

## Leoda Besson Bladsacker and Frank Besson Interview

Interviewer: Earl Robichaux

Earl Robichaux: Uh, if you would state your name, date of birth, and where we are now?

Leoda Bladsacker: Leoda Besson Bladsacker. Born July 25, 1955, on Grand Isle.

Frank Besson: Frank "Peco" Besson. Um, November 10, 1948, born in Charity Hospital in New Orleans.

R: And where we are now.

F: And we're on Grand Isle.

R: Okay. Um, let's just start off with you, Leoda. And you, Frank, right?

F: Mmhmm.

R: Um, what was it like – the island – when you were a child? And can you describe the landscape, and you know..

L: The first thing I can remember about that is the area where we lived in on Santini Lane, I remember our house was about maybe two and a half, three feet off the ground, um, wasn't a big house – "Bago" can tell you all the boys were in one room. The girls were in the other. My mom and dad, and then on the back of the house, my grandmother had a small, I would say apartment, but it was one room where she had her bed, her kitchen, everything – we shared the same bathroom. And outside, I remember we had a cistern – that was our way of getting water – our water source. And then uh, we lived in the back of another house but the street itself was um, I don't remember as far back as the street being a dirt street, but I do remember it being a shell road. And going to school – we used to cut through neighbors yards, and it was just so shady and nice and cool – not many, many houses, but uh, that's the area that I say we never went off like towards the store.

R: So the very middle of the island.

L: Yes, right smack in the middle.

R: So they have what, a lot of oaks?

L: Yes.

R: Okay. Could you describe how dense the vegetation was?

L: I can remember going back on Melon Lane, I remember a big um, a big garden back there – Old Man Charlie Rigaud used to grow cucumbers, and that's the only garden that I remember, but the trees – it was just so full of trees, and it all was shady. You could play outside all day long. It's not like it is today. You know in midday it's really, really hot because we don't have the trees we had back then, but back then, you could stay outside all day.

R: And what about, um, things that your grandmother – mother might have told you – grandfather, whatever – about how the island looked like – any sort of changes between their generation and yours?

L: I never got too many stories from my grandmothers or my grandfathers, but my dad used to tell me um, you know how the island used to be back – he remembered when it wasn't paved, you know. I don't know how long ago the road was built, I know Dr. Stevens was the one who walked from New Orleans to here on the ridge to find the ridge to built the road, but um, that's what I remember – I remember the beach – you could go out and walk a good distance. Um, it was more or less sand dunes instead of a levee. Back then, you could pull your car up. You could park on the beach. Um, I remember that. I remember when we would go to the beach – we weren't allowed to go out far. In fact our moms, out of all the kids that were out there would form a circle, and you couldn't get out that circle, and believe me – we weren't in ankle-deep water. And that's as far as we got to go out there.

R: So if I understand this right – Bayou Rigaud sort of connects to Barataria Pass. Or did – but at one time was all just called Bayou Rigaud, is that right?

F: Yeah, your'e right.

R: Okay.

F: It – I guess it got the name from I want to say Jacques Rigaud, that we knew he was the first one on Grand Isle that I understand. And I guess that's where he landed, and bought a good portion of Grand Isle at that time – or had Grand Isle. That's when he sailed over here, and it was just named Bayou Rigaud. Um, then he had Fifi Island, which stretched out a little longer than what it is right now – and um, it had another island – I don't know the name of it, but they had another Chinamen's platform on it, uh, which was very close to Grand Isle – you had a lot of land um, compared to what you see right now.

R: So in your um, early days, what did the island look like?

F: Well, like Leoda said, it was that you know, we had shell roads. It was dusty and all that, and I can remember each one of the roads – if you get on LA-1 and look down, it was like a canopy – like a covered wagon. If you look down the streets, the oleander – we had a bunch of oleanders on Grand Isle. Um, and oak trees – like if you if looked down, it looked like a covered wagon all the way down. Each and every street. Um, I say oleanders, and we still got a bunch on Grand Isle. I remember we used to go cut um, the oleanders to make slingshots out of them. Or they had uh, another game – I can't think of – it's called pigs. And um, you'd make a pick like – maybe a ...

L: (inaudible) pick.

F: Maybe a couple of feet long, maybe a foot long, and just – everybody would plant them in the middle, and um, you'd pick who would be first, and then he'd try to knock your stick down, and you had to take the stick and throw it like this, and knock his stick and it you hit it three times, and then you're safe. If you're not – he'd take your stick and throw it out, and then you were out the game. You know, things of this sort, but you know, as far as, like, the beach was pretty good – was pretty far out. Um, then, just my recollection when I was coming up, yes. It was out but when I look at some of the photos, and my dad

used to tell me, that they used to play baseball like they almost had a baseball field on the beach, you know. That they could play or before the beach that they would play on, you know. Um, and it's not his judgment at that time, but you know, I kind of visualize, if I look at some of these old photos that you have over here, it don't look like they had that much beach, but you know, they dug the sand dunes were pretty high, you know, fifteen, twenty feet high. Where it was there, I had no idea. Uh...

R: So the end - the east and west end would've been more – just more beach, right?

F: Yeah, yeah, right – very few homes. Everything was built where we're at right here in the center of Grand Isle. You know, from like, Santini Lane all the way to maybe Minnich Lane – in that area. Of course, uh, people in that time, there's not a – even right now, I don't think we have a resident that lives on the main drag of Grand Isle. Everybody – and even us as we came up – that we built or bought homes, that was in the tree line. And I say tree line is that because we wanted to be protected with the trees when hurricanes would come, it would protect our home just as much as it did before. And if you look at the last two hurricanes we had, and you look on the outside the tree line we had on Grand Isle, is that that's what destruction was at – on both sides of us. The tree line kind of saved a lot of homes over here.

R: Plus it seems to be higher.

F: It is, you know. in 19 – in the early 1900s, um, when Nez Coupe was on Grand Isle, I read an article in a magazine where he planted trees on those conditions too, that the storm of like 1893 you know, protected a lot of people on Grand Isle in that particular time. Um, from washing away and all that. In 1965, same thing happened again. When Betsy hit Grand Isle – the tree line – we suffered– a lot of people lost their homes, and the water done that. Well still, a lot of people saved their homes with the tree line. And again, when, when um, Katrina came - same thing again. Saved a lot of homes.

R: I noticed um, the mayor's office and the old Coast Guard station is right in the middle of the island – if the island was on the north side.

F: I don't' remember um, when that thing was built, but I remember as a kid when um, Flossie – Hurricane Flossie and a couple of – I remember walking from my house, which we lived on Santini Lane, walking through the back way, probably uh, knee-deep or maybe waist deep for us, we'd walk to the Coast Guard Station – for protection . That's where everybody went. You know, we stayed upstairs.

L: It didn't link back then, huh.

R: Well, we'll get to the Coast Guard Station in a minute.

F: Alright.

R: Because there's a kid I used to hear all these stories. But um, I have to sort of ask you a bit about um, island life. Like mosquito swarms, and that sort of thing.

F: Well, you know, when I was a kid, sure you had mosquitoes – and I don't think we had any kind of repellent that I can remember, you know, um, and – I used to see the old folks would take those palm leaves, and I got one in the corner over there. And they would – when it would get dry, they would cut it up in little bitty slats, and that's what they would use, you know, to kill the mosquitoes off of them. Uh, I guess when I was a kid coming up, you had cisterns that we used to have. You'd have pans or buckets or whatever. You had water all over the place. Wash that off, and if you suck the mosquitoes where you wanted to drink some water, they would come on the end – you know. And uh, I just don't remember us using any kind of repellent.

R: Oh yeah.

F: And then I – my um, not my grandfather - we always called him Uncle Howard or Grandpa Howard – I remember he lived right next door to us, and he stayed in uh, one of these old fashioned mosquito nets over his bed at night. Um, you know, mosquitoes out of there.

R: Yeah, I slept in those in the early days.

F: Yeah.

R: Um, but in the 1800s, in the nineteenth century, there was a big yellow fever epidemic mainly in New Orleans. And it's well documented that a lot of the prescriptions doctors wrote would be to go to Grand Isle and uh, work as respite to get the patients ocean air, and all that. Yeah. So you have any, sort of memories of that? From your mother or father or anything?

F: The only one I could recollect is like I would say – had any kind of, uh, illness or not, is Colonel Stevenson. He fell ill in New Orleans, which he was an engineer, you know, um, building a Trojan wall for New Orleans, and he came and kind of fell in love with Grand Isle and stayed here quite a bit, and then um, when he was well again, he went back to New Orleans and finished his project, and then of course, he walked from New Orleans to Grand Isle, and you could see how the zigzag is on come to Grand Isle – and built the road in 1907 is when he came. And then also, Dr. Engleback – same with him, you know. He fell ill, came to Grand Isle, and fell in love with Grand Isle, and never left. Now what kind of illness did they have – if it was yellow fever, not – I really don't know.

L: Dr. Engleback was a uh, a nervous breakdown. He was on the brink from a nervous breakdown.

R: It's the place you come.

L: It was recommended that he come here and relax, and like Peco said what he did, he fell in love with it and stayed.

R: And how long did – was he here?

L: I have not found a date when he passed, but I know we have records of him being here as late as 1933 I believe.

R: Okay, so at that time, let's say in the late um, nineteenth century, he would've been the doctor of the island.

L: Oh yeah.

F: Exactly. Whatever aches you had – he'd take care of you. Anyway he was doing you some good or not, you went to see Dr. Engleback. Um, I don't know when he passed away, but his mistress that he had on Grand Isle – she became the judge after him – because he was our first Justice of the Peace elected on Grand Isle. And after he passed away, she must've taken over after him, and her documentaries over there, of – I think it's 1937 that she became the judge on Grand Isle, and kind of ruled Grand Isle to an extent, you know.

L: Very ruling woman.

F: This and that, you know, and um -so Dr. Engleback – I really don't know when he passed away.

R: Okay, so my understanding is that the early days – and I'm talking 1700s into the 1800s, Grand Isle would've been primarily a sugar plantation type thing, and then after that, was sort of truck farming, and uh, and fishing.

F: Well, I about the early days, I don't say in the uh, twenties and thirties and forties, is uh, Mr. Ludwig – they had the little general store um, when - I don't know how long he had the store, and at that particular time, the people of Grand Isle – all they done was fish for a living. You know, they'd trade their fish – they had Chinamen's platform on Fifi Island, and they had another one a little bit further down, that they would trade, and shrimp and fish, and um, at that time, when old man Ludwig came and he was trying to show the people of Grand Isle how to farm. And uh, what he done – he made them make rows and on top of that row, he made them split it in half also. And then he'd go to the Chinamen's platform, and the Chinamen would finish drying off their shrimp. You had the peelings and all that, like a dust that was left over. They would take that and sack that for Mr. Ludwig. And he would bring it back and sell it to the farmers or trade to them, and they would put that in those rows in the middle of the road.

R: Compost.

