

## Roger Carmadelle

Interviewer: Earl Robichaux

Earl Robichaux: If you would state your name or names, and date of birth, and we're in.

Roger Carmadelle: My name is Roger Carmadelle, Date of birth 8-16-31.

Noel Carmadelle: Noel Carmadelle, birthday is 11-7-58.

E: And what – where?

R: Grand Isle, Louisiana. Cheniere Caminada.

E: Okay. So we're gonna talk about primarily fishing and shrimping.

R: Okay.

E: Um, wherever you want to start.

R: Well, like I said, as far as the Cheniere Caminada side, we're strictly commercial fisherman. Now during the shrimp trawling season, we had fisherman coming down from the bayou country – Golden Meadow, Galiano, Cutoff, they used to come down here for the trawling season. A lot of them wasn't living here, but they'd come here. Some of them were staying in the boats. Like they had a couple of the shrimp (inaudible) had little cabins, they would stay in these cabins and stuff like that. And after the shrimp season, they'd go back home to wherever they were from. You know, Golden Meadow, Galiano, Cutoff. But, when you say Cheniere Caminada, you're talking about 100%, in them days, fishing – commercial fishing.

E: And, and tell me a little bit about the nets. You said, uh, they were using.

R: I and – now this is the winter time nets. The winter time nets they used to call it a Tremaux net. A tremaux net had walls made out of cotton. In them days, they never had nylon, monofilm, it was strictly cotton. And these walls might've been ten, twelve foot deep. But then they had a big mesh inside, like a eight-inch square mesh inside and outside, and they'd reduce the net from that depth to about six foot. Five, six foot. Whatever they figure they'd be - whatever type of water they'd be fishing in. And what would happen, when a fish would hit it, it would make a pocket where the fish couldn't back out. In other words, it was like a trap net.

E: So most of that type of fishing was where, in this pass? Caminada?

R: I don't know – in them days, it was mostly, they'd wait for a lot of these commercial fishermen, but wait for a North wind or for the gulf to calm down, and most of the fishermen was along the beach because they needed a good sand bottom where they could pull these nets because if they had any kind of debris, the nets used to hang up, and you know, they use d to – when you pull the bottom would come up and a lot of fish would get- you know, if they wouldn't pocket, they'd go under. But they

needed a good bottom, and it took about six men, because it took three men - these nets might've been six hundred foot long – five or six hundred foot long, and it took three men on each side. One man to pull on the cork, one man to pull on a bottom, the lead line, what you call a lead line, and then they had a man on each side to hold the floats up. It took approximately six men to operate this net.

E: And what kind of boat would...

R: Well they had a small boat. A lot of them used to have a row boat, and then some of them used to have a little a little air cool engine – maybe, you know, four, five horsepower. They never had no power boats in those days. It was all slow...

E: Little putt putts.

R: Yeah. Yeah. Little five, six, seven air-cool engines at the time. And then they'd put this out on the back deck of the boat, they had a deck made especially for the net, and they'd put it out in a semicircle. Half circle.

E: I imagine you caught a lot of fish too.

R: Oh yeah, they had a lot of fish caught. They took, they took well in the fish. But they'd always have one, like uh, the captain, he'd get like on the front of the boat, and he'd kind of spot to see if he could see some kind of um, turbulence, you know where the fish – where a big fish would take off and leave a little deal on there. Uh, he would be the captain, and you know, and they would – where to put the net at.

E: Would they – at times – just watch birds? Like gulls and stuff?

R: Uh, they'd watch birds but not too much. It was mostly, you know, these guys were experienced. And they could tell if uh, if it was a fish big enough, he would like, and what they'd do, they'd stomp their foot on the front of the boat. And if that fish would take off, that fish was kind of, you know, rubbing the bottom, so he'd leave a little swirl, just come up to the top, and they – these guys were pro – they were good at what they what they were doing. The captain – he knew fish.

E: This was pretty low range.

R: Haha, yeah. It's all what was out there.

E: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

E: Probably before even charts were used.

R: Oh yes. Oh yeah they used to – they were you know, they had to be very, very careful.

E: So what about the uh, oyster thing? Like on the bay.

R: Uh, they had oysters – oysters was all over the place. I mean you could go pick up oysters anywhere you want, you now. They had plenty, plenty oysters. They never had too many people doing it. Uh, we had right down on the other side of the water tank over here, water tower, they had the Collins. Old man Levi Collins – which is son is, his grandson is still in that business today. Collins up in Golden Meadow. And uh, they still have reefs right here in the middle. And uh, the grandkids are still after it. The old man died – old man Levi Collins – he had Bayou Thunder, and he had reefs all over. And uh, of course again you know they couldn't go too far because they never had no big boats. Boats were, you know, kind of - and then when they got bigger boats, they start getting oysters from the other side the river, and transferring them into you know, because on the other side the river the water was brackish, and they'd bring them in the salt water for them to grow and get salty.

E: Let me ask you this, since Noel's here. The generational thing – from father to son – I mean, what can you say about shrimping then and shrimping now?

R: Well, it's – it's a complete uh, big difference now because in them days, it was fun, it was - you didn't make much money, but you made enough money to make a decent living. You made a good living. You never had a boss. You made a decent – you had a good living. But as the years went by, the rules, regulations got so strict, I mean the younger people, you know, didn't want to get into it because everything was - got so much...

E: And diesel prices and all that.

R: Well, that – that comes the diesel prices come on later, but I mean the restrictions and stuff like that, and then you had to watch the – all kinds of things.

E: So was there a....

N: Like fishing industry, like he said, he did it for years and if they didn't have no shrimp, you could go catch fish. You know redfish, speckled trout...

R: Yeah, you had something to fall back on.

N: Yeah, so you can go and fish oysters, whatever you want to do. It's like, you could make a living fishing, you know, like some kind of fishing....

R: Yeah, you could always make a living...

N: ...shrimp, fishing, crab, but the way the laws got, you know it's hard, because now trout and redfish is recreational, so that ain't no more commercial fish. So I did all that – you know, like the Tremaux nets and...

E: So at one time speckled trout was commercial?

N: Yeah, not too long ago. It just closed – I'm talking about maybe six to eight, no more than ten years.

E: Yeah, speckled trout and redfish, they...

