that level.

**BL:** But you have some sort of a system where you identify, *ok, at this point, if it escalates to this level—*

**DS:** Yeah. There's two documents that basically dictate search and rescue on the Great Salt Lake. The first document is the Great Salt Lake Pre-plan. That's the actual agreement with the five counties and it also includes Salt Lake International Airport, and it also includes Hill Air Force Base, the bombing range. So you have all these elements that have agreed, *ok, this is how search and rescue's going to be handled*. The second agreement is the action plan, the Great Salt Lake Action Plan. And the action plan actually spells out, *ok, now we have the search and rescue, define what kind of a search and rescue it is*. And there's four categories on that search and rescue. Is it a simple one or is it this kind of condition or is it this kind of condition or it's this kind of conditions. Those four different categories will define what agencies will get involved at what point. And so in the case of the duck hunters that escalated to what we call a category three. And so all of – after just making one phone call – all of the elements automatically activate. That allows us to go out and start doing the search while the rest of the elements are being organized and getting out here. And because we are on site we can respond immediately. It's going to take them a little time to get out here. But that doesn't preclude us from going out and starting the search. So it allows us a quick response time, a quick but organized response time.

**BL:** Yeah. That's interesting. How many people go out on a rescue?

**DS:** It can be as little as one, myself on a boat, if it's calm conditions, and, again, what people would call a rescue that's not really a rescue. We usually—I try not to have any more than five on the boat, because after five the boat—it just gets cumbersome on the deck to work. But ideally I like four to five on the boat, on search and rescue. We might activate two to three boats; we have them. We have a total of five boats on the Great Salt

Lake we can activate. One of them's an airboat, so the airboat would only get involved in a shallow water search. But we can activate the four other boats quite quickly.

**BL:** And are they all based here?

**DS:** Two of them are based here and two of them are based at Antelope Island. And it used to be we sort of divided the Lake in half: They'd take the north half, we'd take the south half. Because of personnel changes and the challenges we've had, basically Great Salt Lake Marina now we're sort of the primary call out, and Antelope Island's going to be a secondary call out. So, if something happens on the Lake, if it's on the north half, we're going to probably just say, "Antelope take it and handle it." But if it's a little bit bigger we're going to respond besides Antelope Island. And we've done that many times.

**BL:** So how many volunteers? We've seen a couple of them here today.

**DS:** We have about twelve volunteer search and rescue people.

**BL:** And do you usually have volunteers here every day?

**DS:** Not usually. On the weekends. No, they're usually just out here on the weekends. Again, if we have something happen on a weekday I might call them and activate them and have them come up and help. Or we'll just take the personnel we have here in the office that day and go out. And, again, if it's something simple I'll just go do it myself. If it's something that's a little more complicated then we are going to call additional state park employees plus the search and rescue volunteers. If it's on the weekend the volunteers are here, I'm just going to grab them and say, "Let's go."

**BL:** Do you have to do a lot of training then, regular training?

**DS:** Yes. And in fact, right now these guys are training once a week, along with twice a month on weekends.

**BL:** Oh is that right? And so you stage an emergency and go out and try to fix it?

**DS:** We haven't really done that yet. Eventually we will, we'll do a mock emergency, and go through all the paces. Right now what we're doing, since this team is pretty new, is we're taking elements that would be in search and rescues, such as side tying tows or stern tying tows, or search grids. We're just breaking little elements and saying this is a skill that you need to know. And so we'll get them proficient at that skill. And then we'll move on to another skill and get them proficient at that skill. And then eventually what we'll do is we'll bring in and we'll do a whole mock-up search and rescue where they can pull all those elements together and use all of those skills.

A good example is we had an AirMed who was kind enough to come in here a couple weeks ago and landed in the marina and go through the process of, this is what we want you to do to set up a landing zone for us and make a landing zone safe. This is how we want you to approach a helicopter and how we want to transition the patient from your care to our care inside the helicopter. So we go through that element with the search and rescue team. We also do that with park personnel. You have any park personnel, they need to go through the LZ training. So, we bring in AirMed and Life Flight in here probably once every three years and do a training for everybody that wants it done.

One of the training's we'll do here fairly soon is we'll do a mock-up incident command, so new park employees or the search and rescue volunteers understand how an incident command works, all of the elements of an incident command. Because an incident command will command the whole search and rescue, and then you'll have your search and rescue units out on the water or on the land that incident command will

control. And so everybody needs to know at least the elements incident command, how they work, so they know how they fit in to that.

