

The University of Southern Mississippi  
Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

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Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Bryan E. Cumbie

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

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*An Oral History with Bryan Cumbie, Volume 1043*

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## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

BRYAN E. CUMBIE

*This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Bryan E. Cumbie and is taking place on December 1, 2011. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.*

**Hester:** This is Barbara Hester with the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage with The University of Southern Mississippi. I'm here with Mr. Bryan Cumbie from Bayou LaBatre, [Alabama], and we're at the Bayou LaBatre Library on Padgett Switch Road. Today is Thursday, December 1, 2011, and it's about twenty minutes after two. Good afternoon, Mr. Cumbie. If you would, would you state your name and address for the record, please?

**Cumbie:** It's Bryan E. Cumbie. [The address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy.]

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

**Cumbie:** Commercial fishing.

**Hester:** Commercial fishing. How long have you been pursuing this occupation?

**Cumbie:** Since 1996.

**Hester:** Nineteen ninety-six. When did you start, and who taught you fishing in general, not necessarily commercial fishing. But when, how far back does this—

**Cumbie:** I started when I was in high school. (0:01:06.7)

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Did you start with friends or family?

**Cumbie:** With a relative.

**Hester:** Who was the relative?

**Cumbie:** Billy Johnson.

**Hester:** Is that—

**Cumbie:** He was my uncle.

**Hester:** Your uncle, was he a commercial fisherman?

**Cumbie:** Yes.

**Hester:** Billy Johnson. What type of fishing did he do?

**Cumbie:** Shrimping.

**Hester:** OK. Did he do anything else, oystering, finfishing or anything like that?

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

**Hester:** No. OK. And when you started with him it was about, you said high school. About, you know?

**Cumbie:** Started about [19]79.

**Hester:** Seventy-nine? Have you seen a change in the equipment that you've used since you started in [19]79 with your uncle to what you're using today?

**Cumbie:** Yes.

**Hester:** How so?

**Cumbie:** Well, you got to pull these (laughter) turtle [excluder] devices. (0:01:56.8)

**Hester:** OK. Is that good or bad?

**Cumbie:** It's just, I don't know. It's just a bunch of propaganda, I guess.

**Hester:** How's that?

**Cumbie:** They just promote something that's really not affected that bad by the shrimp industry.

**Hester:** Can you expand on it a little bit, maybe explain why?

**Cumbie:** Well, I don't know. It's just—

**Hester:** I heard it's a device for something.

**Cumbie:** Right, yeah. You have to put it in your trawl net for a turtle to get out, so.

**Hester:** Have you ever seen any turtles?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**Hester:** But not in your nets.

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah. I've seen them in the nets before.

**Hester:** Yeah?

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Is that a frequent occasion?

**Cumbie:** No. It depends, you know. You're liable to go six months and not see one. You're liable to go one month and see three. So it varies.

**Hester:** Yeah. When did that change in equipment start?

**Cumbie:** I don't remember exactly, when but it was in the mid-[19]90s, I think.

**Hester:** Um-hm, OK. Is that like the only big equipment change, or have you seen any other changes?

**Cumbie:** You got to have that fish excluder. That's like a little device where they can let fish out of the net. (0:03:06.4)

**Hester:** How does the device work?

**Cumbie:** Well, it's several ways. You can have one at your top, sit open at the top of your bag, or you can have one behind your TED [turtle excluder device], or it's in front of the TED. I'm sorry. Yes.

**Hester:** OK. So you do mainly shrimping?

**Cumbie:** That's all we do.

**Hester:** That's all you do is shrimping. So this device is for fish?

**Cumbie:** Right. It's supposed to reduce the small—

**Hester:** From getting caught?

**Cumbie:** Yeah, right. Yeah, they're supposed to be able to swim out of it.

**Hester:** I see. I see. Yeah, so another, another change to have to deal with—any other changes?

**Cumbie:** Nah. That's basically it, I guess, for the most part. And you got to have a

Gulf permit now, and back then you didn't have to have one, but you do now.  
(0:04:04.0)

**Hester:** When did that change?

**Cumbie:** About two thousand and something, two thousand and—I don't know, around the turn of the century, yeah.

**Hester:** Um-hm, yeah. Any other changes?

**Cumbie:** Not that I can think of, no.

**Hester:** What about the species of shrimp? I've heard other fishermen talk about white shrimp.

**Cumbie:** We catch white, brown. (0:04:29.2)

**Hester:** Have you always caught those white and brown?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah.

**Hester:** Since you started?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah.

**Hester:** In high school?

**Cumbie:** Yes. Occasionally you catch pinks in Florida, but that's done there around Key West.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Do you pretty much stick to these waters here, or have you ever gone anywhere else?