F: Like – exactly. Like a fertilizer. Then he'd - they'd bury that back up, and then leave that to settle for maybe a couple of weeks or something like that, and then they'd plant their cucumbers or tomatoes. We used to deliver anywhere from thirty to fifty thousand bushels of cucumbers at that particular time. We shipped it New Orleans, and then from New Orleans they'd ship to Chicago or New York and all over the country. And I – we have a - the name of the brand that they used – it was Gulf Brand Cucumber that they used to ship out of Grand Isle.

R: Wow.

F: Yeah.

R: Um, so can you tell me a little more about like fishing, farming, I mean uh, fishing, oystering, shrimping? That sort of thing?

F: I want to say in the early days, that's all my dad ever done was just fish. You know, till the oil companies came in 1948 when I was born, um, they used to fish and um, they used the *tremaux* nets – that was the way of life – where it was hot, cold, or whatever. Um, when my grandfather was here, we going out tomorrow morning, you better be there. You know, and like I said, they'd trout and redfish was plentiful on Grand Isle – still is. And anyhow, they used to take that – they used to either that on their way back they used to stop and sell that on the Chinamen's platform. Either right here across from Bayou Rigaud or the one – of course you had Manila Village also, but you had another one in between there – I can't think of the name off the top of my head what it is. That and of course shrimp too – you know. In that particular time, they would shrimp with seine – they would seine and catch shrimp. Um, very few of them had trawls – and then of course after the – they came with the motors and all that. and then these old folks, they uh, they get up early in the morning and there's about uh, two three o'clock in the morning they'd paddle – a lot of people, the um, it was shallow coming into Grand Isle – we didn't have no waterways to say I'm gonna put my boat right next to my house. Used to put it in the channel – they had a piling that they'd put down in there. A lot of them would go give them a hand – put their pilings right there where they could tie their boats and stuff. And how they'd paddle out there – and um, they'd go three, four clock in the morning, they'd make three, four, five thing drags, and uh, they'd be in by ten o'clock. Sell all their shrimp at the shrimp shed – old man John Ludwig – I mean John um, Blanchard, and um, (Forlance?) Millet was another one that they used to sell their shrimp to. And um, they'd take a nap after that. They'd take a nap till about um, maybe two or three o'clock, they'd go back on the boat, fix what they had to fix and all that, get everything, and fuel up the boat for the next day.

R: For the next day.

F: You know, they would be gone all the time, you know.

L: Two of them – I remember when Daddy and them used to leave for two or three days to the oyster place and come back with sacks and sacks of oysters.

F: That too,

R: Where were his grounds?

F: Well you didn't have no grounds at that particular time. You know, wherever you wanted to go fish oysters you could go. You picked a spot, you know, where they had a lot of oysters, and yeah. They would go for two or three days.

R: Yeah, but it seems like it would be better to go east – I mean west?

F: Well Grand Isle in general, we had a lot of oysters. And even um, to the like the north of us or to the northwest of us was you know, you had islands that could um, like if a storm or bad weather would come, you could always go on the least side of your island and get out the – out of harms way, kind of,

you know. And that's what they would do and just go through all these little islands wherever there's like wild oysters. At that particular time.

R: Well that certain marsh, yeah.

F: Right and then – I'm not gonna say that very few people over here had oyster leases. Very few, but the oyster leases that they had was like in Baratavia Bay or maybe a little e bit further up where there were open waters, you know, at that time when they came back with the rake that you could go and rake them up or at that time, but like them, they would go fish by hand. They'd bring a couple of pirogues with them, go wherever they had to go. They'd tie up to the big boat - go way back there, and just fish oysters all come back and sell them to whoever wanted oysters, you know. Especially around the holidays – everybody wants oysters, and it's still like that today.

R: Yeah. Well, let me ask you a bit about um, the sailing lugger. You mentioned um, in your childhood you remember pirogues, and...

F: When I was a kid, in the back from where we live on back of Santini lane, is um, Port – my uncle and all that, they all had pirogues to go back and get the big boat, or they used to fish out of them too. And um, I always you know, when I'd get in the pirogue, they always had a hole in the middle and I'd just – never dawned on me that – that it was for the sail, you know. I've never seen the sail, but it was probably in a garage or um, a shed that they had built, because what they'd bring - when they come back is um, they had like a little system to come back and bring the boat right there, and then they'd pull it into the out of the sun. You know, so maybe the sun wouldn't dry up the, cypress and make it leak, so they'd bring it back in there, and in the mornings when they'd want to go fishing, drag it back out, put the sail on...

R: So they basically, when they went to the putt-putt, they just take the sail, up..

F: Right. Well even after they had the putt-putt, our – I don't recall, but I remember some saying – even used the sail to go wherever they wanted to, you know, without, of course gasoline – we had a little gasoline on Grand Isle. But you know, you kind of save the monies that you had without spending anything, you know, for gasoline or whatever. So they would sail all over the pace, you know. I remember a guy by the name of Jeff Santini. He was they telling me you couldn't beat him fishing with a cane pole. You know. Just as fast as he'd throw that line out there – he'd pop it like this and make the fish come back in and they'd hit him in the chest. When it'd hit him in the chest, he'd hit his hand on the hook and put his bait, right back out. Just as fast. You know.

R: A fishing machine.

F: A fishing - and then that's – another thing, you know. Him too, you know, I mean, not only tremaux netting, but fishing by line and go catch – go sell the uh, his trout to the Chinamen. You know.

R: Yeah, Ambrose talked about that a bit. Yeah. Um, in terms of uh, the early part of the twentieth century, would've been the time you were born, um, how much of the island would you say exists today

from that point – from the twenties or thirties, and how much marsh, let's say from Golden Meadow to Larose or so, down here has been lost?

F: Oh, miles and miles.

L: Yes.

F: Of land that was lost - even back of Santini Lane where we were lived at. I kind of remember um, the land would go probably another I bet you about another thousand feet from the levee that we have right now – that's been there since I'm a kid. Um, would go at least another thousand feet, and then you had like a little channel and then you had another island would go on both sides in the back of Grand Isle – Grand Isle used to be covered. Like you ha a little channel, but then on the opposite side of it, Grand Isle was covered again by – with a lot of land protecting us. And um, I want to say like Bayou Andrew – it's just coming to me, is that I remember they had a little – not much of a cut that we used to pass there to go to the duck blind where we used to go hunt at. Um, that's Fifi Island was what come up all the way up to right here in the back of the Coast Guard Station – and then this little Island would take over from there. Um, and Fifi Island was a big island at one time. Um, it was where the Chinamen were at. Um, and in the back of that also was not as wide as it is now. We had islands all over. We lost a lot, a lot of land since, you know, I'm a kid. Um, Grand Isle – it comes and goes. My dad used to tell me like I said, they used to play baseball on the gulf. I look at some pictures of 1948, um, in the newspaper that we have over here, um, and I remember they had a nightclub – um, Tom's – and they put some um, bulkhead in – to protect – not to eat up their place. So the water was up to there at one time. And then I guess after a couple more years, it just came back and filled back up. Um, I'm trying to think of the storm that we had water probably about maybe about maybe a hundred fifty feet in the back of this place – the gulf was right here. It just ate up that much where the Exxon station's at, the uh, edge water motel water was beyond the steps...

L: Right.

F: ...of the building inside – all underneath was in the gulf, you know. Um, and even going that way, it ate up I remember um, where you go to Exxon, the camp Nellie Anne – that was in the gulf. Now you probably got a thousand feet or better that has built back up. Not saying that, you know, now since they came put up this levee that they dredged and, and you know, put the um – Grand Isle back out a little bit. Um, but then after that, it ate up some more, and it keeps building back up, and then right here, um, one of the mayors that put up like a "U" shape rock jetty out there and came back and filled it back up. Now we have um, probably a thousand – 1500 feet of beach right here in the back of us. You know, so it's – it's built up. Like I say, it comes and goes. It eats up, and it build back up.

L: You mentioned...

F: You know, back...

L: ...about Leeville too. I can remember when we'd come off the Leeville bridge, you couldn't see any of the rooftops in Cheniere. Now you can see that coming off that bridge.



F: Well, when you come up - yeah.

L: You can see all the land – you know where it's just gone.

R: Right. The thing is – Barrier Islands will shift, if they – all build and rebuild and stuff, but the marsh and everything behind it seems to be converting to open water...

F: Right.

R: You know.

F: Well as one leaves you're having more and more, um open water, and then you have rougher waters that come back and just keep eating up and eating up, you know. I remember us going where we used to go to the duck camp, um, going towards Leeville at um, East/West Canal, they had all kinds of protection back there. They had a little channel, you know you'd follow, and um, they had all kinds of islands that protect – now, it's all wide open. Um, to the elements. That just – it gets, as it opens up, it gets rougher and in the wintertime when we have those cold fronts, it gets rougher and rougher, and it keeps building back – you know, it keeps eating up, especially in the back of Grand Isle. Um, I remember I was a councilman from '84 to '88, and they had this guy from Baton Rouge, and I can't think of his name, is that he was gonna purchase the back of Grand Isle from Bon Voyage Marina which is Boudreaux Lane all the way to Plum or Santini Lane, and his intention was – he was going to dredge the backside of Grand Isle and make a, a channel there and pump the rest – the sediment on Grand Isle, and he was gonna sell waterfront lots, and he was going to build a big motel and an airport and all that, and we was all for it. And um, of course, we got the bickering and fighting, and we lost election. The following mayor that came, he just threw all that out. I wouldn't have cared if they wouldn't have done anything but to pump that backside of Grand Isle, but it would've been very helpful. You know, that way, people would start building, they would start protecting the backside of Grand Isle. And I can't understand how come the government don't let people build in the back in the marsh area – we have – I'm gonna say, of course I'm not a um, a geologist or whatever, to say that if we have an unproductive marshland, which I don't think we have an unproductive marshland, what little we got left, I don't think it is. Just fill that up – bulkhead it the backside of Grand Isle – at least try to save us, you know. Save the land.

R: Well I think something can be done about coastal erosion, but I think what we're concerned about is the rise of sea level.

F: I can understand that, you know, just...

R: Can't do much about that.

F: No, we can't. But on the other hand, I mean we're looking at people that want to buy, you know, everybody wants waterfront property – let's sell it! Let them you know, um fill up – bulkhead it where we're not gonna erode like we are eroding now.

R: Well see, some parts of the um, island are doing that.

L: Like back..

F: Well it just so happens, there was no marsh at that – in those areas. I'm not gonna say there was no marsh. I want to say when I was um, you talk about erosion again – when I was a kid, I remember they came and pumped out the backside of Grand Isle um, Bayou Rigaud all the way down to right here in fact where the Coast Guard is. That's where they stopped – that's where they usually stop. And they pumped form right there all the way to Exxon, and built the backside of Grand Isle, so we didn't have anymore marsh right there. So people started building up, and look what they have now – I mean it's a wide portion of Grand Isle. You know, getting back to the early days again, is that when they filled all that out – when they filled all that up, we filled up a graveyard that's still back here buried. Um, I don't know if it's the pirate – it's a pirate cemetery or what it is, but it's still – you can go see some tombs there right now on a guy's property.

R: Well I'll get to Jean Lafitte.

