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Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

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Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Gerald William Bosarge

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

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*An Oral History with Gerald William Bosarge, Volume 1043*

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## Biography

Mr. Gerald William Bosarge was born on November 13, 1934, in Pecan, Mississippi, to Mr. Charles Bosarge and Mrs. Bosarge (born Saksa, in Finland). He is married to Mrs. Harriet Janice Zirlott (born in Coden, Alabama on June 27, 1945). They have two children, Gerald William Bosarge Jr. and Lori Ann Bosarge. At the time of this interview, Mr. Bosarge was retired from commercial fishing, and after forty years of fishing for a living, he currently fishes for fun and sustenance. He is from a multigenerational fishing family, with ancestors who fished on both sides of his family.

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## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

GERALD WILLIAM BOSARGE

*This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Gerald William Bosarge and is taking place on November 18, 2011. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.*

**Hester:** —hooked up and started here. Move this a little bit closer. OK. Let's take a look at your address and so forth. OK. This is Barbara Hester with the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage with The University of Southern Mississippi. I'm here today with Mr. Gerald Bosarge in his home (the address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy). It's Friday, November 18, 2011. Thank you so much for having us in your home today, Mr. Bosarge, and if you would, would you give us your name and your address?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. It's Gerald Bosarge, (the address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy).

**Hester:** OK. And what is your occupation, Mr. Bosarge?

**Bosarge:** Well, I'm mostly retired. I oyster, catch oysters some now.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. I didn't mention the time; we're starting about 10:15 in the morning.

**Bosarge:** Yeah, OK.

**Hester:** Yeah. How long have you been oystering?

**Bosarge:** Well, oystering, well, I mean I do all, I did all kind of seafood. But oystering (0:01:28.1) probably forty years.

**Hester:** Wow. Is that right?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. See, what we do when we shrimp, we oyster in the winter when the shrimping's bad. I mean, you know, when the shrimping is bad in the winter; I'll put it that-a-way.

**Hester:** Uh-huh, OK. When did you begin fishing? Did you learn from your father or a member of your family? (0:01:53.3)

**Bosarge:** Well, no. I just picked it up, I guess. I started when I was in grammar school, working on a boat. And when I got to high school, I got a full share; shrimping that was.

**Hester:** And so you learned from working on the boat—

**Bosarge:** Yeah.

**Hester:** —when you were in grammar school.

**Bosarge:** Right.

**Hester:** About what grade were you in then?

**Bosarge:** Well, probably the seventh, eighth, like that.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And then how long did you continue working?

**Bosarge:** Well, just in the summer months, you know, when I was out of school, and then when I got in high school, I worked on bigger boats in the summer months.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And was it with a company or individuals?

**Bosarge:** Well, it was a company boat, yeah, uh-huh, but it was an individual captain of it then, you know.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And who taught you? Who would you say is the one that taught you how to fish?

**Bosarge:** Well, when I started, I started with my brother-in-law's father when I was in grammar school, but wasn't much to it. That was all—you did everything by hand; you wound the winch, nets in the hand, everything. Of course, that wasn't yesterday. (laughter)

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah. It was harder work then than it is now, would you say?

**Bosarge:** Oh, yes, it was a lot harder.

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah. Could you describe the equipment?

**Bosarge:** What, the shrimping part of it?

**Hester:** The equipment that you used when you first started.

**Bosarge:** Oh, yeah. They just had a roller. You wind it in by hand. And then you picked it up. You didn't have nothing to pick. You had a scooping rack. You untied

the tail of the net, and you hooked it on, and you scooped them out of the scoop net on that, unless it was so large, you could just pull it on by hand.

**Hester:** And what kind of fish were you catching in that way?

**Bosarge:** Shrimp. They was mostly small. Some big shrimp but the smaller size shrimp, like forty/fifties and stuff like that.

**Hester:** Um-hm. And would you catch other things in your net, as well? (0:03:59.6)

**Bosarge:** Just a few fish, flounder, and white trout or something like that. Well, ground mullet.

**Hester:** And you would market everything that you caught?

**Bosarge:** Yes, right, uh-huh.

**Hester:** OK. And how did the fishing change over the course of your forty-year career?

**Bosarge:** How'd it change? (laughter) Whew! Well, everything changed, (0:04:24.3) better equipment, more rules, more regulations. Well, see, I'm not just shrimp and oysters; I'm also a snapper captain. See, the last years would mostly been snapper fishing.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. You're a snapper captain?

**Bosarge:** Yes, uh-huh. And then when it got bad here, I worked down in Honduras for about fifteen years.

**Hester:** Oh, my goodness. When was that? About what years?

**Bosarge:** Whew! I probably give it up about five years ago and count back about ten or fifteen years from before that.