N: In '89 freeze. They had the '89 freeze, and they were supposed to open redfish back up, and I remember this because that's when we had – we started with the seines – just like them, we started with the seines and the Tremaux nets, and then the gill nets come out, which we adopted that because the Florida fishermen come down here and did the gill nets, and we adopted it, and it worked better – it was easier. You put it out, and you make noise, and the fish get caught, you pick it back up. A seine – like you said – you had to put it out, and you had to pull it on the bank. A gill net you put it out and you pull it back on the boat. Now a seine, you put it out and you put it on a bank, then you gotta put it back – you know, double time, triple time. So it's a lot more work.

R: Oh yeah.

N: So we used to do the net fishing, I still got some net at my house, but uh, you can't sell nothing no more. You know, the net fishing got bad, and then I still got a shrimp boat. I got a forty foot boat, and since Katrina, and we had alike I told you, up to maybe six, seven shrimp sheds total on Grand Isle. You know this side the bridge you had the Collins, you had two over there, the Tell Star, we dealt with some shrimp at one time. We used to haul them – you know, just truck them to John Blanchard. But we still handled shrimp, and right now you only got one place on Grand Isle that handles shrimp. So it's hard to – you know, I mean and when you got a shrimp season...

E: So you're talking processing place.

N: Process – to sell shrimp and to buy ice. If you can't get no ice, you can't move shrimp. I mean you know, it's - so Since Katrina, and then the fuel went up, so high, you know, it's tough. You know, if you want to make it, you've gotta work for it these days.

R: Oh yeah.

N: I mean, it's hard.

R: Right now, everything is just so seasonal. In them days, you could go from one trade, like shrimp and crab, or fishing, but now, uh, the rules got – and the laws got so strict.

N: It's to sell the pile, to get rid of the pile. You would never think you'd have trouble getting rid of stuff – and like seafood, and it's...

E: Well you know, who ever though that um, somebody like K-Paul would popularize redfish.

N: Well with the redfish, and then they went put the ban on it, you know.

E: Switched to butter fish.

R: Yeah, and when they put that blackened redfish out, that was it.

E: So um, did any of you ever work on a shrimp boat?

Oh yeah, I own a shrimp – they got a picture of my shrimp boat out - had, well I started off with a 20-foot Lafitte skiff. With a 60-horsepower engine. That's a gasoline engine. And at that time it was a pretty

powerful boat – 60-horsepower. And then I went in to a 32-foot boat with a Chrysler. Flathead Chrysler. Uh, it was like uh, about a 100-horsepower, 115-horsepower. But it was a fast boat. It would get up on a wave. Then I went up to 32-foot boat – which was a little cabin in front of it, and we used to have a – we had a wench, and the wench in the back was made with the rear end of an automobile. And they'd come out and they'd make a roll out of oak. And we'd - -when we'd come to pick up the net, we'd wrap our ropes onto that - them deals and pull up. We was going first class then.

E: No doors?

R: Yeah, we had the door, then when the doors come, then you had to handle the doors and put the doors on the - lay the doors down flat on the, on the fan tail of the boat.

E: Oh, okay.

R: Yeah. But uh, you had to watch – especially when you had a calm, calm day, you had to try to handle the rig in the back, and you had your control like middle ways of the boat, that your net wouldn't go under the boat. Now when it was a little windy or stuff like that, you always went with the wind, so the wind would keep the boat away from the net.

E: So would you say that throughout the last three hundred years, most people trawled Caminada Pass?

R: Well, not say Caminada Pass, but in the bays, like this is what they call Bay St. Honore, and Bay – they were strictly – they never had too many, uh, gulf shrimpers at the time. Mostly all your shrimpers were bay fishermen. Yeah.

E: Now I was just wondering about that because Caminada has such a history of, you know, people shrimping. So I was wondering if they had trawled in the past. Um, what do you think they did in the old days? It's like, going out to the gulf or...

R: Well, not like when it was, you know, for the sea bob then, you know they'd wait for like a Northwestern and when the gulf would calm down then they'd go, but with the boats they had in them days, if the gulf was a little rough, they couldn't fish the gulf. The gulf had to be strictly calm for them to fish the gulf. Because, like I said, the biggest boat in those days, and you know, in the later years, might've been 40-foot long.

E: Mmhmm.

R: They never had no what they called like slabs today – biggest shrimp boats they had in them days – if they had a 40-foot boat, they had a big boat with a cabin in the back. Single rig. They never used a double rig. Everything was single rig. About a 32, 35-foot net was the biggest they'd pull.

N: Now they learned how to pull two trawls, now they're up to four trawls.

R: Haha

E: So let me ask you this. I know like after the wind dies down after a front or something, it's a good time to speck fish. Would you see anything like, say prior to a storm or something, that fishing pick up?

R: Um...

N: I don't know if after the storm does it, but it looks like it's a yearly thing – you know like after Katrina we had a good crop of fish, but I don't know if it's due to the storm, or you know, when we had a good crop of trout, you know, I don't know where it's coming from, but we do have a lot of trout.

E: Let me ask you this. What was it like in the early days to go through a hurricane on Grand Isle?

R: Well, it was bad because evidently you never had no weather reports like you have now. When you gotta – when you know about a hurricane, you know, they were right there on your back door. But then in them days, it seemed like a hurricane was, you know, maybe was a hundred miles wide and stuff like that, now they 600 miles wide. And uh...

N: And then like you say the whole coast at the time. Now you flood more.

R: Yeah, you had more land, more protection and stuff like that.

N: I mean, you know, just looking at the marsh we ain't got no more land to protect it. Elmer's Island is about gone.

R: Yeah, all your protection is gone.

E: Okay so like the islands, while we're on the subject, the islands like Fifi Island, and all the other islands in the Baratavia system, um, what other islands would you say have gone under? Like Fifi...

N: Just out this bay right here, you had a bunch of islands.

R: Most of the islands – most of the islands left us, uh, after the big freeze, what year was the freeze?

N: '89 freeze. We had the '89...