F: Haha.

R: But um, while we're still on the subject of land loss, can you tell me a bit about all your experiences throughout the years with hurricanes and storms and – I know a lot of people always - I remember when I was a kid, um, we'd always get a radio transmission form the Coast Guard Station – and the image of sixty, seventy people you know, being stranded in the Coast Guard station, you know, the entire gulf would rise up, and you know, kind of cover the island, you know.

F: Well the problem that we've always had is not Grand Isle in general, but like Leeville would always flood before us. Like I said, when I was a kid, nobody left Grand Isle. Everybody went to the Coast Guard Station. Nobody had transportation to get off of Grand Isle either. You know, very few people had automobiles that they could transport and go somewhere else. But as the years progressed, a lot of people you know, radios, I guess TV's and all that, um, I guess we have a tendency of listening in the summertime to the weather, you know, regardless. What kind of storm would come, or you know, we always looking for hurricanes that are developing – make sure that if it does develop, we keep an eye on it. If it comes close to the gulf, well you start making preparations. You know, tie down, pick stuff up, get your stuff together, make do of where you're gonna go at, and um, make sure your families – I mean, as far as I can remember, we – I never left Grand isle with my parents to get off of Grand Isle for a hurricane. We always went to the Coast Guard Station every time. I remember I left for Betsy – I was nineteen years old – I had bought an automobile, and um, I don't know if my parents – they left. They sure did. I left twice with my parents – I take that back. We took this guy Paul Terrebonne and his wife – his family – some of his family lived in Bogalusa. And um, for Betsy we left, and we went on Airline Highway - not Airline – Jefferson Highway – at a motel, we stopped there and stayed the night for Betsy in New Orleans. Left from one critical point to the next. You know, and that's another thing that you – you look at. You live in Grand Isle – man, I'm not staying here for a hurricane. You know, you look at – I live on Grand Isle. I ain't staying here for a hurricane. But, on the other hand, if it misses us, it gets somebody else a little further up north, you know. So I mean, you weigh your odds, you know, on things like that. But still in all with leaving Grand Isle is – we went up and stayed at the motel the next day,

went drop them off in Bogalusa, and I think a couple days later, I was back on Grand Isle again. You know, the roads were alright, we came back they didn't have all this um, you can't go where you ain't got no lights, no food, this that. Hey. You just make do of what you got. You gonna find something to drink and all that.

L: I was younger – I was ten when Betsy hit, and I remember we made the newspaper in Toledo, Ohio, that they took a picture of – it was three of us I think – maybe four. We were three girls and a boy left – Kelly was the only boy left home, and then my – two of my sisters. And we packed and I remember the newspeople coming down, and my momma had that little Studebaker – I think it was station wagon – something like that. And we packed and we went to Breaux's Motel in Raceland. And it was right next – it was on the bayou side, and we were there with another old lady – her name was Adele Bartholomew. And we were the only two families in that darn motel, and when the night Betsy hit, it was funny because we happened to look out the window and told Mama the water was rising, oh, and she panicked and went to see what we were talking about, but it actually the bayou. Aut after that, we didn't come home – they could because they were older. We couldn't' come home. My mom rented a place with some other family members, and we stayed gone thirty days I remember. And she would come home every day, get some of our clothes because the house had gone under, get some of our clothes and sheets and what have you, and bring them back. And wash them. The next day, she'd take off again. She did that for at least thirty days.

R: Imagine – evacuate to Raceland.

L: I mean we didn't have no choice – I mean, we couldn't go farther – I know the car was old, but things like that, and then when we did come back, we had to go to school on Saturdays for the rest of that year. I think it was a half a day on Saturdays.

R: So what was it like being in the Coast Guard Station?

L: I don't remember that. He remembers – (inaudible)

F: You know, you went upstairs, and you kind of just stayed upstairs. They had – it's a big old hall like this, and then if you look from the city hall where it is now, these are little windows, you know. And either you took the little window – that was your section, you know, you slept, um, I don't know how many – we were a good bit of us – we were eight of us, eight boys and girls plus my mom and dad, um, my mom would stay up. Of course, my dad and them – they would be downstairs. Um, shooting the breeze on the porch and seeing what was happening, you know.

R: You know, this is the same building that the...

F: The City Hall's in, yes. Sure is. And yet the (inaudible)– they were very helpful. Um, you know, the Coast Guard with everybody – whoever wanted to come. They made room for you. They'd pack them in there.

R: I bet.

F: You know. A lot of people um, would stay home too. They wouldn't – "I'm staying. I'm not getting out of my house." Um, we got this guy, Paul - I told you – Paul Terrebonne. He would sleep in his house when the water came and all that, and he was outside – the wind and everything picked him up. He's hanging on to the top of his house to save his life. You know, and after the water went down and um, you know, you've seen the debris – and I remember for Betsy, they would tell us that uh, you know, we had horses on Grand Isle, and they would see horses passing by, by the – uh, on the porch at the Coast Guard Station. Um, old lady Millet had a store right here on the front part of her store – cars were just coming down the street. You know, floating by, and a lot of people that had an automobile parked them by the church – they would just flop over. You know, all over the place. And after it was over with, people went to their homes and cleaned up, and got their business back together.

L: Never waited.

F: Didn't worry about the government coming give us a hand at that time. You was on your own, you know. You cleaned up – in fact, I remember after Betsy that um, all we had – we must've had um, probably a couple dozen barrooms on Grand Isle – maybe more than that. Every corner had one. And they had beer bottles- beer cans, whiskey bottles all over the place, and um, these guys would be cleaning up – pick all that up, wash all that up, they'd – I don't know how we would get ice, but ice was coming to Grand Isle, they'd put that in old buckets and all kinds of tubs and all that. At night – they'd have a good time.

R: That was a blessing after all that stuff.

F: Ha ha.

L: I remember the houses on Santini Lane were in the street.

F: Yeah.

L: I was at least –

F: All on top of one another.

L: I remember five or six of them being in the street. I'll never forget that – when we drove down that street. And my momma told us – you know what to look for. And when we saw that, it was like, oh my gosh. But you know, when you're a kid, you don't worry about that kind of thing.

R: Yeah.

L: Oh man, we just had something new to do, and then they started moving them and bringing trailers in, and we had a trailer – I don't remember Peco and them being home. I just remember me and the – the other three young ones. Um, being in that trailer and the trailer was so small. Like a one or two bedroom, so we stayed in the trailer, and mom and dad had to stay in the house. That was – it had broke in half. And then um, not long after that is when we built the house that's standing now – that's the house they built after that.

F: Of course, you know, you look at every storm that happened to Grand Isle – I want to refer back to Betsy, is after Betsy hit Grand Isle – well the government came over here and loaned you money at three percent. And um, what it done – it bettered people. You know, you built a better house. You done a lot more things better than what you had before. You had – you had a little fund. You had a little money in your hand. And then, like I said, cleaned up Grand Isle to an extent. When um, Katrina came, same thing happened again. In the tree line – saved a lot of homes, but then the government came and helped you out – came built a better Grand Isle again. It took all these old homes, dilapidated homes, and cleaned all that out. You know, so then when Gustav came, also – same thing. Came over here and cleaned Grand Isle – if you look at Grand Isle now, compared to those years, is that you got better looking homes. You got trailers, but we have a lot of trailers on Grand Isle, but that's trailers that people have in their homes or their properties that – I'm gonna buy a lot on Grand Isle and put it over there. Falling apart – but they manage to get on Grand Isle. That was their summer camp. But now, the we have a little more restriction on what you can bring to Grand Isle, but then you gotta go up in the air – so it cost you a little bit more money, you know, to do things nowadays. So we're a lot better off because we've got better structural home and all that uh, with Katrina you have homes made it, you know. But the codes that they have nowadays, you had – when you wanted to build a house in the old days, well uh, so and so – (phrase in French). And everybody in the neighborhood – you'd grab your wood – he was the one man was leading carpenter – he went and helped you out, you know. They built you a house.

R: Yeah, I noticed that um, after Gustav and Ike, I was down here a month later, and actually the homes did okay.

F: Very well!

R: There were few um, few blue tarps, but um, you know, I was amazed that everything went pretty well down here.

F: The homes that were left were homes probably some more homes – that's been there for years and years and made it – just barely made it through these other hurricanes, so when Gustav came - came from the north side of us. Opposite from what we get, so the house was leaning this way, it pushed it back. It straightened it up or knocked it down – one of the two.

L: Ha ha.

F: So uh, you know, give and take on these hurricanes – I'm not gonna say that even with the coast that we have right now, it's – it's up to standard, but is it gonna hold up for a hurricane? You just never know. You know, but it's a lot better than when I was a kid. Um, you know, we had homes on the ground...

R: Oh yeah, you mean in terms of building.

F: Yeah, right.

R: Structural. Well let me ask you about any stories that you might know of the hurricane of 1893.

F: The only thing I can tell you is what I read in some of these magazines – um, some of these books that we have of 1893, you know, where people used to tell me that they used to hear them crying, you know, when the water was coming up, it was in their rooms and all that, and uh, on Grand Isle – is that what I hear, we fared out pretty well. Um, like I told you, a lot of people lived in the tree line where it was protected. You know, so we didn't have a loss on Grand Isle that – what I can read and remember people telling me.

L: It's the (negroes?) that they lost, but it's not...

F: And uh, everything happened like in Cheniere.

R: Cheniere.

F: You know like..

L: Well it says like in one of those stories that I read that the Cheniere people used to use their oak trees for firewood in the wintertime, where the people of Grand Isle would didn't do that because Rigaud owned most of the island when he sold, um, a certain part of Bayou Rigaud, he kept the claims on the beach, that he could collect all the driftwood, and he would sell it to the hotels for firewood in the winter, and that's when the people of the island did - that's why they didn't perish like Cheniere Caminada – they lost, I think, over two thousand people. You know, of course, they had triple times the – ten times the people living there. Here, you might've walked in some places; maybe, you know, a couple blocks to get to your neighbor. You might not have seen your neighbor for two or three days. You know.

R: Right.

L: So...

R: So if I understand you, the Rigaud family would collect driftwood, but they would use it themselves, but just sell it to Cheniere.

L: No.

F: No, sell it to ..

L: Sell it to the island people.

F: Sell it to the island people. Driftwood would come you see at one time, the Mississippi outlet was a lot closer inland than it is nowadays.

R: Yeah.

F: So we would get a lot – a lot of driftwood.

L: Driftwood – a lot.

F: Yeah. You know, just fall on the beach. So what he would do is go collect that. he had a horse and buggy – so he would go collect that, and then either he'd trade or he'd sell it to the people of Grand Isle for firewood, for warmth, or cooking – either one. You know, we had a lot of these old ovens that was all over the place on Grand Isle where people would bake or cook – whatever. Or you had the fireplace. That was – that was the only thing that you could cook with. We had no gas at that particular time until, I'd say the early um, 1950s I guess – when we had butane gas – came to Grand Isle.

R: Yeah, I think uh, Obie Rigaud told me that they used kerosene stoves in the winter, you know.

