

Arthur Blanchard Interview

Interviewer: Earl Robichaux

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

Arthur Blanchard: My name's Arthur Blanchard. I was born on St. Patrick's day in 1930 on the seventeenth. And I'm at the Port Commission Office. Um ...

R: In Grand Isle.

B: In Grand Isle.

R: Okay. Now from your earliest memories or, you know, your parents' and grandparents' stories, um, what was the earliest agricultural memories of Grand Isle?

B: Um, we came here in '52. I came in – I'm originally from Lockport, and I worked for the power company for over twelve years, and since working with the power company, I'm familiar with the people of the island. And um, my earliest um, is what I was told about the old people of the island, that they used to farm cucumbers, beans, cauliflower, and they would ship them to New Orleans. They were the first ones to get over there. And one of the reasons why their – they were first is because of the shrimp brand that they put at the foot of the uh, the um, at the root of the vegetables that keeps them warm during the wintertime, and when the winter breaks, um, they're – the food is, is one of the best eating cucumbers you can find on this earth.

R: Would you say because the soil is sandy here?

B: The soil is sandy and they have the shrimp brand, which they had plenty of it at that time – particular time because we had some shrimp um, we had a couple of dry shrimp platforms over here on the island.

R: So what – how does that relate to the vegetables?

B: The vegetables – they do the same thing. They put that at the foot – at the – not quite at the root of the vegetables, just about four, five inches away from the vegetables.

R: And let it dry?

B: And it's dry – well it's already dry. And it just keeps um, the soil warm, and that's how they – vegetables, they can have early vegetables over here on the island.

R: Hmm. So um, cucumbers, beans...

B: Cauliflower.

R: Cauliflower, um, what about watermelon?

B: Watermelon is wonderful.

R: Yeah.

B: Um, we had an old lady that used to have a place on the beach, um, in front of Ludwig Street, called Ms. Millette's. She used to raise them at 35 – 45 and 50-pound watermelon on the beach. She also had a water well that was (inaudible) pure water on the beach.

R: ...and what was her name?

B: Ms. Millette.

R: Okay. Okay.

B: She used to have a little grocery store right at the corner.

R: So what would you say Grand Isle looked like at that time? I mean in terms of – you know, a lot of oaks?

B: We had a bunch of oak trees, and we had um, people that used to farm on the island. And um, they had their own levee - protect their own from salt water intrusion, and um, they had um, homemade floodgates that they made that – when it would rain, certain people would take care of that floodgate. And then when it would rain plenty, they would watch it. When the tide goes down, they'd raise up the floodgate. Hand-made and they used to drain that water out. And um, when it was – the tide started to come up, they'd go ahead and close the floodgate.

R: Mmhm. So there was no Barataria Pass at that time? In other words, there was only Caminada?

B: No, there was Caminada and Barataria Pass. Both of them.

R: Okay.

B: And they – in the year um, I'd say about forties, the um, the tarpons was in the Barataria Pass. They were catching Tarpons in the Barataria Pass, um, in Barataria Pass in the forties. Senator, late Senator Ayo Rupley - that's where he used to catch all his Tarpons at. In the Barataria Pass.

R: Okay, um, one of the things I wanted to ask was um, you know, fishing, um, what's the word I'm trying to find here – do you remember or have any recollection or stories of the sailing lugger? You know, before there was the putt-putt, and then the oyster lugger, there was a sailing lugger.

B: Sailing – no, I don't. Um, I have a picture – in fact, I brought it over here, and Mr. Wayne Keller has a picture. I wanted to show you what um, what it's all about. He has a big picture of platforms where there were only luggers to transport the dry shrimp from here to uh, to New Orleans where they used to sell all the dry shrimp.

R: And that would be on a sailing lugger?

B: Yeah. That's the only way to get the – to move the uh, the shrimp. The dry shrimp and the fish.

R: Okay. Maybe Wayne can tell us a little bit about the history of the sailing lugger.

B: He's the man to talk to.

R: Yeah.

B: I'm not.

R: Yeah. Um, so in terms of your earliest days when you were a child, were they using putt-putts?

B: Uh, when they had the uh, I know they had some old engines that they used to have – two cylinder engines. And um, they used to have little – put sails on them to uh, save the gas that uh, they had to transport by boat over here.

R: And uh, what were these, like little Lafitte skiffs, or...

B: It was ordinary wooden boats like Lafitte skiffs. Built different though.

R: Ah. Little smaller?

B: Uh, some of them were small; some of them were a nice size. In fact, um, the picture that I brought Uh, Mr. Keller, you'll have to look at it, and you'll be able to see. It's says he had never seen something like that.

R: What, the sailing lugger?

B: The small boats that you talked about – they got small boats in there that shows where they load the uh, the shrimp and everything else on by barrel. They

R: By barrel?

B: Mmhm. They put the shrimp in – dry shrimp in barrels and then they put it on the luggers and they bring it to New Orleans.

R: So that must've been on Cheniere.

B: No.

R: No?

B: No. that was in the um, I'm trying to think – just about um, fifteen miles from Grand Isle they used to have a dry shrimping deal along the Barataria Waterway.

R: Oh, so Manila Village.

B: Manila Village.

R: Yeah.

B: I got a picture of that – a good picture of it that shows the grocery store that's there, and they show also the um, people that are walking, dancing on the shrimp. They would take the hulls off the shrimp.

