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Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

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Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Nicholas Alfonso

Interviewer: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

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An Oral History with Nicholas Alfonso, Volume 1043

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Biography

Nicholas Alfonso was born May 23, 1965, in New Orleans, Louisiana, to Jerry and Ramona Alfonso. He is married to Lisa Christofi Alfonso, and they have two children, Kristy and Misty. He is a commercial fisherman and member of the St. Bernard Coastal Advisory Board, and the Knights of Columbus.

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

NICHOLAS ALFONSO

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Nicholas Alfonso and is taking place on April 24, 2012. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull DeArme y. This interview was conducted by telephone.

Scull-DeArme y: This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Project of The University of Southern Mississippi, done in conjunction with the NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] Voices from the Fisheries project. The interview is with Nick Alfonso and it is taking place on April 24, 2012, at four p.m. I am in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. And Mr. Alfonso, where are you?

Alfonso: I'm in Louisiana.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. The interviewer is Stephanie DeArme y. I'd like to thank you, Mr. Alfonso, for taking time to talk with me today. And I'd like to get some background information about you, which is what we usually do. So I'm going to ask you for the record, could you state your name, please?

Alfonso: My name is Nicholas Alfonso. That's N-I-C-H-O-L-A-S, and it's A-L-F-O-N-S-O.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. And when were you born? (0:01:03.6)

Alfonso: I was born in May of 1965. May 23, 1965.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. And where were you born?

Alfonso: I was born in New Orleans.

Scull-DeArme y: What was growing up in New Orleans in the [19]60s like?

Alfonso: I don't remember. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah? (laughter)

Alfonso: I don't remember. I know back when we was kids, I mean, we went to school all the way to twelfth grade and all that good stuff. Our parents made us get an

education. And I don't know. It was a different world than what it is today.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. What are you doing currently?

Alfonso: Right now, I'm still a commercial fisherman.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you fish for? (0:01:53.5)

Alfonso: I do a variety of a few different things. I'm a little different than most of your common commercial fishermen. I dredge oysters in the wintertime. And after the winter's over, I start fishing crabs, and I do soft crabs, too. And that is from March to May, is the soft crab season. So like right now, I am still crabbing, but I'm in the process of picking my traps up, because shrimp season is going to open pretty soon. This Thursday, which I don't know what the date is going to be, but this Thursday they set the date for the opening of the brown shrimp season, which is what they call a Brazilian shrimp. And from my years of experience, I think it's going to be earlier than usual, because we had such a hot winter.

Scull-DeArmey: I'm sorry, because you had such a what?

Alfonso: A hot winter.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, right. Well, I'm going to jump right into the question bank that NOAA—(clears throat) Golly, I'm sorry. I'm going to jump right into the question bank that NOAA's got for us and ask you when and where you learned to fish. (0:03:29.5)

Alfonso: I learned from my Dad, and I think we about a four-generation fisherman thing.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, OK. Well, how old were you when you first started?

Alfonso: I was in middle school, probably around ten, started going with my dad.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you feel like you really did some work then?

Alfonso: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah? What kinds of things were you doing for him?

Alfonso: Mostly what we call grading shrimp. (0:04:05.2) After he picks up the trawl, when we go to clean the shrimp, we'll grade them. We'll put—say, if they got some sixteen/twenties count shrimp in one basket. And then if there's some forty/fifties, we'll put those in another basket. And if there were sixty/seventies, we'd

put that in another basket.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. You said you cleaned the shrimp? What does that consist of?

Alfonso: That consists of picking the shrimp out of the fish.

Scull-DeArmey: What kind of fish were you catching? (0:04:37.2)

Alfonso: It would be like croakers and saltwater brim and sardines.

Scull-DeArmey: What did you do with them? Were they bycatch, or were you able to use—

Alfonso: Just bycatch, you'd just rake it right back overboard.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Where were you fishing?

Alfonso: They got a place called Delacroix Island in St. Bernard, [Louisiana].

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Is that pretty much where you stuck to, or your dad stuck to?

Alfonso: Yeah. That's where his whole family is from, and plenty of them are still there.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Can you tell me a little bit about the equipment you used when you were ten and growing up on your father's boat? (0:05:20.6)

Alfonso: We used to use what they called brown shrimp trawls. We did all kind of trawling. And you'd have square-frame night rigs, where you would catch them at night with the night rigs.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Can you tell me, can you just kind of paint a picture for people about how a square-frame, what did you call it? Night—

Alfonso: Yeah, it's made out of aluminum pipe, inch and a half. And it's twelve-foot tall and nine-foot deep. So it's not a complete square. And you'd have two of them, one on each side the boat.

Scull-DeArmey: And how did they work?

Alfonso: They worked good.

Scull-DeArmey: Are they like nets that you drop them over into the water?

Alfonso: Um-hm, yeah. You drop them over in the water.

Scull-DeArmey: And do those actually go on the bottom, the way the trawls do?

Alfonso: No.

Scull-DeArmey: No?

Alfonso: It don't go on the bottom. That's the whole idea of it. It actually catches—when you fish them, if they nine-foot deep, you're probably fishing about seven-foot in the water.

Scull-DeArmey: So you're catching shrimp that are in the water column and not on the bottom.

Alfonso: Right. The whole science to it is, when shrimp move, usually it's by the moon. (0:06:56.6) And when the moon gets right, the shrimp will start moving. And that's when you know when to catch them with the night rigs.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow, very interesting. Now, is it true that the moon pulls on the tides?

Alfonso: Yeah, at a certain time of the year. It's just like the shrimp. The brown shrimp will move with the moon, and the tides'll move with the moon. And that usually occurs in May till July. After that, no, it's total different. Everything changes.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, can you give us the secret of what the moon's doing when the brown shrimp are [where] you can catch them, or is that intellectual property and a trade secret?

Alfonso: No. What happens is, you'll have, say, four different crops of Brazilian shrimp. And the biggest shrimp, when the moon gets right, the biggest shrimp will come up, and they'll start moving toward the outside waters, where all the other little shrimp's not going to move. They're not going to move. And then when that moon is over with, then you see a drop in the count of the shrimp, and that's when you know the moon's over with. So if you was catching forty/fifties through the moon, the night you catch fifty/sixties or sixty/seventies, that batch is over with. The big ones done moved out. So you'll have like two weeks before the next moon. And when the next moon comes, the shrimp that come out might even be a little bit bigger than the forty/fifty, which would be thirty-six/forty. It's a neat science to it, because brown shrimp will leave as the average size of the big ones.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What do you do for the two weeks in between the moon being right?

Alfonso: Oh, that's when you might take the night rigs off and put a trawl on, and try to go make a week, week-and-a-half trawling.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK, trawling during the day. (0:09:07.3)

Alfonso: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Do you trawl in different waters than you use the square-frame?