**Hester:** I see, I see. Can you describe the change that you faced when you went to fish in Honduras?

**Bosarge:** Well, we worked here, and we worked all down in Texas and, oh, Louisiana coast and all that. And it was getting kind of slack, so we was a-fishing down there from Pascagoula. We'd run down there with a boat, and we'd fish. And well, I had built a shrimp boat during the meantime, and I was shrimping a good bit, too. And they called me and wanted me to go down there. So I got down there, (0:05:45.5) and Honduras had extended their boundaries out where they never did bother us. And I went down there. I just happened to hear them talking. And they was catching a boat down there, so I left. And that was where the fish was, and then we realized there's a

company down there we could work for. So we'd go down there and fly down there and work.

**Hester:** I see. And you worked there for about five years?

**Bosarge:** Well, no, more; probably about twelve or fifteen years.

**Hester:** Oh, OK. That's right. It was five years ago. Can you take us from Honduras? You came back to Mississippi? What waters did you fish over the—

**Bosarge:** What waters? Oh, you know latitudes and longitudes?

**Hester:** Yes.

**Bosarge:** You talking about? All right. Probably from about sixteen to eighteen or something like that. See, Honduras coast, they got a lot of coast, but out that-a-ways where we was going, that's not really wide, that part there. I think we'd go down to about fifteen, I believe it was, fifteen to seventeen, say, in there.

**Hester:** OK, OK. And did it change? I mean, do you use the same methods over that distance? Or if you go down south beyond a certain point, you have to use another method of fishing?

**Bosarge:** Well, if we went down further, we was in Nicaragua's waters, and we didn't do that, I mean, because I got caught down there years ago, so that was enough.

**Hester:** What is the closest to our shores that you would fish? (0:07:27.2)

**Bosarge:** Closest? Well, most of the time you was off sixty miles, like that because the water drops off slow here, unless you was right around the mouth of the Mississippi River. Then you'd be closer in.

**Hester:** Um-hm. So did you fish at all in the Mississippi Sound?

**Bosarge:** Shrimped.

**Hester:** Shrimped, uh-huh.

**Bosarge:** Yeah. I didn't catch no—uh-huh.

**Hester:** Well, let me ask you this, first. Do you have members of your family that fish, as well, maybe uncles?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Well, they used to, but most of my family, what fishing they did was like commercial net-fishing for fish, like mullet and speckled trout, and stuff like that years ago.



**Hester:** And they did it as a commercial fishermen?

**Bosarge:** Yes, uh-huh.

**Hester:** But was your father a commercial fisherman?

**Bosarge:** Ma'am?

**Hester:** Your father was a commercial fisherman?

**Bosarge:** No, my father—yes, he was, too. Yeah, uh-huh, but my father's been dead since I was two years old.

**Hester:** Oh, I see. I see. So you learned from, from other—

**Bosarge:** Other people, yeah.

**Hester:** —family members.

**Bosarge:** My uncles and stuff like that, yeah.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. So it's a family, a family career?

**Bosarge:** Right, um-hm.

**Hester:** You mentioned state and local regulations. How did the state and local regulations affect the way you fished and your business? (0:08:53.8)

**Bosarge:** Well, one thing, there's federal, a lot of federal regulations, too, like when they put the TEDs [turtle excluder devices] in, the turtle excluder devices, (0:09:02.1) and fish excluder devices, and all that. That really cut us way back. And then when you get the—when you finally learn how to use it, get it perfected, then they change it on you. You got to go to something else, and you go through the same crap, again.

**Hester:** Oh. What was the first big change that you had to make?

**Bosarge:** Was on them TEDs.

**Hester:** Um-hm. And was that a negative effect on your business?

**Bosarge:** It was a lot negative, yes, uh-huh.

**Hester:** Did you have to buy new equipment?

**Bosarge:** Yeah, you had to buy—well, you had to buy the TEDs part, and another thing, say, if you're dragging, and say, somebody's old crab trap or something gets in

one net, and gets in that [TED], that opens it up. And all your shrimp go out on that side. You might have a good drag on this side and nothing on the other side. So it really affected us a lot.

**Hester:** Did you have to change the number of people on your boat?

**Bosarge:** No. We didn't do that, didn't have to change the amount of people.

**Hester:** How many people do you have on your boat?

**Bosarge:** Well, on shrimping I'd carry one, sometimes two. And snapper fishing it's six or seven besides myself. (0:10:13.7)

**Hester:** Wow. Could you describe your boat?

**Bosarge:** Ma'am?

**Hester:** Could you describe your boat? (0:10:19.3)

**Bosarge:** Yes. It's a sixty-[foot]. The boat I had, my own boat, shrimp boat, is sixty-foot long. It's named *Lori Ann*.

**Hester:** *Lori Ann*?

**Bosarge:** Yeah, my daughter's name.

**Hester:** When did you get it?

**Bosarge:** Whew! I couldn't tell you, for sure. I mean, it's—

**Hester:** It's been that long.

**Bosarge:** But I sold it a few years back.

**Hester:** Did you?

**Bosarge:** Yeah.

**Hester:** So you have a new boat now?

**Bosarge:** No. That little skiff I got out there is all I got now.

**Hester:** I see. So when did you sell it?

**Bosarge:** I sold it about six years ago, I guess.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. So are you still commercial fishing, or is it mostly for yourself?