R: When we had the freeze, a lot of the islands had left us because uh, what they call a Mungo – was the mungos, the mung trees, the little trees, the mung trees, well it killed all the trees, and the trees would grow along the water's edge. And the trees would grow thick, and they'd have all that marsh together, and once the trees went, there was nothing to hold the marsh like right here along this bank, I mean you couldn't hardly put a – within a hundred foot from the water, you couldn't hardly walk through it – it was so thick, but when the freeze come and killed all of that, uh, then the land started disappearing. Like right over here in the middle we had like three big islands – we had one we called Bird Island, and a couple of ones on the side, um, and that all washed away. Once the freeze come...

N: Yeah, so I'm only 50 years old, and I remember them islands – like you said, Bird Island, and...

R: Bird Island, they had a lot of people...

N: A bunch of islands up in here. And they all gone. I mean I could – it's unreal, you know.

R: A lot of – bird island was a lot of uh, it was like a crane, crane, nesting area. And a lot of these people from the bayou – when these cranes would get a certain age, they'd go there with – they used to eat these things. And they used to go there with sticks and kill a bunch of them.

N: They'd go and pick the eggs at certain times, and they'd go pick the young birds that couldn't fly away, till they could fly - mean they used to...

E: Easy pickings.

R: Easy pickings. I mean they used to go and eat this...

E: So Bird Island is gone?

R: Bird Island is...

N: Queen Bess Island – they used to call it the bird sanctuary. That's the one they...

E: Tell me what you know about Queen Beth Island, because I want to go there. I've heard a lot about it.

R: He knows more about Queen Bess – he's been taking people out there and all that kind of stuff.

N: We went shrimping in Barataria Pass, and Queen Bess Island actually washed away over the years, I'm talking - I don't know when they rebuilt about seven, eight, ten years ago at the most, but actually was a bird nesting area for pelicans. And we went shrimping in Barataria pass, and Queen Bess is about a mile or two that you could – you used to be able to see, and then it was gone. And next thing you know, you see cranes, and dump trucks, and all, so they rebuilt the island, for this bird nesting area. And they put rocks all the way around, you know for the birds. And we lived on the island with people, and they don't put rocks. It's amazing they don't put rocks around the island for people, but they're gonna do it for the birds.

E: How many pelicans would you say are there?

N: Uh, thousands. Thousands, I mean, I'm gonna try to find ya'll some pictures, I'm gonna bring ya'll them next couple weeks.

E: I think it's important for the CD that you say thousands of pelicans.

N: I have pictures I could find at the house, and I'm gonna have to give them to ya'll. I bring quite a few people over there and just....

R: Well they're down there – people with the Nature Conservative Group...or whatever you're talking about...some old ladies...

N: No, it was some other old ladies, David knew that guy, and they brought their wives and they took pictures, and if we could get a copy of them things, I mean birds were from the time – they had – they

were nesting at the time. They had eggs, and they had little bitty ones, and they had the next size, they had them all the way from the eggs to the adults. She took pictures. You know, different steps. And it was something – but you know, they got thousands of birds there. I mean, and usually three eggs in each thing.

R: Haha.

E: Pelicans.

N: Yeah, pelicans. The pelicans. So uh, if ya'll come in a few weeks, we can go look at it.

E: Well this – so I'll see if we can do that. Because uh, I've always heard about it.

N: You gotta go there. Well if you come in and do this, you know, and just something to go see.

E: Yeah.

N: And they're gonna be nesting by that time – they should be making nests March, April, somewhere up in there.

E: That'd be a real treat. You know, I know when DDT was in the food chain in the 60's, they took some birds from Queen Bess, and moved them over to Florida, and they did well, and then they brought I think it was about '86 – back to Queen Bess. And they just sort of took off, you know.

R: Yeah, uh, we talking back on the Hurricane in 1956 – it wiped out the pelicans over here on Grand Isle. And they had to import pelicans from Florida back over here. Um, to regenerate – to repopulate.

N: They said with the hurricane right before Katrina...

R: Betsy wiped out our pelicans over here.

N: Kat – right before Katrina, we had hurricane Cindy which was early July. If you remember right there, Hurricane Katrina, and we had Cindy in July, and that's when the birds were just young. I don't know what happened to them then, I mean, because most of the time June, July, April, May, May, June, July, they're just...

E: Real tender...

N: Tender, young, and then Hurricane Cindy came, and I know – I don't know what happened, you know, but they're back – I brought people last year and took pictures of them.

E: So basically they built up...

N: The island - yeah. They got the rocks surrounding – the island is surrounded by rocks now.

E: Hmm.

N: So I mean it's a good thing you know...



E: So how far would you say it is from here?

N: Well if you leave from the other end – right here it's about eight, ten miles, but if you leave from Sand Dollar Marina, which is on the other end, two miles. I mean just, it ain't far. But if I leave from right here, Six, seven, you know, about eight, ten miles.

E: Yeah. A lot of pictures. But um, did ya'll – ya'll never ate pelican...

R: No. haha. No.

N: No.

E: Well if you would tell us a little bit about the hurricanes. I mean, if, you know, there's anything sort of, wind and water, that you remember? That you went through?

R: Well, I always evacuated for a hurricane. A lot of times, like I said, in 1956, I had a house across the, across the highway right along side the canal, which my family had, and uh, I lost it in 1956. In fact all my stuff was right here on this side of the highway scattered out. That was nothing but a bunch of – right here on the side of me, there was nothing but a bunch of blackberry bushes In there. Now they had some snakes. Little blue runners that run on top the – they were full of snakes, full of – uh, blackberry bushes, and a lot of my stuff got hung up in these blackberry bushes over here. But uh, three and a half years ago for this storm, the only thing I saved are the pictures that you're seeing and my dishes right here between this house and that house. Everything else was gone – I never found nothing else.

N: In his lifetime, he's lost two houses for hurricanes.

R: Yeah this is my third house.

N: We're still here. Haha

R: Haha.

E: Well you know the um, the um, uh, the National Academy of Sciences, I read somewhere, it says Grand Isle gets affected by storms every 2.5 years. And yet, it's still, rebuilt, you know.

N: The little hurirricanes we get – like hurricane Bill was, I don't' know, when Mama died, in '03? '03 – Hurricane Bill – that's when you were in the hospital. I came over and..

R: Yeah, yeah.

N: What month was that, June? Late, early June?

R: The same time – the day of the hurricane – June. June the 30<sup>th</sup>.

