

Mississippi Oral History Program

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Oliver Goldsmith Brown IV

Interviewer: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

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An Oral History with Oliver Goldsmith Brown IV, Volume 1043

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

OLIVER GOLDSMITH BROWN IV

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage.. The interview is with Oliver Goldsmith Brown IV and is taking place on May 4, 2012. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArmey.

Scull-DeArmey: This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Project of The University of Southern Mississippi done in conjunction with the NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] Voices from the Fisheries/BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster Project. The interview is with Mr. Oliver Brown, and it is taking place on May 3. I think it's the third.

Brown: Fourth.

Scull-DeArmey: The fourth? Uh-oh, I'm lost in time and space. OK. May 4, 2012, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArmey. And first I'd like to thank you, Mr. Brown, for taking time to talk with me today. And I'm going to ask you for the record, could you state your name, please?

Brown: My name is Oliver Goldsmith Brown, the fourth.

Scull-DeArmey: And for the record, how do you spell your name?

Brown: O-L-I-V-E-R, G-O-L-D-S-M-I-T-H, Brown, B-R-O-W-N, and I-V.

Scull-DeArmey: And when were you born? (0:01:11.4)

Brown: December the third, 1940.

Scull-DeArmey: And where were you born?

Brown: In Morton, Mississippi.

Scull-DeArmey: M-O-R-T-O-N?

Brown: Correct.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Where did you grow up?

Brown: The first four years I lived in Morton, Mississippi, with my parents. My father was killed in spring of 1945, and so Mother, my mother moved back with her

family to Waynesboro, Mississippi, a farm southeast of Waynesboro, Mississippi, and that's where we lived until I was an adult, until my mother died a month ago.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. And just for the record because it will be interesting information to people who hear this somewhere down the line, would you tell us a little bit about your childhood?

Brown: Certainly. I was raised on a farm, a standard farm upbringing for southeast Mississippi. It's not good farming country. People can scratch a living out on the farm, but it's certainly not like the Delta or any rich area for farming. When I was a child, it was done with horses and mules. We grew a little bit of cotton and then enough corn to feed the animals. The main thing that we grew, as far as value was concerned to the people that were growing it, were vegetables. We grew plenty of vegetables to eat; we were never hungry. We had a lot of canned goods and meat. We didn't ever have any trouble as far as food, but there was just very little money in the society when I was a child. It was just this is not a rich country for farming. Most of the men made their living in oil field or shipyards or something, somewhere else. And the rich people were like rural mail carriers and that sort of thing that had a regular job, a railroad employee or something like that.

Scull-DeArmeY: We were talking a little bit before we started about the timber industry in Mississippi being—

Brown: It was at a low point at that time. Mississippi has a huge forest that runs across it. It's called the Pine Belt. It's one of the best and largest areas for the growth of timber in the United States. It goes from the border with Georgia all the way to Palestine, Texas, across Mississippi, Alabama, and Louisiana. Highway 84 just runs right through the middle of it. There are countless mills and pulp mills and sawmills and timber activities throughout that area. At that time, 1940 and 1945, it was at a low point. The virgin timber that had covered this country and led to a huge timber industry up until the 1930s was pretty well cut out, and the small timber that was coming on still wasn't big enough to be valuable. Now by the year 2012, we've got a substantial amount of timber grown back, and it's now a thriving industry.

Scull-DeArmeY: And what about when you were growing up as a kid, what did you do for fun?

Brown: On a farm, we had a little river that ran through one border of our farm, so as a kid we fished and swam and did everything boys do, sort of a Huck-Finn type and Tom-Sawyer type existence, really. We ran around barefooted through most of the summers, no shirts, just a pair of shorts. And it was really an idyllic way to raise a kid. It was a lot of fun. We found fossils, and we caught fish and chased snakes, and we were all hunting with rifles by the age of five or six years old, and shooting squirrels and rabbits and that sort of thing, nothing ever very serious. We never caught a lot of fish, either, but we did a lot of fishing in the rivers and the lakes and whatnot.

Scull-DeArmeY: What species were you catching? (0:05:15.0)

Brown: What?

Scull-DeArmeY: What species?

Brown: Mostly small bream and small catfish, majority, two varieties of catfish and just a large number of different kinds of bream and perch, white perch and bull bream and this yellow-bellied perch, that sort of stuff.

Scull-DeArmeY: What did you do with the fish?

Brown: We ate them, if we caught enough to eat. It depended on how (laughter)—if you didn't catch ten perch, you didn't have enough for a meal, so most of it was just kind of thrown away. But if we had enough to take home and clean for our parents to cook, they did it; and the same way with the rabbits and the game. Mother never cooked a rabbit, but I had friends that their family would cook them and eat them. I never did. Mother never did.

Scull-DeArmeY: What were the two kinds of catfish?

Brown: They were mud cat and blue cat.

Scull-DeArmeY: What's the difference?

Brown: We call them "channel cat." A blue cat, it's blue; it's got a blue tint to the color. And a channel cat and a mud cat are more on the yellow, has more of a yellow tint to their skin.

Scull-DeArmeY: What did you use for bait? (0:06:23.1)

Brown: Any kind of meat to catch catfish. You could just—they were meat eaters, so you could use a little fish; you could use pieces of fish; you could use a piece of pork, piece of beef or any kind of meat for catfish, and small fish. Take a minnow and thread it on a hook and use that for bait. Normally they would be caught on trotlines or throw lines. We also fished for them with poles. But usually for catfish, we'd catch them on a trotline or a throw line. (0:06:55.9)

Scull-DeArmeY: What is a trotline, for the record?

Brown: A trotline is a long line that has hooks tied off every, say, ten feet, at intervals. And the hook would be tied to a short line, say, four or five feet long, and you'd stretch the long line out, and then you'd have in essence a clothesline with a short hook tied on it every ten feet, and the trotline is the long line. It can be two hundred feet long, I suppose, if you wanted one. Ours were usually about forty feet, and we'd have about four or five hooks on it, and we'd just stretch it between two trees and tie it and let the little hooks dangle down in the water, and sometimes you'd catch fish and sometimes not.

Scull-DeArmeY: How often did you check it?

Brown: Every two or three days. You didn't have to check it every day. And it was purely fun, so if it was in the summertime it would be checked every four hours. (laughter) If it's in spring or winter, when really we tried to do most of it for eating, the fish to catch to eat, then we'd check them every two or three days. It wasn't a major source of income, by the way. And certainly if my mother had never seen a fish, she wouldn't be disappointed. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Did you ever clean fish when you were a kid?

Brown: Oh, yes. We always cleaned them; every fish we caught we cleaned.

Scull-DeArmeY: You had to clean your own?

Brown: Oh, yeah, but there was no problem with cleaning fish. That was the routine.

Scull-DeArmeY: For the record, just paint us a picture of how you cleaned a fish as a child. (0:08:24.7)

Brown: The bream you'd just take a spoon, lay them on their side and scrape backwards turning the scales up. And small catfish really don't need cleaning as far as that. You just take their head off and remove the guts out of them, and they're edible, trimmed to cut their fins off. If they're large, then you have to pull the skin off. I didn't ever catch any that were that big, but some people do, you know. They can get very large. They can get fifty, sixty pounds, but I never caught one that big.

Scull-DeArmeY: What was your pole made out of? (0:09:00.2)

Brown: Cane, usually, or just a slender sapling from a small tree.

Scull-DeArmeY: And for the record, what is a throw line? (0:09:08.3)

Brown: A throw line is a piece of white cotton line, just like a trotline. It's usually about the water depth. Our water depth in the little creeks that I fished in was about ten to twenty feet long. So we'd take a throw line, [which] is a line about thirty feet long that we tied off to a branch of a tree that was overlooking the stream, weight one end of it, and tie several hooks at it just like we would on a trotline, except that one would be near the bottom, one would be halfway up, and one would be very shallow, and then drop the weight in the water, and it would carry the line down to the bottom. It'd be tied onto a tree branch with the weight resting on the bottom, and it would be just sitting there, dangling at different—the hooks would be at different water depths in the stream. And when you looked at the branch, the branch would always be a little, small branch, and if you got a fish on it, it would be wiggling, and you could tell if you caught anything.

Scull-DeArmeY: What did you use for a weight?

Brown: Pieces of small iron, scrap iron, a bolt, anything like that, an old bolt.

Scull-DeArmeY: And what about hooks?

Brown: We used a hook that would—they were just open hooks, the standard fish hook size with a barb on it, about a half-inch between the vertical part of the hook and the sharp tip coming up on the outside. In other words, they were not big hooks. In saltwater fishing later, I used hooks that were as large as two inches from the shaft of the hook over to the sharp barb looking up. Those were rare. We didn't use them that large normally, but in freshwater fishing they were very small.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Do you have those questions? I can't remember them, either, the questions. And tell me what school was like for you, growing up.

Brown: Very good. We had very, very good teachers, strangely enough. I am to this day convinced that money has very little to do with the quality of teachers. Mississippi was a poor state. They paid the teachers the minimum that they could pay, and that was the way the system worked. A man and wife both had to teach, if they were in the teaching profession, or if the man had another profession, the wife would teach. Most of the teachers that I had in my entire junior, elementary and high school were ladies, and they were always wives supplementing their husband's income. But they were *very* good. Almost across the board, they were *very* high quality teachers.

Scull-DeArmey: Waynesboro is how far from Mississippi Southern? It was Mississippi Teachers College at that time.

Brown: It was. Yeah, it was Mississippi Southern Teachers [College]. My mother's degree was—I think it was Mississippi Southern. It started off as Mississippi Southern Normal School, I think; then became Teachers College, and then became Mississippi Southern College and then Mississippi Southern University, I believe. I don't know the exact years that that change occurred. And then it was probably Teachers College. I was very familiar (laughter) with Southern as a child, by the way. My mother had finished junior college in 1945 and of course married my father. Well, she taught for one year. She finished high school in [19]33, which was the very depths of the Depression, then went to two years of junior college, and got out of junior college, and taught for one year in Wayne County. And during that year of teaching, she met my father who was from up in Newton County, Mississippi. Then she went down to Mobile and got a job in a paper mill, doing bag work, stacking bags, just manual labor, just hand labor because there was no work to do until she and my father got married in 1940. And after they were married, they moved up to Newton. But the school was good. She was a teacher. Her whole life, almost, was devoted to education except for a period when she worked in the social department, social welfare department; I think it's called the Department of Human Services or something like that in the state now.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you think that the proximity of Waynesboro to Mississippi Normal College maybe accounted for some of the good quality of the teachers that you had?

Brown: No, I don't. I should've answered your question. Waynesboro is about seventy miles, by road, from Hattiesburg where Mississippi Southern is located. Mother came here after my father was killed, and she returned home and became a

teacher again. The state was working to improve the educational level of teachers. She needed two more years to get a BS. So she would load us up in the car and come over—I say us; myself and my older sister—and bring us over to Southern with [her], and we would play on the grounds at Mississippi Southern while Mother went to college. This was all summer, but it was a lot of fun. And I fell in love with Mississippi Southern. I didn't go to college here, but I really loved the school. They wouldn't bother me in the library, and I liked to read. When I was about six and seven years old, and Mother was coming over here to go to classes, I'd go in the library and read every magazine they had, I guess. (laughter) It was just great, a great, big room and big, tall ceiling and good light. It was a lot of fun. We would get fifteen cents apiece for lunch, and they had a little shop here called Wimpy's, that was down in the bottom of what's now the Aubrey Lucas Administration Building. And you could get a Coca-Cola and a hot dog for fifteen cents, and that's what we would have for lunch every day. When Mother got out of class, she would come over and collect us under the—at the appointed meeting spot, which was usually the library or a big tree. We'd get in the car and go back to Waynesboro. She never stayed over here as a dorm student until she was finishing up her master's years later.

Scull-DeArme y: That does sound like a lot of fun for a kid.