**Bosarge:** Me?

**Hester:** Um-hm.

**Bosarge:** I just catch a few oysters now, mostly.

**Hester:** Um-hm. And how do you market your oysters? (0:11:01.7)

**Bosarge:** We sell them to a shop, in the shell.

**Hester:** Directly to a retailer, or do you go to—

**Bosarge:** No. That's the wholesaler.

**Hester:** A wholesaler?

**Bosarge:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And how has the marketing changed from when you started?

**Bosarge:** Well, on oysters we used to just go, just go get in the boat and go oystering. (0:11:24.0) Now you got to check in. You got to check out, and all kind of stuff. And of course I hadn't oystered any this year, yet. In fact, they hadn't been doing it too much this year, yet.

**Hester:** Um-hm. When will you start?

**Bosarge:** Probably Monday.

**Hester:** Oh, OK.

**Bosarge:** Um-hm.

**Hester:** Take me through a day, if you would. Suppose you were going to go fishing today. How would your day start, and what would happen during the course of the day? And about when would it end?

**Bosarge:** You talking about on the oyster part?

**Hester:** Let's start with the oyster part.

**Bosarge:** OK. Well, right now you'd have to go over there to Cedar Point, and you'd have to check through the conservation; I guess it's conservation. And then you go oystering, and you catch your oysters. That's all by hand. And then you got to knock

the little oyster—that's what they call culling—put them in a sack, your seventy-pound sacks. And then you got to check back through with the conservation when you're coming out.

**Hester:** Um-hm. What's it like at the conservation points?

**Bosarge:** Well, I don't know right now because I hadn't, really hadn't been over there, but I think they got it perfected. I think to start with they had it pretty bad. It was slow because there's so many of them.

**Hester:** So people are lined up?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. That's what they told me. Now, I didn't, I didn't go over there, but that's what a fellow told me.

**Hester:** So is this a new thing?

**Bosarge:** Well, see, to start with, they was having to get—now they got it all computerized. I think they go through pretty quick. I understand that now.

**Hester:** How long has the conservation point been there?

**Bosarge:** Well, that's just the last couple of years, I mean. I mean, what it was before, they would just come out and check us for size and weights, and all that kind of stuff.

**Hester:** Did they look at your equipment, too?

**Bosarge:** Your equipment, yeah.

**Hester:** And the catch when you come—

**Bosarge:** Yeah, well, all you got are rakes; ain't much to look at on oystering.

**Hester:** Yeah. I've never heard anything, anybody talk about the conservation point, so I'm curious.

**Bosarge:** Yeah, right, uh-huh, yeah.

**Hester:** So when you go oystering, where would your destination be to do the oystering?

**Bosarge:** Well, right now over here, they call it Heron Bay where they catch them. That's over here, just off of Cedar Point, [Alabama]. You ever been to Dauphin Island? It's right close to the road there where they're catching now.

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah, OK. I had said Mississippi before, and I meant to say Alabama.

**Bosarge:** Yeah.

**Hester:** I live in Gulfport, and I'm thinking Mississippi Sound and Mississippi.

**Bosarge:** Yeah, right, right, uh-huh. Well, see, Alabama—now most of the oysters, the last couple of years, it's been bad in Mississippi, too, oystering has. But most of them from here was going over there because for a good many years, it wasn't no oysters. You see, you had a lot of dry weather, and the conchs come in and killed them off. (0:14:09.8)

**Hester:** Oh, is that right?

**Bosarge:** Uh-huh.

**Hester:** When was that? When did that happen?

**Bosarge:** Just, say, five years ago. Well, that was before the oil spill. It wasn't no oysters when the oil spill come.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. There weren't any oysters out there when the oil spill happened?

**Bosarge:** Unh-uh, no.

**Hester:** After the oil spill or before?

**Bosarge:** Before.

**Hester:** It was no oysters before the spill.

**Bosarge:** No oysters before.

**Hester:** Wow.

**Bosarge:** I mean, you want me to tell you the truth, and so—

**Hester:** Absolutely. Do you think that was Katrina? Do you think Katrina did something about that?

**Bosarge:** No. It was conchs.

**Hester:** Is that a cyclical thing? Does it happen every few years when the conchs come in?

**Bosarge:** No. That's the first time I ever know it to really happen that bad.

**Hester:** Is that right?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Um-hm.

**Hester:** Wow. So how would your day go if you were shrimping?

**Bosarge:** Shrimping? Well, shrimping was trips. (0:15:00.2 ) (laughter) We'd be gone five or six days or something like that, as long as you could keep them on ice.

**Hester:** I see.

**Bosarge:** And, well, shrimping is something; it don't get dark, or it don't get daylight; don't rain or whatever. You just *go*, sometimes twenty-four hours a day, according to whether you catch anything or not.

**Hester:** Did you have an ice box on the boat, a refrigerated boat or—

**Bosarge:** Ice.

**Hester:** Ice.

**Bosarge:** My boat was ice, yeah.

**Hester:** And that restricts the number of days you can go out?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Well, we could carry enough ice, we could stay a lot longer. But to have real nice, pretty shrimp, I didn't stay too long because I wanted my product to be good.