R: Yeah. We know Sue is gathering up all the photos, and her role in all this is to scan them for the exhibit, you know.

B: Well I brought, um, let me back up just a little bit. I was interim mayor of the town of Grand Isle for nine months. And I was able to get hold of some nice pictures, and this is one of them that I like, and I figured that keeping them at my house is not gonna do any good, so I brought it over here, so he's supposed to get a film of stuff and set up for people so when they come in, they could look at it.

R: Yeah, good deal. Well we're gonna archive everything including photos that he takes, and you know, old photos, and uh, tell Sue. You know, we'll have copies at LSU, the museum will have copies, and you guys will have copies of the archives. And in the event of hurricanes, which you know, hit the island a lot, have backups.

B: Yeah.

R: You know, maybe in Houma or somewhere.

B: Uh, that's not a safe place.

R: Haha. Gotta go above Alexandria.

B: Haha. Um, if you – we get a hurricane, the best place to get out is over on the other side of I-12 or I-10. Mostly I-12.

R: Yeah.

B: And then depending which place is coming. If it's coming toward here, then the best thing to do is to head towards Houston and some other places.

R: Yeah.

B: Because often times a hurricane turns when it hits the land, turns to the right. It don't turn to the left.

R: I know. Morgan City, remember.

B: Haha.

R: But to get back to fishing – any notable, well let's talk a bit about shrimping.

B: Mmhmm.

R: What can you tell me about like the boats that were used and how they would trawl and where and all that...

B: Well they used to have seines in the old days. And they used to seine for the shrimp. They, they couldn't depend on if they'd go out and there's no wind, with a sailboat, they couldn't pull the shrimp net. So they had to use some seines to fish the shrimp, but they'd load it on the boats, and they'd bring it to the dry shrimp – the shrimp shed.

R: You mean the platforms?

B: Yeah. Bring it to the platforms. And then they'd dry it there – they'd catch the fish. They'd dry the fish also. It was a good market for the fish. And the shrimp – both of them.

R: I've heard about them drying trout. Well what about like, white shrimp – if you catch white shrimp in the gulf, what would you do with that?

B: Same thing. They'd bring them out and dry them.

R: Big ones, huh?

B: Big ones. Anything they could find – they uh, but they had a good price on them.

R: Mmhm. So any notable memories of uh, you mentioned tarpon. Well can you tell me other things, like tarpon, in the pass?

B: Um, there it's – we're supposed to be the ninth best fishing spot in the world – on Grand Isle. We have uh, all kinds of fish, um, we were lucky that they removed the um, the seines and our back waters in the back bays and all that was catching everything and destroying everything. Now everything is coming back again. I am a charter captain, and only in the summertime that I go out, and I usually come in all the time with my limit of, depending on how many people I have, and we usually come in with either speck, red, or um, flounder, drum, sheephead, all depends what they want. If they want sheephead, I'll bring them to certain spots. If they want speckled trout, I bring them where the speckled trout out on the reef – oyster reefs and all. But um, I've got no problem, and I'll bring uh, handicapped people also.

R: Could you talk about a little bit like in the fall when the bull reds come in the pass? Talk a little bit about, you know, what's in the pass in the fall?

B: In the Fall, you got the big drums, um, runs about about forty pound drums, redfish, they – depending if you hit the school, you can get a school of small ones, run 21, 25 pounds, and if you go into deeper water, you are – you're catch some uh 36, sometimes 40 pound bull reds, and some of the – some people fish them with crabs, and some of them fish them with mullets. And if you want to charm them, you can take mullets and cut them into small pieces and throw them overboard. But I never charm them. I usually go on the reefs, and I catch all the redfish I want.

R: And what about...

B: And you can also go in the back bay in the Barataria Bay on the oyster reefs, and certain times of the year, the bull reds are stay – they stay on that oyster reef. And um, but we can only catch one per person.

R: Yeah, the ones in the reefs. What about notable big schools of specks?

B: Um, usually you get a school – a big school of fish – speck on the oyster reefs or in the Gulf of Mexico, right along the bank, um, maybe four five hundred feet from the bank, you got a bunch of seagulls that are fishing. But usually these fish there, they're between ten and eleven inches – they're not big, big fish. Once in a while you may catch a big speck, but in the back bay when you can get a school of speckled trout, they usually run fourteen, sixteen inches. So that's why I usually stay all the time in the back bay fishing.

R: Yes. Pretty sizable trout.

B: In fact, I caught one um, last year, that Wildlife and Fisheries tagged and I happened to catch it. Up in Four Bayous over there.

R: Now between here and that west delta area, could you talk a little bit about some of the bigger fish, like tarpon you mentioned...

B: Tarpon is offshore, um, you got spade fish, you got um, oh they've got a bunch of fish – I'm trying to think of their names right now. That you can go out by the rigs – the rigs are perfect for that.

R: Pompano's.

B: Pompano's, and I worked offshore for uh, three years, up on Conoco for Double A, and we used to – people used to come fishing around that area – we'd try and find out how much fish they used to catch, and then we'd make...

R: Amberjack.

B: Amberjack and uh, Jackfish.

R: Cobia.

B: And uh, there's – the fishing is good over here. The only thing - it's expensive now because of the fuel and the – the big live shrimp right now is thirty cents a piece. And I fish with live shrimp all the time.