F: Well if you – if you look up here, you see all these types of kerosene lamps that we have in here, that's what they all used, you know, to go here and there at night, and uh, they would make the (bayets?), you know, which enabled everybody to go on the porch and shoot the breeze till about seven, eight o'clock when it would get dark, and then everybody went to bed, you know.

R: So did you spend Betsy in the Coast Guard Station?

F: No. I went to New Orleans. Um, I was on Jefferson Highway.

L: Dad stayed here though.

F: Yeah, my dad and my brother stayed here. My oldest brother.

R: Did they talk about it a bit?

F: Well you know, my brother told me that when he was um, like on the porch and all that, that like I said, he'd see old man – old lady Judge Adams – Judge Adams. Ms. Millet, you know, store flying down the street, a couple – two or three cars, and everything coming down the street right there, or – and then the next – you said the water got pretty high. Um, like about maybe uh, eight or ten feet I guess, by the Coast Guard Station.

L: Then there were people staying in the church too at that time too.

F: Yeah, they had people in church.

L: My grandmother was here.

F: Yeah. And uh, he said like here, horses would pass by, you know, and island and all kinds of stuff. He said it was pretty scary, you know, when you see all that, and everybody just mumbling on the porch, you know, what the hell's going to happen to my house, and

L: Daddy saying something about the building swayed a couple of times, and that was scary for him. He said that building – they felt it, like, shift.

F: Well it was twenty feet up in the air, so I guess with the gust of winds – it was shifted one way or the other. But it was – I can't say...

R: You mean his house.

F: No, at the station.

L: Coast Guard Station.

F: Everybody was at the station.

R: Oh, well that's a concrete bunker over there, man.

F: Yep.

R: If that shifts, there's something really powerful going on there.

L: Oh yeah.

R: Um, well, uh, that brings me – I'm kind of doing this in reverse, sort of.

F: No problem.

R: Um, Jean Lafitte – you were telling me about the Nez Coupe. Could you tell us a little bit about the lineage uh, from you to Nez Coupe and all that?

F: Well, I was – I was born Frank Besson. And until I was married and I was um, I want to say 26, maybe 27 years old, Nat Chigazola, which, when I was a kid, I was always with him. He used to take care of a couple of camps on Grand Isle, and this and that, and he'd always say that his great-great-grandfather was Louis Chigazola – better named as Nez Coupe. Um, reason being is that when they went out to steal on these ships, when they was fighting all that, they cut part of his nose off, and being that it was all Frenchmen on the boat, then they nicknamed Nez Coupe, and he held onto that name until he passed away. You know, so um, they used to stay uh, right here on Nez Coupe stayed – not stayed here, but he stayed at Fort Livingston until the government chased

(Unknown): I'm sorry dad. I'm gonna come back.

F: Okay. Until uh, until the government chased Lafitte out of Louisiana. So he asked his men who wanted to come with him, and who wanted to stay. So Nez Coupe migrated to Grand Isle and built a house uh, right here in the back of us, and owned um, I want to say a good portion – a good half of Grand Isle right here in the middle. Still got – in fact, this is his property right here. And um, sold it piece by piece, built that house over there in the back – way in the back, and um, just stayed right here on Grand Isle.

R: So where was Jean Lafitte? I've heard he was on Grand Terre – some people say on Grand Isle.

F: He used to come on Grand Isle pretty often to visit some folks. I mean nobody bothered to uh, mess with him, I guess, you know, and Lafitte um, would go and steal park his ship offshore, and take his dinghies and come to Grand Terre Island. He stayed at the fort – they had a bunch of houses that they had built there, and stayed there. And then when he wanted to trade his goods, he'd stay his old dinghies, and Lafitte knew Baratavia waters better than probably you knew where you was going home this afternoon. Um, if you could see or look up and – look way down, if he could see uh, maybe a sail or something coming up, he could just take another little cut and come back further on down and hide.



Nobody even knew he was there. So he would go to New Orleans, trade his goods, and then come back to Grand Isle, and he just split the loot or the monies or whatever they wanted to do with it, you know. As far as um, that I know of, nobody ever found anything that Lafitte left behind. You know, any kind of jewels, or things that he stole. Um, he just – either he sold it, traded it off, or done something with it, but nothing was ever found, um, over here. Not that we didn't look.

L: I remember reading a little bit about when they used to have the – when they used to set these ships on fire out there, that the people of Grand Isle would kind of peek through threes and just never, never dared come on that side. And then also, that they did have some of the people that lived on the island – they would go pirate with him. And after it was over, they'd just go home. Nothing was ever said, but they never really bugged him. They stayed out of his way.

R: So you mentioned ships set on fire – well what'd they do, steal and just set the ship on...

L: Oh yeah. They would have fights out there.

F: Steal, put everything on a boat -

L: Burn it up.

F: Burn it up – let drift off, kill everybody on board.

R: Nicey nice.

F: Very nice. Ha ha.

R: Uh, well,

F: That's not cousin's. Ha ha.

R: Well you hear a lot of myth, um, but you know, you got really be a myth, and where I read, I mean I read a book he wrote, and you know he was a very eloquent privateer. He didn't consider himself a pirate.

L: No.

F: No.

L: He didn't.

F: He was a ladies' man too. He'd go to New Orleans and big old dance halls and all that, and uh, if I'm not mistaken, you know, it might be just a lie, but didn't he steal the governor's daughter and brought her back to New Orleans, you know, and gave her back to him at one of the dances, you know. Ha ha.

R: Nice guy.

F: Very. Very nice.

R: Well how we doing on time, Mike?

(Mike): You got plenty – you got uh, I don't think you're halfway there yet. Yeah, and uh, forty eight minutes so far.

R: So far? Okay. Um, so let's talk a bit about land loss. Because this is really the whole purpose of the project. Um, the marsh – what can you say about – because I remember Pat Landry telling me that there's so much salt water now, that it's eroded not only the mangroves, but underneath the marsh itself, so big chunks of marsh would get washed out on the passes, and they'd get washed up on the beach.

F: Yep. I want to say – um, when I was a kid, we had – like I said – we had plenty marsh. We had - I don't know who built the levee on the backside of Grand Isle, but Grand Isle comes from the south to the north like elevated up this way. On the backside, and they must've built this by hand because um, I remember there were people saying that everybody that had land used to take care of their own. Um, they used to dig the ditches. They used to clean them up, and they had culverts that they made themselves with planks – that to let the water out or let the water in. Well the water would never come in. It would just stop it from coming inland to, you know, because a lot of them – they would – back of Grand Isle – that's where they were farming at. You know, so they didn't want the salt water come intrude, where it would kill their plants and all that, so they would build gutters if it would rain a lot, all they had to do was go take the boards off – let the water out, you know. And everybody took care of their people or their property I could say, the canal, the ditches or whatever, and clean them up, make sure there was no debris, and he would check that floodgate, I bet you every day to make sure that salt water would not come.

R: So you're talking north of Cheniere Caminada?

F: No, right here on Grand Isle.

R: Oh.

F: You know, we had a lot of um, in fact, they still have some of these old culverts. That were – that's in. um, they buried, but I mean, they're still there on the levee. Um, so that the water – so that the salt water intrusion would not come in where their crops were.

R: Because it would ruin the cucumbers.

F: Very much, yeah. You know. And if you didn't take care of it, somebody would come and jump on you, and tell you hey. Better watch this.

R: So what do you think, in terms of marsh loss, is it – the idea of Barataria Bay and - was there Caminada Bay?

F: Mmhmm

R: Sort of you know going and eating up the salt that way, or is it wave action through the passes, or combination of both, or what?

F: I would say it's a combination of both, you know. I remember um, I guess I was a young kid – not a young kid, maybe twenty years old. We used to go to Lafitte. And even before that, I was young kid, with Nat Chigazola, is that we would go fish. I remember we could fish at Cosbon. That was a little um, they used to have oyster reefs all over Barataria Bay when I was coming up. In fact, um, I don't know if we have a picture of it over here, but they have an island with a palm tree – it's about twenty feet high, in the middle of Barataria Bay. You know, this guy planted a doctor – no, judge. It was at his camp. Judge somebody had a camp there, and he had that palm tree just as pretty if you please. But anyhow, we used to fish Cosbon, which was a um, an island made out of – these people would oyster, and they'd take these oyster shells back, into the bay, and just dump them all in one place and make these reefs. They had houses all over Barataria Bay where people would go and stay. You know, the oysters, in the wintertime they would stay there until they got their core, come back and bring them, go back out there, bring their food and all that. Um, when we go fishing, there was like Cosbon, Sugarhouse Bend was nother one, Independent Island was a big, big island. Now you – you don't even see that anymore. It just – I guess maybe the waves – we quit oystering as much as we did, and quit putting the reefs back together, and it just – that wave action, as it ate up a little bit, it washed more and more and more. Um, the back of Grand Isle, we lost like I said, about a thousand feet since I'm a kid that I can remember right in the back of Santini Lane.

R: Can you name some of the islands in barataria Bay that have been lost?

F: I don't know if – I guess everybody um, that came to Grand Isle – island people – everybody had a name for an island. Monkey Reef, Monkey Island, you know. If they done something that a name came up – I went to Monkey Island – Monkey Island, where the hell's that at, you know? That's uh, so and so – oh, you talking about um, Rafael Island.

R: So somebody else named the island.

F: Yeah. Everybody had a island – they caught fish there, or they did something, like I say, you know, that's what they named it, you know. But yes – we lost quite a bit of land. Quite a bit. You know, even after uh, I was telling you that the channel was on the Barataria – they was dredging it all out, and um, it was solid on both sides going to Bara – to um, to Lafitte and all that. that was all solid land. Um, very fruit – very few um, cuts in there where you could get out the channel. That was all just solid all the way up there. And now, it's all open. All open to the, to the elements. Just wind blown, you know, ate up the marsh –

L: Wave action.

F: I remember we used to fish at Cosbon – me and Nat, and then right up the Cosbon they had another – in fact, where Bird Island is, used to have – I remember they had two houses right there. Bird Island was by itself, and then you had like a little gap about from here maybe to my daiquiri shop. Uh, and then you had another island that had another little house on it. That uh, that people would go out and oyster

and then come back and throw their shells in there. And just keep building it up until the government came and built Bird Island for like a million dollars I think. With little rocks all around it.

R: Let me ask you this. You know, I'm not a predictor of doom or anything, but in the event that we're the last generation to see Grand Isle, what would you say in terms of the difference of the island in the life and culture of the people versus the mainland and what would it mean to see all this disappear? It's kind of a deep question.

F: Well, you know, our lifestyles is uh, is way different from the city. I mean we are relaxed over here. We don't have that hustle and bustle every day that you have to go off – red light here, red light there. Or you know, people tooting the horn at you, or uh, when you go in the store – we have a lot of people in the summertime, and um, anywhere on Grand Isle, within five minutes you can go to the store, get your stuff, and go back home. Um, in the city, you know, you're looking at a day, you know, to go get your stuff, and by the time you get out and you gotta fight with this one and that one, and um it's a completely different lifestyle, you know. We're on slow pace, us. Compared to these –

L: You kind of learn to, to fend with what you have. Also, you know, they don't have something at the store, you know, that you exactly need for something, you know, you can get by without it. You don't have to have it. You know, we've grown accustomed to that. At least I have you know, if there's something I can't get right now, well hey, maybe I didn't need it, you know. That's how we were raised.