**Hester:** And you would come in after how many days?

**Bosarge:** Well, generally, about six days.

**Hester:** About six days.

**Bosarge:** Um-hm.

**Hester:** Oh, yeah. Where would you shrimp?

**Bosarge:** Well, now, a lot of my shrimping was in Louisiana, some in Mississippi and Alabama, but mostly it was Louisiana.

**Hester:** I see. So if you were to leave to go shrimping today, you would head towards Louisiana.

**Bosarge:** Yeah. You'd get a load of ice, fuel, your groceries. Then you got about a

eight-hour just running time to get down there to where you shrimp at.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Do you have much contact with other fishermen—

**Bosarge:** Oh, yes.

**Hester:** —when you're out fishing?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. We had radios and all.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. So they could probably tell you where, what spots are good and that sort of thing?

**Bosarge:** Yeah.

**Hester:** I had somebody tell me about that. I thought that was, that was interesting. So why did you enter, why did you decide that this is the career that you wanted to do?

**Bosarge:** Well, just, you just got started in it when you're young, and then I worked different jobs. (0:16:51.8) I'm a welder, [machine] operator, most anything I can do.

**Hester:** I see.

**Bosarge:** But you always go right back to fishing. Well, I mean, I could make more money, one thing. Of course I was away from my family there. That made it bad.

**Hester:** Sure. So are you still doing multiple jobs?

**Bosarge:** No. Well, yeah, I guess I am because I'm redoing a room in the house. (laughter)

**Hester:** Oh, more your, more your personal—

**Bosarge:** Personal, yeah, but I don't—right now I'm just pretty well retired, unless I go oystering or something.

**Hester:** I see. I see. Interesting. What were the prices like when, when you started? How have the prices changed? (0:17:39.3)

**Bosarge:** Well, when I first got my boat, before then, when I was shrimping, the first big boat I worked on, worked offshore. We was getting like forty-eight cents a pound for tails for big shrimp. And then they got high. And then when I sold my boat, they was low, and I think they've been low ever since.

**Hester:** What made that happen?

**Bosarge:** Imports, they claim. (0:18:10.9) But, well, I can't see it that-a-way myself. I mean, maybe I'm wrong. All right. Now, this year I was talking to different ones. I mean, they was getting like ninety cents a pound for a forty/fifty count shrimp with three-dollar-a-gallon fuel.

**Hester:** Um-hm, got you.

**Bosarge:** So I just don't believe that they can ship shrimp in from somewhere else, catch them, process them, ship them here for that price.

**Hester:** Got you.

**Bosarge:** I mean, common sense tells you they can't. So I mean, so I think it's a lot to do with dealers and stuff like that.

**Hester:** How so? Could you explain that a little bit more?

**Bosarge:** Yes. Well, like I say, I mean, you take a foreign company. They got to pay people to catch the shrimp. They got to have boats. They got to have fuel, everything. I don't believe that they can shrimp, catch shrimp over there and process them and ship them here for no dollar a pound. What I'm saying, you know.

**Hester:** Right, right. So you think that the prices are affected by something else?

**Bosarge:** Well, I don't know. I mean, that's my way of thinking. I just, I just don't believe they can do that.

**Hester:** Right, right. Well, do you have any idea what it might be?

**Bosarge:** Well, the dealers, maybe they ain't making as much on the foreign shrimp, and they're trying to make it up on us. I mean, I ain't saying because I don't really know, but—

**Hester:** Got you.

**Bosarge:** I mean, it stands to reason they can't get that shrimp over here for that price.

**Hester:** That makes sense. How has the market changed, the way that you market your product? (0:19:49.9)

**Bosarge:** It's basically the same.

**Hester:** From when you started?

**Bosarge:** Um-hm. You just catch your shrimp. You bring it into the dealer. They



unload them and weigh them, and you get paid for them. It's basically the same.

**Hester:** I see, I see. Does your family eat fish and seafood? Are they seafood eaters?

**Bosarge:** Well, my son, he worked with me a little bit, (0:20:12.3) but I guess I expected too much of him. (laughter) And he's a carpenter now. (laughter)

**Hester:** Oh, he changed occupations.

**Bosarge:** Yeah. (laughter)

**Hester:** Yeah. Well, does your family have a particular type of seafood that they enjoy eating?

**Bosarge:** I'm sorry?

**Hester:** Does your family have a particular type of seafood that they enjoy eating, themselves?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Well, we have plenty of fish. We have plenty of shrimp. We have plenty of crab. Oysters, I hadn't had no oysters lately, but we generally do. We eat all; see, mostly what we do eat is seafood.

**Hester:** I see. I see. You had talked about TEDs earlier, in the state and regulations, local regulations. What other state and local regulations affected you? (0:21:03.4)

**Bosarge:** Whew!. Well, on the snapper, when they put a limit on that, well, that said definitely you couldn't work here; you *had* to go overseas to work.