R: Yeah.

B: Um,

R: Even with specks?

B: Pardon me?

R: Even speck fishing?

B: Yes, speck fishing all the time with live shrimp.

R: Yeah. So as being a charter boat captain, um, you...

B: I fish, I fish the inside, and the beach. I don't go offshore. I got a 23-foot Seahawk, and um, I strictly – we used to go offshore, but what happened – you go offshore and you get people sick – seasick, because when they make an appointment, they want to fish regardless. And if it's rough, they still want to go offshore. And if you go offshore and they get sick, that day – that weekend is gone.

R: Yeah it's a lost experience.

B: They lost it. So we made uh, we made an order between my son – my son's the one that got the H&M fishing charter. Um, he has a Coast Guard license, his wife has a Coast Guard license, one in four I believe that got a woman Coast Guard license, and I've got a Coast Guard license, and we all licensed to um, but we don't go offshore no more – we tell the people straight off. You want – we bring you to along the bank or in the back bays, wherever you want to go, and or we decide to go, but we won't go offshore because we don't want nobody to get sick no more.

R: Now any um, memories of uh, notable memories of mosquito swarms? That sort of thing?

B: We had plenty mosquitoes at one time, and we were fortunate that we had um, the parish and the town were together and they used to spray with airplanes. That done some good. But then it got so expensive that uh, they had to stop it. So now what they're doing – they're larviciding the island up. And then the spraying whenever the mosquitoes – but you cannot spray for mosquitoes with over wind over thirty, over twenty mph.

R: Yeah. So when they were bad, can you tell me any stories about that?

B: Yeah, when they bad, the best thing to do is take water – salt water and put it on your face and your hands, and they leave you alone. Gnats are the same thing. That's how the old fishermen used to go out – they used to put their hands in the water and just put it on their face and just keep fishing. With salt water – at that time, they didn't have no off and that kind of stuff.

R: That's true. Um...

B: Now they have a um, at one time here on the island we had some animals – we had cows and horses and everything else. And um, the old people of the island could tell when the mosquitoes were fixing to get bad. By the animals – they'd take the beach. They wouldn't stay in the back – they'd take the beach. Because of the mosquitoes – they could tell when the animals were starting to go toward the beach, they say well, the mosquitoes are fixing to get bad. And then they make a little – around the house they make a little fire and smoke – to smoke the mosquitoes away in buckets.

R: So what about like cisterns? Y'all had cisterns?

B: We had cisterns at one time.

R: Yeah. You had to clean the...

B: The cistern was cleaned – the cistern was cleaned every two years. Now we had an old man by Mr. Rigaud. Old man Rigaud. He used to – they had a well where um, Perry Chicazola's place – Blue Water Tackle Shop, right on the corner they had a well at one time before the -I'm talking about back in the fifties. And he used to – he had a donkey – he had a mule and a wagon, and he had two drums. And um, he used to fill the water up there and then he used to go down the lane and sell the water. I think it was fifty cents a drum or twenty five cents a drum.

R: So what about like was there an ice man?

B: Later on there was an ice man that came down – Mr. Richoux came down. Mr. Ervin Richoux came down.

R: So was that a horse drawn deal?

B: No, no. That was truck. In fact he was – the people were so trustworthy over here, that at night or early in the morning, he used to put a little cigar box – you wanted some ice and he was sleeping, you open it up, take the ice you want, and put your money in the cigar box. That is funny, but it's – people were trustworthy then.

R: Oh yeah! Yeah, so that's when they cut oysters? They would use dry ice and keep them that way?

B: No, um, when they dry, when they fish oysters, they'd send them to the factory right away. They wouldn't keep them. You can keep oysters three or four days. In fact right now, we're talking to LSU, and Mr. Supan, um, the Port is gonna lease a piece of property for him to start um, oystering to find out if it's – the kind of oysters he's developing, to see if it's market worthy - people can make money out of it.

R: Yeah, John's been doing this for twenty years now.

B: Well now, he's um, we got him almost set up. That's what Wayne is doing now. He's getting his stuff all lined up so he can, so he can bring it to the board of supervisors so he can finish everything up so he can start.

R: So can you say anything about oyster luggers? No..

B: No. No.

R: I guess most oystering was to the west, right?

B: No, they had all oysters were over here. They got plenty oysters over here. And um, Mr. Collins, and they had plenty people that would oyster for themselves. Like I used to oyster – I had an oyster bed at one time. But we pick them up by hand, and it was strictly for my family. We still got a, um, Mr. Collins, and we got two or three others that still oystering right now.

R: I've heard that name before. I need to talk with him.

B: Mr. Herbert

R: Collins.

B: Collins.

R: Yeah.

B: He's in Golden Meadow.

R: Roger Carmadelle told me about him.

B: Roger?

R: Yeah.

B: Yeah, okay. Well by the way, you don't call him Roger – you call him Smiley.

R: Oh really.

B: That's what we called him.

R: Yeah, he told me his slogan was "Bridging the Gap". Haha he's a character.

B: Oh he is – I'll tell you what. He served with me in the mayor's office, and all the time when I talk to him all the time I called him Smiley. And he'd just shake his head.

R: Yeah.

B: But it's –

R: Yeah he's a good old guy.

B: Yeah, he is.