**Cumbie:** We go from Texas to Florida.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Have you ever gone to the Atlantic?

**Cumbie:** Yeah. We have before. Yeah.

**Hester:** Can you use the shrimping equipment that you use—

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**Hester:** —in the Gulf over there?

**Cumbie:** Absolutely, yeah.

**Hester:** No change?

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** OK. You have to educate me because I'm kind of learning as I go here.

**Cumbie:** That's OK, yeah.

**Hester:** OK. So I guess in general, you know, I asked about the equipment and the species, but can you note any other changes that you observed since you started fishing?

**Cumbie:** I don't know. No. It's about the same, yeah.

**Hester:** It's not a big change?

**Cumbie:** No.

**Hester:** When did you start commercial fishing, basically? I mean, you started, you say you started—

**Cumbie:** The [19]70s, yeah.

**Hester:** —in high school.

**Cumbie:** Right.

**Hester:** But you immediately went into commercial fishing, or did you just fish with your uncle and then decide to—

**Cumbie:** Yeah, right, yeah, yeah.

**Hester:** How's that?

**Cumbie:** I worked with him.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And like commercially?

**Cumbie:** Yeah. Well, I—

**Hester:** From the beginning?

**Cumbie:** Yeah. I worked on his, yeah, on his boat, yeah.

**Hester:** Um-hm. So when did you basically go out on your own?



**Cumbie:** Oh. I went out on my own in [19]96.

**Hester:** Oh, OK. OK. And then you bought your own boat.

**Cumbie:** Right, in [19]96.

**Hester:** OK. What kind of boat did you buy?

**Cumbie:** It's about ninety foot. Yeah.

**Hester:** It's a big one.

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah. (laughter)

**Hester:** Do you have the one boat, or do you have—

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah. I had three at one time, but I only have one now.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Is there any particular reason why you did that?

**Cumbie:** Just wanting to downsize.

**Hester:** Yeah, OK. Let's see. Let's talk about the market. How did the prices change since—(0:06:38.7)

**Cumbie:** Well, you got a lot of factors. You got imports, and so it varies.

**Hester:** How did the imports affect your business? (0:06:43.2)

**Cumbie:** Well, they just come in cheaper. That's all.

**Hester:** So is it a big problem to deal with?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Well, you know, the shrimp caught here, domestic, is not 15 percent anyhow, that's consumed, 20 percent. So you got to have imports anyhow. So just like Red Lobster, they use all imports. Certain places that's all they use.

**Hester:** So in a way it hurts business, and in another way it's a necessary thing?

**Cumbie:** Correct, correct.

**Hester:** OK, interesting. Can you describe the market, basically, over the course of your career so far? (0:07:24.9)

**Cumbie:** Well, it goes up and down. It's kind of on a comeback trail now, so to speak. Yeah.

**Hester:** And what's causing it to come back, and what is it coming back from?

**Cumbie:** We've had a little advertisement, more about promoting domestic. We've had a lot to do with it, so.

**Hester:** You said something, that Alabama's joining in with Mississippi and Louisiana.

**Cumbie:** I think so, yeah. It's a joint effort, yeah.

**Hester:** Yeah, because I've seen signs in Mississippi, as well. So is there like a professional group that is running that?

**Cumbie:** Well, they got like, it's an organization that's behind it, and one of them is the Southern Shrimp Alliance. (0:08:04.8) And it's Alabama Seafood Association, Organized, I think's the name of it. So it's—

**Hester:** Do you have like a local chapter or something?

**Cumbie:** Right, yeah. It's like a local thing. They have periodic meetings. But it's just, some people want domestic. Some people, they don't care; it's price, so.

**Hester:** Yeah. Do you have any challenge with [farm-raised] shrimp? (0:08:49.1)

**Cumbie:** Farm raised?

**Hester:** Farm raised, yes.

**Cumbie:** No, not really. Sometimes you do, but it's not, it's not much, really. It's more the issue of the imports. But a lot of imports are farm raised, so.