Brown: It was great.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. Well, tell me when and where you learned to fish. Who taught you? (0:15:36.3)

Brown: Of course at home, relatives and friends taught all of us children how to bait a hook with a worm or a small minnow, you know, and catch trout and bream and catfish, that sort of thing. Once I went fishing commercially, the crew on the boat that I was on taught me, and it was quite similar to what we did for freshwater fishing, but all of the gear was bigger. We made some parts of the gear, ourselves. We normally, in all the fishing that I did, we used what was called keeno(?) gear, and that was a three-hook attachment, and the fish that we were trying to catch were red snapper. (0:16:21.1) And normally red snapper live on the bottom of the sea around a reef or a wreck or some obstruction on the bottom of the sea that gives them a place safe from predators and probably also where small fish are hiding that they can eat. The first thing a fisherman has to do is learn how to do that. You make a keeno gear (0:16:46.9) by first taking some soft, stiff copper wire and making a paten(?), which you hook a small leader with a hook onto the paton, and you tie three of these patons onto a long piece of snapper [cord]; I'm calling it snapper cord now. It's a white, cotton cord about twice the size of a kitchen match, and that was the cord that you made the fishing apparatus on the end of the line. The line, itself, was wire, when I was fishing, you lowered your hooks, but you lowered your hooks on this wire line, and the wire line had this apparatus hooked on the end of it, made of snapper cord. It had the three hooks attached to three different pieces of snapper cord. You'd lower it down and let it sit on the bottom of the ocean and pick it up just a little bit off the bottom and take your fingers and hold the—I should've mentioned the wire was lowered down and brought back up by means of a reel (0:17:57.6) on the deck. The

reels were called “bicycle” reels because the two handles were just like bicycle pedals. You turned them. And when you turned them, you operated a spool that the wire spooled on when you were retrieving it. And when you lowered it down, all you had to do was just release it and let it run down. You used a weight about the size of a coffee cup made out of lead at the bottom of the wire. Below the weight would hang your three hooks tied onto the snapper cord. You would drop your weight down until it touched the bottom, then lift it off of the bottom a sufficient distance that when the ship rolled, the weight would just touch the bottom, and then when it rolled back the other way, it would lift the weight up. This would cause the hook to just float along, just above the bottom of the sea. (0:19:01.8) And every roll, up and down, would just cause it to jiggle a little bit, up and down. It attracted the fish, apparently. A fish would come along. You would have your hand on your reel up at the surface, ready to turn it real quick, to jerk [and] catch the fish; take your fingers, and the wire was carried over the side of the boat by a thin, metal rod about eighteen inches to two feet long, that had a little, tiny pulley out at the end. You would put your thumb on that little, thin piece of metal, catch your fingers around the wire as it descended out of the pulley going to the bottom, and just hold it. You could feel the tension on the line as the ship went up and down, rocking up and down. And when a fish bit on the end of the hooks, you could feel the fish nibble. You could actually feel the little *tump, tump, tump* on the line when the fish began to try to bite it. So you would let him bite until you thought that it was a good time, and just like you see someone jerk up on a fishing pole when a cork begins to bob, when you thought that the fish was ready, that you could catch it, you would spin your wheel at the surface real quick with the other hand and try to hook the fish. If you’ve hooked him, then you could put your fingers on the line, and you could feel the fish swimming around. If you wanted to catch more than one fish, in other words you felt like there were a lot of fish down there biting, you would wait a while, and you could feel another fish come up and start biting on another hook. You could repeat this, and a lot of times could catch three fish at one time. If there were not a lot of fish and just very few bites, normally you’d catch one fish; then bring it to the surface, remove him, put bait back on, lower the whole apparatus to the bottom, and repeat that process.

Scull-DeArmey: Very interesting. We’ve talked about the equipment that you used as a child. Let’s just talk about, first of all, how old you were when you worked this job, and how you got the job. (0:21:15.5)

Brown: OK. At home, as I said, we lived on a farm. And about the time that I was this age, we had a tractor. And we had stopped farming cotton. We farmed corn and vegetables. The vegetables were just to eat. The corn was for our livestock and to sell. We would plant the crop in the spring. And school in Mississippi in those days was only eight months long, so we were finished with school in May. Normally we would contract the crop being planted. Sometimes I’d have to plant it, but usually we’d contract another farmer to come in and plant, say, the corn. Then I would take the tractor and plow the corn. Usually you’d plow one or two times; this is for weed control and to fertilize it. And I would be finished by the end of May. And once the corn was, as they say “laid by,” you didn’t have to plow it anymore. It was going to

grow out and make its crop. Then I was free to do what I wanted to do. And between my junior and senior year in high school, I wanted to work, and I wanted to work on a boat. So I went to Mobile and got a job on a fishing boat, which wasn't all that easy. I was sixteen years old. And (laughter) I guess I should tell how I got a job. You couldn't do it today, probably, unless you knew someone in the industry. But in those days, snapper boats, and probably to this day, the captain of the boat hired his crew. And I went down to Mobile. And of course we had a lot of relatives in Mobile. I stayed with some of them, and went down to the waterfront, and just started looking around at the marine doings, going on, trying to find something that I could get employment on. And it's very interesting. It wasn't possible, even then, to go to sea properly on a big ship. But I bumped into these snapper boats at Starfish and Oyster. And they were wooden boats, two-mast vessels, sailing craft with little engines in them. And the work was very informal around there. Anybody could get in. You didn't have a bunch of gates to keep you out and guards and all this that you would probably have today around a seafaring operation. And I was down there one day. Matter of fact, it didn't take me very long. I probably got a job within three or four days. I walked down to Starfish and Oyster, and they were putting ice in a boat. And I had been there like twice before, and I had learned, roughly, the system that the captain hired his crew, which was the real key to this thing. And they didn't have boats coming and going every day. The Starfish and Oyster ran about ten smacks, I guess, out of there. So every three or four days, one would come in and unload because they were fishing across the Gulf of Mexico. It took them a couple of days to get over there where they were fishing and a couple of days to get back. And the *Peggy G* was the name of a boat that was taking on ice. And when they're loading the ice on the boat, the crew has to work and push it on, and lots of times the full crew is not there because they got other things to do, and they're not paid to load the boat. They get a percentage of the fish caught when the fish come back in. So I just pitched in and helped them load the ice. (0:25:02.7) The ice was in big blocks about, oh, eighteen inches wide and four feet high and six feet long, came out of an icehouse. And we loaded these huge blocks. We just slid them along the quay until you got to the boat, alongside the fishing boat that was going to take them. And then we'd hook big ice tongs to them, lift them up, and lower them down into the hold of the vessel. And down there, men would take them and slide them into the fish boxes, that we called them. (0:25:33.8) The box was actually a compartment in the hold of the ship. Imagine, these vessels were about eighty-five to ninety feet long. In the bow, in every smack I was ever on, was located the galley and a few bunks. In the *Peggy G*, as I remember, there were four bunks up in the bow, and a galley, the stove and a little table that the crew ate at. In the center from that point back to almost the wheelhouse was the central part of the ship. There were two hatches, big, square openings, that dropped down to a very narrow hall that led the length of that center portion of the ship. And on each side you had doors. I think on the *Peggy G* we had three boxes on either side, and these boxes were little compartments that you would store ice in and then put the doors back on the boxes. The procedure for using this [was]: we put the ice in, in solid, big blocks. But when we got on the fishing ground—I may as well explain how it's done. One man on the ship was a fisherman with a second job as the icer. (0:26:57.3) He had duties over and above just being a fisherman. His job was to

be a fisherman, and as the fish were caught, he had to put them on the ice to keep them. We would catch the fish; get them on deck. When we were moving from one place to—let's say we came to a spot in the ocean; we stopped, and we caught, say, three hundred pounds of fish, and the captain would then move the vessel a few miles to get to another spot. While he was moving, we would real quickly draw the fish, which is just the term that's used for gutting them. We would remove the guts, throw them over the side, and flip the fish down the hole into that narrow aisle down there. The icer would have pulled blocks of ice out of one of the boxes, and he would take an ice chisel, (0:27:57.8) which is a very wicked-looking, almost like a shovel made out of steel with a straight handle on it and sharp edges on it like a tiger's teeth, I guess as you'd say, just little triangles on the bottom that were cut across the bottom of this flat blade. They were very sharp. And he would shave that ice, chip it, with that shovel. And the job was very critical because the trip time was normally based on twenty-one days or three weeks. When we first started storing fish, he would put the ice, a layer of ice that would last a minimum of that time and then lay the fish on top of it. Then after he had all the fish laying flat on it, he would shovel a little bit of ice on them, and wait for the next batch of fish to come down. So when he finished, what he would have in that box would be just a layer of ice, a layer of fish, a layer of ice, a layer of fish, a layer of ice, a layer of fish till he had it as full as he could get it. And it would be, the ice would be based on how much—the amount of ice used would be based on how much time (0:29:11.9) we had left before we got back to Mobile so the fish would keep. And we would fish until all the ice was used or until that first box had to go back to the dock, and then that's when that ended, ended the trip. And normally the trips were about twenty-one days. I kind of got off of how exactly—but that's how the icer did his job.

Scull-DeArmeY: That's great.

Brown: I might mention here how we got paid. (0:29:39.0) The captain hired the crew. He was responsible for everything on the vessel, of course; how well the men did their work, from the cook to the engineer to the icer to the lead hand, to himself, everybody. The reason I got the job was because the captain of the vessel *Peggy Gonzales*—or *Peggy G* was the name of the vessel—was a Swede named Eric. And Captain Eric had jumped ship in Mobile in 1914, was what I was told, and being from Sweden he became a fisherman. That was something he was familiar with doing, a fisherman in Sweden. And he was probably very young at that time, and he became a captain for Starfish and Oyster. Captain Eric smoked a pipe, and he had gotten a growth on his lower lip that his doctor told him, just before we were supposed to sail, that he needed to have taken off. So there were about five of us that had been working for a day and a half getting the boat loaded with ice, ready to go, when Eric came down and informed Starfish and Oyster that he wasn't going to be able to take the *Peggy G* out that next trip. That caused a little bit of consternation there at the moment because they didn't have any spare captains. A man named Blackie Robertson—I believe it was his name—was appointed captain. He was a fisherman. And Blackie knew how to do the job, but he didn't have a crew. So he convinced—I think there were seven more of us—to sail with him as crew. We had an engineer, the

crew, himself as captain. We had a man that filled the position of engineer, another one that filled the position of icer, another one that filled the position of cook, and we didn't really have a first hand. But normally those four men on the ship would get one and a half shares. (0:31:48.5) The captain got one share, and a normal fisherman got a full share, and me, because I had never caught a red snapper in my life, I was signed on as a half share. And when I say signed on, there was no formal documentation whatsoever of who was signed on the boat. It was just, "Get your stuff and get on. You're at a half share. OK." Away we went. And this was normal procedure. I don't know if it's changed, but that was the way we—and all the work of course was on shares. Nobody was paid, and nobody was guaranteed anything. The normal procedure: I'll tell you how the money was split up. (0:32:33.0) The boat got 40 percent of the catch. In other words, to maintain the boat, the owner got 40 percent. He owned the boat, and he had to maintain it so it could work. The trip expenses were then taken out, however much the voyage cost. And then the remainder of money was split in the shares that I've just described: one share for a fisherman, a half share for a novice, a share and a half for the four key people on there that had extra duties, and that did not include the captain, of course. He just got one check. And that was how the money was divided up, and we were paid. And that same system is used in a lot of fishing industries in a lot of places in the world, from the Netherlands. They, traditionally they have a system very similar to that, by the way. I just talked to a Dutchman about it, and that's what he told me, and so it's not unusual for fishermen to work that way.

Scull-DeArmeY: You know, as a matter of fact, every fisherman I've talked to, the way they split it up, these smaller fishermen?