**Hester:** What kind of limits did they place?

**Bosarge:** Well, I think—now, I don't know. Last I heard, like you was allowed two thousand pounds a day for maybe a couple of weeks or something like that.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Have you fished for any other types of gill fish?

**Bosarge:** Well, I commercial fish with gillnet fishing and stuff like that for speckled trout, mullet, and all that.

**Hester:** Have the gillnet restrictions affected your business in any way? (0:21:42.0)

**Bosarge:** No, I don't—well, yeah. See, in Alabama now, you can't buy a license unless you already had it.

**Hester:** Why is that?

**Bosarge:** Well, they're closing it down.

**Hester:** Oh, wow.

**Bosarge:** See? All right. My son-in-law's a fisherman. He can't pass his license on to his son, even. When he gets out of it, that's it.

**Hester:** So there just closing down the local seafood industry—

**Bosarge:** Well, Mississippi did it—

**Hester:** —commercial fishing?

**Bosarge:** Florida did it. Now, Alabama's doing it.

**Hester:** Why do you think that's happening?

**Bosarge:** Sport fishermen. (0:22:17.3)

**Hester:** And how would that change happen? What do you think the reasoning would be?

**Bosarge:** Well, the sport fishermen, they the ones got the power with the economy, state legislatures and stuff. And see, just like on the snapper, well, they went against the commercial fishermen. Now, they down to where they can't catch but one fish. They hurt their self going against somebody else.

**Hester:** I see. I see. Wow.

**Bosarge:** And there's plenty of snapper; always has been. (0:22:52.5)

**Hester:** Have you seen any change in the snapper population?

**Bosarge:** Well, I know. See, snapper, I mean, I'm a professional fishermen; I can tell you. Snapper, if you bother them too much, you can't catch them. They won't bite the hook. And that was the problem. You see. They said, "No fish." But that was one of the main problems. They blamed the oil rigs for no fish, but a oil rig draws fish.

**Hester:** Wow. So I'm wondering about the sports—I mean, are there a lot of sports fishermen out there that are fishing?

**Bosarge:** There's a lot of sport fishermen, yeah, uh-huh.

**Hester:** Yeah. And do they affect the population of fish in the port?

**Bosarge:** I wouldn't think so, no more than the commercial fishermen do because, you see, a lot of stuff, it takes care of itself. All right. Just like say, the snapper, you get where you can't catch them; well, people go out of business. And then you start catching more again because there's less boats. Same way with shrimping.

**Hester:** Over the course of your career, have you seen this rotation of maybe a few bad years, and then it'll kick in, and you'll have—

**Bosarge:** Right, right. Well, let me explain something on shrimping (0:24:16.2); I mean just to give you an example. Shrimping was good. The boats was making them; I mean, they was really making them. In fact, when they got to building boats in Bayou La Batre down here, every shipyard was building as many as they could. And they was building so many boats, you could sell your contract for \$50,000. Anyway, they got all them boats, and then the shrimping dropped because there was so many boats out there. All right. So then the Germans and all that, and a lot of boats went to Africa and all that. Well, shrimping picked back up because there wasn't as much.

**Hester:** Right. That makes sense.

**Bosarge:** Uh-huh.

**Hester:** Yeah.

**Bosarge:** And right now there's very few out there because they can't afford the fuel. (0:24:57.3) Just the good shrimpers can make it.

**Hester:** So the boats are getting the high prices of fuel just like the people driving down the streets.

**Bosarge:** Right. I was talking to a friend of mine, while we're on the shrimp. He got a boat. Well, he's a good shrimper. I mean, he does good. He got a *big* boat. I mean, mine was a small boat. But anyway, he was down in Louisiana, and he told me he left to come home. And all the way home—that was on west of the Mississippi River—he said he didn't see a shrimp boat, and used to be just solid shrimp boats all the time.

**Hester:** How has business been in Bayou LaBatre and Coden?

**Bosarge:** How's business?

**Hester:** How has business been? How has it been lately, and how was it before?

**Bosarge:** I don't know for sure, now. I couldn't say on that. But I just don't see the—now, I can't say because some of the smaller business is out.

**Hester:** Are there any professional organizations for fishermen? (0:26:07.3)

**Bosarge:** They got some down there. They might have a little bit. I don't know.

**Hester:** Um-hm, um-hm, yeah. Could you tell a little bit about what the seafood industry means to you and your family? (0:26:25.3)

**Bosarge:** Well, any more it—I mean because I'm mostly retired and just catching stuff to eat. I catch a lot of fish to eat; I mean my own fish, everything. But other than that, as far as the living part, it's not too much no more, but there's still a lot of younger people, coming on that I'd advise them to stay away from it.

**Hester:** Is that right?

**Bosarge:** Um-hm.

**Hester:** Why is that? Is it money?

**Bosarge:** Well, I mean the rules and regulations and all that because it just ain't there no more. Well, you see, you take a big boat. They burn about twenty-five gallons of fuel an hour, at three dollars and something a gallon. (0:27:12.4) (laughter) He's got to be a good producer. Now some of them can make it, but most of them can't.