**Hester:** Where are they coming from, mostly?

**Cumbie:** China, you name it, Ecuador.

**Hester:** No kidding.

**Cumbie:** Yeah, all over the—Bangladesh. I mean they come from places you wouldn't dream of.

**Hester:** Well, do they come through Bayou LaBatre?

**Cumbie:** No, no. They come through Miami, New York, San Diego, basic—

**Hester:** OK.

**Cumbie:** Yeah. They come from all over the world, Vietnam, Thailand.

**Hester:** So it's a national thing. It's (inaudible).

**Cumbie:** Well, they're coming over here for the sales, for the money, see.

**Hester:** Um-hm, yeah. If you would—you're commercially fishing now. How often do you go out in the water?

**Cumbie:** Well, I don't go out personally. I've got Vietnamese run my boat.  
(0:09:42.4) Yeah. They're out now.

**Hester:** OK. So do you ever go out in the water yourself?

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

**Hester:** —what a fisherman's life is like, when you get up in the morning and pack up to—

**Cumbie:** Well, they'll work around the clock if there's enough to catch. It depends.

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

**Cumbie:** Four.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. How long do they stay out?

**Cumbie:** Thirty to forty days.

**Hester:** No kidding.

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah.

**Hester:** How far out do they go?

**Cumbie:** Oh, they go out about a hundred miles. (0:10:15.8)

**Hester:** Wow, a hundred miles—

**Cumbie:** From the Coast.

**Hester:** —east to west or—?

**Cumbie:** No, a hundred miles south.

**Hester:** South. I'm hearing from a lot of commercial fishermen that fuel prices are just absolutely blowing them away right now.

**Cumbie:** Oh, it's about \$3.20. (0:10:30.1) Three dollars and twenty cent a gallon right now.

**Hester:** So is that hurting you any?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah, yeah. But usually the price of shrimp kind of—it's, it depends. A couple of years ago fuel was high, and we was doing better.

**Hester:** Really?

**Cumbie:** Yeah. So it's—get more for your product.

**Hester:** How do you handle it?

**Cumbie:** Well, as long as you make money, you go. If you can't make none, you just tie it up, stop.

**Hester:** Can you tell when it's going to be a good time to fish?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah, yeah. They got—through experience, yeah. We work about from the first of May till the end of January. We stop February, March and April. (0:11:04.5)

**Hester:** And do something else or just shut it down?

**Cumbie:** We just, yeah, just shut it down. It's not feasible to go out.

**Hester:** Do you do something else outside of fishing during that period of time, or do you just, like, it's some holiday or something?

**Cumbie:** Correct, yeah. We just do boat maintenance.

**Hester:** And what about the crew that you have working for you? Do they do something else?

**Cumbie:** Some of them'll go back to Vietnam for six or eight weeks, yeah. They just kind of lay low.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Neat, OK. Can you tell me what commercial fishing means to you personally and economically? Is there a way that you can describe that for me? (0:11:47.6)

**Cumbie:** Oh, well, I just been involved with it basically all my life, but I don't know. Just born and raised here, so it's part of—

**Hester:** Yeah, sort of in your blood or—

**Cumbie:** Well, I wouldn't say that, but it's just you got to do something. (laughter)

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah. Is your uncle still in business?

**Cumbie:** No, no, he's been out. No. He's retired now. He's been retired.

**Hester:** Is he in Bayou LaBatre?

**Cumbie:** Grand Bay, which is close. Yeah.

**Hester:** Were you born and raised here?

**Cumbie:** No, unh-uh, no.

**Hester:** Where are you from?

**Cumbie:** I was originally born in Dallas.

**Hester:** Oh, really?

**Cumbie:** But I've been here since I've been about two, so.

**Hester:** Yeah. So you been closer to the water.

**Cumbie:** Right.

**Hester:** Yeah. What would you say that commercial fishing means to the people of the Gulf Coast? (0:12:38.8)

**Cumbie:** Well, it's kind of like farming in the Midwest. It's just part of the heritage, working the waters for shrimp, crabs, oysters, fish.

**Hester:** You know, driving around Bayou LaBatre, I see a lot of seafood-related industry. I mean, would that be like a primary—

**Cumbie:** Oh, that's just primarily a seafood town; without it, it wouldn't exist. Yeah.

**Hester:** That's what I thought. So Bayou LaBatre, would you say, over the course of your experience here, what have you seen change? Where was it when you were in high school, and up to where it is now, how has it changed? (0:13:25.2)

**Cumbie:** Well, your boats got bigger. They converted from ice to freezer, and the fleets went down. So it's been some changes.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Were you affected by [Hurricane] Katrina? (0:13:43.2)

**Cumbie:** Well, we was to some degree. No. My boat wasn't here. We was in West Louisiana. We didn't have no damage, but there was a bunch in the bayou that was damaged, but we didn't have none. We wasn't here, so.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Did it impact your business in any way?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah.