Alfonso: Yes. Yes, you sure do.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Can you tell us what the difference is?

Alfonso: On the trawls, you would drag in what we call bays or lakes, and the square-frames would be used only in canals and bayous and channels.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Do the trawls catch a different kind of shrimp?

Alfonso: No.

Scull-DeArmeY: Same shrimp.

Alfonso: Actually, in my belief as a commercial fisherman, all the years that I've done this, I think they do have two different types of Brazilian shrimp. And it's all the same family, but I think one of them is a nighttime shrimp, and one of them is a daytime shrimp. And the reason why I say that is, you can catch a thirty-one/thirty-five brown shrimp at night when the moon is right. And when you trawl, you might not catch a shrimp no bigger than a forty/fifty. So what happened to the thirty-six/forties or thirty-one/thirty-fives?

Scull-DeArmeY: What did happen to them?

Alfonso: Right? Because it's a nighttime shrimp. It won't show itself in the daytime.

Scull-DeArmeY: Where do you think they go at night?

Alfonso: They bury up. They bury up in the mud.

Scull-DeArmeY: Oh, OK. That's very interesting. You mentioned that you gather species, Brazilian shrimp, crabs. And you also catch as byproduct or bycatch croakers and saltwater bream. Are there any other species that you gather? (0:11:00.8)

Alfonso: You might catch a couple crabs or something. But I do catch white shrimp too, later on, when the white shrimp season comes.

Scull-DeArmey: When is that?

Alfonso: That's from, the law (0:11:14.9) has always been the third Monday in August, the third Monday in August; I'm sorry. And it usually ends December 23.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you have any idea why they might have framed the regulation that way? Does it make sense? Is there a reason for it?

Alfonso: Well, actually, the regulations have gotten better to protect the species more because now, in today, 2012, the biologists can open a season anytime they want, and with a seventy-two-hour notice they can close it. So if too much shrimp show up, if they open it and too much small shrimp show up, they can shut it down, which is a good thing. Like that it gives them time to grow.

Scull-DeArmey: That makes it pretty difficult to—I can't think of the word—to rely on your paycheck, doesn't it?

Alfonso: No, in this business, in this business it—this business is kind of like any other business. You got to save it when you make it because you know there's going to be tough times and curves thrown toward you. (0:12:33.8)

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So people who don't have the self-discipline to save it aren't going to make it in the business.

Alfonso: Exactly, that's the way it's always been. I've seen people come and go. I've seen people come and stay. I've seen it all.

Scull-DeArmey: When did you begin fishing commercially for yourself? (0:12:55.4)

Alfonso: When I got out of high school, after I graduated; that was 1983. I'm old. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: (laughter) You're not as old as I am. I was born in [19]54. (laughter) So you're not old yet; believe me. (laughter) Why did you decide to enter that business?

Alfonso: Well, I've always loved it. I love the nature of it. And I guess not having a boss telling you what to do means more, I guess, to me. Knowing if I don't get up and go out there and do what I need to do to provide for my family, there's nobody going to give me none. And really, it's something to be proud of.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. Can you kind of put into words what the business means to you and your family? (0:13:53.9)

Alfonso: It's my world. It's my world. And my family knows it's my world. They support me in all of it.

Scull-DeArmey: Some of these questions are really, really broad. So just cast your mind around, and whatever you come up with is a good answer. Tell me about how the business worked when you started in 1983, maybe some things that have changed since then.

Alfonso: Well, when we started—when I started in 1983, we never had all these imports, shrimp imports. (0:14:33.6) So the price of shrimp was worth more than than what they are today in 2012. And fuel was so much cheaper than what it is now in 2012. So businesswise, there was more of a profit to be made back then than what it is now. But the reason why we're still in business now is because of all of the land loss. The land is what creates the seafood industry. (0:15:07.6) The larvae from the shrimp and the larvae from the crabs and all that comes in and gets in our marshes. And it generates, and it gives it places to hide, to survive. Well, we've lost so much land in Louisiana now, down here in St. Bernard, that it opened up a lot of areas for more—I'm going to call it bedding ground.

Scull-DeArmey: What ground?

Alfonso: Bedding ground?

Scull-DeArmey: Bedding, B-E-D-D-I-N-G?

Alfonso: Um-hm. So now we have a pretty good population of seafood here. But the only issue is—and it's something I've been fighting. We need land put back because, in other words, our sanctuaries are going to disappear.

Scull-DeArmey: Your sanctuaries—

Alfonso: A bedding area and a sanctuary to me is the same thing.

Scull-DeArmey: I'm sorry. Would you say that again?

Alfonso: A bedding area for the seafood is the same thing as a sanctuary for me. That's how I see it.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, what caused the land loss in the first place?

Alfonso: Well, you're always going to have land erosion, but they put in a freshwater

diversion (0:16:27.8) in what we call the Caernarvon Siphon. And I don't know if they expected this thing to make land or what, but what they trying to do is get the salinity of the water level down. That means less salt in the water, so what we call three-corner grass, pythene(?) grass, all them kind of grasses would grow better. But it's not putting land back. So really, it's a bad thing to me as a commercial fisherman because without land, we're not going to have no more seafood. And the more they run this, the more land we lose, the less of a future I have.

Scull-DeArmey: How would they put the land back? (0:17:18.8)

Alfonso: Well, to me, as a fisherman, from what I've seen, they need a spillway. We have what they call a Bonnet Carré Spillway, (0:17:27.9) and when they open it, when the river gets real, real high, it flows the sand in the river through it with the water and with the salinity. So you building. With no sand, you not building.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What about dredging to put land back? Is that possible?

Alfonso: It can work; it really can. But for some reason, there's too many people against us. I sit on the St. Bernard Coastal Advisory Board. And we bring this up all the time. They just say, "It costs too much money. It's too much money, too much money." Well, if that's too much money, let's look at a long-term effect here. Let's get a spillway put in. It can't cost that much to build it. And it won't cost nothing to run it, because the corps of engineers get paid eight hours a day, if they running that spillway or not. So for future, and something I might not see, but maybe my kids will see or something my grandkids'll see, they'll see land come back here. I'm not trying to say this is a short-term fix. I'm trying to say it's a long-term fix.

Scull-DeArmey: Right. Is there anything else about that that you'd like to put on the record?

Alfonso: Well, when we was in 1983, that was the last year we trapped for furs, for animals. At that time, the animal activists came out real strong and shut the fur industry down, which they used to make coats and all that from. So I've walked plenty of this land in St. Bernard Parish with my Dad because he used to, he used to help run the Delacroix Corporation land. And from what it was back then to what it is now will bring tears out of your eyes.

Scull-DeArmey: The loss of land?

Alfonso: Loss of land. (0:19:32.3) And it really makes me mad because there's nobody in Washington [DC] or the legislature or the president who cares about any mom and pop who own two hundred, three hundred fifty acres, et cetera, when these people are losing their land because of the freshwater diversion.