Brown: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmeY: The boat gets—if you have three people, captain, deckhand, boat, boat gets a third; captain gets a third; deckhand gets a third. If there are four people, you know, yeah—well, if there are three people, and the boat counts as one, it would be a fourth. Four people, the boat counts as one; it would be a fifth.

Brown: OK. So they give the boat one share just as though it were a man, huh?

Scull-DeArmeY: That's right, yeah.

Brown: Well, these were bigger boats. They were sailing craft, (0:34:10.6) but they were still quite complicated. It took a lot to maintain them. They were wooden, and so boat, as I understood, got 40 percent; the boat got 40 percent.

Scull-DeArmeY: That's a lot.

Brown: It was a lot, but we were supposed to catch a lot. On the *Peggy G* we didn't, but that was the theory. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: How long did it take before you got paid, after the catch was sold?

Brown: Actually, I don't think the Starfish and Oyster ever got any money. We went out the first trip and sailed to Campeche. (0:34:42.3) And the Gulf of Campeche is across the Gulf of Mexico, off the Coast of Yucatan, basically. And today this is Mexican waters, and American fishermen can't fish in there without special arrangements. (0:34:57.4) But in those days, you fished anywhere in the Gulf you wanted to. We knew that we weren't supposed to go into national waters; this was the twelve-mile limit, but I don't remember anybody ever paying much attention to that rule in those days. There are a lot of little islands out there that belong to Mexico; Nuevo(?), Renos(?), and Alacrans(?), and several other places, and we fished them within a mile if we wanted to. Normally, snapper are not in real, real shallow water anyway. Normally they're out in water at least ten to twenty fathoms deep, so we were normally a fair distance from shore. But it would take us about two days. Coming out of Mobile, you sailed south by west. I never will forget that course. And all you did was just keep it on south by west until you reached the Campeche fishing grounds, and then you started fishing. And I'm going to say it took us about two days to get over there, normal weather. They liked for us to have all the sails up by the time we reached the sea buoy coming out of Mobile, which the sea buoy's the last buoy in the line of markers where the ship's going out. And of course we kept all the sails up till we got across to Campeche. And once over there, we lowered the foresail, the sail on the—these were gaff-rigged schooners, (0:36:18.5) so it was a fore-and-aft sail on the mainmast and a fore-and-aft sail on the foremast, and then a jib. When we were fishing, we did not use the foremast at all. We furled it. We kept the mainmast on the back about half furled and a jib up, and then used a little four-cylinder diesel to putt around with, and stop, and fish, putt-putt, move around. We would fish in daytime and anchor at night. And it was generally daylight to dark, every day, and we ate on deck. One thing that was memorable to me, there were no sanitation facilities whatsoever on these smacks. (0:37:07.3) (laughter) They were built with the assumption that the ocean could take care of everything, and it did. (laughter) We washed our clothes in saltwater, and we took baths in saltwater. If you wanted to wash the salt off, you would get about two quarts of water from the cook in a bucket, and after you finished scrubbing your clothes with saltwater, then you would take, dip them down in that two quarts of water and wring them out and dry them out, and that would get some of the salt out of them. Same way with taking a bath; you took a bath, and then you took that two quarts of water and poured it over your head, and let it run off your body, and that would supposedly remove the salt. We usually didn't wear shoes, by the way. Once you left the dock, nobody on the boat had shoes on. Everybody was barefooted.

Scull-DeArmeY: What did you take with you? You said they told you to go get your stuff. What did you take?

Brown: Oh, just clothes; I had some blue jeans and shirts and underwear, just regular kid's clothes, clothes for a young man. I was staying with my Uncle Jesse(?) and Aunt Omiga(?), which she lived over on Bear Fork(?) Road in a little subdivision in Mobile called Prichard, at that time. It was a sort of a middle-class area to live. And I went over there and collected up my stuff, and I think I had a little suitcase, and I

brought it on back down there. I didn't intend to take a lot of clothes. Took it back down to the boat, pitched it in the boat. I slept up in the galley (0:38:31.4) where the cook was, worked. And myself, and I think it was one other man, slept up forward with me. We were light on crew because Blackie didn't have a full crew.

Scull-DeArmey: How many were there?

Brown: If I remember right, there were seven on the *Peggy G*. Normally it would've been a nine-man crew, but like I say Blackie didn't have a, didn't have a full crew.

Scull-DeArmey: What were your sleeping amenities like in the galley?

Brown: The sleeping what?

Scull-DeArmey: Amenities.

Brown: Oh, fiddle! It was terrible. I mean, today it would really, it would be scandalous. You slept in a box that was about four inches deep and about two and a half feet wide and about six and a half feet long, and it was nailed to the side of the ship, the bulkhead, the inside bulkhead of the ship. And there was one on top and one on bottom on each side of the bow. And it had a mattress in there that had been there in 1922, I suspect, (laughter) and had never been washed or never been anything done to it. And there was, I believe, one blanket furnished, and it (laughter) was of the same vintage as the mattress was. And you just threw it out on the mattress and crawled up on it and went to sleep.

Scull-DeArmey: What was the mattress stuffed with?

Brown: I would say cotton. It was about three inches thick.

Scull-DeArmey: What were the temperatures like?

Brown: Hot, but not as bad as you would think. You're at sea, so we had these revolving, little—I don't even know what they're called. We would turn them so that when—we would anchor at night. So when we were anchored, the ship of course would swing around in the wind to where you could have this breeze going down these funnel-like apparatuses. I'm sorry. I worked on a boat, and don't know a piece, the name of the equipment, but you see them on every ship. They're these round things that come up and have a bell-like face on them, and they turn to face the wind, and they catch the wind and blow it down below decks. And, of course, our below decks, only two feet up was the main deck outside; you weren't in very far. It was just one wooden deck between you and the outside, above you. And it wasn't that—strangely enough, it wasn't all that bad. A lot of times we would sleep on deck, too. It wasn't unusual. You'd take your mattress and go out there on a nice night and just throw it out. And most nights were nice.

Scull-DeArmey: Were you not afraid of going overboard and nobody noticing?

Brown: No. I don't know why nobody was worried about that. That was the bathroom. That was everything else, but we never paid any attention to it. And the Gulf of Mexico, (0:41:12.2) at night, is a very, very nice place to be on a moonlight night or a quiet night. Most of your summer evenings out there, it's really pleasant. You get a little breeze, a little gentle rocking, and the stars are just unbelievable. It's black. It's beautiful. It's like East Africa. You can get far enough away from the city, and when you look up, there's just *millions* of stars. One year when I was fishing, a comet came across. I should go back and find out which summer this was. And it was spectacular every night, coming across until it finally disappeared.

Scull-DeArme y: I'll bet it was.

Brown: But it was really, it was really pleasant, really nice.

Scull-DeArme y: I have a couple of follow-up questions I don't want to miss. What did you use for bait? (0:42:03.1)

Brown: Squid or skipjack were our two main baits. Both of them were salted. The squid was frozen, usually, and the skipjack was salted. Skipjack is a small fish. We'd take those and cut those up in horizontal slices from the head back. And the squid, same thing, we would thaw them out and then cut them in about one-and-a-half-inch strips, crossways the body, and that left you with a tubular body. You'd fold it, double and just gently hook it on your hooks. And like anywhere else, even though you were in saltwater, you would try to kind of hide the end of the hooks so the fish couldn't see it. I don't know if that made any difference, but theoretically they would just see a piece of squid or a piece of fish, bobbing along just above the bottom and bite it.

Scull-DeArme y: Could you see? What was the clarity of the water like? (0:42:54.6)

Brown: No. It was just blue. Well, going over, the water goes from green to blue and then back to green when you're on the banks. The banks, the water's not deep. You have to have real deep water to get that blue ocean, but it's beautiful. It was in those days.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you have to help sail? Did they teach you? (0:43:20.9)

Brown: Oh, yeah. I mean, (laughter) there was no formal training thing, as you can well imagine. It was, "Grab that rope and pull it!" And that's what we did. And the guys on the boat, they knew how to sail the boat. There was no problem with that. We got the rags up on it before we, long before we got to the sea buoy. We went out using the engine, and of course as soon as you got to the end of the sea buoy, you didn't really need it, but if the captain felt like it was worth it, he'd keep it running. And I think most of the way over there, Blackie kept the engine running. But diesel was a factor in our expense, so you didn't want to use it unless you needed to. But I think on the *Peggy G*, we used it most of the way over and most of the way back.

Scull-DeArme y: How'd you store the diesel? (0:44:08.3)

Brown: It was in a tank that was in the boat, internally to the boat. We loaded it up.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you actually see them take on fuel? I wonder how that looked. (0:44:19.9)

Brown: Oh, yeah. It was just a hose. Down at Starfish and Oyster, they just had a hose down on the deck. It was kind of like fueling up a car, in a sense. It was longer, but they just ran it over and put it in the opening for the tank and filled the boat up.

Scull-DeArmey: So there was a fueling dock?

Brown: Well, they just had fuel there at the dock. But now remember; Starfish and Oyster had been there a long time, and they had an ice house. They made their own ice, had their own dock. We ordered groceries. Before we went out, the cook would order. He knew how many men he was going to feed, how many days, and he would order groceries, and they'd be delivered just before we sailed. We would load that in. Another thing that was interesting about that operation is they always ordered sea stock, (0:45:03.5) and sea stock (laughter) was jugs of muscatel wine, and cases of beer. And I think when we sailed from Mobile the first time—and don't hold me to this because I can't swear—I think we had nine gallons of muscatel on board and six cases of beer. They were hearty drinkers; I mean, they were hearty drinkers.

Scull-DeArmey: Was there any left when you got home?

Brown: No. There was nothing left when we got to the banks. They drank it all up before we ever caught a fish, when we were going over. There wasn't a lot of noise on the boat, as a matter of fact. (laughter) Once we cleared the sea buoy, the captain came back and told me to steer south by west. (0:45:55.6) And he showed me the little point on the compass that was south by west and told me to sit down and keep the bow pointing in that direction. And so I sat down. Fishing smacks had a little, small cabin above decks, on the back, that had the wheelhouse in it, and right behind the steersman who would sit there, was a bunk for the captain. And I sat down. The wind was blowing. The sails were doing great. It was just a nice afternoon, and it was easy to keep the ship, the smack, boat, whatever you want to call it, going south by west. It was very easy. You just sat there and just gently worked the wheel back and forth a little bit if you needed to, and it just sailed right along. And so he went back up and joined the guys drinking, and I think I was on duty for about eighteen hours. (laughter) Nobody, they didn't care what happened. (laughter) It was amusing. I didn't think anything about it, either, because I had never been there. I thought it was kind of normal, but I did get awfully tired. But about, oh, I'd been there about six or seven hours, I guess, and one of the guys brought back a half a cup full of wine. And he asked me if I'd ever drank muscatel. And I told him, "No, I hadn't." And so he says, "Here, taste it." I said, "No, no," I said "I'm doing this. I don't want to drink anything." He said, "Oh, go ahead, just taste it. Tell me what you like." So just to please him, I took a taste of it, and he said, "Hot dog!" And he went running back forward with the cup. And what that did, that meant that I had to pay my share of the sea stock. (laughter) If you took one drink, you were in for your share. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: But he didn't tell you that.