**Hester:** How so?

**Cumbie:** Well, it messed up a lot of shrimp shops. But sometimes a storm can help you on the catch, but then the price was bad. But it was OK. We was catching a bunch of them.

**Hester:** So how would it improve the catch?

**Cumbie:** It just does. I don't know why. Yeah.

**Hester:** You got a lot of debris out there and stuff to contend with, with a hurricane, though. Don't you?

**Cumbie:** Yeah. But where we're at, way out, you don't have that much. Now, if you in, on the small boats, the twenty-, thirty-, forty-footers, it's different. But we're out seventy, eighty, ninety foot, or deeper. It's not as—

**Hester:** Well, how would you handle, if the processing plants and wholesalers and so forth were affected by Katrina, how would you handle that when you brought your catch in?

**Cumbie:** Well, we just sold to a local guy here, and he made arrangements to get them done somewhere else, yeah.

**Hester:** OK. So you didn't lose any boats or equipment or anything?

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

**Hester:** You were good in western Louisiana.

**Cumbie:** Right.

**Hester:** So did you, like after the storm, did you immediately go out? You were able

to go out and start fishing again? About how long after the storm?

**Cumbie:** Oh, well, they went in less (inaudible). They wasn't in but about a week.

**Hester:** Oh, really?

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Oh, OK. So you never even had too much downtime or anything.

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

**Hester:** OK. What about the BP oil spill? How did that affect you? (0:15:29.5)

**Cumbie:** It's really kind of too early to tell. I mean, it stopped production for last year.

**Hester:** Um-hm. What did you expect the season to be like last year when the oil spill happened?

**Cumbie:** Well, it was kind of on the comeback trail, so like what I was talking about before. But it's affected it some, no doubt. Now, how much, I don't know, so.

**Hester:** Right, time will tell.

**Cumbie:** I mean, did it destroy it? No. But it affected it some, I'm sure. To what degree? I don't know. It's hard to say.

**Hester:** When you heard about the spill, did you do anything to prepare for it before they closed the waters down?

**Cumbie:** Well, when it first happened, the people didn't know how big it was, how long it was going to leak. So we just kept working till everything got closed. Then we quit.

**Hester:** Um-hm. How was the catch? Was it as you expected?

**Cumbie:** Yeah, it was about normal, right, yeah.

**Hester:** Um-hm. OK. So can you tell us what ran through your mind when you heard about the spill? (0:16:33.0)

**Cumbie:** Well, when we first heard about, we didn't, people didn't know the magnitude of it till—it was just an oil rig blew up out there in the Gulf. And people didn't—it was no big thing when it first happened. Then as it, the story progressed,

it—

**Hester:** Yeah, so—

**Cumbie:** We worked as long as we could, so when they closed everything, we quit.

**Hester:** Um-hm. So as you're hearing the news, did you change what you were doing in any way to prepare for it? (0:17:00.9)

**Cumbie:** Well, we stayed away from it. We went more to the west and vice versa.

**Hester:** Um-hm, OK. Did you participate in the Vessels of Opportunity program? (0:17:15.6)

**Cumbie:** Yes, yeah, we did.

**Hester:** Can you tell me a little bit about that? How did that work? How did you apply for it, and how did—

**Cumbie:** Applied over the telephone.

**Hester:** Did you, really?

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** There was a local office here, I understand. I had an interview this morning and Mr. Will Zirlot was telling me that there was an office here.

**Cumbie:** Well, they had a place in Mobile. It really wasn't here in Bayou LaBatre. No, unh-uh. No. They had a command center in Mobile.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. So you called them on the telephone, and you spoke to someone, and then what happened?

**Cumbie:** Right. Well, you just tell them who you are, what boat you got, submit it. And a couple of weeks later, they sent you a thing in the mail and signed you up.

**Hester:** Um-hm. And so what did you do?

**Cumbie:** We were just on standby and learned how to deploy boom in case the oil got close to the beach here like it did in Louisiana. It didn't get that close here. It got some, but not the magnitude it did there, just kind of prepare you for that, how to handle it, and what to do with it.