Scull-DeArmeY: Right. Who are the advocates of freshwater diversion? (0:19:59.0)

Alfonso: The corps of engineers.

Scull-DeArmeY: And what do they see that makes it a positive thing to do?

Alfonso: I don't have a clue. I've been trying to figure that out for twenty years. And trust me, if this would work, and it would mess up my seafood industry, I couldn't say a word because it's building land; it's building the first protection of storm surge for St. Bernard Parish, New Orleans. I couldn't say a word as a fisherman! But it's not working, and we losing more land now than ever. I just feel like I got the right to bitch about it.

Scull-DeArmeY: Right. Can you explain, for people who may be listening to this fifty years from now who have never lived around a coastline, the relationship between the wetlands, the marshes and the hurricanes?

Alfonso: Can you say that one more time?

Scull-DeArmeY: Can you explain the relationship between the marshes and the hurricanes that come in? You just mentioned storm surge. So when a hurricane comes in, what happens in the marshes? (0:21:14.6)

Alfonso: You see, it's a neat science to this that a lot of people don't understand. Before the hurricane comes, the water level raises real fast. So your outside, what we call outside land along the edge of the Gulf [of Mexico] goes underwater. Well, the land on the inside edge, toward the Mississippi River, doesn't have time to get that effect yet, so you still got land sticking out. Well, when the waves get real bad, and the weather gets real nasty, well, as the water's raising, that water is beating this land and beating this land and beating the land until it erodes; it washes away. Now, the outside land is still there with some damage to it, but not as significant because it was, like, a couple of feet underwater. The wave action couldn't beat it.

Scull-DeArmeY: Um-hm. So actually, by being underneath the water, it was somewhat protected.

Alfonso: Right.

Scull-DeArmeY: People who don't live around the Gulf Coast may not realize how big a storm surge can be. In Hurricane Katrina, do you remember hearing, like, what the largest, biggest, in terms of feet, how high the storm surge came where you live?

Alfonso: Well, I can tell you how it come in my house. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: OK.

Alfonso: I had seven-and-a-half foot of water inside my house. (0:22:52.8) I was here for it; I stood through it. I seen the water when it made the turn coming down the highway. It was about a three-foot, white rapid, just coming. And it happened so fast that when I ran inside—because the storm, the eye passed, and I went outside because it calmed down, to plug my cell phone in my truck. And man, I just—something was wrong; I felt it. I looked down the street, and there's, like, a two-lane highway there. And it's like a levee in a sense because it's higher than the street. And on the other side of the highway, I could see a car, a boat, and a portable building up against the highway. And I'm like, "No. Something wrong." Well, next thing you know, I see the water make the turn down the street, and it was on. By time I ran inside my house and got my dog out the bathroom, the water started coming in the house before I got out the back door because I've always kept boats in my yard, being a fisherman. You know, the little boat that we got down there, I always bring it to my house up here in St. Bernard. And it's something I hope nobody ever sees again, but eventually somebody will.

Scull-DeArmey: So you got in the boat to wait out the surge?

Alfonso: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: We do have a section of questions on Hurricane Katrina a little bit further on, so I'm going to put that aside for the moment and ask you about how you market your catch. How do you market it? Who do you market it to? (0:24:34.7)

Alfonso: Well, we have what they call seafood docks along the bayou, and that's who we sell to because we really don't have the time to, what we call, peddling the shrimp. You know, if you came in with a thousand pounds of shrimp, it would take you quite a few days to sell that. So we sell it to the dock, and then the dock sells it to the processing plants.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So they're dealers at the seafood docks; they would just be seafood dealers, I guess.

Alfonso: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What do you think the seafood industry means economically? (0:25:21.9)

Alfonso: I think it's a huge impact on every community that they have that because you're creating money. You taking a wild shrimp, and you making a profit off of it. So when you do that, then you're paying taxes at the end of the year. So you taking

something, in the sense of wild or kind of like farming, but we're not farming it, because it's there. It comes and goes. So you creating it. You creating the work ethics and the business part of it. I don't know how to explain it.

Scull-DeArmey: That was beautiful. So harnessing something natural, and making it—

Alfonso: Profitable.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. Making it work for people.

Alfonso: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: And another nice thing about this natural resource is that it also naturally reoccurs.

Alfonso: Right. And I'd like to say one more thing for the record. Most of your commercial fishermen are their own conservationists. (0:26:47.2) If we see where we can't—well, let me repeat that. If we see where there's too much fish to catch the shrimp, we won't trawl there. We'll go somewhere else and find other shrimp.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Because you don't want to kill the fish.

Alfonso: Right. I mean, we don't want to kill no more than what we have to. A lot of people don't understand. If I go out there and I kill everything out there, I'm out of work! I don't want to be out of work. I love what I do.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. How many boats do you have fishing right now? (0:27:34.7)

Alfonso: I have two that I operate. One is a big boat; it's thirty-eight by sixteen that I built like six months before [Hurricane] Katrina hit. And that one there, I shrimp with, and I oyster with. And I have a smaller boat, a twenty-five-foot skiff with an outboard motor that I crab with.

Scull-DeArmey: Can you put into words what the seafood industry means to the people and culture of the Gulf Coast. (0:28:08.0)

Alfonso: Well, it's a, I guess you'd call it a legacy. It's amazing how much the local people around us want our seafood, and they enjoy our seafood. There's a lot of different places that have seafood, but not all seafood tastes the same. Where we live at here, our seafood has less iodine in our shrimp and crabs than anywhere on the Gulf Coast.

Scull-DeArme y: Wow. I've never heard anybody mention that before.

Alfonso: Um-hm. It's because our salinity of salt is not there. We have a brackish water, and not a real, real salt water. The less salt, the less iodine. Like me, I can't go to anywhere else and eat shrimp, say, like along the Mississippi Coast.

Scull-DeArme y: Really?

Alfonso: Yeah, can't. The iodine kills me.

Scull-DeArme y: Are you allergic to it?

Alfonso: No, no. I just can't take the taste of it.

Scull-DeArme y: Oh, yeah. Very interesting. I grew up in Gulfport. I grew up on those shrimp. (laughter) You know, talking about the legacy and being your own boss, there have been a couple of moments in my doing interviews that are just crystallized moments for me. I don't think I can ever forget them. I was talking to an eighty-something-year-old, retired commercial fisherman, and he talked about the lovely life of an oysterman. And those were his words, that it was a lovely life. And then there's a man named Eley Ross who was a commercial shrimper and had multi-generational—in fact, he was the one who was telling me about working on his grandfather's sailing schooner. He was in his eighties. And he was talking about being at the mouth of the Mississippi River, around where those passes are. And you know, I started just thinking about what it's like to be on the water with the sun on the water, you know, and just—

Alfonso: Ninety percent of people miss the best part of the day, like when the sun is coming up off the horizon.