**BL:** That's good. What's the most interesting part of this job for you?

**DS:** Probably the thing I like the most is getting out on the Lake and discovering something new. It's a big lake out there; there's a lot of history on that lake. And I love history. So to go out there and explore Gunnison Island for my first time back fifteen years ago was like, *wow, this is really cool*. And started to see some of the history and say, "What is that?" There's just a lot out there.

Three years ago when the water was really low it created some extreme challenges for us on search and rescue. We had to rethink, *how do we do this*? We've got the reef now that's obstructing us from getting to the duck hunters. We can't get to the duck hunters now if they get in trouble. So how do we get to them? And it wasn't a matter of, we couldn't do it, it's a matter of, we have to solve these puzzles and figure out how to do it. So we had a big search and rescue boat, the thirty-five footer. We decided, *well, why don't we buy a little rigid inflatable and we can put it on the rescue boat and transfer that rigid inflatable out there quickly* to the general scene, launch the RIB, and get it across the reef to help duck hunters. So the challenges, like I say, what the Great Salt Lake imposes on you and figuring out how to solve the problem. It's not that you can't solve it, it's just be creative how you decide to solve that problem and still maintain totally functional.

The other thing, again, during the shallow water year, even though, again, it created some great challenges for us, man, what we started discovering on the beach, that used to be under the water. We found these anchors that were over a hundred years old.

We started finding some of the old shipwrecks that were out there that dated back to the 1800s or the building of the old trestle across the Great Salt Lake. We found Brigham Young's *Timely Gull* on the south tip of Antelope Island, that was now exposed. So we started finding all this history that had been exposed, that had been underwater for a long period of time. And it was that kind of stuff, the discovery, or the rediscovery of these things, it's like, *wow, this is a piece of history*. And you get to go back and read the stories of that, and read the newspaper articles or things like that.

And then of course Fremont Island, going out there and realizing that that used to be a prison for one prisoner, a grave robber, Jean Baptiste. Or going out there to the Wenner family homestead that lived out there in the 1890s. Or going and visiting the grave sites out there on the island. That kind of stuff that most people don't get to do because it's too remote to get there. Going out to Hat Island or Gunnison Island and looking at the bomb craters from back when the *Enola Gay* was using that area as bombing practice. So just discovering all that kind of stuff. And that's what I encourage a lot of people to do if you're going to come out here to Great Salt Lake: Discover what's out there. There's a lot of wonder, a lot of incredible things. Going out to Stansbury Island and hiking some of the canyons and the springs out there. Hiking up to the top of Fremont Island and looking at Kit Carson's Cross that he engraved on there. All that kind of stuff.

The fact that the Great Salt Lake is such a unique body of water. And again, I told you I've traveled all over the world, sailed in all those places. Yeah, it's not the Caribbean, we don't have great scuba diving here and turquoise water. But we've got a reef here. We've got navigation challenges here to solve and to pay attention to. This

isn't like going to Deer Creek and just going out and boating. You really have to think about what you do out here. The fact that you have current out there, you can use the current to your advantage. All of that's cool. Great Salt Lake is such a challenging and unique thing and it's definitely worth going out there and exploring. And the people that do, most of them are just, like I say, they're very passionate about it. A lot of people like to go out to Antelope Island, they'll paddle board out to Antelope Island. They go, *I can do this real quick,* and then realize, *oh my God. This is eight miles out there.* But they're fighting it the whole way, they don't know why they're fighting it the whole way, and it's because, well, there's a current that comes from Antelope Island right towards here. That's the kind of stuff, just the wonder of the Great Salt Lake.

The fact that people don't appreciate it, and think it's worthless and we ought to just stop all the water from coming in here. And they have no idea what a wonder, what a treasure Great Salt Lake is. Or the fact that Great Salt Lake is responsible for all of their drinking water and they have no idea. Or the recreational water up in the mountains. Without Great Salt Lake the Wasatch would be pretty much as barren as the Stansbury Mountains, or the… oh, what are the other mountains over there… Grassy Mountains, Lakeside Mountains, all of those. Great Salt Lake with the lake effect dumping all that extra moisture on the mountains. So without this lake being here—all these people don't appreciate it. They have no idea how much they depend on the fact that it is here, even though they don't come out and visit it they depend on the fact that it is here.