N: June 30 we had – when you get a hurricane early, like June, July, they don't supposed to be much. Little tropical storms, but when they get to the island, I don't know if it's the temperature of the island or the gulf, Hurricane Bill, Hurricane Danny, Hurricane Cindy was some little tropical depressions. Well

Cindy they finally categorized it as a hurricane, last few years, but I was stuck for all three storms, because they claimed they wasn't gonna be much. They fifty sixty mile an hour winds, but when they get to the island, they get to 80, 100 miles an hour. And three hurricanes, little hurricanes, now I wouldn't want to be here for a big one, but you can see what the little ones do. You know, I'm talking about some little hurricanes, 80 to 100 miles an hour, and that's why I showed you the picture of the water, that was for Hurricane Bill. Hurricane Danny was another one before the – I remember the hurricane before that rodeo. That was rodeo is July 31<sup>st</sup>. The big Tarpon? And anything before that it's just a little storm, but they put a good little punch on you. It's a way to – they get you – it's a wakeup call. You notice a little storm, but they claim that – you watch the news, and they always had good weather and all, but they little tropical storms, little depressions, and man next thing you know, I had my shrimp boat go on land at one time because we didn't leave, because when a storm comes, we evacuate. We bring our boats up the bayou by the floodgate; because over here you're gonna get over three to four foot of water. You know, maybe up to six feet of water, and you can't tie your boats like that. They go up and down, and quite a few boats for hurricane Danny sunk where – where Wayne Eschete shrimp shed, and nobody left. Because we wasn't supposed to. But boats go up, and they're tied on the pilings like when they go up, and when the rope gets tight, the rope pulls them to the – and when the boat goes down the pilings go through the boat. You know, the pilings are made on a flair, like. And you tie them loose where they could go up, but as they go up, the rope gets tight so it pulls them, and when they go down the piling goes through the boats. And that's how we get...

E: So the rope stays at the bottom...

N: Yeah.

E: And the boat goes up, and pretty soon...

N: But as the water goes up, and as the water goes up, the boat aint' gonna go away from the dock, it's gonna go up, and then they pulling and then the tide goes down, and they had...

E: I see in Lafourche, what people do is they go and anchor in the middle of the bayou.

N: They used to do that - yeah, that's something that your boat could go up and down, like you said. Along a dock, you tie up, you gotta leave slack where you go up. But as you go up, the rope gets tight, so it don't really go out, it just starts pulling and then when they go down, it goes back and

R: Well for protection, a lot of people will tie, tie their boat tight, they want to use a bunch of ropes and stuff like that, you know. And best way to tie a boat for a hurricane is to use one rope where it could, you know, float around.

N: Float around, yeah.

R: But then the thing is like you say you gotta be in a bayou where the boat can turn. If it's tied up to the dock it can't because if the water comes high, your boat's gonna end up way on top of a piling or on land.

N: Yeah, it's the tide surge, like you said. We're getting so much water after the storm is you know, it's hard to judge things. Now what you're going to tie tight – and now you go into the flood gates, it helps. But I don't know how much – if the flood gates have a little, you know, I mean, we're in bad shape. Up the bayou, I'm talking about. We have to go all the way up the bayou.

R: Try to find a fisherman – a lot of fishermen today, when there's a hurricane or – but now you got way in advance notice. They take the boats on the other side on the other side the floodgate.

E: Go through Lafourche.

R: Yeah. So the only way – if the levee gives out in the back of Golden Meadow, Galiano, and stuff like that, then people would be in trouble, but uh, it gives the boat protection once they put them back of that floodgate.

E: So on the subject of land loss; let's say the marsh from like Golden Meadow to here, how much would you say has been lost in the last fifty years?

N: Uh, I'm only fifty years old, but what I've seen in the last – and since, shit I've seen probably fifty sixty percent of it, at least.

R: Oh yeah. Because a lot of them, which today, you see bays along the highway. That was nothing but small duck ponds.

N: Yeah, those were duck ponds.

R: Yeah, when you drive down highway...

N: Then it turns to a lake, and next thing you know...Just in the last – in the last few years, I mean in the last ten years it got worse. I mean, yeah. On a good day I mean right now you could see Leeville Bridge. Leeville Bridge is not far from here. We sit on a porch right there, and you see the Leeville Bridge lights, and you see headlights, and they're coming toward you, and then – because Leeville Bridge is right there. I'm talking – you go straight – maybe five, six miles, you know? And then you turn, and you gotta go all the way to Fourchon which is that way, and then you gotta come back, but notice next time you gotta come from Leeville when you come all the way to right in the middle, you look at – you're gonna see Grand Isle water tower.

R: Oh yeah.

N: But then you gotta make that turn – but Leeville Bridge, from here to Leeville Bridge – and then you still have bayous and bays and all. Just like they have that little cut, and then you hit some bayous and – but it's it's all over now.

R: Everything's open up right now.

E: Yeah, I remember talking to – I don't remember if it's Pat Landry, or Ambrose Besson, but they talked about when the north wind blows in the winter, there are big chunks of marsh that just go out through

the pass. And then the wind blows them up on the beach. It's like – you can make a whole – marsh. Just with the stuff that blows up on the beach.

R: Like I said, the stuff they had before the freeze, the mungo's used to hold this marsh together because they had a lot of roots on it. They used to hold – now they don't have anything to hold the marsh together, so anytime you're gonna get a little wave action, there's gonna break, it's gonna break in sections.

N: Just right up the road, right there by Plaisance? Right after the third little bridge they got an oak ridge. Oak trees right up here? I don't know if ya'll have seen them. Katrina knocked the hell out of them. But they looked like they was coming back. But the last two storms – and I don't think they're gonna come back, but it was a pretty oak ridge right when you're gonna go – right after the third little cement bridge you're gonna look on the left. They had a little, not a little – well it's a big oak ridge. Was pretty for years.

R: There was a big oak ridge. Now it's a little narrow ridge right there.

N: Oak trees right there. You could see the roots and all, but Katrina knocked them because Katrina came from the North end and knocked them out. But they started doing good, they started growing and all, and now the last two storms blew them the opposite way, and I don't know if they're broken, or – but they ain't coming back. When you lose stuff like that – that's what protects – I mean it's not a whole bunch, but it's a line of oak trees and oak trees are tough, but it just, you know...