Brown: No. He didn't tell me that until I had already taken that drink, which I didn't really give a flip about anyway. I was happy to be there. But anyway, they all sobered up. By the time we got to the fishing grounds, all the sea stock was gone; all the beer, all the wine, everything was gone. And we got busy fishing, and we fished until we went—time to come back into Mobile. And we started back. (0:47:59.8) We didn't have many fish. A boat like that would normally hope to catch forty thousand pounds of fish, between thirty and forty thousand pounds of fish. If I remember right, we only had about fifteen thousand pounds. It was not much of a fishing. And here I've got to mention; those fish, this was pre-GPS [global positioning system] days. (0:48:26.0) These were days when you went by what the bottom looked like on a lead(?), or how deep it was. And the captains that had a lot of experience had learned where the wrecks were over on Campeche, where the reefs were under the water. I didn't know this at the time. Blackie didn't know where they were, and so we carefully wandered around—we had a fathom meter on board—measuring constantly the depth of the water and any change because if the water got shallow or deeper, that indicated a place where fish might be. And when we saw a little irregularity on the bottom, then we would immediately stop and start fishing. They were very scientific in those days, the way it was done. If you moved across a bump—we'll call it—the captain would throw a tin can out, a soda can or something like that, that had a piece of tape across the opening, and it would be floating, and that was his marker. He would quickly turn the boat around and come back over that can, just try to run back over that can. Now the wind would blow the can a little to the right or left, but normally he would find that bump again. Then he would turn the ship into the wind, and move up from the bump, and let us drift back down across it, fishing. If we caught fish when we drifted over it, and it looked like it would be substantial—he'd do this several times. But if it looked like we were catching a lot of fish, that there was quite a bit, then he would go upwind and anchor, and then we would play the anchor off it till we were back over the spot. And then we would sit there and catch fish until they stopped biting. That was the procedure that was used. And it was key to know where those spots were, and that may have been the reason we didn't catch very many fish. But as our twenty-one days came to an end, we turned around and started back to Mobile.

Scull-DeArme: What did y'all do for light below decks? (0:50:22.5)

Brown: We had electric light. We had a four-cylinder diesel engine on there that had a generator, and we had some batteries. And at night we'd have little, bitty bulbs. But we didn't burn them very much. We kept the hatch open to the outside virtually all the time, unless we got in real rough weather or ran into a squall where we had a lot of rainfall. Normally the door—you had what's a—the hatch going down into the bow was just a roll-down thing that you could slide in and out on a track, and back on. The only other opening to the living quarters was back on the wheelhouse. It had two little doors on either side. And normally both of those doors were open. If we ran into a squall, which is a little thunderstorm at sea, we would close them just to keep the insides dry, but normally they were open. It was very pleasant. It was good living. It was hot, and it was breezy, but it was good.

Scull-DeArmey: I know that on really old sailing vessels there were, there would be holes in the deck, and then there would be a prism that was maybe octagonal on this surface and came to a point.

Brown: Uh-huh.

Scull-DeArmey: It would take the light, the ambient light on the outside and bring—

Brown: Transmit it down?

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Brown: We didn't have that. And we weren't down very much. From the time the sun came up till the time the sun went down, we were outside. And as I remember, there wasn't any reading material on a boat, on any fishing boat I ever went on. There was no reading material. We worked daylight to dark. And later on in my fishing career, when we found fish biting at night, we would work all night. But (laughter) working on the *Peggy G*, we didn't ever find that kind of fish. (laughter) But later on we did. We would fish during day, and at night we'd anchor. And we had a little, old, one-cylinder diesel engine with a big flywheel. (0:52:28.1) And in the mornings we'd squirt a little bit of gasoline in it, roll the flywheel around, and get the old engine running, and putt, putt, putt, putt, putt, putt, putt, putt. We would pull our anchor up to the surface, and then go off hunting for fish, again. And we did this every day.

Scull-DeArmey: What did y'all eat? (0:52:45.7)

Brown: It was pretty basic fare, potatoes, different—we didn't have a freezer on the rig. We carried frozen goods, but we didn't have a freezer, per se, like a kitchen freezer. We had lots of potato salad, canned beans, peas, different kinds of canned meat, on that first trip, a lots and lots of pickled pig feet. The cook had been pretty inebriated when he ordered his supply stuff, (laughter) and he ordered twelve pig feet, but what he got was twelve *gross* of pig feet (laughter) because they sold them by the gross. And so we had a big bowl of pickled pig feet, set down (laughter) on the table the whole time. As a matter of fact, I think we had some on the second trip, too. We had lots and lots and lots of pig feet. (laughter) But mostly it was canned goods. He would cook stuff. We had bacon and beef, you know, that he could cook up and make stews from. And we rarely ate fish, very rarely. But there was one meal that was cooked, of fish, that I loved and still love. I haven't eaten it since I was fishing. And it was called corned grouper, (0:54:16.8) and we had it for breakfast. And you would take a small grouper, oh, about an eight-, ten-pound grouper and fillet him, and the cook would steam it. And then he'd take that white meat and peel it off and mix it with onions and mustard and whatever else you wanted to mix with it, almost, and eat it. It was delicious. It was a really fine meal. But I've never eaten it except on the fishing boat.

Scull-DeArmey: Why did they call it corned grouper?

Brown: I don't know. That was what they called it, corned grouper.

Scull-DeArmey: Anything else besides onions and mustard, like what might—

Brown: You could put anything with it. They would have potatoes, boiled potatoes out there to go with it, and chipped-up onion. Usually that was about it, and bread of course, mayonnaise, mustard, ketchup, anything that you wanted to blend with it and kind of make it (inaudible). I liked it. It's not a bad dish; I'll assure you. It's very tasty, freshly boiled potatoes cut up real small and mixed with it. It was tasty.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you catch the grouper?

Brown: Oh, yeah. When the cook wanted one, he'd just come on deck and tell us, "When you get me a grouper about this big, bring it down." And so whoever caught the next one would take it down, and he'd prepare it.

Scull-DeArmey: For the record, bycatch is catching something that's not your targeted species. What kind of bycatch did you get? (0:55:44.9)

Brown: We had one bycatch that was kind of heartbreaking, and that was grouper and Warsaw, huge, huge Warsaw. These things go three or four hundred pounds. Some people call them Jewfish, and they might be something similar; I don't know. They might be a different species, but they get three or four hundred pounds. These things are like a great, big perch, a huge perch, and we only got a nickel a pound for them at the fish market. So when we caught them, they took up so much room in the fish boxes that we didn't keep them, normally, because if we filled up our boxes, we couldn't put in snapper, and red snapper was what we were after, and that was thirty-five cents a pound, so we really wanted red snapper. Normally if we caught big ones like that, we would occasionally keep them if they weren't too big. But the normal procedure was get them to the surface and just cut the line and let them go. And normally the float would've popped out of their mouth, so the fish was laying on its back flopping its fins, but he couldn't go back down because they have an air chamber in their body, and so this two- or three-hundred-pound fish would just go drifting off on the surface, shark bait. We didn't catch a lot of shark or a lot of barracuda, but they were certainly out there. It was infuriating to hook snapper and be pulling them to the surface, and the barracuda would follow them right up to the water line, and when you're reaching down to pick your fish up, they would bite it off right behind the gills. Shark and barracuda got a lot of our snapper. It was aggravating. It was really, really infuriating.

Scull-DeArmey: I'll bet.

Brown: Later on I ate barracuda in Nigeria, (laughter) and it's not one of the world's greatest fish, but it's edible. But bycatch, the big grouper were the main thing. I can't think of anything else that we threw back. Everything else we kept. And there are many varieties of snapper. The small grouper, we kept them; I mean, anything under fifty pounds, we'd keep them, and all the red snapper. And there are two or three different varieties of snapper, and we kept them all. Nothing, though, as good and as pretty as what the conventional red snapper is, but we kept them.

Scull-DeArme y: Do you remember what you got paid for the grouper?

Brown: The grouper, I know the big ones were five cents a pound; the smaller ones might've been eight cents a pound or something like that, that we kept. The twenty-pounders was probably a little bit more than the giant ones. I'm going to make a guess and say probably between eight and fifteen cents a pound for grouper (0:58:34.3) because grouper was something that people would catch a lot of inshore, and so the market was not real, real good. Snapper you had to go out farther to get them.

Scull-DeArme y: So earlier I asked you how long it took you to get paid, and you answered—

Brown: Starfish and Oyster, now, it wasn't the company's fault. Starfish and Oyster was a fine company, (0:58:56.7). It had been there many, many years. It was just the fact that we didn't catch very much fish on the first—the only two trips I made out of Mobile was with Starfish and Oyster. And the second trip ended in total—the first trip we might've gotten fifteen dollars. I can't even remember. (laughter) We got back in, and we unloaded the fish, and the ship, we had gone through a hurricane. And when we got back in, there really wasn't a lot of talk about paying us off. I think they were happy to see us come back, and everybody else was so happy to get back, we just unloaded the fish. They stayed in port for two or three days while they checked the boat over and did what little repairs we had to do. We reiced it and went back out. And that was probably the most interesting part of my whole fishing, was the first trip, although I didn't realize it. (0:59:49.4) Coming back from Campeche, on our way back toward the end of June, one night, probably on about the night of the twenty-fifth of June, the sea got up, and we had a very strong wind blowing, blowing at us out of the south. And so we turned into the wind, reefed the foresail completely; took it down; reefed the mainsail down to a tight tuck. It was just a small piece of sail left, and swapped out our normal jib for a storm jib. We did that about eight o'clock at night, if I remember right. And I think the night was the twenty-fifth, the evening of the twenty-fifth. And what was happening, a tropical depression had turned into a hurricane behind us in the Gulf. It had crossed Campeche and turned into a hurricane and was catching up with us, and that hurricane was named Audrey. And you have the write-up on the storm there. It was a big [storm]; it was a bad storm. It destroyed Cameron, Louisiana, and did a lot of damage. It killed about six or seven hundred people when it got to the Gulf Coast. It hit the Coast of Louisiana and Texas. But that night, the seas got bigger and bigger, and the next morning we were in a truly severe state asea. It was a survival state; there was nothing we could do except survive it. The waves were, I'm going to say, forty or fifty feet high, and I'm not exaggerating. The smack was about probably eighty-five feet long, and it seemed like to me that when we went down, when we topped the crest of a wave, that the entire vessel was pointing down on a wave. There were huge swells. We had strung lifelines up on the boat about belt high, from the mast to the shrouds. All over the boat when you walked, you could hold onto a piece of like two-inch manila line, everywhere you went. You never had to (inaudible). The seas were breaking over the deck of the boat, oh, sometimes knee deep and sometimes a little deeper. All the hatches were shut. She was battened down for really bad weather, and we had really bad weather.