R: Good point.

F: Some people plan a day a week, you know, to go out of town and do your shopping and take care of the banking business, your groceries, or go here or there to get this. You just make one day out of it. And uh, take care of business.

R: Let me ask you this. Because I talked a bit about this with Ambrose, and uh, you know Willy Bradbury?

F: Yes.

R: He's my next-door neighbor.

L: Really?

R: Yeah.

F: I hadn't seen Willy – it's been twenty years.

R: Since Julie died, he's had some – he has a mass for her every day.

F: I heard that.

R: Every day.

F: He was in love with her very much.

R: Yeah, he definitely misses Julie. Um, anyway, I'll tell you about that later. Um, the idea of freedom – when you live on Grand Isle, there's no real restrictions. Um...

L: Haha

R: And when you – it seems like when you cross – when you go north of Leeville, you enter the world.

L: That's why we're so unique. Ha ha

F: You know, I want to say I remember when I was a kid, and even up till today is that when duck season would come on Grand Isle, as a kid, if I didn't kill a hundred doves, I didn't kill one dove. There was no camps on Grand Isle – Grand Isle was for you. You went where you wanted, you done what you wanted to do. And it progresses until today, where now, it's kind of hard to hunt on Grand Isle because you have so many homes, and that's why there's a lot of people from Grand Isle that resents that because we have a lot of people that got camps, and it's just..

L: They intrude.

R: And then Exxon moved in, or...

F: Yeah, when Exxon moved in, but even after Exxon moved in, Exxon brought in uh, an industrial that would help out Grand Isle to the extent is that before that, all – the only thing you had in your pocket was pennies and nickels, you know, because that's what you made on fishing. You know, and maybe selling a few ducks when you went out duck hunting, you may have sold a pair to your next door neighbor for fifty cents. 25 cents a piece. Well when Exxon came to Grand Isle in 1948, it gave a lot of people opportunity to get a job where it was for fifty cents an hour, or a dollar an hour – a dollar twenty five whatever it was – at the end of the week, you had fifty, a hundred bucks in your pocket. And things started getting a little better for people in Grand Isle. People started buying automobiles, could build a better home, you know, so things started happening, and then some more people came to Grand Isle. Gulf, um, California Oil Company – Texaco came to Grand Isle. There are several oil companies that came and hired people, and like I say, put money in their pockets. You know, to buy automobiles to get off of Grand isle – go here, go there.

R: Yeah. But I mean, going back to what you said about when you hunted ducks– the feeling, because I remember Willy Bradbury telling me, he said he used to run the island every day. And um, the sense of uh, you know, all the smells and oleanders, and the salt – fresh salty air and all that. wouldn't you think that that would be – in other words, it's in your blood. I mean – I just couldn't imagine leaving it.

L: Personally, I never ever want to leave Grand Isle. I'm sure he feels the same. Never – I hope I never have to. I hope nature doesn't force us away because of the fact that the, the school – you know, I work at school. I've been there going on eighteen years. Now, since Katrina, we've lost about forty of fifty kids. But even so, we know everybody here, and it's just a sense of – and we all have our bickering at times, but when it comes down to helping your neighbor or something when they really need it, you know everybody's there for one another. It's just so unique and so relaxing, and it's just hard for me to explain at the same time, it's hard for me to give it up to all these people who come here and who come

here and they do something here that they would never do at home. That's the part of us that wants to retaliate or rebel. You know, when we see people come here and do that. Come to Grand Isle and enjoy yourself, because it's a place that we love, but don't abuse it.

R: Don't abuse it, you know.

L: Don't abuse it. You know, and then that's the part of me that gets very, very defensive um, when I see that happening, and we do have it. We're always gonna have it. I used to sometimes I say I just wish that we would've never allowed anybody else to come build here, you know, but you can't stop those kinds of things, and you gotta kind of learn to accept them. But in accepting them, we also – I also expect the people who come here to respect this place, because it's a beautiful place like no other. There's no other place like it. No other.

## PART 2

L: It's – it's – tourists come here. This is his living – that's how he makes his living. And that's fine, but it was well said the other night at the town meeting – I don't care if you have bought a piece of property here fifty years ago. You will never be a Grand Isle resident. And this lady just – she blew up. She said, yes, I am a resident. I spend half of my life here – no you aren't. You weren't born and bred here. And it – and it's something that we cherish, and I'm proud to say that my family is from Grand Isle. I was born and raised here. Actually, born – I was one of eight that was actually born here. And it makes it even more special to me because of that, but seeing my brothers – I still have three brothers that are here, and myself and one other sister live here. It's like you know, they've moved on, but I know he's a dying art. I know I am, you know, and after the storm, we get here, we do what we have to do for ourselves, then when we're done with that, we're gonna go see who else we can take care of. Things like that – that's the part of Grand Isle that I cherish is the loyalty I guess. I should say that – that's the original island people have for one another and for the island itself. It's just – it's a precious thing that you don't see. I mean, you have some people who – I mean, their mom and dad's in one town, and they've had eight children, and they're all over the United States.

R: That sense of community here, you know.

L: Yeah, and it's a sense of – I don't know what the correct word is for it, but it's just a sense and a feeling of being a part of something or somebody, and we don't want anybody else to come in.

R: Community.

F: Well, one of those things that we have is that once you have the sand between your toes that you're gonna come back to Grand Isle.

L: Yes.

F: And if you – if we look at the from years now, everybody that left Grand Isle, the majority of them came back.

L: Slowly. Or come back to Grand Isle. That's right.

F: You know. And I can remember in my twenties and thirties is that I could probably name everybody on Grand Isle that was living here. Right now, I can't go to school, and I can't tell you who – you know, I can see your face, I know who your daddy is, you know, I know this one, that one – right now, can't even tell you.

L: I have looked at every class from K through 12. I do this every year. And I look and see how many kids are from Grand Isle itself, and I bet you that out of the hundred and forty kids – well hundred and fifty seven I think in, at the end of last year, that in any given class, I cannot find more than five kids, if that many, that are Grand Isle bred. Can't – we have a lot of people now that come in, and a lot of them don't stay. You know, they may be here a few weeks. They may be here a half a year. Some come one day. Look like, you know, they might feel the sense of – never gonna fit in, you know, and just they leave. And a lot of people come here to get away from things they've done – wherever they're from that they may think we can't find out about it, but somewhere along the line, we will because somebody's always digging.

R: You eventually will.

F: Yeah. We had uh, a good instance that we had my brother was the chief of police here, and this guy was on the Ten Most wanted list in the mafia. He came to Grand Isle. He stayed here for I don't know how long, (inaudible) me and you, just like we talking right now, when visit this guy, bought him an icebox, took care of him, something wrong with the kitchen, redone the whole kitchen. My brother's um, daughter was a hairdresser. Go over there – cut his hair, fix his wife's hair and all that, they go drink coffee in the mornings and all that, and I say he stayed here on Grand Isle for a good period of time. All of a sudden, he must've found something. He left. Well the following week, we found out he was wanted on the – Ten Most Wanted in the United States.

L: That's right. Ha ha

R: But it's a – the phenomenon is – that phenomenon is for people like in Florida, or anywhere on the coast, because um, you can almost become someone else.

L: Definitely.

F: You know, we used to ship them offshore.

R: What's that?

F: We used to ship people offshore, you know, well one of the chiefs, with some of these companies out here, he made deals with them. You know, hey. Put them offshore for about six months or two, three months. Nobody would know where in the hell he would be at, and they just – stayed out there. They would make money – he could make money too.

R: But getting back to the island life, um, can you say anything a little more about the uniqueness of preserving or keeping a part of the past in the present?

F: There's only a few people I'm gonna say that wants to do that on Grand Isle.

L: Yeah.

F: Very few, you know, Leoda and I, or Andy and Jean, um, Pat Landry's another one, you know, just for instance, if you look at the old Oleander Hotel that's been in the shape that it's in right now for a good number of years, you know, that the parts – this guy – I know they got a few little coins, you know, that they can't put that thing back together, and they used to have a good business - a good restaurant business downstairs, and a couple rooms upstairs that they rent – and a lot of people – several people try to buy it off of them to redo it. You know, and even the old store, but these guys just – they got something that they just don't want to let nobody in it, you know.

R: Well it seems to me that Pat and Jean do have a good idea. Because the idea – dedicate almost solely a B and B to birders. Birders are pretty intelligent people, and pretty respectful of um, where they are. And birders look for one thing – habitat.

L: Yes.

R: You know, and that's what Louisiana has.

L: But you know, when the birds first came here, I know I felt that I was very offensive because I felt like they were coming here and kind of taking over Grand Isle, but when I look today, as to when they first came here, I appreciated it because of the fact the bird conservancy has purchased a lot of land here, which stops the – you know, it stops the people from coming here and building more and more, and where the birders have bought is a part of the island where we have the trees and the – you know, and things like that that helps save us.

R: Yeah, I also heard, I think Jean told me that the Nature Conservancy was – they got like, some big grant or something.

L: Oh yeah.

R: Oaks on Grand Terre.

L: You know, and that's the part that you know, way back when I didn't want it to change, but now when I see that it has actually helped us, than hurt us, I'm more comfortable with it, you know?

R: Sure.

L: It's a uh, I mean, coming up as a kid here, there couldn't have been a better life. We used to steal Old Man Jeff's pirogue. I was fourteen, fifteen years old, and he knew what he was stealing. He stood on the edge you know, he'd wait till we leave and then come on the edge of the levee and fuss, and shake his finger at us, and we each had a little mayonnaise jar that we cleaned out and bring out an oyster knife,



and we'd go, hell, pick six, seven oysters and eat that and come back – leave his pirogue, he never waited for us. You know, it's just a thing. You – you got hungry, you went – you could pick blackberries and make dumplings. You could – you just lived off the land here. You could go in the back where Peco's talking about at the end of Santini Lane - we could go crabbing back there, catch us six or seven crabs. You know what else we would do? We'd gather up a bunch of wood, make us a little clearing. We might've had a little pot you know, that mom might've gave us to play with. Make our fire. We'd go - home everybody would come and – did you get you – the eggs, you know? No, my mama was watching. You know, well I got two. I got you one. You know, or I go get a couple of potatoes. That's the fun. People just don't know that part. My kids didn't grow up like that. We lived off the land – we didn't have the things they have today. I was thirteen years old when we got our first tape recorder. We were so excited for that Christmas – that was the only gift we got – it cost my mama thirteen dollars. And she got us each a one.

R: Well it seems like you know, um, the simplicity of life, and then when you got something like a bike or a tape machine, it was like surreal.

L: And you better take care of them, because my mama worked all year. My mama worked all year. She used to clean Exxon camps when Exxon came; she used to iron throughout...

F: Clean shrimp heads.