E: Well oak trees can't stand up against salt water.

N: No, that's what – you know.

R: No.

E: So you mentioned Katrina – I didn't know, I mean I knew Grand Isle got hit pretty – but how strong do you think it was here?

N: Let's see what they say – what Katrina was – I don't remember what they recommended...

R: I think it was about 80 – recorded winds up to two hundred miles per hour.

N: I think in Fourchon.

R: Yeah, in Fourchon, 200, 210, 215.

N: If you look at – I think they said that Katrina passed at 90.6, or something like that line, and we 91. If you look Grand Isle is on 91. So actually we was on the worse side, because you know, we're on the left side, but when it came we was right there. I mean it's just...

E: Well, you were close enough to it to wrap around.

N: Yeah.

E: You know, and it hits it directly.

R: Yeah. I think at Fourchon it was 82, 200, or 215. On some of them uh, offshore boats they recorded. Yeah. Big, big hurricane.

N: The next street over they had like 21 camps the next street over, two. And they had three left after that. I mean where they're building them new ones that we've seen right there, if you they only had three that stood up. And the rest ...

E: So was the island, like completely covered? Because I heard that you know, the wind from the north – if the water was, well, the water they tell me was rising because it didn't have a way to get out.

N: Right. Because you had the levee, and the water just didn't go – from one end of the island just go over the island, they had that levee, and until it broke a few places in the levee, but that levee had debris all over. I mean, you know, the big levee that you know, where they're building it now, but since the storm, Katrina came from the North, man the debris was stacked up on that levee. I mean wood, trash, any – you know, everything was on there.

R: I think the gym –how much water they had in the school gym at the time...

N: Four, five feet in the gym or something? Maybe a little deeper? Right by the town hall and all. Like you said, man. Gustav and Ike came, and they still put...

E: Let me rewind this – we're at the end of a tape.

N: And they thought they were gonna stop the erosion, but it eroded more.

R: Okay and I think that neutras caused erosion more when they went to.

N: I don't know if it caused it or not, now they ain't got no neutras and it's going quicker. Haha.

E: Well let's talk about trapping.

N: Haha.

R: Like I said, when my daddy moved down here in the late '40s, well in summertime, they used to fish crab. Now when they'd fish crab, they never had no crab traps. You had to put a line, and the old Frenchmen used to call it a *parlon*. And uh, it was maybe uh, three, four miles long, and about every six foot, they used to put a bait. And they used to use cattle lips and cattle ears. And put a slipknot in it and measure, and put a - and then have a like again, a small boat, and then uh, you had, you had a stick. You had to steer, and you couldn't run fast. It had to go slow because every six foot, in them days, every bait had three, four crabs on it. And, in the back of it they had – we used to call it a patch because it was made like a "Y", and you get to your line where you had a picket, then you had a brick on the end to bring your line down, and then you had to hold it, and after to pass your brick, you put that line into that patting stick, and then you run and you had like a, a, like a ping pong net, but it was made out of used chicken wire because you didn't want to use a string or anything like that because a crab would bite it

and it would hold on to it and you never had a chance, so you used to use a chicken wire, and put it real tight when you get the crab, that he'd flap right off. And you had to, you know, dip the ...

N: It's almost like they do with the pilons when they...

R: Like when they - like when they play tennis. It was like a tennis. And you had to run and then you had to steer the boat, and you had to do that and you do that all - you had to do that all day long.

E: It's just picking crabs.

N: You know how they do it on the beach now, with the two sticks and with that crab line, but a lot of people tie chicken necks, and you just go scoop them up, but that's just for fun, but do it commercial, like he said, I remember when I was young, and the bait they would use would be tough, like cow tongue, or cow ears, or something and you had to soak that down. And the crab would come over here and you wouldn't want them to - you got a crab on your stick.

R: You had to put that line out every, you had to put that line out every morning, but it had to be yeah, and it had to be calm. You couldn't fish in rough weather with a line. And you had to pick it up every afternoon. When you finish fishing, you had to pick up your line. And when you pick up your line, you had to uh, you know, put it , and try to put all your bait - you had these bushel baskets and after so many layers, you had to take some salt and put some salt to keep the flies off, and these (inaudible), you had to salt your bait down.

E: Yeah, I used to do that with my dad, but we used bull lips.

R: Well we used to use cattle lips, and cattle ears. But uh, mostly the lips, you know for bait.

E: So most of the crab fishing was in the bay, right?

R: Yeah.

N: Yeah, all in the bay. At the time the bays were smaller too, you know, because you had a lot more land...

R: Yeah, you know, right along the edges.

N: You know, you had more protection, and you could fish in all different times.

R: Yeah, we never did fish in the middle. It was always you know, like on the edge of the bay, we used to fish.

And like he said, as far as making a living, he used to shrimp on shrimp season, crab, fish, then wintertime would come - trapping was a big deal down here. A lot of animals down here.

R: And that's what...

N: I did my trapping - when I graduated in '77, and I did some trapping for a few years.

R: That's what I said, you know, in them days, uh, when you was a fisherman, you'd always, you know everything was seasonal. You had one thing, you know, that uh, after the other, that you could go back on. But now today you don't have that. It's one thing at a time. You know, and you've got to depend on other things.

E: Well how bountiful were nutrias? You mentioned me, talk a bit about that.

R: About the nutrias?

E: And the mink.

R: Oh, uh, in – well when they had the minks, they never had no nutrias down here. They brought the nutrias after. But uh, right here by Elmer's Isle and bridge and all that, that was mink country. My dad and my uncle used to fish, and they used to catch a lot of minks in that area. And uh,

R: When they brought their...

N: Nutria rats took over, and the 'coons too. Man, they had the coons wherever you go, but they had the pipeline canals, and they had the trees used to grow on them. After they dig a pipeline, when all those things over the pipelines, talking about erosion and all, the pipeline canals are going, so I mean you aint' got no high areas hardly no more back there. I mean the land is just gone, you know.

E: Yeah, sinking.

N: Sinking , washing away...

E: Well what would you say, like we talked about earlier, are the unique things about living in a place like Grand Isle?

N: Well you know everybody, you know your neighborhood, you know, well not just your neighborhood, the whole island knows each other.

R: Yeah, everybody knows.