But the boat took it very well. We were turned into the sea, and probably the engine was a great benefit in this case because it kept us—we always had steerageway. We never really were—the boat was never in danger as far as the strength of the boat or the seamanship was. The only problem we had is that at some point—we were in those conditions all day the twenty-sixth and probably came out of it the morning of the twenty-seventh, and then the afternoon of the twenty-seventh, it cleared up to be just pretty normal weather. We were, say, thirty-six hours, maybe, in the storm. But the day of the twenty-sixth was memorable. The twenty-seventh was when we were clearer, completely; I'm sure. But the bilge pump broke. (1:03:16.7) That was the only thing that really caused us a lot of distress. I was never afraid or frightened, personally, because when you're seventeen years old, you're bullet proof. Huh? Oh, some of the older men were certainly concerned about it. They were afraid we were going to lose the boat, but we didn't. The bilge pumps on a sailing craft—and I think they're pretty standard on wooden crafts—are just simply plunger pumps that lift the water the short distance from the bilge up to the deck. You don't have to lift it any higher than the deck. When it comes out on deck, it'll just run over through the scuppers. Well, our bilge pump, that ran off our engine, was rigged up on power takeoff from the diesel engine, and it was a little centrifugal pump that, as long as diesel ran and the little clutch was engaged, it would spin this centrifugal pump, and it would just spit the water over the side. As I understand it, a short metal bolt, two or three inches long, a little, short piece of rusty scrap down in the bilges got bounced up by all the ship's working over those big waves and bouncing and rolling and pitching, and it got caught up in the impeller of that pump, and it broke off the little bronze blades on the impeller, or damaged them so that it wouldn't pump very efficiently. So we had to go to using hand pumps to pump the bilges out. These hand pumps were located out on the main deck. There were, I believe, four of them; there may have been just three. But there were two located amidships, one on each side of the ship down to the bilges. And I believe there was two, one on each side of the hatch, going down into the galley. There may have been just one, but I think there was one on each side. The pumps were operated by a wooden handle that looked a lot like a shovel handle, but it didn't have a shovel on it. It just had a pointed end. That pointed end fitted into a pump device that was flush with the deck. When you'd push the handle away from you, you would bring up some water; when you pulled it back from you, you would bring up some water. And the pumps, the bilge pumps probably had a diameter of about eight to ten inches. So when you would *scoosh, scoosh* back and forth, quite a bit of water came out right at your feet. It just came out at your feet and ran across the deck. And you were only lifting the water, say, six to eight feet from the bilge to the deck, so they weren't very hard to pump, but normally we did it with two guys. One would be on one side and one on the other. I would pull; then I would relax. He'd pull; I'd pull. He'd pull; I'd pull. He'd pull; I'd pull. And you'd just keep doing that for hour after hour, and you'd keep pumping all the time. The rough seas made the wooden boards—now, this is my opinion of what happened—made the wooden boards stress as the ship went over the waves and hit the bottoms of the troughs and shook. And on occasion we would have water, three and four feet deep on the bow of the vessel as it went into a wave and started up the other side of the next wave and the (inaudible). And boy, that water would come rushing out as the bow

came out of the water. And we would be standing there knee-deep in the water, and the boat would give a little sideways motion. It would just move a little bit sideways-to-sideways, as it was coming up, all that water would spill off. And by the time we reached the top of the wave, there wouldn't be any water on the deck. And then we would plunge over into the next wave. And when we'd hit the bottom, we would get this water up on deck again. Now, through all this, we would be pumping, just *scoosh, scoosh, scoosh, scoosh*. Well, all that working of the boat allowed water, I think, to come in through the cracks in the hull. The ship did not have to go in the shipyard when we got back in, so maybe it was coming in through cracks in the deck and going down, although on the deck you didn't see any cracks. But we did take on water while we were in the hurricane, and we had to pump. And all of the gaskets in the pumps, as we started pumping, failed. They were old. They had been in the pumps probably for years, you know. Those pumps were never used because we had that little bilge pump on the engine, and they were never used. And that caused quite a bit of consternation. Fortunately we had multiple pumps, so we would be pumping on one pump, and when it ceased to bring any water up because its little gaskets on the plunger were destroyed, we would move to another pump and start pumping. And the engineer would come out, pull the gasket, pull the plunger out of that pump, cut out a gasket from gasket material, put the little thing back together, and he could do this in thirty or forty-five minutes. He could put a new gasket on it, put it back in, rig it up to where it would pump again, and we just kept moving from pump to pump to pump. And every time one would quit pumping water because the gasket had gone bad, he would come behind us and pull it out and make another gasket and put it back in. And this worked very good except we only had a limited amount of proper gasket material. And so after we ran out of the proper gasket material, he started using rugs, cardboard, anything that he could lay down and make a pattern of. And these gaskets would be a circle, some ten inches in diameter, with holes around them where the two pieces of wood fitted on them, and he would unbolt the two pieces of wood, put down his circle over these bolts, and put the other piece of wood on top of them, run his bolts back on, and come outside, and replace them. He went through blankets. He tried to make gaskets out of blankets, cardboard, oil cloth off the table in the galley. And I think the last one that he had made was made out of the captain's leather jacket, but I can't swear to that. I know there was a lot of grumbling about it later. But anyway, the vessel stayed afloat, and we made it on back in to Mobile. On the twenty-seventh, when the storm was passed, we were still, our engine was still running, and the seas had gotten down to just normal seas, and there weren't very many—we knew we were somewhere close to the coast because the water was green and muddy and all that. You could tell you were close to the coast. We spotted a pleasure boat, a cabin-cruiser out there, and a guy was fishing on the stern of it. There were a half a dozen people on it. And we putted over to it because Blackie didn't know exactly where we were, and he asked the guy to give us a course to Mobile. And the guy told us steer a course zero—thirty degrees was our heading and that would pick up the Mobile light, Mobile buoy. And we turned on a course of thirty degrees, and *putt, putt, putt, putt*. We found Mobile in, say, twelve hours. We found the sea buoy and went on back into Mobile. And once we got back in there, they repaired the bilge pump, pumped out the

boat, and we unloaded the fish. And just in a very few, short days we were ready to go to sea again.

Scull-DeArmey: When did you learn that another boat had sunk? (1:10:58.4)

Brown: In Mobile. The *Keturah* was a snapper boat, also a smack, a two-mast smack, very similar to the *Peggy G* that operated out of Pensacola, Florida. And of course the snapper fishing business was not that big so much so that the companies weren't aware of everybody that worked for them. All the permanent fishermen knew each other. The captains were well known in the different companies. And the boat *Keturah* did not make it through the hurricane. And we have a report that you can read, and I've read it. The *Keturah* was trying to make it into Galveston under sail. Its engine failed, and it called for help with the Coast Guard. And a Coast Guard cutter was dispatched out of Galveston to help them about ten o'clock in the evening. Well, let's say they left around four o'clock in the afternoon from Galveston on—oh, let's see what day it was. They left about 4:15 in the afternoon of the twenty-fifth. The Coast Guard cutter was the *Cahoone*. It left Galveston, responding to a distress call from the *Keturah*. It found the vessel a little bit to the east of Galveston, and they put a line on it and began to tow it to Galveston. The line parted as the seas got rougher and rougher. They were unable to reattach the line. The crew, using sails only, were continuing on their way to Galveston, and during that night it hit a oil platform and destroyed it. Both of the masts were broke, and the wooden hull, of course, was destroyed, and it sunk near that platform. And later on I got an opportunity to go out there with a diver to investigate it. But there were nine men onboard, which was a standard crew for a fishing smack, and all of them lost their lives. But anyway, as far as the *Peggy G* was concerned, we got it iced back up real quickly and just in a few days went fishing again. Same procedure exactly, we loaded the boat up, sailed out of Mobile Harbor, went to Campeche Banks to go fishing. And we got over there, and we fished, I'm going to say, for approximately two and a half to three weeks. But we had less fish then, than we had on the first trip. And the captain, for some reason, went into Galveston. (1:14:14.2) And as a novice, I understood we went into Galveston to get ice and sell the fish and then go back out. But when we got there, we unloaded the fish, and then the captain and most of the crew disappeared, and myself and two other guys were left, living on the boat. And we were told to just stay there and help would come. But after, oh, the better part of a week, no help had come, and there was no food. And we were eating blue crabs, by the way. We ate a lot of blue crabs. We'd catch them by the basketful then. But another boat that caught snapper came in and tied up on the same pier we were tied up on. And hungry and ever-resourceful, we go up there and talk to the captain, a gentleman by the name of Ralph Calvert(?), and the boat was named the *Argo*, A-R-G-O. And the *Argo* was not a fishing smack. (1:15:20.7) The *Argo* was a converted World War II, wooden-hull boat about a hundred and ten feet long with twin diesel engines in it. And I think it had been either—I think it had been a mine sweeper or a torpedo boat, but it may have been just some type of patrol boat. It was a very nice boat, much better accommodations. I mean, we had much more room with a much bigger galley, better food, better lighting, and everything. Anyway, I applied for a job on there, and one

other guy off of the *Peggy G* applied for a job, and we got it. And they had just gotten in from a trip, and we told the captain that we were staying on this other boat, but we wanted to go back out. He interviewed us a little bit, and he was a nice guy, and he could use a couple of men. Of course both of us had to sign as half shares. The other guy that signed on with me was a half-share guy; he was also a novice. He took us both at half shares. But the very next day, he came over to the boat we were staying on and told us to move our clothes over to his boat because he had a charter job. (1:16:40.5) And that charter job was to take a man, take a diver out to investigate the remains of the vessel *Keturah* that had hit the oil platform and had been sunk during Hurricane Audrey. And by coincidence, another fishing smack had sank not very [far], probably not twenty-five miles from where the *Keturah* hit the oil platform. And its name was either the *Polaris* or the *North Star*, I believe. I can find no record of it. Somewhere there will be a record. But the Coast Guard was not involved with that one, so there's not a Coast Guard record that I can find. The glan (?) packing around the shaft, going to the propeller failed when the vessel was underway, and it just simply took on so much water through that failure, they couldn't pump it out fast enough. And the ship, the vessel slowly filled with water as it was trying to get into Galveston to get repaired, and it sank just straight down and sat on the bottom just as though it was upright, except it was on the bottom. And all the crew got off of that ship. And when we went out to inspect the *Keturah* wreckage on the bottom of the sea, the charter required us to carry the diver on over to inspect that ship, sitting on the bottom of the sea, to confirm that, for insurance purposes, that it truly was destroyed. It was not raised; it was left there. Well, anyway, that happened immediately after I got signed on to the crew of the *Argo*. And here again, the *Argo* carried a crew of about eight or nine men, but most of them were ashore. So we sailed out on this charter job with about four men, I'll say, besides the captain. And we went out and carried a diver out with the ancient, old, bronze-helmet type diving gear (1:18:54.1) and a hose that led from the bronze helmet. It rested on his shoulders. He went over the side. He had a rope tied onto him, and we let the hose down as he went down, and he breathed from air pumped from the ship down through the hose. And he had a speaker in his helmet that we had a wire and a little—that came back to the surface like a telephone. And up on the deck we could hear him talk if he wanted to shout. It wasn't a very good communication system, but he could make a noise. The water depth that the boats were in were probably, both rigs, both wrecks were probably between sixty and eighty feet. There was no surface sign of the *Keturah* when we reached the *Keturah*. It had hit the platform and broken up and sank a couple of hundred yards away from the platform. We anchored over it, put the diver over. He went down, inspected it, and came back up. A very offhanded guy, he said, "It's down there. There's not much left." Then we went over to the second vessel, which was, say, an hour, steaming away, an hour, hour and a half. And the mast of that vessel was sticking above the water just as though ship were floating on it. It was sitting on the bottom of the sea. The mainmast was sticking up, I'll say, between ten and fifteen feet out of the water, and the foremast was sticking up about five feet above the surface of the water. Beautiful day, little small waves, two- or three-foot waves. It was just really a nice day. We put the diver over the side, lowered him down to the bottom, and while he was doing his inspection, the little compressor that supplied him with air

stopped. (1:20:42.1) So we had to close that valve, open a valve to a hand pump, and start hand-pumping real quick, which I've got to admit we did at super speed. And the diver told us when we got him back to surface that the water came up to his lips, but he was able to breathe (laughter) through his nose. But I'm pretty sure he was highly concerned there for the twenty seconds it took us to shift methods of pumping him air, but he came back to the surface. I don't know his name, but he didn't seem a bit upset about it because he was a diver, and they're used to risking their lives. I guess he could've, in an emergency he could've probably lifted that off of his head and just come to the surface as free diving. He wasn't down very long. If we did it in scuba gear today, we'd call it bounce diving. He went down, was on bottom for twenty minutes, confirmed that those were the vessels that were supposed to be there and their condition, and then he came up. And that was all he needed to do to make a report. Anyway, we did pump him [air] so that he could finish his dive, and he came back up, and we went back into Galveston. And that afternoon, me and the other guy were sitting there on the boat alone, and a pickup truck came down and delivered six cases of beer from the diver. (laughter) So the rest of the time we were in, we had beer to drink. (laughter) We didn't have a heck of a lot to eat, but we had beer.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you remember what your share was for that charter trip or your half share?

Brown: Oh, we didn't get any money.

Scull-DeArmeY: You didn't get paid for the charter trip?

Brown: No. We didn't get any money for that, me or the other guy. And as a matter of fact, Stephanie, I'm not sure that Ralph didn't give us ten bucks or twenty bucks. I really don't remember, but it certainly wasn't very much. He probably gave us each ten bucks for riding the boat out—

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah.