**Hester:** Did you have to—



**Cumbie:** How to—we seen very little, mostly tar balls, what they call, weathered, so.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Did you have to handle any boom?

**Cumbie:** Well, we deployed it and stuff. We just practiced, showed you how to do it. We didn't actually put none out, no, unh-uh.

**Hester:** Um-hm. I was doing some work out in Grand Bay on the Mississippi side of the line, and it was out in that estuary area. And so we were in and out with a boat over the boom, so I kind of have an idea of what it looks like. Yeah.

**Cumbie:** Well, they put it all out along the beachfronts and all, anyhow, like a precaution, in case it did get here. So it was kind of predeployed.

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah. You think it would've worked? I mean I had—

**Cumbie:** Well, it depends. If the oil's coming in too much, and the sea's too rough, it really don't help much. (0:19:08.3) But in some places it does. So it depends on a lot of criteria, I guess, weather and so forth.

**Hester:** Well, how did you first find out about the Vessels of Opportunity program?

**Cumbie:** Oh, it was just word-of-mouth. Everybody knew about it.

**Hester:** Um-hm, OK. So do you know other fishermen that also did the Vessels of Opportunity?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah, yeah.

**Hester:** A lot of people who did it?

**Cumbie:** Oh, absolutely.

**Hester:** Did it all work out OK for the community, do you think?

**Cumbie:** I guess. Well, it's hard to say. Yeah, for the most part.

**Hester:** Is it still going on?

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

**Hester:** It's over. OK. You said that it had impacted your business. How did it impact your business, and over what length of time. Can you describe that?

**Cumbie:** Well, we just couldn't work; that's all, so.

**Hester:** How long were the waters closed down? (0:20:10.8)

**Cumbie:** Oh, about six months, roughly, yeah.

**Hester:** How was it when you got back in and started fishing? (0:20:19.1)

**Cumbie:** Well, it's hard to tell. It's been kind of sluggish since then, really slow, so. Yeah. It's going to take a little time to really—I don't know. It's hard to say. It's going to affect it, yeah. How much? How long? Who knows?

**Hester:** Yeah, that makes sense. So like when your boat comes in—it's out right now. When it comes in, is it an average catch, pretty good catch?

**Cumbie:** The last couple of months it's been slow, below average.

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah. I think we're almost finished. It went quicker than I thought. You were right. (laughter) So what do the waters look like right now? Are they good?

**Cumbie:** Well, they tested OK. I've done some work with NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration]. (0:21:16.0)

**Hester:** Have you?

**Cumbie:** Well, I was contracted by BP. It was called the Seafood Safety Sampling Project, was what they called it.

**Hester:** I have never heard about this. Can you tell me about it?

**Cumbie:** Well, it was out of NOAA, out of Pascagoula. But I was contracted *with* BP, and I had NOAA personnel on board. But we done that for six months.

**Hester:** Really?

**Cumbie:** Yeah. We caught fish and shrimp and crabs and—

**Hester:** And then they would take it?

**Cumbie:** And they'd freeze it, and label it, where you caught it, and bring it into the dock. And they'd take it over to that lab in Mississippi and sample it. And the woman over there at NOAA, I think her name is Brandy Noble, and the other one was Melissa Cook. The way they talked, they done like ten thousand-plus samples.

**Hester:** Wow.

**Cumbie:** And never found nothing wrong with anything, so.

**Hester:** Really? Well, so there must've been a number of people doing it.

**Cumbie:** Oh, they had, oh, yeah, they had long-line boats doing it. Yeah, I was the only; they had me. I was the only shrimp boat, and there was one more, I think from Louisiana. But we went all the way to Texas and all the way off to Pensacola, and out so far. They had it zoned off. And certain grids, you had to catch so much here, then move over here, and catch so much. But they told me that they didn't find nothing. No dispersants. You know what I'm saying: nothing wrong with anything.

**Hester:** Nothing wrong with anything. I'm just kind of curious because you're doing commercial fishing since high school, and it comes to last year, and then there's an oil spill, and you take a different direction. I mean, how did you learn what to do? Did they train you to catch fish for purposes of—

**Cumbie:** No. We just done it natural. We know what to do. We just—

**Hester:** Oh, OK.

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** So it was just like going out any day to fish.