N: You can kind of basically do what you want. It's laid back. Haha. You like to fish, this is the place to be.

R: Oh yeah. Not only fish, I mean, it's ....

N: The women don't like it down here. They aint' got no place to shop.

R: Haha.

E: They need a place to spend money.

N: So that's it, you know. Wal-mart is what, 35 miles up there. So 40 miles, so I mean, it depends, you know. Some women like it here, they like outdoors, but if they ain't an outdoorsman, it ain't good.

R: And then, then, a lot of times, you have a lot of little community activities going on. You know, little cookout and stuff like that. In the city, you don't have none of that stuff going on. A lot of times.

E: Let me ask you this. Here we are in 2009, and I've heard reports that sea level will rise between one and six meters – that's, you know, a meter being about three feet, between now and the end of the century. So if – I have my own personal feelings about living in a place like – I probably would, but what do you think is the general feeling amongst people, especially elderly people, on the island?

N: I would say like his age, you know, he's in his seventies and all, they're gonna make their life over here. If I could get to seventy, twenty more years from now, I don't know if I'm gonna be living here because it's just like you say, you know the sea level just in the last few years with the hurricanes knocking the island, well ya'll have been on the island. It's hard to say that I'm gonna finish – I'd like to finish my life here, but it's, it's hard to – like you said, you know with the, the island itself, I mean, it's going so quick, you know.

R: Yeah, you think, uh, where you went to interview Russell Crosby back in there they had the mobile houses back by the cemetery – cemetery lane – them houses are a hundred years old. They never had water around the area. Now you these last, last couple years, they all had water in them. A lot of them got destroyed. A lot of them...

N: The island – some parts of the island will be here, like the old - but it's from here to Leeville and to Golden Meadow, you know, is that gonna be there, because I mean when you look – when you're gonna be traveling, when ya'll are gonna be traveling, look at that road. There ain't, you know.

E: Right now.

R: The water level is rising, and your land area is shrinking. So it's giving you more water, you know, bring in the water closer and closer to your land.

E: Well would you say that it's worth staying here to for the sake of the culture, the lifestyle?

R: I'd say yes. Haha. Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

E: I agree.

R: Definitely, like I said, it's 100% different lifestyle. You know, there's freedom, and like I said, everybody, everybody knows one another and stuff like that, and you have these community gatherings ever so often, that people go to. Uh, which, like he said, you know, ladies, they don't have the shopping centers, haha, but some things are good...

E: So you gotta make a little trip to New Orleans every once in a while.

R: Yeah, either that, or a lot of people they don't go too much to New Orleans – they go to Houma. Yeah, they – a lot of them – go towards Houma's shorter, and they got a lot of stuff in Houma, so most of them go on to Houma.



E: Well, I was down here about a month after Gustav, and what I saw, and what I saw – it looked like it lifted or I maybe like did this, it looked as if they lifted the storm surge just lifted the dunes on the western part of the island, just the piles that are on the island.

N: I mean when you come across the bridge and all where it just washed it all the way across from one end to the other end...

R: Yeah, yeah.

E: You can see the gulf from the road. And then when you get to the area where Bobby Santini and uh, Mr. Crosby live, it looks to me like the center of the island will still be around.

R: Right, yeah.

E: But the gulf looks like it wants to bisect the island.

R: And now you think from, from that area to this area, you're looking at about a four foot difference. In elevation.

N: When you cross the bridge, a lot of times the water used to come across the...

R: That's the highest – that's the high part of the island.

N: And the oak trees and all of that too, I mean...

E: I mean, you know, Cheniere I'm sure.

R: Then from the years, what happened, like you see this sand, and then they have all them trees there, from hurricanes and stuff like that. The, every year there's a buildup, buildup.

E: A buildup of...

R: Of sand. Elevation – they get a little bit higher elevation.

N: Like Gustav pushed all the sand over everybody's lot. It just builds them up.

E: Oh, I see.

N: And they're gonna take up – it might get higher, but it's getting narrow – it actually – and it ain't just the gulf either. I mean you gotta – people don't realize the back side that's going – you've got a bad winter with a lot of North winds, that eats you up. And then in the summer you've got South winds. So it's heating a little bit on each side. And actually, you get smaller, you know I mean, some places of the island. And like I said they put rocks and then they quit. They put rocks, and they quit. I don't – I don't understand the – you know, if you've been on the island...

E: But there should be a lot of jetties...

N: I mean...

E: ...on the North side.

N: Yeah. They went up to a certain – like he said, when ya'll gonna ride around the island next couple weeks and somebody brings ya'll all the way around the island, you could see. You know, I could, you know, ya'll come in a couple weeks.

R: You know, the rocks or sand levees is good. But you know if you gotta build a – if you gotta build a twelve foot levee, nine foot levee, you can't build it all at one time. You gotta build a certain stage, and then in a couple years come back and with another three or four foot. You gotta build it in stages because uh, that stuff – it sinks. Just like these rocks in the gulf. They put that, what, eight, ten years ago? I mean, you know, they sunk. Now it's time to come back with another layer. Of course they – you know after all the stuff that the Corps and all done, then they claim they made a mistake because they left the openings too wide.

E: Oh, the Corps made a mistake?

R: Haha. That I admitted. That I admit. But the thing is, and then like you see these rocks over here, if you look at them, they're kind of staggered from one another. So if you come in, you gotta come in on an angle – you can't come in straight. These cuts – they're wide. Now it would've been good if they'd have left them wide and come with a jetty from the bank going out in between where it would've trapped the sand. Bu they didn't do that.

E: Okay, I'm – this just occurred to me – You're in Grand Isle. You've seen a lot of Tarpon Rodeos.

R: Oh, yeah.

E: What would be some of the biggest fish you've ever seen caught in the past?

Well, right here at uh, they had a lot of big tarpons caught right here in Caminada Pass. You don't see tarpons here anymore. If you wanna catch a tarpon, you've gotta go toward the river. Um, the salinity of the water is, you know, tarpon like salt water, but they don't like it real salt. And uh, so everything – and then with the traffic and stuff like that, but I know we have a friend – he was a boat builder in Westwego. He had a camp right in the back, and he was a, a tarpon fisherman and a mackerel fisherman at the time. And he used to fish right here in the pass and catch all kinds of tarpons. That's gone.