Brown: —and coming back in, but I just, I don't remember.

Scull-DeArmeY: That might've been pretty big money in those days.

Brown: Oh, we would've spent it, yeah. Oh, yeah, ten dollars back in 1957. I've done just a rough rule-of-thumb estimate of the value of money the year I graduated from high school in 1958, and now, 2012. And I can assure anyone that the common things that we bought then and buy today have increased by a factor of between tenfold and fifteenfold. In other words, what we paid for a dollar then, it's between ten and fifteen dollars now. No. Our living standard then was a lot worse than it is now. It's just that there has been a tremendous inflation. But you got to remember in those days, I couldn't buy a cell phone for a million dollars. And now I got one very cheap, you know.

Scull-DeArmeY: Right, yeah.

Brown: Really, so—

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. We kind of have more expenses just because there are more things.

Brown: More things. Yeah. Now, we have to pay for TV. In those days we didn't have very good TV, but it came, was free, and it came to an antenna that you went outside and turned with a pipe, you know. And life's better. But anyway, that's pretty much the interesting part of the fishing business. I worked that summer and then came back home, of course. I caught a bus out from Galveston, Texas, went back home. Oh, there was one big, *big* difference on the *Argo* as far as the fishing. (1:24:13.1) The work wasn't as hard, and we caught more fish. The *Argo* was equipped with electric reels instead of the hand-powered bicycle reels that you cranked by hand. And these were really nice. And Ralph knew where to fish. Ralph Calvert was the captain that knew the places, and he was from a fishing family out of Pensacola. He had a brother, James, that fished out of Houston, and I think there were five of those Calvert boys, and all of them were captains of fishing boats. One of them had been lost overboard outside of Galveston just a year before I got there, which was very unusual. And I know it was still a matter of concern as to what exactly happened. He may well have had a heart attack or slipped or something and fell overboard, but he had been lost. But when I was on there, it was an entirely much more pleasant place to live. Of course the boat, none of the boats were air-conditioned; they weren't air-conditioned. None of the smacks were. We didn't even have fans. But as I say, life was pretty good. The cook was much better on the *Argo*. We had a lot better food; had a much better galley; had a freezer in the galley, so they could freeze goods and carry them out. But the work was the same. It was twelve hours a day, more than twelve. It was sunup to sundown in the summertime, which run fourteen, fifteen hours a day. And we were busy just about all the time. There were lots of unusual things about it that were different, in a sense. Snapper will rally. (1:25:58.1) And I use that word as a term, R-A-L-L-Y. And I think it's what they're—I think they're getting together to breed when this happens. They're normally a bottom-dwelling fish, but when they rally, the fish come to the surface over an area of, say, an acre. And literally, the surface of the water will be teeming with hundreds of thousands of red snapper. It's awesome to see. And it was while working in Galveston that I had an opportunity to catch fish in two or three different rallies. When a captain would find a rally, of course you would anchor your boat where the fish were doing this, and we went to twenty-four-hour-a-day work. We really took after it. We would stop, maybe, six hours a day to get some sleep and clean the fish and everything, but you could catch a boatload of snapper in just two or three days on a rally. Of course you never knew when they were going to start; you never knew when they were going to stop. It was something that was totally unpredictable. The snapper captains would find one. And they had a lot of code. Ralph would call his brother and tell his brother he'd decided to buy a Chevrolet or something like that. (laughter) And then his brother would know that he was on a rally at a certain point, and he'd show up, and then the boats would be anchored together, and we'd all be catching fish. And all these guys listened on the radio all the time to what everybody was saying and trying to keep track of what was going on. (laughter) Most of the fishing of the seafood industry off of Texas at that time wasn't snapper. It was shrimp. (1:27:52.3) Shrimpers were having

a heyday in the late 1950s off of Galveston, Texas. At the correct water depths offshore, when we would anchor at night, it would look like a floating city. It would look as though there were a thousand shrimp boats in view at any one time at night. It was awesome. They were catching shrimp in immense quantities. I'm sure it's not that way now, but then it was really a huge industry. Snapper fishing hadn't changed much. Snapper boats have been catching snapper off Texas and Campeche for fifty years. But the shrimp business had just hit west Texas within the last ten years of that, from in the late [19]40s on up to the early [19]60s. There was an immense amount of fishing. And so we were small (inaudible), we were, for the fish houses. The snapper boats would come in, and we'd unload our stuff. But what they were really handling was an awful lot of shrimp. But anyway, it was pleasant.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you think that you came home with about what was—what was the—what would it hold? Fifty thousand pounds or seventy?

Brown: You mean on a ship?

Scull-DeArmeY: On your—

Brown: Oh, oh, on the *Argo*. The *Argo* would carry more fish than that. I'm going to say our average trip on the *Argo* was probably between thirty and forty-five, thirty-five to forty thousand pounds, thirty-five to forty-five thousand, (1:29:23.6) something in that. The *Argo* didn't have sails, but it was faster. Those twin diesels would really move it. There were a couple of amusing things that happened. (laughter) (1:29:33.1) In the second year I went fishing, when I arrived in Galveston, I ran into a friend who had worked on the *Argo* the year before with me. And he and the engineer, a fellow by the name of Cocky Brown(?), who was an Indian, had gotten into a dispute with Ralph, probably over money. And Ernest told me that they were going to change boats. And he said, "Why don't you come with us instead of going with Ralph? He's not paying as much as we ought to get." So I made a trip that lasted ten days with Ernest and Cocky on a little boat called the *Baby K*(?). (laughter) It was amusing because it was owned by a guy named Red Brown. He was the captain and owner, and there were only five of us on the boat, I think. And Red was not a real strict listener to the radio. (laughter) And the weather could kind of come up on us. Anyway, after we'd been out for about, oh, ten days, puddling around out there, catching fish, he had a mainsail for his boat. It only had one mast. He had a mainsail, but he didn't have a jib, and we could use the mainsail to keep it turned into the wind, but you've got to have a jib to sail it. So we couldn't actually sail his boat, but it was supposed to be able to sail, but we depended on a little engine to get where we wanted to. And we had caught some fish, and the weather started turning bad. Red finally listened to the radio, and there was a hurricane coming into the Gulf. So we headed back to Galveston, and the engine quit just as we got inside Galveston Bay. And so we had to anchor. And we got out of the ship channel, drifted out of the ship channel and anchored. And it was at dark, and boats were coming and going, but you can't shout and someone hear you on another boat because of engine noise. And we were blinking with a flashlight and whatnot, trying to get somebody to come over there and help us get on into the dock. And a shrimper noticed the light, and it came over beside

us, and they shouted back and forth. Red explained that our engine had quit, and we needed to get towed into the dock, and the guy was very amenable to it. He said, "OK." And he came around. We pulled up our anchor and passed him a line, and he took off in that shrimp boat. And Red commented, after we got in and tied up to the dock [that] that the fastest the *Baby K* had ever gone (laughter) since he bought it, was being towed by that shrimp boat. (laughter) It fairly flew. (laughter) Red was afraid the guy was going to actually make it leak or something, but he didn't. He got us in. (laughter) But anyway, that was two years of that. I did that the year after I got out of high school and bounced off of a couple of colleges my first year in college; did it that summer, and then joined the Navy, and that's the end of my fishing career. (1:32:44.3) But it was very enjoyable.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember what your payment, your half share was from the *Argo*?

Brown: Oh, no, I don't. The money was never very much important to me. But strangely enough we didn't have a lot of money. We didn't do a lot to spend money. I think the first payday I got from Ralph, (1:33:01.6) the first fishing trip was about forty-five dollars. And then after that it was about double. It'd be ninety to a hundred dollars. But we would only be in port between four and five days, and there were lots of sleazy hotels. (1:33:15.7) Some of them, strangely enough, were not all that dirty. I mean, they were just very cheap. They were very, very old hotels that we could usually get a room for fifty cents a night. No kidding, now this is 1956, '57, '58. You could get a room for fifty cents a night. A lunch at one of the cafeterias was thirty-five cents. Cigarettes, a hotel, beer, and a few soap and razors, you know there just wasn't very much expense to life for me and for a lot of the guys on the boat. A lots of them were drifters. (1:33:57.9) On the *Argo* we probably had Ralph, Cocky Brown, the engineer, and the first hand was a guy named—the icer, was a guy named Skip. He had a living arrangement ashore. Cocky was married, I know, and Ralph was, and I'm not sure about Skip. Those three had somewhere to go when they got ashore. For the rest of us, really wasn't anywhere to go. We would go get us a room in one of those old hotels. The main thing they had going for them, the beds were always clean, but you had showers.

Scull-DeArmey: You had beds.

Brown: Oh, we had beds, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Brown: Actual nice beds. I say, nice; they were usually bunks, bunk beds, small rooms, but they would always have a shower and a bathroom at the end of the hall. They were old hotels built in the [19]20s or 1910. I never will forget; we stayed in one of them one time that had the overhead chain that you pulled to flush the toilet. But it was all in perfect working order; it was just antique. But you could take, really take a good bath, shower, and after being out two or three weeks you'd have skin just peeling off of you. So we'd get a lot of soap and stuff and scrub ourselves down, get ourselves presentable, again, and get a haircut and buy toothpaste and toothbrushes

and all that, that we had to replace. And then there would always—usually, half the days there'd be something to do on the boat. They'd ask you to come down there because had to work on an engine or something, and we'd go down and maybe work on the boat three or four hours a day. And within four or five days you're back at sea again. So it wasn't very much to do, go to a movie occasionally, go to the library and get a book; that was the sort of stuff I did. The guys that were pros, (1:35:49.3) for the most part lived in the bars. They drank an immense amount of liquor. And the bars were the main social outlets for the fishermen. That was where everybody met. I don't ever remember seeing a fisherman in Galveston in anything other than a bar; either in the bar or on the way or coming back. They'd go to the bar because, see, you'd get a breakfast in the bar. They would serve you meals. The favorite bar in Galveston at that time for fishermen was the Union Bar, and I want to say it was on Station Street. And it was open on two sides; one on Station Street and one on another street. And it was run by a lady that everybody called Chick. I don't know what her name was, but she was a Yugoslav. Having been familiar with Yugoslavs a bit, I would suspect that she was what we'd call a Croatian. She was probably from Croatia. She had definitely been raised in a seaside town, and she knew how to handle fishermen. She had handled them all her life. She had one side of the bar, was a restaurant. You might say it was a bar type restaurant. You'd go over there and sit on a barstool, and she'd fix you a ham sandwich or scrambled eggs or anything else. And the other side was twice as long, and she had a bunch of tables, and that was beer and liquor. Most of the drinking was beer. Guys would come in there and sit and drink beer from, oh, ten o'clock to six o'clock in the evening and go toddling off to a hotel somewhere. That's the way I remembered it. We would, occasionally, myself and another guy would get some shrimp and go out on the beach at Galveston and have a shrimp boil. That was kind of pleasant. The guys would give us the shrimp in exchange for snapper. The shrimpers didn't catch snapper. They caught a lot of bycatch that I don't know anything about because I've never worked on a shrimp boat. But we always caught a trip, got a trip-fish. (1:37:56.2) It was just a custom. When you came in, you picked out a nice-sized snapper, say a ten-pound snapper, and the idea was if you were living with somebody, you could take that home for supper. I didn't have anybody to live with, and a couple of the other guys didn't either, but you could swap them to the shrimpers for [shrimp]. And they caught little, bitty, tiny shrimp called rock shrimp (1:38:19.2) that there wasn't a market for them. And so you could get a bushel of those things for a cotton-picking snapper; at that time you could. And so we'd boil those and eat them. That was kind of about the only diversion other than just drinking beer and sitting around talking or going to a movie or going down to the boat to work. Galveston in those days had lots of winos; I mean lots of winos. (laughter) An incident that has nothing to do with fishing, but Ernest Carroll who was the first hand on the boat, on the *Argo*, most of the time that I was on it, and a friend of mine, and I were staying in this old hotel up there. And like I say, it was pretty nice. He had a room, and I had one, and we were across the hall from each other. And one morning about one or two o'clock in the morning, I heard a *thump*, *thump*, *thump* on my door. And I got up, and I opened the door, and it was Ernest. And he was sick; he was bad sick. He said he was really sick, and could I go get him something to eat. And I thought, "One o'clock in the morning in Galveston, there's

not much open.” It was about one, between one and two in the morning. And anyway I told him, “Yeah.” And I went outside and went walking up the street to get him some food, and the only place I knew that would be open was the bus station, so I had to walk about four or five blocks to get there. And there was an individual stretched out on the sidewalk; his head was up near the building, and his feet was pointing down toward the street. And the sidewalks in Galveston all had covers over them because of the summer rains, and you could get out and walk along, and the gutters were about three feet deep, so that the water would run off the sidewalks and into the street. They’d had a horrible hurricane in Galveston at one time, and Galveston was kind of equipped to handle a lot of water. But anyway, I was walking along, and I was in the moonlight, and then I’d be in the shadow under these covers, and I’d be in the moonlight, and then in the shadows. And I was walking along and came up on this wino sleeping across the street. And I was in kind of a hurry, so I just walked up and stepped over him. Just as I stepped over him, he rolled over, and I thought I wouldn’t touch the pavement (laughter) about half a block. When I brought the soup back—I got some chicken soup for Ernie. When I was coming back I got out in the street, and I walked around the poor guy. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmev: Oh, that’s kind of sad.