Scull-DeArme y: You're out there in nature and you—you know, I'm sure the work is arduous and difficult. But when I think about just being able to work in that environment, it sounds wonderful.

Alfonso: Um-hm. It is when it's not a hundred degrees. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: But don't you usually have some breezes coming off the water?

Alfonso: Well, you get a lot of bad times with the weather. I mean, you got to respect Mother Nature. (0:31:25.8) Two things are fishermen's rules: You respect your mama because she put you here, and you respect Mother Nature because she can take you away.

Scull-DeArme y: Um-hm, very wise. When you think about your career in the

seafood industry, how has fishing changed? How has equipment changed?
(0:31:45.9)

Alfonso: Well, equipment has changed a lot. Now, we've moved on to what they call skimmer nets. And skimmer nets are something that you don't have to—I mean, you can use them day or night. You can use them like night rigs, or you can use them like a trawl, which a trawl, you're allowed a fifty-foot trawl, by law, on the inside waters, where skimmers, you're only allowed sixteen foot on each side, so that becomes thirty-two foot. So actually, you cut back on the length or the size of the nets, but it's a lot easier to operate for us commercial fishermen.

Scull-DeArme y: Why is that?

Alfonso: Well, you can pick up the tails and empty them as soon as you want. I mean, like us as fishermen, we empty them every hour, sometimes before the hour. So you do have a lot of fish and crabs and all of that that the live ratio that goes back overboard is a lot greater. (0:32:53.8)

Scull-DeArme y: So some of them actually, some of your bycatch actually goes back over alive.

Alfonso: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. You see, with a trawl, usually you drag two hours, three hours before you pick it up. With these skimmer nets, you picking up on the hour or before the hour. Makes a big difference.

Scull-DeArme y: Which do you prefer, personally?

Alfonso: I'd rather the skimmer nets.

Scull-DeArme y: So is that what you're using now?

Alfonso: Yes, ma'am.

Scull-DeArme y: Um-hm. How many people are going out with you on your boat?

Alfonso: Oh, it used to be me and my daughters, but now they all grown up, went to college and married off. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah?

Alfonso: It's just me. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: You don't take a deckhand?

Alfonso: No.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Wow. It seems like a lot to do all alone.

Alfonso: It is, but I love it.

Scull-DeArmeY: If you pick up your skimmer every hour, what's a typical haul?
(0:33:57.9)

Alfonso: Well, there's no typical part of it. You know? Usually what happens in the beginning of the season if you have a lot of shrimp in your area, the first week is going to be very good. Then it's going to slack off. And then when the moon gets right, then you pick up and catch more. And then after the moon, you drop off. And that's how it works, all through it. And eventually you see there's a difference. The brown, the Brazilian shrimp start off small and get bigger as the season goes on. (0:34:32.3) The white shrimp season start off big. The shrimp start off real big and eventually get smaller and smaller. Both of them are just the opposite. But you got to remember, the white shrimp season, when it opens, it's the hottest part of the year. And then when it closes, you at the cold part of the year. So the colder water don't allow them to grow. And that's the reason why they get smaller and smaller.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. How have state and federal regulations changed? (0:35:09.4)

Alfonso: They've changed a pretty good bit, and I can only say it's probably for the better. There are some things I don't agree with. I don't know what else to say on that. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Well, can you give me some examples of what regulations are making it better? How [do] they make it better?

Alfonso: Well, the regulations are, you pick up every hour, and you don't need a TED [turtle excluder device] rig now. That's the turtle excluder for us. Now, the big boats need them regardless, with the trawls. And I think that's getting ready to change where they going to make us put the turtle excluders, too. Now, there are some things I will agree with. The way they got the season set where what they call—they call this a double-rig line. The inside water's closed, and the double-rig line out stays open. That gives the fishermen an opportunity to still go work in deeper water if your boat can handle it. And it gives the shrimp an opportunity to come in and lay their eggs.

Scull-DeArmeY: Um-hm. Well, I have two follow-up questions. And it's making my mind paralyzed because there are two of them. What are some examples of how the regulations have not made it better?

Alfonso: Well, I really don't know how regulations haven't made it better.

Scull-DeArmey: For example, TEDs, do you feel like the TEDs in your net make you lose catch?

Alfonso: I don't say it makes you lose a whole lot. You might lose a percentage. But it's an object that's hanging in the air when you pick up, swinging all over the place. So you have a greater possibility of getting hurt. (0:37:14.0)

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. Do you think the TEDs might keep out some bycatch that would've filled your nets?

Alfonso: No.

Scull-DeArmey: No?

Alfonso: No.

Scull-DeArmey: Have you had any experiences catching sea turtles?

Alfonso: I've caught three in my lifetime. And all three lived. Actually, I had a tag on one of them, and I wrote the number down on a piece of paper on the boat. And I don't know what I did with it. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, I'll bet the—

Alfonso: It ate me up because I would've liked to know the history of this turtle. I really would.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. Yeah, I bet the Department of Marine Resources would've really liked to hear about it also.

Alfonso: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: You talked a little about how the wetlands and the marshes have changed. Is there anything else you want to say about that? (0:38:10.3)

Alfonso: Well, once all the land's gone, then the volume of our seafood'll be gone, too, because it won't have no place to hide. The nutrition that it takes for the species to develop and be there until it's time for them to leave.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. OK. Have you seen species change over your lifetime as a shrimper, a crabber?

Alfonso: No. I sure haven't. They're all still the same.

Scull-DeArmey: They're staying pretty steady.

Alfonso: Yeah, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: That's a good thing. Are there any changes in the market?

Alfonso: The only changes in the market is all the imports. (0:39:01.6)

Scull-DeArmey: Can you talk—

Alfonso: The imports, you would think that the imports would have regulations because everything we do is regulated. But they can dump as much imports as they want in the United States. When there's other [countries] that won't accept them because of what they're grown in. So a lot of it don't make sense to me.

Scull-DeArmey: So as a shrimper who catches a wild product, there are limits that you have.

Alfonso: Right.

Scull-DeArmey: Regulations. But the imports can flood any amount.

Alfonso: The imports can flood any amount. And the chemicals and different things that they use to raise these shrimp and other species would not be agreed on if it was being raised here.

Scull-DeArmey: So they wouldn't meet the standards of, say, like the Environmental Protection Agency?

Alfonso: No. But they allow you to eat it! (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: I know. I always try to make sure it's wild-caught if I can.

Alfonso: It's crazy.

Scull-DeArmey: And it's difficult, really, to find out if you're eating imported shrimp or wild-caught because I think the restaurants are going to—they try to figure out what you want to hear and then tell you that. (laughter)

Alfonso: Well, in New Orleans, we do have a lot of restaurants that support us. And that is a change that we didn't know was going to come. And I really think it's doing good.