E: What about tuna?

N: Tuna – that's an offshore fish. You never get too much tuna. That's way offshore, you know. This time of the year, but it needs cool water.

E: So, this area is not really part of that West Delta area?

N: It's – no, it's um, tuna – I mean, you go out – they've been going out ....

R: You gotta go toward the river because tuna like a cooler temperature of the water.

N: I mean, they're talking about eighty miles out.

E: I heard the record was like, 800 pounds.

N: 800 pounds.

R: Yeah. And that's why they're staying in the deep part because down below is, you know, the water's cooler.

N: This time of year is tuna fishing. Right now it's uh, a bunch of...

E: Oh yeah, big time, you know. Spring time, west delta, that *is* the time.

N: When they launch by the marinas over here – it's only about a forty mile ride. They go toward the river. Now if they want to go straight out, you're talking about eighty miles...

R: ...on account of the water temperature. Fish that the water temperature isn't...

N: They got enough fish – if they want to fish just along the coast over here, I mean you gotta have the right bait. I mean you know, it depends on what you want to catch. Redfish, trout, you know, and what size trout- if you want to catch small trout, fish with live shrimp and artificial bait inside, in the oyster reef, but if you want to catch big trout, the live croakers is hard to beat. I mean people found that out the last few years, and it's just –

E: Well what about any notable schools of specks that...

Oh, they, you know, they're gonna – that's when you see the birds and all, and that's when you gonna see them start coming in, and especially a lot of times, it's hard to get your limit. You might catch a hundred trout to catch 25 – them little school trout come in, well that – it's fun fishing, that's all artificial, but the big trout are mostly right along the beach, you know, you do good with that.

E: What – and also along the pass, right?

N: The pass is the edge is on the sandbars and all, well it's all about the bait too. And the line.

E: Yeah, last time I fished, all we caught is sheepshead, and uh, large stingrays, and then these dolphins moved in. And once they moved in, that was it.

R: Once they move in, you gotta go pick up your line.

E: Yeah.

R: Oh yeah.

E: Yeah, they can clear out an area pretty quick.

N: Well I gotta get going – I gotta be at school at three.

E: Okay.

E: Okay. So tell me a bit about Barataria Bay. You mentioned – you're originally from Westwego?

R: Yeah, I'm from Westwego.

E: Yeah. So um, what would be the bay and connections down to Grand Isle?

R: Well, first you had to come to, of course, we didn't call it Bayou Segnette at the time. We used to call it the Westwego Canal. Then you come out – you went to Lake Salvador, you pass through Lafitte, Barataria Lafitte, then you come out to Grand Lake which is Barataria Bay also. And then come down to Grand Isle.

E: Now at one time, I don't think they had a Barataria Pass. Right?

R: Uh – they didn't call it Barataira Pass – the old um, Cajuns down here used to call it the Big Pass. There was no – they always had a pass by the fort, but they used to call it the Big Pass. Bayou Rigaud. Bayou Rigaud Pass. Because then they'd come into Bayou Rigaud from the backside. But they – they never did call it Barataria Pass. It was always the Big Pass, you know, coming out to Bayou Rigaud.

E: So Caminada Pass empties...

R: Caminada Pass is right back here.

E: Right. So it empties – everything – I'm just trying to see what – what the marsh would be – where it empties.

R: It empties Bayou Thunder, Bay St. Honore, um, part of Caminada Bay, because where the bridge is at – that's Caminada Bay. This is Bay St. Honore. And it empties to that Bayou Thunder and all these back bays like Lake Laurier, Lake Palourde; all that goes out into Caminada Pass.

E: Lake Palourde?

R: Lake Palourde – they got a Lake Palourde over here.

E: Oh, here. Okay.

R: Yeah. Now they got a Lake Palourde out of Morgan City, but they also have a small lake back here between here and...

E: Now, I gotcha. Yeah.

R: Back in here.

E: So um, during the course of your lifetime, what can you tell me about things like mosquitoes? Gnats? That kind of deal.

R: Well, at the time, when we first moved down here, this was all uh, marshland. In other words, where they put the pump right up the road, they never had no pumps at that time. They had a culvert. And water used to flow on both sides of the highway. This used to flood right here in this area. And when we

first moved down here, yes, they had mosquitoes. Um, when you went outside at night after it got sunset, we had to dress like the Lone Ranger – put a mask in front of our face because we were told not to get choked up on mosquitoes. And if you – you had to make sure you had good screens on your house. And a lot of people – of course, a lot of the young kids don't know what an ice pick is right now, but you had to have an ice pick in case your screen might've had a little dent in it, to close that hole because they would come in that hole and uh – at night when you never had no a/c or anything like that. Because the power – the electric didn't come down here till the early '50s – '51, '52, when Entergy brought electricity down here. So you had to sleep with the windows open, and you could hear the mosquitoes humming outside, singing. Mosquitoes – we had mosquitoes, yes. Plenty, plenty mosquitoes.

E: So when you say humming, sort of how the...

R: Against the screen – they were trying to get in. Oh yeah, they were trying to get in the house. They were trying to get in. I guess they could, you know, with the smell or whatever. No, they were trying to get into the houses. Like I said, you had to have, you had to have a good, good screen to make sure that if you had a little mesh of the screen was a little bit stretched, they'd found – they'd find a hole to get in. so you had to have a screen where mesh is small so you have to kind of take an ice pick or fork to try to kind of close that gap in. Yeah, they were bad. They used to have – in them days, they used to have cows that used to roam the island. And it depends where – now, cows looked like, they was ahead of people because they knew where the wind was gonna be coming from because where the wind was gonna be coming from, the cows would walk where they could get the most wind. So they would roam this island from one end of the other. Then the cows also brought the mosquitoes.

E: But um, basically they just, what? Ate grass?

R: The mosquitoes?

E: No, the cows.

R: Oh the cows? Yeah they would feed off the land. Yeah, they feed off the land.

E: Because we talked to um, Mr. Rigaud – I'm trying to, um...

R: Aubert?

E: Yeah. And he said, um, it never occurred to anybody to slaughter a cow.