Brown: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmev: All that drinking because you know those guys probably all were alcoholics and died of cirrhosis of the liver.

Brown: There were a lot of alcoholics. There were a lot of those guys that had a pretty checkered past, (1:41:00.8) and names were not, probably not real in a lot of cases. We paid no taxes. We paid no social security. (1:41:10.2) We paid no anything. They sold the—

Scull-DeArmev: Was it all cash?

Brown: All cash. It was handshake; you were on the crew. When you came back in, you unloaded the fish. When you unloaded the fish, you got a tally. They worked out the tally real quick. The arithmetic was simple. He’d get on, “OK. Here’s yours. Here’s yours. Here’s yours. Here’s yours.” And Ralph would divide it up and have it in an envelope so he could hand it out. The men got share and a half in an envelope, full share, half share, whatever you were. He just passed it out. There was a very simple accounting. He’d say, “OK. We had \$884 to split up. You guys can check the arithmetic.” And as far as I know, no one ever checked it. Although when I got back the next, that one summer Cocky and Ernest were not sailing with Ralph, and maybe they thought they got shorted or something. I never found out what it was. They made that one trip on the *Baby K*, and when we came in, I guess Ralph had been thinking about it, and so they got back together, and we all went back on. (laughter) It was a very interesting thing. It was a great thing for a sixteen-, a seventeen-, eighteen-, nineteen-year-old youngster to do for a summer. On the boats there was no violence. It was (inaudible). The guys would get in fights on the shore, but when they got on that boat, and once the lines came off, they all understood the rules. No

fighting. And sometimes there'd be pretty hard words changed, but *nobody* would ever swing a—

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever see the captain take disciplinary actions over crew?

Brown: No, other than using strong language. There was no such thing.

Scull-DeArmey: They'd get right back in line.

Brown: Oh, yeah, everybody was—well, once everybody sobered up and were working, there really wasn't any time for that. It was pretty steady. You would have idle periods. Let's say (1:43:05.7) you catching fish for an hour on a spot, and you caught like three hundred pounds of fish, and they stop biting. So the captain's moving to another place. You go over there real quick and draw those fish up, toss them down in the hold. The icer's already down there, and he's going to ice those fish down as soon as he can. And the boat goes meandering around for forty-five minutes and stops. You start fishing again, and it was that, just repetitively. You didn't have a lot of time.

Scull-DeArmey: So where did the fish stay until they were drawn and iced?

Brown: On deck.

Scull-DeArmey: Were they just on the deck?

Brown: On deck.

Scull-DeArmey: Not in a—

Brown: We had water running on deck. We had a hose running on deck all the time. The fish didn't dry out. They would lay there and flop on deck until they died. But we would draw them usually pretty quick; we didn't want them to stay long. One time we caught [a] moray eel, (1:43:51.6) a huge moray eel, which was just an interesting observation. This moray eel was nearly the length of a man, and it was big. It was six or eight [feet] from top to bottom. You know, they look like a snake.

Scull-DeArmey: I know.

Brown: And that moray eel was thrown over there on the side. The man that caught him just cut the hook off real close to his mouth and let him fall over there with the fish. And that rascal was biting snapper as he died, big teeth, *chomp, chomp, chomp, chomp, chomp*.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah, it's just primal, I guess.

Brown: I guess so. I just remembered—

Scull-DeArmey: "I eat. That's what I do. I swim, and I eat."

Brown: Well, I guess he could see a red snapper, you know, laying down on the side of him, and it's a fish, an eel. The moray eel, itself, is a fish. And I wish he'd have thrown it back in the ocean, but he didn't. He threw up on the deck, and it died, and then we threw it over after we got through. I guess he just wanted to look at it.

Scull-DeArmey: The eel probably thought it was in heaven. (laughter) "Look at all these snappers!" (laughter)

Brown: Well, yeah, I guess if that's where eels go, that one's there now.

Scull-DeArmey: When you were onshore and you were in the hotel, did you find that you were pretty tired and you spent some time—(1:45:02.4)

Brown: No, not at that age. The first day in was mostly just scrubbing and getting clean and getting some clean clothes. There was always a laundry around, by the way. We would always, that would be one of the first things we'd have to do. If we didn't have clean clothes left, from the last trip out when we came in, the first thing we'd do was go to a laundry and put your clothes in. They would wash them and fold them, and you'd come down and pick them back up. Now I'd come in, and I don't remember any of the guys—everybody in the business was healthy. I don't remember anyone, except Ernest when he got sick that night, and it was probably food poisoning or something. We all came in. We would work. Usually on the day that we cargoed, the day that we came into port, by four o'clock that afternoon, we had the boat unloaded; everything was buttoned down, washed up. We were ready to go. Ralph would pass out our pay, and we would head uptown. The first thing to do was take a bath, put on some clean clothes, and meet at some bar for a beer and supper and for some food. But there is no question about it that the city was very, very, very rough. (1:46:18.9) I mean, we stayed together, and the places that we went were places for fishermen. There were places in Galveston that were dangerous, and we knew that.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you find that your comrades kind of took you under their wing as a young—

Brown: Oh, yeah, certainly. I was a kid. And looking back on it, yeah, they made sure I didn't get wandered into a place where you could get killed. Galveston had a, like all seaports, I guess, it had a seedy side. And it was very seedy and very rough in Galveston. And it was very well organized because Galveston was also a tourist town. And so the tourists could come into Galveston and wander around, and it was sort of a no-no to hurt the tourists because they didn't want to hurt that tourist trade. But a seamen, that was an entirely different matter. And we would see the seamen off of the ocean-going ships. They had steamers coming in, and it wasn't uncommon for them to be rolled and all their money stolen, slipped a mickey, a drink, and knock them out. That wasn't uncommon in Galveston. And a lot of times their ships would only be in a day, two days. And then that guy's gone again, and he's missing a lot of money, but the police are not going to do anything. Anybody else is not going to do anything. But with us, as a general rule, we weren't bothered. But then again we didn't have all that much money. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: It wasn't worth it. (laughter)

Brown: It wasn't worth it to the rougher elements to really bother us.

Scull-DeArmey: They got paid highly per hour. (laughter)

Brown: That's right. And too, strangely enough as it sounds, the fishermen kind of stuck together. Even though it was a fairly good-sized city, we frequented the same places; we ate at the same places; we drank at the same places. We stayed at the same places. When I look back on it, it was pretty routine.

Scull-DeArmey: When you were out at sea, did you find yourself, or did you see any other fishermen, who had a problem with their skin because of the sea—

Brown: No.

Scull-DeArmey: —the salt, the sun?

Brown: I did. One summer I got hurt. (1:48:32.7) I guess it was the last summer I went fishing. I'd been up in Washington, DC, and I came down there and went fishing. I took my shirt off, and I peeled and blistered like all get-out. But no. Normally we toughened up pretty fast. We didn't wear shoes. We wore cutoff trousers and no shirts and no shoes. And that was pretty much standard. I mean, the captain, he didn't have that hard a job. He had a shirt. The icer wore a shirt because he was down there cleaning out the—working the hold. And the engineer wore a shirt; Cocky Brown always had on a shirt. But the rest of us, we just wore shorts, and I don't—I cut a finger real bad one time. (1:49:18.8) And medicine was very primitive. I soaked it in saltwater, and I think the cook had some Mercurochrome, and I dabbed it on it. But it cut it almost to the bone. But no. No one was sick at sea when I was there, and other than me cutting that finger real bad, I don't remember anybody getting hurt real bad. It would've been very easy to have done it. I mean, the knives were sharp [and] the pucks that we used to flip the fish around with sharpened points. And there was absolutely *no* (laughter) safety training. But once you got—the fishermen working by you would tell you how to take a hook out of a snapper and throw it across the deck. (1:50:04.7) There's a way you do that. You don't just grab the fish. A snapper has a small, little pocket in the gill, and you take your finger and stick it up there, into that little pocket, and hold him up like that. And with a thirty-five-pound fish, it can be pretty—it's not just one finger. (laughter) You had to—and then you take the hook out of his mouth and then chunk him across the deck. The fish were thrown to one side of the boat, and we all lined up and fished on this side. And the opposite rail, we threw the fish, and there was always water running down that side, so the fish laid there in a bath of water that was about two inches deep continuously, the sea water pumped over, flowing down the deck and back over the side. (1:50:43.2) And when we would be moving from one spot where we were fishing to another, we would go out there, and just squat down in that water, and take our drawing knives, draw the fish, throw the entrails over the side real quick, and rinse the fish off, and pass them down below to the icer.

Scull-DeArmey: Heads on or off?

Brown: Heads on; the only thing you remove from a snapper is the intestines from the neck back. And get the liver out. We left the gills in. It was just cod that they take the gills out. We don't take the gills out of the snapper.

Scull-DeArmey: Real quick.

Brown: It's very quick. Once you get used to it, you could draw fish faster than you can talk. I mean, it's really quick. And you'd get good at it, and generally the people are—everybody's working hard, so there's no, not a lot of conflict. You get it done as soon you can get it done. And we all enjoyed it. (1:51:37.4) Lots and lots of joke telling, lots of storytelling, lies, you know. (laughter) We would sit around the hatch at night, sometimes, you know after we'd anchored and eaten. Well, now it's 8:30, or nine o'clock, and a lot of time we'd sit around outside and tell yarns and talk and stuff for an hour, and then we'd go into a bunk, and be back up at 5:30 the next morning to go again. And it was pretty standard, and it was pretty enjoyable.

Scull-DeArmey: I thought—

Brown: It was not a way to make a living, though. (1:52:08.6)

Scull-DeArmey: Right.

Brown: Unless you were the master and the owner of the boat, it was not a way. The drifters that were fishermen that I knew, for the most part, in any normal occupation, people would laugh at them. You don't make a living doing this. You do it because you like it, or because there's a good reason why you don't want to get in town (1:52:33.3) and get a social security number and get your name published. And I'm sure I knew a lot of guys that were that way.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow. They were running from something.

Brown: Well, yeah, or just didn't want to, didn't want to draw a lot of attention to themselves.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah, keeping a low profile.