**Cumbie:** Right, yeah.

**Hester:** But you just didn't bring it to market.

**Cumbie:** Right, yeah, right.

**Hester:** OK. I was just wondering how that worked. Did you ever actually see any oil?

**Cumbie:** Did *I*, actually, personally?

**Hester:** Yeah.

**Cumbie:** *Me?*

**Hester:** Yeah.

**Cumbie:** No, I didn't.

**Hester:** OK. How is the health of the fishery now, from your perspective?  
(0:23:31.7)

**Cumbie:** It's below average.

**Hester:** How so? What causes the difference in the health of the waters?

**Cumbie:** I don't know. We had a lot floodwater come down in the spring. It's probably a combination of things, the oil spill and the high floodwater that come down.

**Hester:** Is it like a cyclical thing?

**Cumbie:** Yeah, it can be, too. So I think all them things calculated together adds up to a below-average year. Just my personal opinion, now, yeah.

**Hester:** Right. I understand completely.

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** So this is a question that I've been asking everybody. If a young man came to you today, and he was thinking about making commercial fishing his career, what would you say to him?

**Cumbie:** (laughter) I don't know. You got so many regulations coming in. (0:24:30.6) The government can amaze you at times. They'll over-regulate when they're not supposed to and under-regulate where they need to. It's kind of like these turtles. We don't really kill any turtles anyhow. Like I told you, it's all propaganda. You know the right people in the right place. They call the shots without very little, research or whatever to back it up, so.

**Hester:** So would you recommend—

**Cumbie:** It's kind of like they're more interested in the animals than they are the people. Which we don't purposely kill a turtle, but—

**Hester:** Of course not.

**Cumbie:** But our point is we need to take care of our fellow human first, and if we lose the turtles, we lose them. If we don't, we don't. That's all, so. It's kind of like during the oil spill. I know you've seen it on television and stuff. They was more worried about catching dirty birds out there and cleaning them up, and there ain't no telling how many billions of dollars BP spent on that. And I'm not saying if you can pick a bird up and clean the oil off of him—that's fine, but that can't be your top priority. In a lot of ways, it was with them.

**Hester:** So—

**Cumbie:** I mean, there's no telling how much money, them kind of grant money and stuff they'll get to study, and you know.

**Hester:** They're still around, aren't they?

**Cumbie:** Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Hester:** So what do you see for the future?

**Cumbie:** It's hard to say. Plus you got pollution, too. (0:26:09.8) I mean, who knows what a corporation is putting in a river upstream, a hundred and fifty miles. You don't know, see? That's the thing. That's what I'm talking about. A place, something like that they need to regulate more, there. They're kind of like they're under-regulated there. And down here, they're more worried about us killing a turtle. I'm talking about kind of like they got the wrong focus on what they need to be doing. And I'm not pointing no fingers on no particular company, but I mean, who knows what, like Lagouste(?) over here on Mobile River. I mean, that's a German-based chemical company. They claim if they had a leak over there, it could kill everybody within a fifteen-mile radius. I mean, I don't know what they're putting in the water. Who knows? But you notice all them major chemical companies are right on top of a river. They got to have water. So.

**Hester:** It does arouse some concern.

**Cumbie:** Sure it does, yeah.

**Hester:** Yeah. And I would imagine that your profession is particularly sensitive to a healthy environment.

**Cumbie:** Right, yeah. But I'm not saying—I'm just saying, to me they ought to maybe regulate something like that versus—

**Hester:** I understand.

**Cumbie:** It would be different if we out here and you got dead turtle carcasses all up and down the beaches, but there is none. That's the point. It's like they're fighting a lost cause.

**Hester:** So if you were, say you were appointed to a position where you had to make recommendations to improve the health of the environment, what would be your recommendation?

**Cumbie:** For the health of the environment?

**Hester:** Yeah, the water environment, let's say. What would you recommend?

**Cumbie:** I don't know. It's hard to say. I don't know. I need to maybe study some different things. I don't know. Maybe, like I said, check these companies out, and see what they're putting in the water. You need regulations to some degree. I understand that, but I just think they kind of got the wrong focus on what they should be doing, so.

**Hester:** I understand.

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** In conclusion, I'm just going to—I'm pretty much finished the questions that I was going to ask. Do you have anything you'd like to put on the record? This is going to be preserved for a long time. Is there anything that you would like to say that you would want to be preserved in your oral history interview?