R: No, nobody killed cows that way at the time. Now Aubert Rigaud in all of them days, they used to have in wintertime they used to slaughter pigs – they used to call it a *Boucherie*. They had the *bougeries*, but they never did have – they never did kill cows to have, you know, anything like that. But they used to – they used to have, in them days, they used to have these big *bougeries* every year.

E: Yeah, yeah, I'm familiar with that. Um, was there anything like um, like in Ville Platte, you know, where they made boudin, or hog cracklins, or anything like that?

R: Now they made hog cracklins, but not boudin that I know of. They made hog cracklins, hog head cheese, and stuff like that, but as far as boudin and all that kinds of stuff...

E: Now what would you say are some seafood dishes that you can remember?

R: Seafood dishes?

E: Yeah.

R: Well, you had – always had your fried seafood – shrimp, fish, crab, oysters, and stuff like that. And uh, people used to make uh, a shrimp salad.

E: Well redfish courtbouillon? Or anything like that...

R: Redfish courtbouillon. That was popular. Shrimp stew, Shrimp stew...

E: There were really no clams around here, right? Because I know around Morgan City those are all freshwater clam lakes.

R: People wasn't too much on clams over here. Now the old Cajun people mostly from on the bayou – I don't know about the island - they used to love bigoneaux. Not the crawling – the one with the flap on the bottom – they used to take that, boil that, take the, they had what they call a tobacco sack, and take that bag out, they wouldn't make a gumbo - people from Golden Meadow, Galiano, Cutoff, now maybe some old Grand Isle people, but they wouldn't make a – they wouldn't make a gumbo if they wouldn't have bigoneaux in it. A lot of people from – a lot of the old Cajuns on the bayou are still looking for bigoneaux.

E: So bigoneaux is a clam?

R: Well it's a – like a little snail. Small. Like an eye – once they get it clean, it's like the eye of an oyster. It's small. It's not big.

E: I've never heard of that.

R: Now, they catch a lot of them on oyster rigs. They like to get on an oyster. Get on an oyster and they drill a hole in an oyster. Suck the oyster out.

E: Never knew that. So what about redfish, like, swirling on top of an oyster rig?

R: Well, like uh, when I was a – in the fifties again, yeah, early fifties, I used to – I used to, when we talked about Tremaux nets, they used to – in the wintertime I used to – well they had Old man Tom Valance - he was a professional Temaux netter. And we used to – we used to go work with him – I was good friends with his son. And we used to go ride inside of (Coupe?) Belle. And Coupe Belle was narrow - just a little, maybe a hundred, I don't think was a hundred foot wide little narrow deal with uh, sandbars on the inside. And this was like, in wintertime, and after a northwestern, we'd wait there, and when uh, we'd go over there and we'd just anchor the boat out – stay tied up, and when the wind would calm down and stuff like that, the water would come red with redfish. So we'd just make one drag, we'd

fill up everything – we'd fill up the boat, and then we'd have to come back home. And oh yeah, they'll do that. Not these days, but in them days, yeah. Haha. Well you could - that's what I said, with the fishermen, you could spot fish easy because they wasn't – you know, you never had all these boats running around, stuff like that. It's just three or four boats a day that would run around. So, oh yeah. Water would just come up red. And throw the net all around – that was a whole day's work right there – taking them out of the net. You'd pick up - well the net would get full, maybe you had, you had twice as many, three times as many would get out because the net would only hold so many. You couldn't catch them all.

E: So would that be maybe, half a ton of reds? Would that be like, maybe a half a ton of reds?

R: Maybe a ton or better. Haha.

R: Geez.

R: Oh yeah. Oh yeah we used to – and like I said, our boats wasn't that big – we had to, you know 18, 20 -foot. boats. Well we used to fill up the boats. I've seen a couple of times - we went to (Coupe?) Belle we had to leave the net. We couldn't – we didn't put – but they had oyster camps on the shelf – we used to leave the net out there on the, the – to make room for the fish.

E: So you couldn't pick it up, it was so heavy? Or...

R: No we'd unload the net, and after we emptied the net out, we didn't bring the net back home because we had to – we used to – we needed the room for the fish to put the fish. We used to leave the net out there.

E: Okay, let me ask you this. Your nephew is David, is that right?

R: David, yeah.

E: So the current mayor of Grand Isle. So how do you feel, um, obviously the name Carmadelle factors into the history of Grand Isle.

R: Well, actually, the Carmadelles was here, well my uncle was here I guess in the thirties. We had the restaurant at the foot of the bridge. But the thing is the island was, like, two parts. They had the Cheniere Caminada, and you had the Grand Isle. And it was like, you know, it wasn't – it wasn't a mixture at the time. Grand Isle took care of Grand Isle, Chenier took care, took over in Grand Isle. And uh, so they had uh, it was a difference because um, now I remember in, in the fifties now, the guys from Grand Isle - it was okay for them to come on this side, but if you, if our guys from the Cheniere went on the other side, you had to be careful. Haha.

E: Haha. Yeah, I remember Russell talking about that. Even football team, uh, in Cameron islands, same here. But um, you know, I'm just you know, because my dad was a councilman, um, city councilman. You know, and I have that sense of responsibility, you might say, to community, uh, maybe it's just from

being, his being my father, but I was just wondering, do you think that it's in your family, and it's now transferred to your nephew?

R: Well the thing is, I was a council member for twenty years down there. In fact, I lost out this past election a year ago. And uh, when I ran in 1988, in fact Andy Valence – I ran for mayor at the time. And like I said, the island was split and what the uh, if you come on the island in the 80s where the bridge – they had the new bridge and the old bridge, how they had that gap in between, and when I ran, of course, I was a school bus driver before my son, Noel, and I was known pretty much on the island. And I rowed out under the slogan bridge in the gap because they had a gap between the Grand Isle and this side of the bridge. And I ran under the slogan, "Bridge in the Gap". Of course, we've bridged the gap. And then, they had a guy that was elected uh, a Bradbury. He was elected in '88 and he never did – then he moved to Texas. He didn't take over.

E: Is that Leon?

R: No, that wasn't Leon. It was one of Leon's cousins I guess. And he moved into Texas. He didn't take – he won the election but he didn't take office. He moved out before, and then in '89, that's when David comes in. David was elected as a councilman in '89.

E: Um, good deal. We're at the end of the tape. And all I can say is thank you so much.

R: Okay.