Brown: Yeah. They'd work in a—oh, we went there—they would change boats, change harbors. They'd work out of Pensacola for a couple of months, work out of Galveston for a few months, come back over and work out of Mobile for a few months, work out of Pascagoula for a month or two. Several or quite a few ports had fishing boats, and if a guy was a snapper fishermen and he could get a job on a boat, well, then maybe he was Larry for a while over here and might be Robert over there. Nobody cared.

Scull-DeArmey: For you as a person saving money to go to college, was it—

Brown: I wasn't.

Scull-DeArmeY: You weren't?

Brown: No. Heck, no. I was in high school the first year. The next year I went to college. Let's see. I was a junior, senior summer, high school the first year, and then senior to freshman in college the second year, and then the next year, I was a college dropout. and I was figuring out what I was going to do. And September, which would be normal time to go back to school, I enlisted in the Navy (1:53:58.9) and stayed in the Navy four years and got out, and then I went to college. It worked that time.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. Yeah, working out in the real world will often make, yeah, studying—

Brown: And just getting a few years on you, you know.

Scull-DeArmeY: Um-hm.

Brown: But I was nineteen when I joined the Navy, and when I got out I was twenty-three.

Scull-DeArmeY: Had a reason to study.

Brown: Had a very good reason to study; I was married and had a child. (laughter) And my wife and I went to school together, and we both finished at Mississippi State and have been married; I mean, have been working ever since, but not as a fisherman because I couldn't afford to live, working as a fisherman.

Scull-DeArmeY: What was your degree in?

Brown: Petroleum engineering.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. What about hers?

Brown: Education.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Did she teach?

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmeY: What did she teach?

Brown: She taught in several places overseas, but in the US she only taught—well, she taught at Pinola, a little school here in Mississippi. I worked in the US five years before I went overseas. And when I was living in Magee, Mississippi, she taught at a school in a little town, place called Pinola, Mississippi. She didn't teach until I went overseas. In Bahrain, she taught. I was in Bahrain for five years, and she taught some at the little, private company school we had and then some down at an international school that was really run by the US Defense Department. We have a small naval base in Bahrain. And then later on she taught at Khartoum. We were in Khartoum. She taught at the international school at Khartoum. And I think she taught a little bit when I was in Ras al-Khaimah.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you spell that?

Brown: R-A-S-K-A-H-M-A.

Scull-DeArmey: That's close enough for me to google it.

Brown: No, no, no,. Ras al-Khaimah

Scull-DeArmey: Where is Ras al-Khaimah?

Brown: I didn't know where it was when I was assigned to go down there, and I went next door, and I asked a friend named George did he know where Ras al-Khaimah is. He had worked in the Dubai port, and he told me, "Oh, Oliver, you're going to love it. They built a road to it there now." (laughter) It's the last emirate as you go north, coming out the Straits of Hormuz. It's on the Arab side of the Gulf. And it's a huge emirate there. There's lots and lots of land, but very little oil, and our oilfield was offshore.

Scull-DeArmey: And you worked as an oilfield engineer? Is that right?

Brown: Oh, yeah. Down there I was the operations manager for that little oilfield.

Scull-DeArmey: Are you retired now?

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: When did you retire?

Brown: I retired from Chevron in the fall of 1967. Forty—

Scull-DeArmey: You've had a long retirement.

Brown: Forty—nineteen—2007, forty years. I worked forty years for them, and then I worked for about a year in China as a consultant. And the only thing that I learned in that year was a *lot* about China. China's a very interesting place, but I don't want to go back there and work, and I don't want to work in the oilfield. It's too many, too-long hours. It's eighteen hours a day, just day after day after day after day after day, and you get tired of it.

Scull-DeArmey: I'll bet.

Brown: And I just don't—

Scull-DeArmey: Good grief.

Brown: —want to mess with it anymore.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. I can't blame you for that.

Brown: But China's very interesting. The people—everybody talks about how much money the Chinese have. Imagine that their money is a little frosting of snow in a desert.

Scull-DeArmeY: (laughter) Is it melting fast?

Brown: When it disappears, it'll go (claps) like that, and it'll be gone.

Scull-DeArmeY: Well, I just saw something about China's banks.

Brown: They're probably in terrible shape.

Scull-DeArmeY: They're going to need to borrow money.

Brown: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmeY: They're going to need to borrow money.

Brown: They have an immense amount of development work to do in China. I mean, it is like thousands of dollars, per citizen, need to be spent to get China into the modern world. And if you take all that foreign exchange they've got and you divide it by a billion and a quarter, the numbers get very small on a per-person basis. That's what I mean. You know as much about my fishing assignment.

Scull-DeArmeY: (laughter) That's wonderful. That is a wonderful addition to this collection of interviews.

Brown: Well, I wish that you could go and get on a sailing smack and see what it was like, but I do not know of one in existence. (1:58:36.8) I'd wanted to take my children to see one when we were coming overseas once, many, many years ago, and we were driving from Florida up to Waynesboro. And going through Mobile, I drove over to Starfish and Oyster, and the boats were there, but all the masts had been pulled out, and they were floating under the pier. They were converted to just diesel-power boats. And it kind of broke my heart. There was one left; the name of it was the *Buccaneer*, and it had been kept as a—it was a smack that was around a hundred and ten or fifteen foot long. It was the largest snapper boat I ever saw. It was old. It was tied up to a pier in Pensacola, Florida. And I made a point to take the family over there to see the *Buccaneer*, but it was a tourist attraction, but it was roped off at the time I was there, and I couldn't get on it, but it was exactly like the smacks that I fished over here that's described in this incident report.

Scull-DeArmeY: I wonder if it's still in Pensacola.

Brown: I haven't heard of it for years, and I've been down there to see it in the past, and I haven't seen it. Now, it might be in and out. And somebody told me the Boy Scouts were trying to maintain it and use it as a Boy Scout boat. But it would be an expensive boat to maintain and keep. Wooden sailing craft are not easy to maintain, and they require constant work.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. We have some schooners on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, but I don't know if they're wooden. They might—

Brown: Oh, yeah. Oh, well—

Scull-DeArme y: Are they?

Brown: A lot of fishing smacks were built down there on the Gulf Coast, on the Mississippi [coast]. (2:00:29.8) As a matter of fact, legend has it that Longfellow wrote "To Build a Ship," or "The Building of a Ship" while he was staying in Pascagoula. There's a big, old, white house down there called the Longfellow House. And he was down there one winter, I guess, when it was cold up in the Northeast and supposedly wrote that poem down there. But it was a very active shipbuilding business, using this heart pine and the oak. We had the lumber; we had the wood and all we needed, and there were craftsmen down there that built them.

Scull-DeArme y: We had a bunch of immigrants down there who brought boatbuilding skills with them.

Brown: Oh, yeah. I'm sure they have. Well, it's been settled pretty much two hundred and fifty years, so they've been a lots of boats, built down there.

Scull-DeArme y: They're still building boats down there. Of course, it's pretty different now, the kinds of vessels.

Brown: Well, the biggest shipyard in the United States is down there, Ingalls Shipbuilding. And of course it's Lockheed/Ingalls. It swaps around among the defense contractors. And there's a yacht-building company down there that puts together hundred-million-dollar yachts. My sister was invited to go on one, and she said unless you've been on a boat that costs a hundred and twenty million dollars, you don't really know how ritzy a boat can get. (laughter) And of course it's a ship. It's a ship. But the guy that was showing her around was explaining to her the economics of it, and he said "We're taking the customer through, and he says 'I want an elevator over there.' Even if the thing is 90 percent finished, you don't even quibble. You say, 'Yes, sir.' And you put the elevator the way he wants it." And he said the people that they build those boats for can afford it. There are very few in the world that can do it, but they put them together down there.

Scull-DeArme y: Can't imagine.

Brown: And I believe it's an Australian company, but they build the boats here, or the head of it's in Australia.

Scull-DeArme y: That's really, *really* incredible.

Brown: Yeah, it's hard to imagine that kind of wealth. Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: Whoa! Gosh.

Brown: A yacht that costs a hundred and thirty million dollars to me is just—and, well, there are Americans that have it. Well, there are not very many Americans that can do that, but there are a lot of people.

Scull-DeArmey: That's disposable income.

Brown: Oh, yeah. That's disposable income. Well, of course, some of it may be companies. There may be companies that rent them. Let's say, you're in the Mediterranean, and you're catering to the movie crowd. Now, that may be something that you'd position in Greece or Monaco for the crowd.

Scull-DeArmey: It could be a business.

Brown: You'd rent to this person for a week or have it available for four days for this person.

Scull-DeArmey: I could rent it for two seconds, maybe.

Brown: Yeah, me, too. I'd rent while I walked across it. (laughter) But I mean—

Scull-DeArmey: Take a lot of pictures.

Brown: Yeah, it must be—

Scull-DeArmey: Just one more.

Brown: When Grace Kelly got married, her daddy rented an ocean liner for guests because there weren't a lot of hotels in Monaco, so he just rented an ocean liner and brought it around there, and everybody stayed on the ocean liner. So if you've got that kind of money, you can rent one for ten days if you're kicking around in Monaco. And so some of them might be that type thing, you know.

Scull-DeArmey: Right. Yeah. Well, we have been asking folks what is your favorite seafood. And how do you prepare it? (2:03:49.6)

Brown: If I'm going to have to cook it, I'll take a red snapper, take the scales off, and draw it, of course. You take all of it, open up the body cavity, stuff it, stuff a lemon in it, a chopped-up lemon, and wrap it in tinfoil, and place it on the grill. And it'll come out—and you can put a little other seasoning in if you like it. Lemon juice is always available, and it doesn't take but a few minutes to take a lemon and quarter it and stuff it up in the body cavity and put it together, and wrap it in tinfoil, and lay it on the grill. A few minutes on one side and a few minutes on the other side, depending on the thickness of the fish, the size of the fish, and it is delicious.

Scull-DeArmey: Makes me hungry.

Brown: Um-hm. It comes off tasting real good. You can take it—and of course you need something to go with it. We usually make a salad or green beans or something that'll go with it. But I don't get snapper very much anymore because I don't live by the sea. But Ras al-Khaimah, there were excellent snapper.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow, hm. Well, is there anything that I have not asked you that you—

Brown: No. You've asked me about everything (laughter) that we've done, and that is, so far as I know, a pretty factual account of how it went. You were hired by the captains. You were paid by, depending on how much the thing was. The really unique thing about the experience that I will always kind of enjoy is the fact that I went through a dad-gum hurricane on a sailing craft, and it was an experience. I'll assure you that anybody that ever does it, they'll never forget it.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you have any trepidation about going out the next time?

Brown: At seventeen years old? No. For goodness sakes. This is what you were supposed to do.

Scull-DeArmey: "I'll take another hurricane!"

Brown: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: "I'd do it again!"

Brown: *Now* I would know: get inshore and get inshore fast. We were caught by Audrey because it became a hurricane right behind us. We were sailing back, and it became a hurricane right behind us. But *now* I'm sure—well, all the oil companies get all their people off the rigs, off all the platforms. There's no telling. And no sane person would take a wooden, sailing smack to sea in a hurricane. I mean, the ship was well built. (2:06:08.0) I mean, the *Peggy Gonzales* was built down there in Mississippi or Bayou La Batre, some place like that, out of heart pine and cypress and oak. It was a well-built vessel. It took a *pounding* during that ordeal, and it was probably forty or fifty years old then. And they were still building smacks in the [19]50s. The design was changing on them. They weren't *pure* sailing craft anymore. They were getting them beamier because they were putting engines in them, and to get cargo space, they were making them a little wider than a real sailing vessel should've been. But that was about the end of it, about the late [19]50s. But that was really an experience. It was something. Those waves were huge, and the wind was screaming. It was an experience you don't forget.

Scull-DeArmey: I'll bet.

Brown: And so you've got the whole story; that's what it was like.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, thank you so much. I'm going to go ahead and turn the recorder off.

(end of interview)