Scull-DeArmeY: Good. How has marketing changed, or if it has changed, how has it changed since you started?

Alfonso: I find there's more marketing, but ever since the stock market crash, people have tightened up on their budgets. So the marketing is still there, but it's just people are more tightened up on their budgets to know what they're going to spend it, and where they're going to spend it, and how they're going to spend it. And that's just how I feel.

Scull-DeArmeY: Is there a group of fishermen who would like to, say, brand wild-caught shrimp as unique and special? Which, I think it is. Do you know of any groups of fishermen who are wanting to advertise wild-caught shrimp and wild-caught crabs as a superior product?

Alfonso: Well, we had that started. I got on the Shrimp Advisory Board (0:42:06.8) in Baton Rouge before the BP [British Petroleum] oil spill, about six months or eight months before the BP oil spill. But since the BP oil spill, they never did put the board back together. Now, they do have other shrimp task force, et cetera, boards, but they've never put the board back together that I was on. Everything there is BP. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Why do you think they failed to come back together?

Alfonso: I don't know. I really don't know.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Well, let's talk about Hurricane Katrina a little bit. Tell me how Hurricane Katrina affected you personally. (0:42:53.1)

Alfonso: Well, I finished my boat about three or six months before Hurricane Katrina. Then Hurricane Katrina hit. I had some family in Georgia, my wife and one of my daughters. My other daughter was with her fiancé's (husband's) family in Texas. And we were separated for a long time, and we couldn't—when we did come back, we lived on my boat for a month and a half. So in one sense, it was a good thing that the boat survived because we had air-conditioning and two beds and that on it, and hot water and a shower. But living on the boat for a month and a half, while we would come to my house every day and start gutting it, just doing different things around here, there was no seafood dock. There was no ice. There was no fuel. There was no nothing; nothing for a long time.

Scull-DeArmeY: No infrastructure for your business.

Alfonso: No, none.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you know for about how long?

Alfonso: I really don't know; I don't remember.

Scull-DeArmey: It's hard to remember.

Alfonso: My focus was to get my house back. And then I had to focus on getting my mother-in-law's house back because she's a single woman. And she has two daughters. One is my wife, and the other daughter lives in Florida, so we was her only support and trying to help family and friends. And work wasn't really an object, in a sense.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. You have two boats now. Did you lose a boat during Katrina?

Alfonso: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: You did.

Alfonso: I lost one boat that I used to fish mullets with. And it was a small boat with a outboard motor. And I don't know if you know what a mold is. A mold for a boat is what you build the boat out of. (0:44:56.9) And it gives it the shape, the width, the length. It's like a shell. And you start the boat off on the inside of the shell, the mold. And then you pop that out after it dries and put it on the side, and then that's how you create the boat. Well, the mold for my big boat was thirty-eight foot long and sixteen foot wide. We don't have a clue where that went.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow!

Alfonso: And I still don't have a clue to this day where my little boat went.

Scull-DeArmey: Where was the little boat? Was it in the yard?

Alfonso: It was at Delacroix Island where I park my big boat.

Scull-DeArmey: Where did your big boat go during the storm?

Alfonso: I [brought] my big boat to Caernarvon, Caernarvon Canal. It's right down the line of St. Bernard and Plaquemines [Parishes]. And that's where most of the people from Delacroix Island and there bring their boats. We tie them to a bunch of trees in that.

Scull-DeArmey: How did those boats do during the storm?

Alfonso: Everything (laughter) turned to land when the water went down, so all our

boats was on land. But it survived, so I can't complain at all on that.

Scull-DeArme y: Were they damaged?

Alfonso: A little bit, but it's nothing we can't fix. We built them, so that really wasn't nothing major.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you have to use fuel to keep your air-conditioning going and stuff like that on the boat?

Alfonso: Yeah. My thing is, every time a storm comes, before the storm gets here, I fill my big boat up with fuel, with diesel. So I probably had pretty close to four hundred gallons of diesel in it.

Scull-DeArme y: How long did that last you in terms of living on the boat?

Alfonso: Oh, a long time. You only burn about twelve gallons in a twenty-four hour period. And then when we did need fuel, we'd go to Slidell [Louisiana] and get it and come back. Get it in cans and stuff.

Scull-DeArme y: I was going—that was my next question. How do you get four hundred gallons of fuel to your boat?

Alfonso: No. We wouldn't bring four-hundred gallons. We'd just get some of them red cans and fill them up and put it in there. Same thing as water. We'd go somewhere where they got a faucet and fill up some cans with water and put them in the boat.

Scull-DeArme y: What was it like to get fuel when you went to Slidell?

Alfonso: Well, they had long lines! (laughter) Wherever you could get it, they had long, long lines.

Scull-DeArme y: Who helped you recover in your recovery from Hurricane Katrina? (0:47:35.0)

Alfonso: Family and friends. I have some good friends who live in Biloxi, and they all came. And it's a lot of good people. After I finished my stuff and started on my mother-in-law's house, I joined up with Habitat for Humanity, them kids. And helped them build a house right here, on side of me for an elderly couple, which she lost her husband when they started it. A Habitat house, that's what it is, a Habitat house.

Scull-DeArme y: So there were teenage volunteers?

Alfonso: Yeah. Church groups, and just, it's unbelievable. I never knew. I mean, I never knew they had that many good people in this world. I really never. I mean, they had people from all over the world came. I met people from all over the world. Most of these kids that came, they didn't know how to nail a nail in a piece of wood with a hammer. And when they left, they was very good at it. They gave up their spring break and everything. It's amazing to see; it really is.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. It restores your faith, doesn't it?

Alfonso: Um-hm. Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: When did you start fishing again after Hurricane Katrina? Can you kind of remember when infrastructure started to come back, or did you have to go to Texas or anything to sell your catch? (0:49:13.4)

Alfonso: No. We would haul them to different dealers that opened back up. Some opened up sooner than others, because some of the people had more problems than others. Some people lost more than others. But I really don't remember how long it took before we started back up again. But I do know when we did start back up, there wasn't many fishermen out there. They had plenty of seafood, though, but just not a bunch of fishermen because people were scattered all over.

Scull-DeArme y: But you got your boat back in the water, you think, before most people did?

Alfonso: I got my boat back in the water the same time that other people did, within a couple of weeks. But I came back home quicker than what most people did.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Why did you?

Alfonso: Because I wanted all my stuff back. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: (laughter) So you were coming back to work?

Alfonso: I was coming back to fix my house and everything.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. So while you were fixing your house, you were actually still shrimping?

Alfonso: Well, we started shrimping, yes. Whenever we got a sale, whenever the dock would tell us, "Hey, we can use, say, five hundred pounds of shrimp," we'd go out there and get them, come in, and that would be it until they'd tell us again when to go back.

Scull-DeArmey: And the family was living on the boat. So does that mean the whole family went out shrimping together?

Alfonso: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, that is so great!