L: Peco could tell you more about this – they used to have - the army men used to come here and do a different type of maneuvers – they used to come, maybe a hundred of them would come. My mama used to wash their clothes on a ringer type washing machine, starch, and iron those clothes. She wouldn't get paid a whole lot, but it was a job, and that time, she got to stay home because some of us were small. You know, it was things like that.

R: That would've been an airbase, right?

L: No, it was – they used to just come and – they used to come and bring theses um, I used to call them ducks, and the island people used to go on the beach, and they used to give us a ride – that was the best time of our lives back then.

R: Practicing for Normandy.

L: Yeah. I guess, either that's what they were doing – we would go take a ride, and they would cook, you know, they had a little campsite – in fact, my brother lives where the camp used to be.

F: Yep.

L: My brother Kelly. And I can remember the tents all being in a row, and you know, if they would cook, if they had extra, they would give it – you know, to the people who lived close by. But that's the kind of things we did when we were kids. We went crabbing, as we got older, you know, and that sometimes – that was supper for a night, you know. Things like that – we'd go. They used to have, they still have some guava trees, but you know, you could go, they had apple trees here, and lemon trees, bananas, I

mean you could get all – we used to go get bananas, and my mama used to fry that on Sunday mornings – that was breakfast – drizzled with a little butter because you didn't have, you know, you didn't have a whole lot of money to go buy butter, but we had that, and then we sprinkled sugar. That's the kinds of things we did.

R: Yeah.

L: We played marbles a lot, clear off the – my aunt had a yard. She had a fence around it. We go - everybody come with their bag of marbles. Boy, and we'd trade, and then we'd play. Another place we used to go is in the back of Santini Lane we used to call it the three (platins?) You remember that.

F: Mmhmm

L: There was three big plateaus of land – big, big pieces, but one attached to the other, and we would go out there and draw some big hopscotch's, and just play out there all day. And my mom used to come on the back porch, and when she would call us, we could see her on the back porch, and hear it as clear as a bell – it was time to come home. Don't let the sun catch you here. That's what she would say. Get home on time. Things like that was..

F: You were talking about birds, but if you see that um, that trap way at the top up there – that's some of the trap that we used to use to catch birds. When I was – when we were kids, you see all kinds of birds, and just like – if you know, the, the migration never changed, you know, but you had a hundred different types or maybe better than that coming to Grand Isle. Two or three – mulberry trees, they had a lot of vegetation, you know, for them to stand on, but that trap right there is that, we had a net on it, and it opens up like this, and you got wood that's split in half to keep it open. And there was land on there, and the trap would keep them and we'd keep them for a good while, you know, and then we'd let them go again.

L: It was just fun to do that.

F: Either that, yeah, either that or we'd take um, horses hair on the tail – we'd take that and make a loop – several loops, and just put them in the uh, in the mulberry trees – and we'd catch the birds you wanted to do, and catch them, just put them back in the uh, in the cage and keep them there for a while, and then after a while you know.

L: You had – you had – it was freedom. You didn't want to go and do anything in anybody's yard that you shouldn't have because you gotta whipping from that person, and when they went and told your mom, you got another whipping if you were doing something you shouldn't have, but we used to pick acorns, I can remember for ten cents a bucket. You know, to – Mr. Percy used to feed his pigs, and you know, whoever would buy them. And it was just so, so free. You could just walk wherever you wanted. Everything was ...

R: Let me ask you this, because you mentioned migrations in – you trap, um, do you remember any notable fallouts um, I remember Jean talked about you know, the whole yard one time was covered by bluebirds – indigo buntings. That sort of thing.

L: I don't remember anything like that.

R: And I remember – I think it was Ambrose – he told me when sometimes after a fallout, the whole - all the trees would be like covered with Christmas ornaments. It's all these tropical birds.

L: Yeah. Well they have – I can remember plenty different colors – rose birds, you could see them – now you kind of see maybe one or two, you know...

F: I can see rose birds that thing here...

L: But back then, oh gosh. It was –

F: That was like a – that was like a...

L: Like going to pick a berry off the tree, huh?

F: Exactly. The rose bird was the bird you try to catch.

R: It must've been a Summer Tanager, huh? Well it's – looks kind of like a cardinal, but no crest?

L: Yeah.

R: About that long?

L: When did that...

F: Didn't it have like a beak like a parrot, you know. It wasn't a straight beak like that. It was kind of I want to say...

R: Oh, well that's a rose breasted grosbeak.

L: Oh maybe so.

R: That's a deal. But it had red on it.

F: Oh yeah, definitely.

L: Yeah.

F: Beautiful.

L: Beautiful birds.

R: That's Bobby's Batch. Haha

F: Yeah.

R: You know, that's – I mean, all the mulberries in his yard and the backyard and the planters – they're all for those birds, you know.

F: Right.

L: But see, it's like – like blackberries were really, really plentiful. On the beach, and it's not that way anymore – I mean they still have some, but that was things that – that was your treat. You know, where they had fall, and they could make so much of that. My mom used to make this um, cookie that she would make, and I used to watch her – I just never ever thought that I would be doing that. but she used to make these cookies around Christmastime – and we used to call them bon (noms?) it was a little man – she'd cut the head. My mom was very creative – um, she'd do that, and I can remember they were never – they were never put in a container. It was always set out, and it was – I guess a hardtack cookie. You know my dad used to love that stuff. And I'll make the same cookie today – it's called a tea cake, but it was the same thing my mom made. Things like that – my mom used to make pies. Back then you had to you had to learn how to bake. I mean you know, if you wanted your family to have sweets and things like that, and there was no such thing as going to the store and just pick up a candy bar, you know, and when we were smaller. Now, I remember after Betsy, even before Betsy, we had this neighborhood – this little neighborhood store – we had two stores on our street. But one of them – we used to, you know, we used to go and pick bottles – they had the old NBC bottle? We used to pick that up – you might've got a penny for it or might've had to give two bottles for that penny. And we would save up so that we could go buy us a candy. But you didn't have candy back then – that you do now. At the local – one of the little corner stores? We used to go buy one slice of cheese for two cents. You know, and the man of the store would get so mad, but his wife was so sweet. You know, we'd wait till she'd get there, and then she gets in. "Can I have a slice of cheese?" you know, "two cents!" You know or you can buy one piece of ham. That's just the way it was.

R: Well you were – I guess like me, you were on the visage tail end of the generation that lived simply.

L: Yes.

R: And it seems like - it seems like all the generations have passed down their modes of living, and their oral traditions except now, we're losing, you know, there's no more – it's almost like the next generation won't remember anything about the past.

L: I think you're correct.

R: You know.

L: Very much so. And it's sad. Because they'll never know what this place was really, really like.

R: Well that's what this project is about.

L: They will never know.

R: To try and capture, you know, memories, and also how well – and through that, the culture – how people lived, and...

L: You know what else was something? It was a ritual. You went to church on Sundays. I don't care if you were sick, you weren't sick. And you better have something on your head – and sometimes, I can remember that we used to have this little um, it was a little lace thing-y that you used to wear. And sometimes we'd lose it, and my mom would take a handkerchief and fold it in four, but on an angle like that. It looked like that – not square, and take a bobby pin and pin it on them – that's what you went to church with. You did not walk in that church with not anything on your head.

R: Okay. I'm glad you mentioned that. The church on Caminada – that was destroyed in the hurricane – and then the bell – the bell was what? Taken and, and somehow found and...

L: They said that someone took the bell out and kept it for a couple of years, and

F: Oh, longer than that.

L: And then...

F: Westwego. Somebody brought it to Westwego. Yeah.

R: That's what I heard.

L: And then it came back.

R: Buried in a graveyard in Westwego and then dug up and brought abck, and so was the Lady of the Island Church always here?

F: Yes.

L: Yeah. That's the old one right there in that picture.

R: Really.

L: That's the first one. The one that's – the one that's across from the big church?

R: Uh huh.

L: That's the original Our Lady of the Island. They just added the two sides later and lifted it.

F: Lifted it up.

L: But that – that's the original.

R: So all of that survived the hurricane of 1918 and 1893.

L: Yeah.

R: Interesting.

L: And then where the big church is, that whole field was a cucumber field.

F: Yeah. As you can see where they're making their confirmation right behind there.

R: Oh, that's what I was gonna ask you.

F: Yeah. You see how small the church is, and later on, they put the two wings on each side. They had more and more people.

L: And that's...

F: That'll come to Grand Isle.

L: And that picture was after they erected it.

R: Yeah.

L: That was before (inaudible)

R: So would you say that about that time, um, mid 19<sup>th</sup> century would've been the biggest population on the island?

F: As far as island business, I'm – I would say yes. You know.

L: Because when we were - when we were in school, we had three and four hundred kids in school. Island kids.

F: Mmhmm.

L: Because Exxon kids didn't come to school here. They bussed them off the island.

R: So the population would've been about, what, two thousand or so?

F: I'm gonna say probably a little bit more than that.

R: Uh huh.

F: I remember – and I'm gonna go by the Board of Registration. We had a lot up to three thousand – thirty five hundred registered voters on Grand Isle.

R: Mmhmm

F: So out of that, I'm gonna say you probably had a couple of hundred – not – not resident, but outside people voting.

L: Yeah.

F: Uh, in the election over here on Grand Isle.

R: So what would you say it is today?

F: Today? We have eleven hundred registered voters. So you're looking at about fifteen hundred residents. Roughly.

L: I usually go by how many kids we have in school – and I feel safe to say that it's less than a thousand.

R: Mmhmm.

L: I do because by the – I'm going by the amount of kids in school, but then also, I have to remember and tell myself that we have a lot of people that have retired here.

F: Yeah.

L: So that may make up the three hundred. You know, somewhere in that.

R: I think you people should have your own store. Because I remember um, Old Man Rigaud saying that we all have to pay tourists prices for everything, and we don't make the money for that. You know. And um, there are – there oughta be a tourist's store.

L: And look – it's not gonna get better. Once this toll sets in place.

R: Yeah.

L: We're gonna pay – we're trying right now to keep the island residents from paying, but we're gonna catch it anyway through the groceries, the food, things like that. We're gonna catch the brunt of it regardless.

R: So in terms of land loss, would you say that Grand Isle will still be here and then LA-1 will go before it?

F: They predict us to be here till 19 uh, 2050, Grand Isle will still be right here.

L: I think Grand Isle's gonna be here for a long time.

F: Yeah, I'm gonna say the same thing. Um, of course the federal government is doing more and more things you know, to protect the coastline than they've done before. Before, it was um, well, we're gonna do this, studies after studies after studies, and now, we're finally looking at it. And what really hurt us – and I'm gonna say the entire coast of Louisiana – that's just my prediction, okay? Is that at one time we had a lot of uh, trees and stuff that would come out the Mississippi River – comes to Grand Isle, and then the trees would settle on Grand Isle and all these other island as far as that goes, and the silt would come and build up. And it would go away, but it would come back – still in all, we have a lot of trash that would build up on Grand Isle. So then, the Corps of Engineers – what they done, they stretched the mouth of the river like two miles if I'm not mistaken, my rocks, you know, so what they done – they funneled the mouth of the Mississippi River, or the kind of like shells.

