

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

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Leslie Hood

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

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An Oral History with Leslie Hood, Volume 1043

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AN ORAL HISTORY
with
LESLIE HOOD

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Leslie Hood, and is taking place on February 17, 2012. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.

Hester: This project is actually is funded by NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration]. It's a grant that was given to the university, and Tracy was providing names just to help us out, so it's not a DMR [Department of Marine Resources] thing. It's a research project that USM [University of Southern Mississippi] is doing, and NOAA's funding it.

Hood: Well, actually I got a call last year, I think, sometime or other, and was maybe going to do this, and I don't know what happened.

Hester: OK, all right.

Hood: It didn't happen.

Hester: It probably was with somebody else because we've only been doing this for—we started about August of last year, so.

Hood: That's probably about when I got a call.

Hester: Oh, OK. Well, maybe so, then.

Hood: Somebody sent some questions and stuff to my e-mail address.

Hester: Oh, OK. Well, then probably it did come from us, yeah.

Hood: Yeah. They said USM, so.

Hester: Yeah, absolutely. We've got a few people working on the project, so probably one of them sent you a letter. Well, that's good. All right. So we'll go ahead and get started. And I'm Barbara Hester with The University of Southern Mississippi, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. Today is Friday, February 17, 2012. We're in the library on the campus of Gulf Park, USM, and it is about 9:40 in the morning. Thank you so much, Mr. Hood, for being with us here today. Would you state your name for the record, please?

Hood: Leslie Hood.

Hester: And your address.

Hood: (The address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy.)

Hester: OK. And Mr. Hood, what is your occupation? (0:01:43.3)

Hood: Commercial fisherman and builder.

Hester: OK. And how long have you been pursuing both of those occupations?

Hood: Well, I started when I was about eight years old, working as a fish boy on my brother-in-law's boat. And I always said that one day I would own my own boat. Well, when I was twenty-one, I bought my first boat. (0:02:05.5) It was a twenty-seven-foot Lafitte skiff, and I ran it for about a year, I guess. And then I built a boat in 1975, a thirty-three-foot Lafitte skiff. I built it from scratch, (inaudible) the keel, went to George Engine, picked out my own engine and all. I ran it for one year. In the meantime I got married, and I bought a fifty-six-foot lugger out of Pass Christian, and I moved to Pass. After about a year I had my first child. But I had named the boat *Katrina Marie*, and then I named my daughter after the boat, so that's kind of the way my wife and I talked about it.

Hester: This is the one in 1976?

Hood: Right. And I owned that boat for approximately ten years, I guess. My two older children learned how to walk on that boat. It was a interesting lifestyle. (0:03:15.2) My wife was basically my deckhand, and the children, and I mean, it was just a family thing. We made our living and enjoyed life on the water. During Hurricane Fredrick, (0:03:30.7) I stayed on the boat. It was pretty scary.

Hester: What year was that?

Hood: I'm not exactly sure when that storm came through, but it was in, probably, the mid-[19]70s, late [19]70s, somewhere along in there; I'm not exactly remembering. I just remember staying up in Huckleberry Hill with the boat, and it was rather scary, (laughter) me and one other man. It was USM property, in fact. It's back off of Wolf River. And they have like a research area back there. We stayed back there, another man and I, and because of he and I, we saved several other boats because of it. He was on one end of the line; I was on the other end of the line, so we were constantly tightening up and loosening rope, so as to keep the boats afloat back there, I guess you might say. But afterwards it was kind of tough to make a living after the storm because it was just difficult with freshwater and debris and everything else. But I guess that's been the life of fishermen for years, running from storms and then dealing with it afterwards. But after the *Katrina Marie*, I had—let's see. Which one came next? I've had so many boats; it's unreal. Then I had *Kelsey Nicole*, which was named after two of my daughters.

Hester: So did you sell the—

Hood: I sold the *Katrina Marie*. I sold it right back where it was built in Biloxi, and it was built for McPhillips(?) Packing Company in Bayou La Batre. And the people I

sold it to, it went right back to Bayou La Batre, right across the bayou from where it was originally built for, McPhillips Packing Company.

Hester: And that would be the *Katrina Marie*.

Hood: That was the *Katrina Marie*. So that's the history of that boat. Many years later, I found out that it had sunk in the Mobile Bay. But I had the *Kelsey Nicole*. Then after the *Kelsey Nicole*, I had the *Rene Michelle*. She was forty-eight foot, and twenty foot wide. (0:06:02.9)

Hester: And the *Kelsey Nicole*, what size boat was that?

Hood: She was also forty-eight foot. It was a Biloxi lugger. The *Rene Michelle* was a hoisting rig; the cabin was on the bow of it.

Hester: Would you say the name of it again, hoisting rig?

Hood: It was hoisting, yeah, just like a hoist. So the cabin was on the bow of that boat. I prefer the cabin on the stern. You can just see better. It's a more comfortable boat to work, in the bay, especially. After the *Rene Michelle*, I had *Captain Zeb*. I completely rebuilt it, and I named it after my son, and had it for several years. We dredged oysters on the boat, as well as shrimp. And then I bought *Captain Luke*, and I changed the name of it to the *Michaela Cheyenne*.