**Cumbie:** Well, I'd just like to [say that] we try to do the best we can and do it in a legal, professional, clean way. We don't try to pollute nothing, or like I said, we don't *try* to kill a turtle, but it's kind of like they don't want you doing it, but they don't tell you that. They just pass laws that make it harder for you to do it. So that's kind of the way I see it. So I don't, I personally don't recommend it to somebody, like you said earlier, somebody coming up, wanting to—

**Hester:** Um-hm. What do you foresee for yourself for the future. Are you going to stick it out? (0:29:33.8)

**Cumbie:** No, unh-uh, no. I'm going to probably sell.

**Hester:** Are you?

**Cumbie:** Yeah. But the market's been so depressed here because the prices in fuel the last six or eight years, just, you couldn't do nothing but tough it out. (laughter) You didn't have no other options.

**Hester:** Yeah. I have heard that over and over again.

**Cumbie:** But now it's starting—now all the boats is being depleted. They've been sold off overseas, and all the repos, and like I told you earlier, you got to have a Gulf permit now. If you don't have that permit, these younger—ten years ago, you could be a banker from Boston and if you had the money, you could come down here and build fifty boats, a-hundred-foot-long and put them all out there shrimping. You can't do that no more. Gulf shrimping was the last open-access fishery in the United States, so now it's all regulated by NOAA. (0:30:12.2)

**Hester:** Wow.

**Cumbie:** Just like the crab fishing in Alaska, just like the scalloping on the East Coast. You got to have a federal permit now.

**Hester:** Um-hm. And that's a hard thing for a man who's trying to make a business, an income.

**Cumbie:** Well, now you can't—like I said, you can't go to a shipyard now and build a

boat. If you don't have a permit, they're not going to let you shrimp here.

**Hester:** Wow.

**Cumbie:** So.

**Hester:** Yeah. So what are your plans?

**Cumbie:** Which in a way, that's good. That can help the people that's toughed it out or however you want to say it, stayed in it. This could be beneficial to some degree, but it's just, I don't know. Seem like to me, just trying to choke you down with too many rules and regulations.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Yeah, I've heard a lot of people say that.

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** So what are your plans? Are you going to change fields completely?

**Cumbie:** I'll cross that bridge when I come to it. (laughter)

**Hester:** I understand.

**Cumbie:** Yeah. It's hard to say. We'll do something. We try to have a survivor-type mentality, so. I mean, we don't believe in sitting on our hands. But it's just like the shrimping industry. That's why we use Asians because most of your domestic people are, they're either alcoholics or drug addicts. You know what I'm saying. So it's just—you don't have people coming from The University of Southern Miss with a bachelor's degree, going shrimping. You got people that can't read or write, not meaning nothing derogatory about them. It's just that's the type of people you have to deal with in this industry, so. But we stick more the Vietnamese, (0:31:56.5) the Orientals. I do, anyhow, because they're more natural-born fishermen, so it's kind of what they do do best. So that's what I use. Now, I know some people using all Americans, but—

**Hester:** Yeah.

**Cumbie:** So I think you're better off with the Asian. If you look around, most of the people left in it now is Asian.

**Hester:** Is that right?

**Cumbie:** Yes.

**Hester:** Do you have many Asian business owners here, like processors?

**Cumbie:** Well, they're kind of in Louisiana and stuff. They don't have them here in Bayou LaBatre. No, unh-uh. But they do have them here; they exist, yeah. You get down in Golden Meadow [Louisiana] and places like that, they're down there, yes, absolutely. They're just not predominant in Bayou LaBatre, but they are there in Mississippi. They're in Louisiana, yeah, and in Texas, yeah, they're—

**Hester:** Yeah. Interesting. I guess that's it. (laughter) And if there's something else that you would—anything else come to mind that you wish that I would've had listed on my questions?

**Cumbie:** No. I guess that's pretty good what you had there. It's OK, yeah. Just, it's hard to say. Of course the way the economy is, it's hard to see a future in anything. (laughter)

**Hester:** Isn't that the truth. (laughter)

**Cumbie:** So it's—

**Hester:** Yeah.

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Wow.

**Cumbie:** It's going to be some tough days ahead, looks like.

**Hester:** Yeah. It does seem that way.

**Cumbie:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Well, Mr. Cumbie, thank you very much.

**Cumbie:** Yes, ma'am.

**Hester:** I appreciate you coming here and doing this for us.

**Cumbie:** All right.

**Hester:** And I'll go ahead and shut this off.

**Cumbie:** OK.

(end of interview)