**Hester:** What makes the difference between the two?

**Bosarge:** Knowing how.

**Hester:** And what do you believe is the correct way, I guess, to do it to make it work with the high fuel cost?

**Bosarge:** Oh, well, like when, well, say, a dollar a gallon and stuff like that but—well, to give you an example, I was talking to a friend of mine. He said to fuel his boat up—and that's before it went up there, like at two and half—was twenty-seven thousand and something dollars just for the fuel.

**Hester:** Wow. (laughter) So you got to catch a lot of fish. (laughter)

**Bosarge:** You got to catch a lot of shrimp—that's right—which he does. But see, what's a help to him: now, it's not many boats.

**Hester:** So he's catching more fish because he—

**Bosarge:** Yeah. See, he can catch more shrimp because there's not as many boats a-bothering them.

**Hester:** Got you. So the seafood industry now is not as closely intertwined with your family because you're retired, but what did it mean to your family when you were fishing every day. (0:28:35.7)

**Bosarge:** Oh, it meant a lot. I mean, that was our livelihood. I mean, the more I could produce, the more my family could have.

**Hester:** I understand.

**Bosarge:** Uh-huh. And see, that's one reason I started snapper fishing because that's where the money was. I could make more, a good bit more in that than I could shrimping.

**Hester:** You were saying that you did some other occupations. Was it to fill in, or was it equally balanced with fishing?

**Bosarge:** No. When I did that, I generally just did that, like I welded some, and I worked at a plant in Bayou Casotte some, and all that. But I mean, we'd go backwards when I worked them jobs. I really couldn't come ahead, so back to the boats.

**Hester:** Got you; I understand.

**Bosarge:** Uh-huh.

**Hester:** I'm going to take it a step further, the question. What do you think the seafood industry means to this community in South Alabama? (0:29:37.1)

**Bosarge:** Well, right now, just like the oystering, the way they talk like it's a lot of them, so it's a big help, especially with no jobs, the economy, no jobs around, but I guess they got a few around, now, here. But it's definitely a big help for a lot of people.

**Hester:** I understand. [Hurricane] Katrina hit, 2005. How did it affect commercial fishing? (0:30:07.4)

**Bosarge:** Well, I can't say. I mean, you lost time and all that, and then you get a—like for the shrimpers, it's puts a lot trash out there, and it gets in the nets and keeps them from catching shrimp. But other than that, I don't know that it did much.

**Hester:** How did it affect you, in any specific way?

**Bosarge:** No, unh-uh.

**Hester:** You didn't lose any boats or equipment or anything like that?

**Bosarge:** No, unh-uh.

**Hester:** And it didn't affect your business, at all, really?

**Bosarge:** No, unh-uh.

**Hester:** Did you see any down days after the storm?

**Bosarge:** No, I didn't. I mean, for myself I didn't, anyway.

**Hester:** Um-hm. What about the BP [British Petroleum Deepwater Horizon] oil spill in April of last year? (0:30:52.9)

**Bosarge:** Well, that's just one of the things. I mean—

**Hester:** How did it affect the community?

**Bosarge:** Made them a lot richer. (laughter)

**Hester:** How's that?

**Bosarge:** Well, BP was putting out the money.

**Hester:** And what were the people doing?

**Bosarge:** They was getting all they could, I guess. (laughter) It just—

**Hester:** Could they fish?

**Bosarge:** No. Well, I mean, stuff was shut down, far as fishing and oystering and all, but it wasn't no oysters, anyway; I'll put it that-a-way, but I mean—and as far as right here, like the gillnetters, what few was left, it probably hurt them some because they couldn't fish for a while. But they went to work for BP, I guess, anyway, and probably did better.

**Hester:** And what were they doing for BP? (0:31:42.8)

**Bosarge:** Just their boats out there, that boats of opportunity [Vessels of Opportunity] and stuff like that.

**Hester:** Did you do that?

**Bosarge:** I put in for it, but I never did get a call.

**Hester:** What do you think was the reason for that?

**Bosarge:** Friendships. Some of them had four or five boats and stuff like that. No. Let me take that back, now. I didn't put in to BP. What is it? Same thing, just another company, operating *for* BP, and they said that we had to go to this meeting to get your boat in. So me and my brother-in-law, who lives right down here, we went to the

meeting. And he put in for BP that day, and I'd go to the other place and put in. We was going to work together, and both of us still waiting for that call.

**Hester:** So you just didn't get the call.

**Bosarge:** Didn't get the call.

**Hester:** Were there a lot of people in the community that were waiting for a call, and they didn't get the call? Were there many fishermen in the community that were waiting for a call and just didn't—

**Bosarge:** I don't know. I know people that got, worked in plants and all that, got leave of absence and all to do it, but we didn't get to do it.