R: Yeah.

B: Real good.

R: Um,

B: Man is Wilbert Collins.

R: Wilbert Collins, yeah.

B: He's uh – he brings the oysters in to Seniere and um, from there he brings them to Golden Meadow, and um, that's where he delivers oysters at.

R: Now when you were a child, of course you grew up in Lockport...

B: Mmhmm...

R: Did you ever come down here much?

B: Um, the first time I came over here on the island was when I was in the Boy Scouts. That was in World War II. And we used to watch – we used to stay at the Camp Driftwood, and we used to watch the uh, the CPA, um, walk the beach with the uh, with the dogs.

R: So what the island looked like at that time?

B: The island was in A-1 condition.

R: Plants, you know.

B: Anything.

R: Anything.

B: You had anything you want, you had.

R: This...

B: Oranges, and um, fruit grows good over here. Fruit trees? It grows wonderful over here. And at that time when they had a fruit tree they used to put oyster shells around the um, the foot of the um, I don't know if it's – what for, but they said the fruits were wonderful with the oysters shells around them.

R: Hmm. So what other kinds of plants could you remember? You said there were oaks, oleander...

B: Oh, the plants? Yeah, they had oaks, and the majority was all oaks because it stands the salt water. And um, at one time, when I came over here and I was working on Santini Street, uh, about thirty foot wide I guess, and it was completely like tied in, and um, they used to have street lights, and you had to cut a hole in the oleander so the um, light would go through. You'd walk like in a tunnel. And then the storm came by and killed them. Betsy tore a good bit of them up, and uh, Flossie messed things up. Hurricane Flossie.

R: Alright, so this little oak run, acres or so, starts at Bobby Santini's backyard, goes out to the main road – how much would you say...

B: Not – at one time, um, they uh, I'm trying to think of the name of the – of the subdivision right now. Um, Lupe Subdivision – they used to call that um, Ben's um, farm - they used to be a line of oak trees all over in there. And finally they died with salt water and everything else, and they're now at the time has an ordinance that if you cut a tree, or a tree dies on your property, you gotta plant another tree.

R: So Grand Terre – what did it look like? Was Grand Terre just as ...

B: Grand Terre was wonderful. Um, at one time, I don't know if you know about it or what, but we had a um, an airplane um, deal that you could land your airplane there. And um, Wildlife and Fisheries used to

bring in their people there. And um, we had people from New Orleans – they used to come down and land their planes down on there – and then they'd go fish – they'd go swimming in the afternoon, and then after that they'd go back and New Orleans.

R: Yeah, I've heard somebody say that. Um, it was built – an airstrip was built during World War II or something.

B: No, Uh Uh. No, it was built after that. Wildlife and Fisheries are the ones that started that – that airstrip.

R: So...

B: But now, now the airstrip is gone.

R: Okay, well...

B: The airstrip is gone, the beach is gone, and the, the chimney's gone. They used to have a - you know, they used to have a sugar mill over there on Grand Terre.

R: Really.

B: And that's gone. That's in the water.

R: So when Grand Isle had the sugar plantations, that mill was gone?

B: Yeah.

R: Well that would've been as back as far as the early 1900s.

B: I can't say – I don't know.

R: Yeah. But did Grand Terre – I'm sure at one time – have oaks just like Grand Isle?

B: Yeah. Sure did. Had the same thing as Fifi Island. Fifi Island had a bunch of oaks, but they don't have no more now. And we're trying now.

R: There's no more Fifi Island.

B: Well what we're trying to do now is to um, we're trying to um, have the um, the Corps – whenever they dig Bayou Rigaud and the ship channel and the ship – and the uh, to put all the sand – we got some rocks and stuff that we set up, with the Levee Board – Grand Isle Levee Board and then the Grand Isle Port Commission, and um, we bought some, some – some oyster leases so we could do what would need to be done, and gradually we're bringing Fifi Island back like it was.

R: And so Fifi Island is where?

B: Right in the back of Grand Isle.

R: Oh, okay. I thought...

B: That's a protection, or that's a protection of the island from the north wind, but when they got a hurricane and the wind changes to the west and changes to the northwest, and brings all that water from the back bay, and instead of hitting the island, it hits Fifi Island and breaks it up, and that's where we get – we get some protection from it, so that's what we're working on right now.

R: So it's kind of northeast?

B: It's right in the back of the north – uh, no, northwest of the island. Right in the back. That's it right there. The top part coming down.

R: I see.

B: Show you something. This is all rocks that we put – that's some rocks from here going here, we want to finish these rocks. Now north, northwest coming down this way, all your water's coming down this way – if this wouldn't be here, Grand Isle would catch the bulk of it.

R: Right.

B: So that's why we're building this up and then the next, next stage is gonna be to try to build this up.

R: So Fifi Island is that little deal...

B: Fifi Island – from right here all the way to this point. This is Fifi Island.

R: Because I remember talking to Pat Landry, and he said Fifi Island is gone. I thought he meant up around Leeville.

B: No, no no. Fifi Island is – we're bringing it back a little at a time. What's happening – we got school kids that are coming in from all over, and um, the Port bought a boat and they come in and we bring them out there, and they plant grass - they plant trees, grass, and everything else. Last time they came, I believe they had the old – little over 200 trees that they planted out there. So gradually they're bringing it – bringing the stuff back. But you can go over there and dig and find some oak trees, um, roots and stuff. So we know that, that there were oak trees and stuff on the island – and that's what we're trying to build up again.