R: Right.

F: Okay. So what that done – if you know, this is how I predict it happened, is that if you put a water hose in your bathtub, right in the center, it's gonna go and hit that other wall, but what it 's gonna do – it's just gonna circulate just like this.

R: Mmhmm.

F: And that's what it's doing to Grand Isle and all the entire coastal Louisiana, because they're funneling it out so far out that what it done – we got current from west to east, and it's doing this all the time - all the time. And it's eating up and eating up but if you look, it's eating up on that side – it builds up right here. You know, and...

R: Normally through Southwest Pass, it would be, what from east to south – or to west.

F: Right. That's where they're throwing the water.

R: Yeah.

F: You know.

L: I had read something.

F: So now all our debris and everything goes to South Padre Island. Nothing comes over here anymore. But you can't tell that to the Corps of Engineers – they don't want to hear that.

L: No.

F: You don't know what the hell you talking about.

R: Right. So what would you say were some of the more successful projects? Um, and I'll throw the Army Corps in. Um, because I mean, I'm from Morgan City, you've seen those tracts.

F: Well okay. You know, ya'll had a – y'all had a dam over there if I'm not mistaken.

R: Underwater.

F: Underwater dam – we took those rocks from you and brought them over here and made those rocks in the back of Grand Isle.

R: Well we blew it up.

F: Right. Exactly, you know. So we took those rocks and put them back in the back of Grand Isle – try to save our erosion from the backside.

R: Really.

F: Yes sir.

R: Well have those jetties helped?



F: Oh hell yes. It stopped some of the erosion on the backside.

L: What they put up here did good. That build up.

F: We put twenty six of them in the gulf. For two –

L: That lasted three or four years, that.

F: No. no, in the gulf. We have about twenty six rock jetties out there that's built up quite a bit, you know, since they put those up.

L: I always thought – saw we suffered a lot since the wooden jetties started deteriorating, and they never put them back.

F: Well, you know, and as a councilman at that particular year, I guess that was not in our heads to do that, but we should've kept on.

L: Yes.

F: Even at the Corps of the parish or something – somebody give us a hand and rebuild them.

L: Right.

F: You know, and we did not do that. We just...

R: You know, I heard Arthur Blanchard talk about that. So what would happen – would the sand build up behind them?

F: It would build up like – just like, you know, and I'm gonna use something else, is that the jetty is out this way, so it'd build up on this side right here because east or west, or west to east, the current would travel, you know. So it would built up right here – it'd get a little shallow, I mean a little deeper on this side, but not that much. It would still stop some of the erosion. Um, you know, and we had um, probably a couple dozen I guess – jetties.

R: So you wouldn't mind saying the jetties were more of an erosion barrier...

F: Right. Exactly.

R: ...than an actual builder of more sand.

F: Right.

L: But you know what Peco? I always wondered why – why those wooden jetties were on this end and never – I don't ...

F: Yes they did, oh yeah. They had some in there.

L: They did? Oh. I don't remember that – that was...

F: My prediction is – when they oughta do is that at the um, at the state park, if the last jetty that they have either first or second one, is that we oughta have another rock jetty – maybe on a 45 going out to that uh, rock jetty that's already there and make a T. Make a T out of it. What that would do is, or the first one that would do it – it would stop the current coming this way, and it would build up on this side of it. On the other side, it wouldn't build up as much, but then, you got wave action that's stopping right here, you got the current that's stopping right here, and depositing your sand also. But then, you throw in your current, off of this – this jetty right here, you throw it a little bit further out, and which it would throw it into Baratavia Pass. It would be no erosion on that side of Grand Isle.

R: Mmhmm.

F: This right here – the first one would build up tremendously. I know it would. And as it would build up, you'd go to the next one. And after a couple years, and see how much it builds up, you go to another one and do the same thing. What you doing there again is you throw on your current further - not further out, but you make another blockage, but as the current would come back, it would be hitting along this jetty right here that you already have the existing, and it would keep throwing, and building up all the time.

R: So when the current comes in the bay, it kind of brings sand.

F: Right. As it travels, it keeps eating up everything along side of it. You know, it keeps eating up and throwing in the sand. If you look when you get off the bridge, it, it built up uh, I don't know how much sand on that side of Ceniere.

R: So if I understand this right, they would be building a loop in the pass.

L: More or less.

R: In front of uh, you know.

F: That's what 's going on. Over there – yeah. You know, it's so deep. We got (a hundred and eighty?) feet of water in Baratavia Pass.

R: A hundred and...

F: eighty feet of water.

R: Really.

F: Yeah. It goes like this.

R: So at one time, when it was Bayou Rigaud...

F: Well Bayou Rigaud is this way on this side of Grand Isle, but Bayou Rigaud into the, you know, Fort Livingston and Grand Isle - you have that much water right there. Fort Livingston – I mean uh, Bayou Rigaud – we dredged – we try to keep it – we was trying to keep it dredged to like twenty four or twenty two feet – something like that. And then of course the silt – we threw it on Fifi Island, and it helped out a

great deal. Same thing – what they're trying to do in the Mississippi River. But instead of trying to, you know, just push this silt all the way down to the mouth of the river, is that we ought a be taking those um, dredges and just dredge it and throw it on this side the levee. And

R: I agree.

F: You know, we got the monies to do it. Man, I just put a (booster station?). You know, it's all water. Just keep pumping it out.

R: And you right.

F: Right. So then all you're doing is you're building more and more of these islands all along the coast, and the silt is not going...

R: Dedicated pipeline slurrage.

F: Hell yeah.

R: They've – David Carmadelle about that, um, I don't know if you know Kerry St. Pe.

F: Yep.

R: Um, that – he's been pushing that for years.

L: They spend too much money on studies. Studies and studies.

R: But not only that. You see, that's really the only way to save the coast. It's the only way. You can rebuild the coast in two to three years if you do that. But the Army Corps keeps coming back and saying, well we have to have a pump every couple miles...

F: For what?

R: ...and I don't think we can afford that. But that's what they do!

L: But it would be cheaper in the long run to do that than to keep doing these studies.

F: The Corps of Engineers has never done anything on a permanent basis. It's always been temporary.

R: I know – I know. All they know how to do is build levees and dredge.

F: Yeah. And that's not even permanent.

R: But the um, I lost my train of thought. What were you saying, um, about um, I forget. What were you saying?

L: Um, when I said that they spend too much money on studies...

R: Oh yeah. Right.

L: And in the long run, if they would do what you all are saying now, it wouldn't have to make any more studies because they would be proven as to what...

R: I agree. I agree. But you see, all these started with the Breaux act, um, several years ago. And, and the Breaux act was planned in three phases. Originally there was a study phase, and then there was a reflection sort of phase, and you know, everybody involved in the community debating it, and now we're in the implementation phase. So it all gets down to money from Washington. If Bobby Jindal can manage to get it – we might get the project.

L: But you know, that's another thing though. Why – Why I think about the bird conservancy again. The government's gonna spend a hell of a lot of money to save the birds. They not worried about us, but they'll do things to save the birds. So that – that's on our side.

R: It is. Yeah, I really do think it is.

L: It's on our side.

R: Grand Isle is the only inhabited barrier island on the gulf. I mean the energy of one third of our nation comes from Fourchon. They're not gonna let this go.

F: One third of our energy...

L: Well it's about time they woke up.

F: One third of the energy comes from around here – from Grand Isle to Fourchon.

R: Yeah. I know.

L: It's time that they finally see that.

R: But I'm saying. But I think the thing is – it's like the (Tefl ire?) It's the unkept secret. You know, it's been a secret for so long, and basically because they opened up the everglades. Everglades is like a household word when you say swamp. Well Grand Isle – nobody knows where Grand Isle is. People are more familiar with India or South Florida or something there. Well they gotta know now. You know.

F: Well you know, we have a lot of people that, that love Grand Isle. You know, they come to Grand – got camps on Grand Isle, and they will do anything they can to help.

L: Exactly.

F: To help out, you know, I mean if we know that we need something, and uh such-and-such has got a camp on Grand Isle. Let me talk with him and see if he can help us out, and I mean, that's our little ways of, of doing things too.

R: Yeah, and now you have this Friends of Grand Isle group?

F: Yeah, right.

R: That's how I got the money for this project

F: Right.

L: Really?

R: Yeah, Bob Stewart.

F: Well you know, the Friends of Grand Isle helped me out quite a bit you know, and after the storm we collected a few dollars from Dan Allemand – of course, I rebuilt my um, my chicken place with, and we done a little work in the, in the souvenir shop also, and of course we done this also with some of the monies that I got from them, but um, yeah. They helped us out quite a bit. We really appreciate it.

R: Yeah. It's really a very nice little museum, and I was telling Frank, you really need to protect what's here. I mean, you know, we're approaching hurricane season, and I think about Grand Isle every hurricane, you know. And I would just hate to see this destroyed.

F: And you're not by yourself. You know, a lot of people that think you know, Grand Isle – man, I'd hate to see uh, this happen to Grand Isle. A lot of folks that – even though they don't have any property, we are - any summer homes over here that come on a regular basis, you know I get a lot of friends that uh, that call me the evening after a storm – man, how ya'll doing? And this that or that, you know, we'd kind of concerned and praying for ya'll. You know, a lot of people around Louisiana kind of care about us, and we appreciate that.

R: I mean, what I was telling David, I said, you have a very important historical situation. You know? You're – I mean, you're the top of the canary and the muck. You're the brain of the canary, you know. But um, really I think that the idea of land loss, the rise of sea level, of course – you know, we can't do much about that. But um, Grand Isle is the, the very frontline. And whatever happens here, it's gonna eventually happen to New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

L: You know, I was so impressed when the parish finally stepped in. In fact, if you remember correctly, when Yule Norman um, that's was uh, unveiling a poster for the Tarpon Rodeo this year, he mentioned about Grand Isle being the only inhabited barrier island, and how much they were striving to help us, that they have finally seen that if we go, they're next.

R: Mmhmm. Yep. I notice that after Gustav, this place was like cranking. Now if this does get to Washington, Library of Congress – it's possible. What would you like to say in the event – a Congressman were to listen to this tape?

F: I would say that you know, being that Grand Isle, you know, through the history, um, with Jean Lafitte and all that, they protected Grand Isle just as much as we need their protection right now. You know, we live here. This is our home, and we would not like to see nothing happen, you know, to Grand Isle. No one that these people has control of money and the sources to protect us. That they oughta do what they can, you know, from day one, Grand Isle has been a vital um..

L: To Louisiana.

F: To Louisiana and to – and to, to the nation as far as that goes, you know. Um, not only but that Jean Lafitte and them stole products from other countries over here and brought it to New Orleans and the tradition's been going on ever since, you know. Shrimp, fish, oysters – even oil. Um, at one time, um, we had – well even right now, I'm gonna say we got at least uh, ten thousand people in the oil company that comes to Grand Isle and goes offshore. So it's – it's vital to not only us on Grand Isle but to the nation that they help us protect Grand Isle and if – I would appreciate it. I'm sure the rest of the people of Grand Isle would also um, appreciate saving and done what they have done already for us.