Alfonso: Yeah. We got pictures of everything too. It's a trip. I got pictures of our boats on land that will just blow your mind. You invest eighty thousand dollars into a boat, and a storm comes like a train, and you see it on land. And for twenty days, I didn't even know if I had a boat. It's crazy.

Scull-DeArmey: What was it like right after the storm? What did you do?

Alfonso: You mean when I was in my house?

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Alfonso: Well, you might have heard of this. After I weathered it out, and the worst of it passed in the boat, (0:51:30.4) I live right here on the side of St. Rita's Nursing Home. You remember that?

Scull-DeArmey: Was that the one where people died?

Alfonso: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Alfonso: Yep. I lied to a lot of my family, telling them it wasn't so bad because I didn't want them to worry. But the last phone call I got before my phone went dead was my sister. And I know her husband. We went to school together all our lives. And his mom used to make me brownies every time I'd go by their house. His mama treated me real nice. Well, his mom was in that nursing home. So they was under the impression that they was going to evacuate all of the people out of the nursing home. But when she called me, and she told me that they didn't, I was like, "I can't believe this." And then the water hit and all of that. And I tried to get over there as soon as I could, which as soon as the wind calmed down enough, to about forty, fifty miles an hour, I took the boat over there, and I mean, they had people pulling people out the water. But when I got there, they had like, the three nurses were still in the water, that were still alive, and I helped pull them out. But that was about it. That was the last live people that come out of there.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Alfonso: That'll put tears in your eyes. I had some tools in my boat, and one of them guys there said, "Man, you got any tools?" I said, "Yeah." So I went and got them. And we took the roof off in one section to see if we can get in through there, to see if there were any more live people. But when we took the roof off, I looked down, and that lady was about—I don't know. I guess about six or eight inches under the water, looking straight up at me with her eyes open. I lost it.

Scull-DeArme y: That was the one who used to give you brownies?

Alfonso: No. But I, I just lost it.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah.

Alfonso: And one of the nurses, I went back, and I asked her about my brother-in-law's mom. And she shook her head, "No." So I knew what it meant.

Scull-DeArme y: Oh, I'm so sorry.

Alfonso: I'll never forget, though. The last three people come out of that place alive were the nurses that come out of that water.

Scull-DeArme y: Wow. Probably because they weren't old and infirm, they were able to survive.

Alfonso: They was trying to get as many people out as they could. That's what happened, once they got at that point where there was no more they could do.

Scull-DeArme y: I know people didn't really realize that storm was going to be so bad. I was fifteen when [Hurricane] Camille came through, and I lived in Gulfport. And when I saw Hurricane Katrina on television filling up the Gulf of Mexico, I said, "This is going to be another Camille." But it just didn't occur to me that anything could be worse than Camille. But Katrina was so much worse. It was like Camille, like, two hundred miles wide.

Alfonso: Right. Well, the bad part about us is we surrounded by levees.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah.

Alfonso: If the water goes over the levees, it stays here; it don't drain. (0:54:48.2) So it don't drain until you break a levee.

Scull-DeArme y: How long did the water stay in your house?

Alfonso: I left out of here on the ninth day or the tenth day. But the ninth day—I

might have left out of here on the ninth day—the water was still even with my slab of my house. I might have had maybe an inch left in it. Yeah, and I think it was nine days.

Scull-DeArmeY: So it drained pretty slowly.

Alfonso: Yeah, which I'm two foot off the ground already.

Scull-DeArmeY: Right. Is there anything else about Hurricane Katrina that you'd like to get on the record?

Alfonso: Don't ever think you're going to get back what you had. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah.

Alfonso: Because my house was six years old, and I thought—I knew it was bad. But I told my wife, "We are a lot better off than a lot of people." And she couldn't understand it because she didn't see what I seen.

Scull-DeArmeY: Oh, yeah, just being alive.

Alfonso: When I went to rebuild it, I wanted to get all the stuff I had here before. I mean, everything was brand-new! I wanted to buy the same things. Couldn't do it. You couldn't buy the same color tile. You couldn't buy the same color carpets and et cetera.

Scull-DeArmeY: Um-hm. Too much competition for it?

Alfonso: Well, every so many years, they change different patterns. And you know, it's completely different. But there's a lot of things that happened from Katrina that you would think that somewhere, somebody would organize a group, talk to the people who stayed, see what they thought would be how to handle these things better. I'm not saying they did a bad job. I'm saying: how can they handle a disaster better?

Scull-DeArmeY: Um-hm. Learn some lessons.

Alfonso: Right.

Scull-DeArmeY: And then share those lessons with other people.

Alfonso: Right, exactly.

Scull-DeArmeY: What about debris in the water when you were fishing? Was there anything from Katrina that was dangerous for you or your nets? (0:57:13.4)

Alfonso: A lot. It was like us learning the waters all over again. Places that didn't have stuff before has it now. So I mean, you'll rip a net up, quick!

Scull-DeArmey: Did you have any kind of, say, depth finder that might have told you find where those things were?

Alfonso: No. A depth finder won't tell you nothing. Nothing but how deep the water is, that's it.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So how did you find out where those kinds of hangs were?

Alfonso: When you hook on it, and it stops the boat, and you break a rig! (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Ugh!

Alfonso: And then you got to replace the net or take a day and a half to patch the net up, to put the webbing back in it that you ripped up because I make my own nets and everything. (0:58:00.9)

Scull-DeArmey: Do you?

Alfonso: Uh-huh.

Scull-DeArmey: Where did you learn to do that?

Alfonso: My Daddy tried to teach me to sew, and I was too hard-headed to learn. And I've learned off of other fishermen at Delacroix Island.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Alfonso: Cousins, uncles, all of that.

Scull-DeArmey: So your big trawl nets and your skimmers, you've actually knitted those yourself?

Alfonso: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: That's really impressive!

Alfonso: It's a neat science to all of it; it really is.

Scull-DeArmey: Are people going to keep that alive, you think?

Alfonso: Oh, yeah!

Scull-DeArmey: Are you able to teach? Uh-huh?

Alfonso: Oh, yeah, um-hm. This industry will stay alive as long as they don't let it get overfished, as long as they keep a fresh product, as long as—you got to realize: people are way more educated now today than what they were thirty years ago in this industry. And don't get me wrong. In every industry, you cannot get everybody to agree on something. You're not going to have 100 percent of people that's all good. You're going to have some bad apples in the bunch. The bad part about our industry is, them bad apples in our bunch that sticks out, and that's what people think how we are! And it's not right.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. And unfortunately, they're the ones who usually get in the paper.