R: Yeah. So I would say, well, if I'm wrong here, correct me. But I would say on the west end, it's sort of building out, and on the east end, it's not. Is that...

B: Well, we got, we got rocks that are stopping it uh, from erosion now. See that line – that little line all the way around? That's all rocks that we put there.

R: Yeah.

B: And to do that we had to buy some oyster leases that to come all the way to the island. So the Port Commission bought some, and the Levee Board bought some oyster leases from people so we could do

the work like it's supposed to do. Not doing it halfway. And now, you can see the difference now. Also it's good fishing around them rocks.

R: Yeah. Yeah.

B: Especially for puppy drums. On four to six pounds, seven pounds, ten pounds, those are those kinds that don't have the worms in it.

R: Around the pass?

B: No, around them rocks.

R: Anywhere around the rocks.

B: Mmhmm.

R: Inside the rocks?

B: Outside.

R: Oh, outside.

B: Outside. Inside they just got mud that they uh, they sand that they pumped in.

R: I gotta uh, put in new tape.

B: Okay.

R: Okay. Tape two.

B: When I first came down here, we used to have animals all over the island. Cows were all over, horses were all over, and um, like I said before – when the animals used to go to the beach, people knew that they were gonna get some uh, a bunch of um, mosquitoes.

R: Now, what about – you said that um, there was this, Coupe?

B: Nez Coupe?

R: Yeah.

B: Yeah, Nez Coupe had a, had a house here on the island on Park Street off of Medical. And the old days, and they had an oak tree there and they used to – Nez Coupe and uh, Jean Lafitte, they used to uh, communicate with uh, notes and stuff through that oak tree hole. They had a hole in the oak tree – that was their um, their message of getting to one another.

R: So where was Jean Lafitte living at that time?

B: I can't answer you that. I don't know. But Nez Coupe was on the island. He had a - he had a house here on the island.

R: Yeah. So what would you...

B: I – I believe, I'm not – I stand to be corrected, but I believe Nez Coupe was part left Grand Terre. And traveled from here to New Orleans through the back bays. Now that's what I heard – now whether it's true or not, I can't answer that. I'm just telling – repeating what I was told.

R: Mmhmm. So let's talk a bit about land loss. Um, since you in your lifetime, what would you say was – how much marsh has been lost...

(inaudible) ...what have you seen on the island?

B: I hate to get into this because I've seen too many things happen. One of the things is that we cannot burn our marsh no more. So when you can't burn your marsh, your animals won't live over here no more. Your marsh – when you burn your marsh, it hardens your uh, your marsh up. When you burn your grass, it um, it hardens your – your land, and then in three to four weeks, you got small grass starting to grow. That small grass, when you go, when you have constipation, you go to the store – you go to the drugstore and you get some medicine. That small grass is constipation medicine for all the animals. The animals are no longer here no more. Now for an example, our (inaudible) had some, some expert um, rifle. The um, animals were eating the grass in town over there, in Gretna and all over, and the levees make holes. The reason for they kept moving over there because they wanted that, that grass. That young grass there. And um, when I first came down, to change the subject on this – when I first came down, when we'd pass on the road from Leeville – from Leeville from Golden Meadow over here, we had dead animals all over the place, but at that time, the people would um, burn the marsh. And now, when you can pass right now, which you can't burn the marsh no more. You can pass and there's hardly any dead animals at all. On the road. So they left. Either they left or they got constipated and died – one way or the other. But if we could burn the marsh, if we could burn – excuse me a minute. Um, right now you have no um, no burning of the marsh. You're losing your marsh because the grass roots are gone. If you pass along the highway from here to Leeville, you'll notice on the side of the road – all that, that marsh that's in the bayou – and the little ditches – that's because the roots are gone. If you could burn the marsh and you get them grass to start growing again, you'd save your marsh. It's just as simple as that.

R: Well what about nutria that eat the roots?

B: The reason they're eating the roots is because they don't have no grass to grow to eat for their digestive system. Wherever you got some young grass, you'll find animals.

R: So...

B: But the idea is that the – if you can't, if you can burn that marsh, you can burn that marsh and get that young grass to grow, you won't have no trouble. And you harden your grass – you harden your marsh. See the trawlers – the uh, the people that um, I'm trying to think of the word now. The people that traps will never, never destroy the property that he traps on. He goes ahead and he burns that marsh to keep the grass – keep the animals there for the following year. And when you can walk – when

you burn your marsh, you can walk with knee boots, and if you don't burn your marsh, you gotta have some hip boots because you sink. The mud – the marsh is not there no more. And you can see all the holes and stuff they got on the side of the road that's gone, that's because no more – no more roots to hold the grass down. Simple as that.

R: Never heard that before. Um, so what do you think about things like the Barrier Islands disappearing?