**Hester:** Um-hm. What were the expectations for the fishing season before the oil spill? (0:33:07.0)

**Bosarge:** Well, for oystering, it wasn't no expectations that I could see. But that's what I was doing, but for gillnetters and stuff like that, I guess it was some.

**Hester:** What about shrimping?

**Bosarge:** Well, that hurt the shrimpers, too, unless they went to Florida or Texas or something like that.

**Hester:** Um-hm. When you heard about the oil spill, did you do anything to prepare for it?

**Bosarge:** No. I mean, all I had was my skiff, and it was here, so I didn't have to do anything.

**Hester:** So you were using the skiff then. You had sold the big boat?

**Bosarge:** Yeah, like for the oysters. See, what we was doing before the spill, they'd get some, and they'd passed so much. Go out there and check the bottoms and all that kind of stuff, and we'd make a little money like that. In fact, whenever we was dealing with BP, they told me I was one of the very few could prove I was a oysterman.

**Hester:** One of the few that could what?

**Bosarge:** Could prove I was a oysterman.

**Hester:** That could prove you were an oysterman.

**Bosarge:** Yeah, other than a license, see, where I showed where I'd pay tax on my

money and stuff.

**Hester:** Got you; got you. So you had that communication with BP about—

**Bosarge:** Yeah, right, um-hm.

**Hester:** And that was in the course of making a claim or something? (0:34:31.2)

**Bosarge:** Yeah, making a claim.

**Hester:** Got you.

**Bosarge:** Yeah, uh-huh.

**Hester:** Were you happy with the results of that claim?

**Bosarge:** Yeah, with the claims I was satisfied. I mean, they did what they said. I mean, no problem.

**Hester:** OK, good. Can you tell me what your thoughts were when you heard of the oil spill? What ran through your mind?

**Bosarge:** Well, (laugh) I don't know. I mean, just, I've been through so much. Stuff like that you don't—I've been shipwrecked. I've been gun boat caught [fishing off Nicaragua]. I've been through it all, so.

**Hester:** Oh. Were you in the service?

**Bosarge:** No. I was never in the service.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Did you have a chance to do any fishing before they closed the waters?

**Bosarge:** No, unh-uh. Well, if I'd have did any, it'd just been sport fishing anyway, so it didn't really matter.

**Hester:** Because the season wasn't open yet?

**Bosarge:** Well, the season for sport fishing, like you can pretty well sport-fish most any time of the year.

**Hester:** I got you. I see. So did it work out for you at all, as far as doing the fishing then?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Well, I mean, I didn't do no fishing. I always have enough fish in advance, where we don't worry about it. I mean, we try to keep enough in the freezer



to where we—

**Hester:** I see. How did you find out about the Vessels of Opportunity program?  
(0:36:06.3)

**Bosarge:** Just people talking.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Was there a good response, that you know of?

**Bosarge:** Well, a good response, you talking about the people?

**Hester:** Yes.

**Bosarge:** There was a lot of people that got into it.

**Hester:** I've heard some fishermen say that a lot of people who actually weren't in the fishing industry were involved in that.

**Bosarge:** I know people that was.

**Hester:** What businesses were they in?

**Bosarge:** Well, I know—well, somebody said lawyers. And now, I'm just talking now, but I know people that had jobs, got leave of absence to do that, to work on these boats of opportunity.

**Hester:** Got you, yeah.

**Bosarge:** I mean, now, a lot of it's hearsay, but that's not hearsay. That's facts. I know a truck driver did the same thing. He parked his truck. (laughter)

**Hester:** Yeah. And you found about it from other fishermen.

**Bosarge:** Yeah, right.

**Hester:** So how did you apply?

**Bosarge:** I just went there and told them I wanted to enter my boat. And, well, you had to go get your boat approved by the Coast Guard. So whenever they told me, well, they took my name and all, "We'll call you." I didn't even go get my boat approved because I knew it wasn't no use, when they tell you that. I mean, I've been around enough to know. And then my brother-in-law the same day had signed up on the BP side, and he didn't get a call either.

**Hester:** So a lot of people in the community that were—

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Some of them got it. Well, some of them had four or five boats going. (laughter)

**Hester:** How were the waters over here? How were the waters affected by the spill over here? Did you see any oil or tar balls?

**Bosarge:** Well, let me tell you what. The only odd thing I saw was on television. I was out there. I worked three days. A friend of mine needed—he had to be off three days, and he got me to run his boat, and I did work. That’s all I worked for BP, but I worked for *him*, really, and I didn’t see nothing. (0:38:22.7)

**Hester:** Do you think there was any under the water?

**Bosarge:** Well, now, I don’t know. I can’t say on that, but I don’t believe it was, not there. Now, I ain’t talking about on the beaches of Dauphin Island or wherever. We was inside waters. But I will say this; that stuff, they was stretching out them booms; that’s all just a waste of time. (0:38:38.9) Of course that was showing they was doing something, all I could see.

**Hester:** Did you see any catching any oil? Did you see them catch any oil?

**Bosarge:** No. I didn’t see none. I mean, I did see some on television. Well, here’s the thing about it. If the weather—the slick—no wind, they would probably work, but any little wave would wash it right across the top of them, if it would have. I mean, I didn’t see it, but I mean, I know it would have because I’d seen what was out there.