Alfonso: Um-hm, exactly. Exactly. That's how come I kept getting all these people calling me because every time somebody was going to the island, Delacroix Island, they'd give them my name and number. So they came to me. I don't know if you looked any of that stuff up, but—

Scull-DeArmey: I did. I googled your name, but I found a lot of other Nick Alfonsos, and I don't think any of them were you, so—(laughter)

Alfonso: Anything to do with the BP oil spill. And if you do do it again, google it and put on there "videos." And then you'll see me and my wife, and we're talking about the shrimping industry and all of that.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, great. I'll do that. OK. Well, speaking of the BP oil spill, what did you expect from the season before the spill? (1:00:18.8)

Alfonso: I didn't know what was going to happen. I don't know nothing about oil. I don't know nothing about dispersant. The only thing I know is about seafood.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Were you preparing for your crabbing and fishing season when you heard about the spill?

Alfonso: I was crabbing; I sure was.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What was your catch like?

Alfonso: It was OK. It really was. And then they stopped us from fishing, so we had to pick everything up. Well, I did, anyway. And really, it was day-by-day until everything went crazy. And—I don't know—they started this Vessels of Opportunity,

and that went crazy. (1:01:06.9)

Scull-DeArme y: Did you participate in that program, the Vessels of Opportunity?

Alfonso: I did, but I couldn't get on until really late in the game.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, how did that work out for you?

Alfonso: Well, it became politics. It's who you know. That's how fast you went to work. A lot of, lot of politics. Anytime you got money being thrown around, it's a lot, a lot of politics. People don't like the way I talk, but the truth's the truth. I'm not saying that people were prepared for this because all of this was something that's never happened before. But people got greedy. People got real greedy. There was a lot of cutthroats going on when all of this took effect.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. How did you make it through the summer of the spill, that summer of 2010? (1:02:10.8)

Alfonso: Well, what I did was—they would open sections of the waters up. Sometimes they'd be open; sometimes they would be closed. But when it was open, I would go out there, and I would go push and see what's going on. I wanted to know, myself. I wanted to know if our crabs were still there, if our shrimp were still there, what was still there. And that's what I did.

Scull-DeArme y: How were you testing for that?

Alfonso: With my skimmers, my skimmer nets.

Scull-DeArme y: And you would know about the crabs that way, too, or did you put out crab pots?

Alfonso: No, no. I would know about the crabs and everything because like I said before, we are our own scientists.

Scull-DeArme y: So what did you find out about shrimp when you would go into those open sections?

Alfonso: Well, what I found out was the shrimp was there, but not as great as it usually is. But as long as there's shrimp in my view, you have something to multiply. But from being out there, and seeing what these seagulls and storm birds were doing, that showed me something was wrong first. (1:03:22.7)

Scull-DeArme y: What were they doing?

Alfonso: They was piled up. They'd come pile up on the boat. Seagulls do that; storm birds don't. I even had a pelican that landed on my boat that had an oil sheen all over him. But he didn't have enough to where it would kill him. That's one pelican that will live.

Scull-DeArmey: What about the seagulls? How did they appear?

Alfonso: They looked good. They just—it was very, very plentiful. So that told me that the birds out there done moved in. They knew danger was there. Animals have a, a sense of, I guess, threat.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. So they were moving away from it, from the oil.

Alfonso: Yeah, um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: How many crab pots did you have out that summer?

Alfonso: About two hundred and thirty.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. And how did the rest of that crab season work out?
(1:04:29.9)

Alfonso: It didn't. We had to quit.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you do any other BP work besides VOO?

Alfonso: No. That was it.

Scull-DeArmey: Was it actually helpful to you at all, financially?

Alfonso: Oh, yeah. Yes, it was.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So that helped you make it through the summer.

Alfonso: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: Did it come anywhere near what you would've made if you were crabbing? (1:04:56.4)

Alfonso: Yeah. I'd have to say yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, good. I'm really glad to hear that. Have you gone through the claims process?

Alfonso: I put in a claim in 2010, when all of this went down because that's what they told us to do. And I've just been waiting to see what's going to happen.

Scull-DeArmey: Isn't that amazing, that you're still waiting two years later?

Alfonso: It is, but it takes—and my theory is, on this, you should wait a little, a couple of years, to see what's going to happen to the seafood industry because it might deplete more than it picks up. But the way I see what BP's doing now—and I could be wrong because I'm not no lawyer; I'm not none of that; I'm just a fisherman—here, pretty soon in the next couple of months, they're just going to hand you money and say, “Thanks. Bye.”

Scull DeArmey: Um-hm. And they're not going to be concerned about the long-term effects.

Alfonso: No. But that is the greatest thing we do have. The whole Gulf is really rich. And me as a fisherman, I believe it will all come back. I've got to have that faith. If not, I got to get out this industry. If you ain't got faith, you don't have nothing. And that's in any business.

Scull-DeArmey: Would you want your children to become fishermen?

Alfonso: If I had a son, yeah. (laughter) I got two girls.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Well, what if they were interested in it, would you encourage them?

Alfonso: Yeah, I would. I really, really would. You know what? It's an honest living. (1:06:39.1) It might not be the most high-paying living, but it could be the most honest living. And as long as you got an honest job and you make it in this world, that's all that counts. That is it. And that's something you learn when you get older.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. How do things stand for you now, as far as your catch with shrimp and crabs? (1:07:05.5)

Alfonso: Well, I'd say it's slacked off some. It really has, but I'm going to keep the faith that it is going to get better. Now, the price of the seafood is what really went down because of all the media and everything and people not wanting to eating it. And I can't blame them. I really cannot blame people for not wanting to eat it yet because I felt the same way when the mad-cow disease come out. So I mean, I can understand their point. I just hope with all of this science and testing that we can rebound and convince the people to eat it.

Scull-DeArme y: What do you hear about testing the seafood there in Louisiana? (1:07:51.8)

Alfonso: I don't hear nothing anymore. And I know they are, but us as fishermen should know about that. Us as commercial fishermen should be involved in that. But you got NOAA doing testing, and you got all these other environmental groups doing testing, but we don't hear nothing about nothing of it.

Scull-DeArme y: I didn't know anything about the Gulf, the Mississippi Gulf Coast shrimp testing, until I interviewed the director of the Department of Marine Resources. And I found out that the Gulf shrimp is *the* most tested seafood product anywhere.

Alfonso: Yeah. That's very, very true.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. And I saw an article not too long ago, maybe last week, that now they're testing for the dispersant. Initially, I guess they were just testing for oil and components of oil. And now they're testing for the dispersant, and at the time of that article, the tests that had come back, even with all the dispersant that they applied, the seafood was still coming back safe to eat in terms of—

Alfonso: Right. That's why I say we have the richest Gulf in the world. A lot of people don't understand. And look, I'm still a fisherman. Right?

Scull-DeArme y: Um-hm.

Alfonso: You have natural oil coming out of the ground everywhere. (1:09:16.7) I don't care if you're on land. I don't care if you're on the water. Both of them come out the ground. Well, they do have bugs that eat this. And common sense tells you, the more oil you have, the more multiple of bugs you're going to get that eat it. The less oil you have, the less bugs you're going to have because some of them are going to die off.