B: Let me see if I can explain something to you. We tried all kinds of ways of harvest the sand on our beach. We had a man by the name of Andy Valence. He was the mayor. I worked with him for nine months on the board – I was appointed by the uh, Governor Foster as a councilman, and um, we sat down and talked to the old people at that time on the island, and they told us, why don't y'all try to harvest that sand? And we couldn't figure out what they were trying to tell us. He said if ya'll could build something that that sand can build up again, he said, you would extend your beach and you'd save, so we got together – the board, the mayor, and the chief, and we applied for permit to put some rocks on the beach. Six hundred feet of it wide, and three hundred feet long, facing in the water. Um, it took us a while, but we finally got the Corps to give us the permit. And the only reason why they gave us this permit, is number one, they didn't think that we could pick up a half a million dollars from the people of this island and the people that had camps here, or summer homes. And we got the permit, and then we hustled the money. We picked up a half a million dollars, and Petousi Construction, the one that done the job for us, where we had nine feet of water at the end of this system that we built, and in three years you can pass an 18-wheeler there. We harvested that sand. And why nobody wants to do nothing no more about it. Now what they've done – some people – what the federal government done – they came and they built rocks along our beach. But what happened – they built it between the, the uh, system we built and where they started was at least two thousand feet away from us. So the current runs in, and hits the beach, and takes the sand and it's gone to the pass. It stopped – they said they would stop the waves from coming to the beach. It did, but it didn't stop the current. The current is what eats you up. And we stopped the current. We made the current work for us. And the system was – like I said, 600 foot wide, and 300 foot into the gulf – in the gulf.

R: So the jetties would stop the sand, must be.

B: It stopped the sand – stopped the current. What happened on each end of the jetty...

R: And the sand would just fall out.

B: Yeah. On each end of our jetty, we have...

(inaudible)

B: Now them rocks would stop the wave from coming in with force. It would slow it down, and when the current would take the sand and go around the jetty, then it would settle the sand there, and the water would keep going. And I could tell you – in three years where they had nine feet of water, you could pass an 18-wheeler now.

R: All you gotta do is keep extending the jetties.

B: Can't get nobody to do anything. They don't want. And they messed up when they put them rocks in front of the island because they stopped the wave of coming in. But they don't stop the current. It's wide open all the way. I don't know how much money they spent to fill the uh, refurbishing the beach again.

R: Yeah, well when they put sand on the beach, the next hurricane just blows it away.

B: It's funny – it's funny. It never done anything to the way we worked that. Our systems were at - stayed.

R: So your system is on the north end?

B: It's on the east side –south east end of the island. Right in front of the town hall? It starts from the town hall coming towards this way to Santini – Chigazola Street at 600 feet.

R: On the bay side?

B: No, on the Gulf Side.

R: Gulf side. Well...

B: You can walk out there.

R: So how about on the bay side?

B: On the bay side now they're putting some rocks to stop the water from the – from the west – from the northwest from hitting the - eating our um, our shoreline.

R: Yeah. So...

B: Now that's stopping it.

R: So where do you think this oyster lease for development of oysters would go?

B: He's going to put some long lines where the oysters in bags instead of putting on the ground. And he needs some place that where he could walk and do this, and um, we got the property for it. So this is what we – we uh, we doing right now. We're trying to get this stuff lined up for him to start.

R: I see.

B: And this – these oysters that he's developing will um, never be skinny, and they'd be fat all the time, so it would be a marketable oyster.

R: Yeah.

B: All year long. Now you see the oysters we have now, come April, it'll turn its milk loose and it'll get skinny, skinny till next year. But these oysters would remain fat all the time. But you've got to find out if it's marketable – if people can make money with these zone lines to bring to market. With the oysters.

R: Yeah.

B: This is what he's trying to – try to prove.

R: So no reefs.

B: No. No, no reefs. You don't have to have – it won't be on the bottom. They'd be on the long line in baskets or a net – whatever it is. And every so often, you're gonna take those nets and take them out the water, and leave the sun hit the oysters, they get the bacteria and stuff out, and then they put them back in the water again. Probably uh, six to eight hours.

R: It seems like a lot of labor to get the oysters.

B: It is a lot of labor, but the price might be just right. Right now, what, it's 45 dollars a gallon? I beg your pardon. The sack is 45 dollars.

R: The sack is 45 dollars.

B: And uh, when you got them open, it's - I think it's sixty dollars a gallon open.

R: Yeah. So like, in your lifetime, just looking at the marsh from say, Golden Meadow to here, what would you say in terms of percentage, how much has been lost?

B: Fifty percent. Because of not burning the marsh no more. Because for Betsy, we never had any problem coming to the island for Betsy. Then they stopped burning the marsh, and now whenever there's a storm, or storm that comes up, we've got to have some frontend loaders to clean the marsh off the highway.

R: Yeah.

B: And the only reason for that –because there's no more roots left in the marsh.

R: You mentioned uh, Betsy, and it reminds me. We didn't talk about hurricanes.

B: Yeah.

R: You said you had been through just about every one. Now you don't stay, but can you tell us a bit about some experiences of being in the storms?

B: Let me, let me see if I can go back to uh, Flossie. Flossie had 97 miles an hour winds recorded. Our island was cut in seven places. From the beach going this way. But it wasn't cut all the way from the – from the beach to the bay – just certain areas. And it didn't take long to fill it out – to refill the thing up and at that time, we had no um, along the highway coming in, there was nothing on our highway. No marsh, no nothing. And um, we had the electricity here um, twenty four hours after the storm. We had a bunch of damage. But we had people to come in and help us, and we had electricity here after Betsy. Not long.

R: So during Betsy...