**BL:** Definitely. Well what do you see is the future of this lake?

**DS:** I actually have hope for the future. I think for the first time the people that govern the Lake are starting to realize we need to figure out a balance for the Lake. I remember,

Governor Huntsman put a coalition together to study the future of Great Salt Lake. And one of the things they came out with is that Great Salt Lake's impact on our economy is in the billions of dollars, whether it's from recreation or tourism or brine shrimping or mineral extraction. And all of those interests compete, needs-wise, with each other. So where's that balance. And for the first time the government's sitting there saying, "We need to think about that balance because the impact on our economy is so huge from this lake." What is a healthy lake level? What can we afford to allow the Lake to go down, as far as lake elevation, before we have to really start paying attention to it? And so for the first time, like I say, there's some real hope for the future in making sure that we don't squander this, that it doesn't become another Aral Sea, and end up just basically drying up because nobody's paying attention to the impact. So I have great hope.

We've been in a drought that's really affected the Great Salt Lake. But you sit there and everybody says, "Well we're diverting water from the Great Salt Lake for drinking and all of that, the Lake's going to dry up anyway." Well, not necessarily. I've seen those newspaper articles since the 1800s. You go back and research it and people talk about the Great Salt Lake drying up since the Mormons originally came here.
[break in recording]

**DS:** You can tell I'm passionate about the lake. But again, the other cool thing about this is that with such an interest now in making sure that we protect the Great Salt Lake long-term, people have been studying this lake for a hundred years. And in about the 1970s they started taking a lot more interest in the Lake and starting to do research. Well, with the Great Salt Lake Commission they're finding out we're just scratching the surface of our understanding of the Great Salt Lake. So there's even more interest now

being poured into the Great Salt Lake and understanding it, and what man's impact on it is having. So, I've really seen a difference in the understanding of the Great Salt Lake and protecting it.

So my concern is what nature is going to do to Great Salt Lake. Such as, three years ago we were half a foot lower than we are now. And we were having some trouble with sailboats getting out of the marina, in fact fifty percent of them were stuck in here. If we have another bad year, what are we going to do with all these sailboats? We're going to have to pull them out and put them in the parking lot and become dry storage. And then what's the future of the marina? Well then the next year, two years ago, all of a sudden we had a record snowfall and the Lake came up a record five feet. It's like, wow! And so, my point was they're always talking about the Great Salt Lake drying up, you can see the impact that nature has on it seems to be much greater. The drought or heavy snowfall is what's really going to dictate the future of Great Salt Lake. Man could certainly screw up the ecology of the Lake, but nature seems to be the bigger player on the lake level.

**BL:** And no guessing what she's going to do.

**DS:** No guessing. Right now I'm not looking very optimistic this year. I'm looking at the weather patterns and the weather patterns are very similar to what they were last year. There's some great storms, they're going over the top of us. Tacoma's just gotten record snowfall. And we look at the high pressure that's camped on us. October was only fifty percent of normal precipitation. November's on a path to be about fifty percent of normal precipitation. So we're not in a good trend right now. We need something to really switch over, like it did two years ago, where we start funneling a lot more storms through here.

**BL:** Dave, this has been great. Is there anything else you'd like to add to this?

**DS:** No. If you have any future questions feel free to call me or whatever. I feel like we sort of just scratched the surface.

**BL:** You know what, I feel like that too. I'd love to maybe go back sometime and come and talk again if I can come up with some more questions.

**DS:** Sure. Maybe we can do it on a weekday when it's not so crazy.

**BL:** Yeah, that'd be great. I think you've got some wonderful stories and a lot of insight into the Lake that, like I say, we're just barely tapping into, so it'd be fun to hear some more.

**DS:** Well, you saw a lot of people wandering in here. All those people wandering in here probably feel as passionately about Great Salt Lake as I do. It's something that if you're here you feel passionate about it, you want to protect it. And you feel sort of privileged that you're one of the few that really understand and appreciate the Lake. Probably ninety-five percent of the Wasatch Front has never been out here and they just read that the Lake stinks and all that kind of stuff. Well you're here today, does it stink?

**BL:** No, no it doesn't.

**DS:** And so we've got this nice hidden treasure that nobody really appreciates. And so we get to keep it to ourselves. But yet when people come in it's like, yeah, I want to express that appreciation with them. And the international tourists, it's just fun to watch them come out here because they're just in awe of the Lake and they love it.

**BL:** Cool. Well, alright, we'll say this is the end for now and we'll get together—

**DS:** I appreciate it. Thank you.

**BL:** Thanks a lot.

**END OF INTERVIEW**