**Hester:** Right. Well, when you’re oystering, you’re working with the bottom. Have you seen any on the bottom?

**Bosarge:** No, unh-uh.

**Hester:** You’re still in the industry, but as a retired fishermen now, just going out occasionally, how many times do you go out a week?

**Bosarge:** Well, right now I hadn’t been because my sister-in-law’s been sick. And my wife’s been tied up in that, but if you go, it should be five days a week. I mean, they close it up on the weekends.

**Hester:** Um-hm. So looking at what happened with the oil spill, and just say, the year before and where you are now, would you say that you’re back where you were before the spill?

**Bosarge:** Well, (laughter) let me put it this way. Right now, they’re getting some oysters. Before the spill, we wasn’t getting any. (0:40:14.2)

**Hester:** Got you. So it’s a little bit better now.

**Bosarge:** It's a little bit better right now, yeah. Like I say, the conch had killed all the oysters out.

**Hester:** So they're coming back?

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Well they, they planted a lot. (0:40:25.8) They planted rocks and stuff like that. My boat wasn't big enough, and I'm too old. It's too much work, but that helped. Now, they moved some oysters down in Mobile Bay a ways. That was just a waste of time; I believe. When they did open it, in Mobile, they're doing pretty good. The ones that really wanted to work now is doing good.

**Hester:** Good. And the shrimping and the gill fish and snapper, they're doing well, too, now?

**Bosarge:** Well, yeah. You see, like this time of year a lot of shrimpers, when the shrimp starts falling off, they go oystering. But I think it's a few more shrimp this year, too, out there, but there just wasn't much price.

**Hester:** What do you see for commercial fishing in the future, just as a general statement?

**Bosarge:** For commercial fishermen in the future? (0:41:17.6) Well, now, for me, I'd advise anybody to stay out of it. I mean right now the way it looks, go for something else. Now, I know some people's making good money at it. I know a few but not a lot. And they some of the best fishermen, too; I mean best shrimpers and all.

**Hester:** Have been doing it a while? Have they been doing it a while?

**Bosarge:** Yeah, right, been at it for years, yeah. Another thing, shrimping, well, see just like that fuel, another thing about shrimping or anything, well, if you're in business for yourself, is controlling your money once you get it. That's got a lot to do with it.

**Hester:** Would you say that the fishermen that are still out in the waters, fishing are old, middle-aged, young? What would you say?

**Bosarge:** Well, they're all different ages right now, but what I'm talking about's that's doing—one of the better ones is, he's probably not even good middle-aged yet.

**Hester:** Do you see many young ones?

**Bosarge:** Well, yeah. It's mostly young ones, deckhands and stuff like that.

**Hester:** You see any young fishermen coming into the business?

**Bosarge:** I don't know, now. I mean, of course I ain't too involved in it like I was, but I'm not, I don't see too much anymore.

**Hester:** Well, I think, Mr. Bosarge, I have exhausted the questions that I had, so I will just give you the opportunity to make a record of whatever you want to say, if you would like to tell us something about your career as a commercial fisherman, a statement about the industry. What would you like to put on the record to be preserved?

**Bosarge:** Oh, well, I wouldn't know. I mean you know just that I'd been doing it all my life, and I mean—and when I say something, I believe that. I mean, it's just—I wouldn't know how to say it. But like I say, I mean, fishing was good for us. I mean, we made a good living. We have pretty well what we want. But like I say, right now it don't look good. And you see, right now, say, now boats like mine is a waste of time to be now. You need a big boat. You talking about over a million dollars just for the boat, and you better have some knowhow. (laughter)

**Hester:** Yeah, and money for fuel.

**Bosarge:** Yeah. Well, see, let me tell you something else about seafood; I mean about boats, running the boats, captain. You got to have a feel for it. You got to have a draw for it. To shrimp, they're going to be over there. Somehow, you got to *know* they're going to be there, somehow or another. I can't tell you how. But that's the same way with snapper fishing. You just got something that's drawing you there. You know? I mean, a lot of people don't understand (laughter) that, but it's that-a-way.

**Hester:** It's sort of in your blood.

**Bosarge:** Right, right, uh-huh. And when I was younger—well, let me put it this way. I could be working twenty-four hours a day, and say, we go to bed at ten o'clock at night. I'd tell my crew I want to get up at two o'clock. I didn't have to set a clock.

**Hester:** Your body knew what time you had to get up.

**Bosarge:** Yeah, that's right.

**Hester:** Amazing. Well, thank you so much, Mr. Bosarge. I've enjoyed it. Thank you for inviting me into your home.

**Bosarge:** Yeah.

**Hester:** And I'll go ahead and turn the tape off now.

**Bosarge:** Yeah. I hope it helps you out, hon.

**Hester:** It has very much.

**Bosarge:** All right.

(end of interview)

## APPENDIX



Gerald Bosarge, 2011