B: I mean, correction. Flossie. I'm talking about Flossie.

R: But during Betsy, you were here?

B: No, I left, um, at ten o'clock in the morning, and the first squall followed me all the way to Thibodaux.

R: In the olden days...

B: You had to come back – come back to the island, Pat Landry and I (inaudible) hitchhike with full boats to come back to the island from Larose. To Lafitte, from Lafitte to Grand Isle. I lost my house, and um, like an old Cajun, I built it bigger and better. This is the third time that I build.

R: I hear you. So um, you know, when you were a kid, you know, what would happen during a storm? What are the things you remember?

B: The storm never bothered us. We wouldn't worry about the storm because I was living in Lockport as a kid.

R: Well what would the sky look like, you know, before weather and all that came out?

B: Oh, we had wind and rain and everything else and squalls, but at that time, we didn't worry about it because we didn't – there was nothing we could do about it. We were safe where we were at.

R: You got any warning signs?

B: No. No. we had uh, battery radio, and that was put on only for emergency. When I was a kid.

R: Because I always used to hear when I was a kid, the Coast Guard Station in Grand Isle, everybody was like, that stayed here, went to the old Coast Guard station.

B: Yeah. Um, people would for Betsy, and for um, Flossie, the people were told to leave, and those that didn't leave would go to the Coast Guard Station. Now when the Coast Guard – when they built that place in Bayou Rigaud over there, um, their people would leave and the only – I believe they had six or seven people that would stay over there at Bayou Rigaud. And um, then it become the old Coast Guard Station became the Town Hall, and that's where people used to go at. And for Betsy, we had um, we had – I think it was four people at – or six people. Four, five – I believe that stayed for Betsy. Everybody else moved off the island.

R: What I understand is that the island would get covered by water except for the Coast Guard Station.

B: No. Coast Guard Station – the old Town Hall which is the Coast Guard Station. Alright for Betsy, for Flossie, we had um, see if I can remember for Flossie we had eighteen inches of water. For Betsy, we had four and a half feet of water at the Coast Guard Station – or at the Town Hall. They used to have little white pickets all around the – and the only thing you could see was just the top part of the pickets – little white dots on top of the water. And um, the other thing – animals are smart. We think they're

dumb, but they're smart. We had a man here that had a (inaudible) Brought it (inaudible) on the steps at the old church – not the new church, the old church (inaudible) platform up there. And the horse decided to want to get down. The storm was over. That horse knew when the storm was over. And the man's name was Richard Demonier. He's deceased now. But that horse knew when that storm was over – when the danger was over. It walked back down and walked around.

R: Do you think that the storm of 1893 has affected the way people look at hurricanes today?

B: I think so very much. Because that's when Cheniere got cleaned out. The people on the island um, got real hurt, but not as bad as Cheniere – Cheniere cleaned out completely. I believe they got pictures somewhere of all of the Chenier being cleaned out.

R: Can you talk a little bit about that?

B: No, I'm not familiar with it. The only thing that I was told is that um, Murphy Crosby's wife – her grandma saved her life by having hair long enough that got caught in the tree.

R: I heard that story.

B: Well that's a true because I knew Murphy's wife very well. And she told me, she told me that um, said grandma um, life was saved by her hair got caught in the tree.

R: Yeah, I think Richard Crosby told us that.

B: Yeah. That's Richard's um, great-grandma.

R: So nowadays, it seems like the gulf is so hot, when, you know, hurricanes get from the Caribbean into the gulf, it seems like you're right at ground zero.

B: Hmm?

R: For these big storms.

B: Um, let me back-track something. We talked about this system that we, we done with the mayor Andy Valence and the deal. In front of Grape street, which is about a half a mile on this side of where the um, the stuff was – the um, we build the stuff, you go over the levee and you walk twenty five feet, you was in the water. Since we built this thing, right now, you got at least a baseball (inaudible) Jetties (inaudible) built the system. Built up the front part of this island. In fact, right over here, you walk over there and you're twenty feet you was in the water. You got – you got about maybe a two, three hundred feet now before you get to the water. All because of a system that we built. And we cannot get a permit – we cannot get anything to build – to keep building that system up. If we'd keep on building it going toward the Barataria Pass, um, we could build this island like you wouldn't believe. And save our levee that we have. Now, this is my personal opinion about this. Listen carefully at what I want to tell you. When you go over the Caminada Bridge, you notice that sand levee on the other side of the Cheniere. On the end of Grand Isle, on the Caminada (inaudible) there's a rock jetty there. What they done, and

this is my personal opinion now. What is being done – the current comes in and takes that rock jetty and sends that sand, and across and building up um, that sand, sand levee at um, on the end of...

R: Caminada Beach?

B: Yeah.

R: Where Elmer's Island used to be.

B: Yeah.

R: Yeah, I can see that. In fact, we were out there this morning.

B: And that is my opinion why it's being done. Now if they'd take a rock jetty and move it in front of Caminada Avenue, which is the road that goes from the bridge to the, to the gulf, instead of that sand going to Cheniere, it would build, it would build the end of that island out.

R: Okay, well let me ask you this. In spite of all the projects um, and coastal erosion, and you know, both – for other reasons, um, they're saying that sea level is rising.

B: We said that um, from what you're right. That's what I understood, and yesterday we were talking about the island sinking. So many years, the island sinks about a quarter of an inch. Exact amount, I can't answer that.