R: Well I'd also add that in addition to that, but as I've said before, the idea of our link to the past still exists where as – let me give you an example. I live in Houston for a couple of years. And in Houston, if a building the last five years that's a long time. And New Orleans – they do everything they can to protect the building that's been there for 300 years, you know. And the same with Grand Isle. There's a lot of history that is to be – not only preserved but understood and respected because of the fact that – when you live so close to the water, you know, and there's a sense of uh, community that doesn't exist on the mainland – that's a, that's like a precious jewel.

L: Well it's like – to me, it's like Grand Isle is a place – one of few places maybe in the state, maybe along the whole gulf coast, maybe in the whole United States – that – that you could come and talk to somebody like us that our family has been in this town on this island for generations. Since the beginning of Grand Isle. You don't find that too many places where you can – where you can go and talk to somebody who knows what – what happened hundreds of years ago here, you know. Or how - from the beginning of it. From the beginning of its time, and it's just Congressmen – this is the very unique place, and a unique situation. It's – it's the heart of Louisiana. It's the place where everybody wants to come because we have the only natural beach. You can come and enjoy yourself. You know, crab. Fish

R: It's the only held beach other than Cameron.

L: You know, yeah. And it's just – it's just special. It's a special place for me, you know.

R: Well yeah, I mean the salt water's in your veins. So how we doing on time now?

M: Uh, still got probably another thirty, forty minutes left.

F: I don't think that – there's not a governor in the state of Louisiana that we elected or appointed, whatever, that didn't' come to Grand Isle. I think every one of them, some kind of way, managed to come to Grand Isle.

R: So let me ask you this...

F: ...and see what we have.

R: ...while we're on that subject. Have you seen any difference in this Jindal administration as compared to other administrations?

F: Well, maybe she can elaborate on there. Um, you know as far as fundings, you know, to come to Grand Isle that I haven't seen – I'm gonna tell you, no. Um, since he's been elected. And it – he's probably done some things – don't get me wrong. You know, some kind of fundings that I'm not paying attention to, and I'm sure he has.

R: I think the only project is that too, thing.

F: Well, that of course.

L: The thing is – we, we're always being told that the money's there, but we haven't seen it yet. There are a lot of irons in the fire right now for this project, that project, but we haven't seen it yet. It's coming – it's been coming, but when? You know, that's a phase that I have a problem with being on the town council is that things don't happen as fast as I would like for them to happen. Because you have to go through so much red tape, or government issues, and I understand a lot of it – why it has to be. I just – the need is so great at this point for them to do something to Grand Isle. It shouldn't need all the studying and all the this and the that. I mean it's here. You can see it – it's not something that you can't see that it needs. You can see it – it's visual. Why on Earth does it take so long?

R: Well I think a big problem is that the Army Corps's afraid, uh, they're gonna do another thing wrong and be sued. Ha ha

F: What did they do right yet?

R: Ha ha

L: Yeah, I mean, for instance, we started with the burrito levee. We started on the west end of Grand Isle with a burrito levee. In the middle of the project, all of a sudden now, we're into geo tubes. What happened between the buritto and the geo? What happened? Did somebody come along...

R: The jetties.

L: ...and have a better idea? This you might want to cut, but I'm gonna say it.

R: Oh, go ahead.

L: You know, somebody came along with a better idea than maybe "Hey uncle, I got a better idea than that buritto levee. What is it? This is it. Oh! Man, this looks good. I think we're gonna take that." and there goes the burrito levee and – you know what I'm saying?

R: Suyre.

L: It's like they cut in – if it's gonna benefit – if you know somebody and it's gonna benefit you, you're gonna take a try.

R: You know, one of the things – do you know Johnny Glover?

F: Yep.

R: You know?

F: From Houma.

R: Johnny – I interviewed Johnny one time, and he told me, he said you know, it's rocks, man. Rocks will work. If you put chicken wire and stretch it along PVC pipe in the marsh, oysters will grow, and oysters will stop the wave action and also, it'll be brackish again, you know. Um, but of course, you know, that's too easy. Ha ha.

F: Exactly.

L: Exactly. How long does it take for a rock to erode – years and years and years and years.

R: Centuries.

L: That's the key. It's those rocks, and it's not gonna...there's, there's too many people making too much money off not doing the right thing.

R: Well you're probably right there, but we have a couple miles till we get off the continental shelf. I mean there's plenty of, um, shallow water to put projects in.

F: Oh yeah.

R: You know? I mean at one time, the coastal parishes used to extend fifty miles. See that's the – it's sad, but five hundred years ago, this state really extended out into the gulf, and now it's out to this. We're down to – and I always ask this question. I've done this project for – well, if I include work I've done before, I always ask a question. Do you really think a levee can stop the Gulf of Mexico? No, it can't. It's like an ant hill compared to the rise of the gulf, you know?

L: You know and the Army Corps of Engineers always waits. Why didn't they start this damn project right after Gustav and Ike? No. They were giving a little more time to settle, and to, you know, to pack up and do whatever they had to do, but now, here we are almost in the heart of hurricane season, and what's gonna happen? It's gonna come. The geo tube I believe will stay, but whatever they put on top of it is gone again.

R: Sure. Sand.

L: And to me that's just pissing in the wind.

R: Wasting money on sand, you know?

L: Pissing in the wind, you know.

R: While we're talking about the strength of say, more hurricanes in the future, um, in other words, when we see a tropical system in the gulf, and say at a high tide, you normally get flood now. South Terrebonne – Grand Isle I assume, so...



L: Not to Grand Isle, but in Leeville...

R: Leville.

L: Leville and Fourchon floods. That's why we have to leave a couple of days ahead of time because of that. It's not here. It's up a little further.

R: You know, the temperature the other day – the water temperature off the coast of Florida was 94 degrees.

L: Wow.

R: So if you look at an infrared satellite view of the gulf, it's vivid red. So the only thing this year – we have to be thankful for is El Nino. But in the future, there are gonna be more and more of these super-storms like Katrina and Camille and that sort of thing. Do you think that they'll be a Grand Isle to continue to buffer these storms?

F: I'm gonna say yes.

L: Me too. I don't – there's a saying in one of the books I read. Um, about when you have oak trees like you have here, that the land is very, very hard. And it's um, God what did they call it. Not the *la grand terre* but there was a word that they said in French. Um, about the land being so hard that even back then in the forties - and thirties and forties they felt that this place would never perish because of that. Like Last Island wasn't like – Last Island didn't have all the oaks and...

R: No. They didn't.

L: And all they had on it for that big storm in 1856 hit them.

R: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

L: They didn't have that. This place does. And that's the thing – I just got on the (inaudible) committee, and we're trying to do something about the trees that people just want to come and cut, and build a house and things like that. It takes ten good years to get a decent oak.

R: Oh, yeah.

L: You know, and it's – it's things like that.

R: Now I think that Nature Conservancy's – because if you look right on the marsh – if you look at say, a hundred years ago, Grand Terre used to be three times the size of Grand Isle.

L: Mmhmm.

F: Airstrip on it.

R: Yeah.

F: Yeah I remember that.

R: I mean, it's just amazing what it is – then and now, you know.

L: I think Grand Isle is gonna be here for quite a few more years.

F: I read in the paper – I think last week sometime where um, is it Donald Trump or somebody – they're trying – no, it's Gates. They got this big old tube that they're gonna try or they're gonna – looking for the people investing like him – is they're gonna be pumping um, cold water down about a hundred feet or maybe better, and just keep pumping and churn that water and try to cool that water off – jus tin the Gulf of Mexico to see if that would stop.

R: Yeah I've heard about that. They talked to Ilar Van (inaudible) about it, you know he's with the hurricane center in (Angou?) and Ilar said you need so many of them, it'd literally be about a thousand or so.

F: They put a few of them drawn out on a map, you know, but on the other hand, if you look at it too – if they would persuade the oil companies – same thing. Um, to all these platforms – we have over two thousand. Shit, we got more than that. If they would put a pump on each one of those. I don't know if they would be that much far stretched out that it wouldn't make any difference.

R: Mmhmm.

F: I really don't know.

L: It would be worth a try though. They're spending money on senseless things as it is.

F: And what...

L: It would be worth a try.

R: Now I'd say stretch to Florida. (inaudible) channel.

F: You know, yeah. I was gonna say – if it catches the – if it cool water would, would grab onto the channel, um, you know, that might make a difference. Who knows, you know. If we try enough.

R: Yeah, you definitely need some in the gulf.

F: Oh yeah, definitely. What I'm saying – look at all the platforms we have right here.

R: Yeah.

F: You know, and um, and way out there also, you know.

R: I'm sure it could at least have the money to experiment.

L: Oh yeah.

Well, um, so we're gonna end this up. Um, Leoda? Frank? I thank you so much.

F: No problem

L: Thank you.

R: You did really good, and before we end it, is there anything else you'd like to say?

F: Well, I hope that um, if this tape makes it like the way you say it's gonna make it, that these people that's gonna look at it and um, really uh, study what we said, and other people from Grand Isle, and they put a lot of effort in trying to help us out, and beat the erosion not only for Grand Isle but for the Coast of Louisiana. Um, that I think everybody um, would appreciate it very much, and not only trying to save us, but New Orleans, um, Gretna, St. Charles Parish, all along...

L: There's a lot to lose.

F: Very much so, and um, and Grand Isle is a very vital island, and a lot of people in Louisiana enjoy themselves. A lot of people got camps and property owners from throughout um, Louisiana, and throughout this country. Um, that owns property over here, and loves to come and enjoy themselves over here, and just hope that somebody hears this and could help us out.

R: Well thank you so much for your time, and hope we can continue in the future to do the interviews.

F: If we can help you any kind of way, we'd be more than glad to.

R: I appreciate it.

F: Um, I'm always trying to do something for Grand Isle in any way we can so that we can be there for the rest of our lives.

R: I'm with you. I'm with you.

L: I would say too the congress men or whoever's gonna see this in Washington, or hear it, that if they would just take the love that they have for their family and their country and multiply it, that's how much love that the island people have for this place. The ones that stay here – that are never gonna leave – we love it ten times better. Ten times. Hopefully it'll work.

R: Well it's very well said.

(SEPARATE PART OF THE TAPE)

F: Jean Lafitte and his men – they went stealing, and when he came back they had two gold coins – they divided the loot among themselves. And they had two gold coins left, so Nez Coupe's wife used to do the sewing and do all kinds of things for Lafitte and his brother Pierre, out the two gold coins – they gave it to her. And Nez Coupe saw that, and he said no honey, you give me the two gold coins, and the

Frenchmen boss of the family, she gave him the two gold coins, and Lafitte seen that. He said, no, he said you give them back to me, so he did that. So Lafitte at that time had a blacksmith shop in New Orleans, and he went and made the gold thimble. He came back and gave it to Nez Coupe's wife for doing all the sewing and helping them out in there. And it got lost for a good number of years, and um, we finally got it back, and now it's back in the family, and here's the gold thimble that Lafitte made.

R: Awesome.