Scull-DeArme y: Right. Well, the bad news is, that, according to the study I read last week—

Alfonso: Um-hm?

Scull-DeArme y: The Corexit dispersant does make it more difficult—it appears that it makes it more difficult for those bugs to eat the oil. Not impossible, but it makes it more difficult. So you as a fisherman, google Corexit, the dispersant, and oil-eating bacteria, and see what you can find out about it because if there's another spill, you fishermen, you might want to use some political will to decide whether that much dispersant gets dropped or not. You know?

Alfonso: That's something we don't have no control over, though.

Scull-DeArmey: You don't think you do even if you organized?

Alfonso: We don't have no control over that. Once that hits the Gulf like that, then it's all big politics.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, I hate to hear that. Well, Mr. Alfonso, how long do you think you can stay in the industry?

Alfonso: I'll be here until the day I die.

Scull-DeArmey: (laughter) OK.

Alfonso: Because I do believe it will come back strong, and I believe as long as we help it come back by not destroying everything out there. The last thing I want to see is this come to an end.

Scull-DeArmey: How do things stand for your friends in the industry?

Alfonso: They feel the same way. They really do. I mean, you get tough times. You got good times. Just, you got to be able to budget your monies that you make in this industry for when times are bad.

Scull-DeArmey: How do the waters that you've been fishing all your life appear to you? Do the waters seem to look different? (1:11:34.9)

Alfonso: No. The water still looks the same.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever see any oil? (1:11:40.4)

Alfonso: I seen some oil that come on shore that I guess it must have been weather-beat; that's what they call it. And that's about it. That's about all I've seen.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you know what's meant by weather-beat?

Alfonso: It means the chemicals in it evaporated out of it, certain chemicals.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. You know, that's what the director of the DMR told me. And I didn't think of it at the time, but I thought about it later, that I wonder what happens to those chemicals when they get into the water vapor. I mean, when they're evaporating, they have to go somewhere.

Alfonso: Right. Probably breaks up into millions and billions of particles.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah, maybe it actually even changes its composition and isn't, like, toxic anymore. I hope so because otherwise you would think that maybe it gets rained down somewhere. Well, from your perspective, how is the health of the fisheries that you fish, the crabs and the shrimp? (1:12:44.7)

Alfonso: I think that whatever happened out there, it played a part on the reproductive system. But I believe the reproductive system is coming back; I really do. We'll know more by the end of this year, 2012, than what we knew at the beginning of this year in 2012, by what we see out there [in the Biloxi Marsh area of the Louisiana wetlands, which were heavily affected by the BP Deepwater Horizon oil and dispersants]. This is going to be a learning experience for our generation, to tell our kids and nephews, whoever is going to get into this industry, if this ever happens again.

Scull-DeArmeY: How do you feel about future drilling for oil in the Gulf of Mexico? (1:13:36.0)

Alfonso: I think they got to do it. It's got to happen. You can't put that many people out of work. Now, this was, I'm going to say, an accident. There's eleven people that lost their lives that have been plumb forgotten about, which is a shame, because their families been more affected than any of us, *any of us*. But they've learned something here, off of this accident, if this was to ever happen again, how to control it. And you'll never have a fix for an accident that has never happened before, until it happens.

Scull-DeArmeY: Right.

Alfonso: Now I'm sounding like a schoolteacher! (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: So the value in it are the lessons learned, and how we can apply those in the future.

Alfonso: That's it.

Scull-DeArmeY: Where does the Gulf Coast seafood industry stand now, do you think?

Alfonso: I'm going to give it at 60 percent; 60 percent is good. You got 40 percent yet to come; [however as we speak, we are down even further in our area].

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Has this season been good to you?

Alfonso: This season has been slow; it really has. But I'm not going to complain

because I know a lot of my friends out of work right now.

Scull-DeArmey: Are shrimp and crabs both bottom-dwellers, would you say?

Alfonso: Yeah, until they travel. When they travel, they come more to the surface. They come up. They get off the bottom, and the current flows them to where they want to go. Both of them.

Scull-DeArmey: Can you see, from the shrimp and the crabs, that there's anything different about the bottom now, than before the oil spill?

Alfonso: No.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. In your work, do you actually see any of the bottoms that are underwater? Is it clear enough for you to see that?

Alfonso: No, not the bottom.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. I have two questions for you that weren't on the sheet that I sent you. We've been asking folks what your favorite seafood is. What is your favorite seafood? (1:15:51.8)

Alfonso: My favorite seafood is shrimp, white shrimp, brown shrimp, white shrimp, just shrimp.

Scull-DeArmey: Prepared how?

Alfonso: Oh, it goes—Lord, girl, you'd have to get a pencil and paper. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Your most favorite, tell me, your most favorite shrimp dish.

Alfonso: My most favorite shrimp dish is, you take you some butter. You put it in a pan. You take you some peeled shrimp and dice them up. Throw them in that pan, with that butter hot. And then put you some garlic powder, onion powder, lemon powder, salt, pepper. And then put you some parsley flakes on it. And then put you a little bit more butter and smother it down and make you some pasta on the side. Ooh! You talk about good!

Scull-DeArmey: That sounds delicious!

Alfonso: Um-hm. You better have some bread, too, because you're going to want to soak up that juice. That's like yesterday; I tried something. I took some filleted speckled-trout. (1:16:51.0) And I put some butter in the pan, and I got it hot. I soaked the filleted speckled trout in some olive oil vinegar. And then when I put it in

that pan, I put some more seasoning on it. Ooh, man! You talk about good!

Scull-DeArmey: Wow! What did you use for seasoning?

Alfonso: Oh, just the regular stuff: salt, pepper, garlic powder, onion powder, parsley flakes.

Scull-DeArmey: Probably lemon, huh?

Alfonso: Actually, I wouldn't put lemon pepper on that one because that vinegar in the olive oil, that stuff is pretty strong.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. Well, the very last question that we like to ask is this one. Is there anything that we did not talk about that you would like to put on the record?

Alfonso: The one thing I'd like to put on the record is a lot of people think this industry is really doing bad. But if you go back to 1983 to 1990, and look at the price of shrimp back then, and look at the price of fuel back then, and look at the price it costs you to keep your boat going, the price of your boat going was way cheaper. (1:18:18.2) Everything was way cheaper back then. The price of fuel was way, way cheaper. I think it was like, maybe sixty-nine cents a gallon for diesel? And the shrimp, the price of shrimp back then was higher than what it is today. And we're paying right at four dollars a gallon for diesel now. The equipment for the boat costs like four times more than it did then. So now you really got to be more of a business person in this industry to be able to survive. But that's in every industry.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. Well, I thank you so much for the interview. I'm going to turn the recorder off.

(end of interview)