R: And sea level goes up.

B: Sea level is coming up. That's what I heard yesterday talking with somebody yesterday – he was telling me that.

R: That's the purpose for this project, you know. That's the big elephant in the room.

B: Mmhmm.

R: You know, all of South Louisiana is under the gun – even where I live, I mean, you know. So I'm just curious to see if you have anything to say about rising sea level, you know.

B: Well, I don't. That's something that I don't think we can do anything about.

R: So what would you do?

B: Huh. Ain't nothing you can do but raise the island up with sand. Keep building our beach up. Keep protecting the back part of the island up. Keep putting some structure that would harvest the sand that's in that water. Now the old days, let me go back to the old days when they used to seine the beach. The island people – the old people. They could not have a cuff in their pants, nor when they'd go seine, they had to take their pocket and pull it out. They'd get in the water with the current; sand would fill the pockets if they didn't pull the pockets out. The cuff was full of sand. They couldn't go into the house – the old ladies wouldn't even let them go into the house. That's why all the old people – they

don't have a cuff in their pants when they'd go trawling – when they'd go shrimping. Um seining, and um, it's – it's one of those things, but that's what made us think about trying to harvest that sand that's in that water. The old people was telling us that, and we started thinking about it. And that's how we devised - we done what we could on paper, and we brought it to the Corps. We wanted a – but they couldn't think that – they never thought that we could raise half a million dollars. In fact, we done the job 465,000 dollars. They still got some money left in there.

R: Yeah, I remember when were talking to uh, Clovis...

B: Yeah, Ovin.

R: He was talking about driftwood in the old days on the beach.

B: Yeah. Mmhmm.

R: Well it seems like that traps sand.

B: It does.

R: You know.

B: It does. That before they went ahead and uh, stopped all of the uh, the drainage that comes out of the Mississippi River and push it all out.

R: Well can you talk a little bit about the driftwood that built up and all of that...

B: The driftwood um, people used to in the olden days, they used to take the driftwood to burn to heat themselves up. And some people used to come down, pick up the driftwood, and make decoys because they had some good lumber for that. And we used have some trunks – some trees that used to come over here, six, seven foot in diameter. And on one side was sand and the other side was nothing.

R: But you don't see that anymore?

B: No, no. not since they stopped the drainage coming this way.

R: Well also the uh, the gulf outlet and stuff, you know. I mean everything is – everything goes off the continental shelf.

B: That's what we can't understand – why they taking that sand and moving it into uh, a thousand feet of water. That don't make sense.

R: Well you know,...

B: And another thing that happens there, is they're taking that sand, and the chemical in that sand, it's causing dead water.

R: Dead zones, yeah.

B: Dead zones.

R: Well they're experimenting with uh, diversions (inaudible) they don't really know.

B: Well, I don't think they know. Honestly I don't think. Now Dixon Bay, which is on this side of the river, they used to have some openings there that used to come to the gulf and uh, Poston Fin and all of that area. And now, that's – we, I used to pass there to go hunt at the end of the year every year, and um, right now, I don't think we can pass there no more. The only thing they had to do is to reopen and let that sand come towards, towards the island, and I think it would build it up.

R: So what about areas that have been converted to open water? Can you...

B: Oh, we've got plenty. We've got plenty of it.

R: Can you name me the islands that have disappeared?

B: I don't know the names of the islands, but I can show you on the map all the islands in the back of the – in the back of Grand Isle that have disappeared because of it. I used to have a camp. And um, and right now, they got three foot of water there. And that used to be land there all over. And that's gone. But if – I can show you some maps – the land that disappeared.

R: So why is it that Queen Bess seems to hang on? You know, when all these other placees seem to go under.

B: Well if you notice, they got rocks all around Queen Bess.

R: (inaudible)

B: Now, they got different names for Queen Bess. They got Razor Island, they got Queen Bess, they got two other names – I forgot the names of it. And that's good fishing all the time because of the rocks that the Wildlife and Fisheries built around it. And right now, from what I understand, they got a certain amount of money allocated from Wildlife and Fisheries to make some reefs. So people can go fishing. We're trying to get some reefs built over here if we can. We're trying to save Independent Island. At one time, Independent Island had camps there – ground and everything else. It's gone. There's not more ground – there's no more nothing. In fact, the Wildlife – the Port spent something like six thousand dollars to go put a piling where um, Independent Island is at so people don't run into the old pilings that are underneath the water.

R: Well we're almost at the end of this tape. Um, anything else you can think of to say about land loss?

B: We need to put some rock jetties.

R: But I mean, just what's disappearing, you know.

B: Yeah. And um, if the oil companies want to put some pipelines, not to dredge uh, forty, fifty foot wide. Make a canal – take marsh buggies, and um, just dig where the pipeline's at – that's it.

R: Put them on the bottom.

B: Put them on the bottom. Don't put no dams. You put a dam, it's over with. You're gonna lose the land. Because the property where I had my camp at –I had three dams. And that's what caused the problems. That and the current coming around the dams. It ate up the whole thing.

R: Well I'm gonna go ahead and uh, close it up here.

B: I appreciate talking to you.

R: Same thing here!

B: I hope I can uh, do you some good.

R: You said some really good things, and I thank you so much.

B: Okay.

R: You know.