Hester: How do you spell that?

Hood: Michaela?

Hester: Uh-huh.

Hood: Michael with an A on the end. M-I-C-H-A-E-L-A, *Michaela Cheyenne*, C-H-E-Y-E-N-N-E. That's my baby girl. So I've had a boat after every one of my family members, including my wife.

Hester: Wow, that's amazing. (laughter) That's great. Now the name of this boat was the *Captain*?

Hood: It was the *Captain Luke*.

Hester: *Captain Luke* and then it was changed.

Hood: And I changed it. I changed it to *Michaela Cheyenne*. Now that was about sixty—she was also twenty foot wide, but it was a little over sixty foot long. It was a steel boat with a cabin on the back. It was built like a Biloxi lugger; had a tunnel in it and all, and I repowered it, put a 3176 Caterpillar in it with a four-and-a-half-to-one gear. I had plenty power. And because of a divorce, I lost that boat. So that was my pride and joy right there. I had about a hundred and eighty thousand dollars in that boat. When I sold it, I got a smaller boat, which was only forty-two foot. It was a Alabama style crab boat; I had a 671 in it. And I had it up until Hurricane Katrina. I lost the boat. I lost everything in the storm. (0:08:33.8)

Hester: What was the name of this one?

Hood: The *Bama Lady* and I lost it in the storm, so it was quite some time after that before I was able to recoup enough. I was doing construction at the time right after the storm. Six months after the storm, I fell off a two-story building, (0:09:01.9) and broke my neck, broke both my arms, and crushed my shoulder. And so I lay up for quite a while. Then I got back working again. It was real slow for a while. After about four years, I finally was able to come up with a boat that I felt comfortable with, and I had to completely rebuild it, but I found it in Bayou La Batre. (0:09:27.7) It's also, it's right at forty-eight foot. I don't know; I guess that forty-eight foot is a kind of a round number when it comes to luggers, but it's sixteen foot, three in its width. It's forty-eight foot long and got a 671 in it with a three-to-one, twin disc clutch. I bought it in Bayou La Batre. It had been sunk, and I took it straight to a shipyard. I spent four months on the shipyard. Completely redid the boat; stripped all the wires; stripped everything out of it; put it all back together; vacuumed it even from the bow to the stern and all the way through the inside; got everything completely cleaned and put back together; sanded the whole boat down to the bare wood and started over.

Hester: You did this yourself?

Hood: Yes, ma'am. I did it by myself.

Hester: How long did it take you?

Hood: And with my children. About four months. I spent about four months on the shipyard. Put the boat back in the water; brought it to Pass Christian Harbor; built a new dredge table and all, and was ready to go back in the oyster business. I got started dredging oyster. (0:10:43.2) The boat was doing excellent. Two weeks after I put the boat in the water and started working, the BP oil spill came. (0:10:49.6) So I mean, it's just a series of events from Hurricane Katrina all the way up until the BP oil spill, I mean, it was just, seemed like the odds were against me. But I mean, I did good with the boat up until the spill. And then it was quite sometime after that they started the VOO [Vessels of Opportunity] program, (0:11:09.4) and boats were coming from out of the woodwork, you might say, twelve- fourteen-foot, aluminum skiffs with umbrellas and outboard motors, and these guys out there making twelve, sixteen hundred dollars a day. And here I am a commercial fisherman all my life, owned all kinds of boats, and still sitting in the harbor not able to work.

Hester: So you did participate in the VOO Program?

Hood: Oh, I did.

Hester: You did.

Hood: I did, but it took some time. They had, Roger Wicker, senator, had a meeting and called the press and fishermen, (0:11:45.8) and I think some DMR members were there, a lot of fishermen. They had a lot of dealers, people that owned the ice house, all over at Shaggy's in Pass Christian. And they started talking about various different things. Well, some of the individuals caught me off, on the side, talking, and then they

interviewed. They had a—I don't know if it was TV or radio or somebody from somewhere else, but anyway, they wanted to interview me. And all the fishermen kept pushing, "Be our spokesman. Be our spokesman," because I mean, our Coast will never be the same. (0:12:24.1) I mean, you're still finding tar balls and all that in Alaska, that's over thirty years ago when that went down over there, the *Valdez*, and they didn't do all the dispersants like they did here. And a whole lot more oil was dispersed in our Gulf than people will ever realize. And right now, today, I can take you on that beach; on a low tide, I can show you tar balls.

Hester: Is that right?

Hood: Right now, today. On any dead, low tide, you can go out there and walk along that beach, and you can see tar balls. The dispersants, I think, had a large effect on our oyster reefs. Then on top of that, just recently, the Bonnet Carré Spillway, (0:13:11.2) that surely didn't help anything either because we already had a fatality rate of [oysters of] about 80 percent. So now it's more; the fatality rate is even more since the [the opening of the Bonnet Carré.] I mean, if you take and you have an 80 percent fatality rate already, and then you open the spillway, and then they say, "Well, they have a 95 or 100 percent fatality rate, or 80 [percent]—whatever they're calling it—I mean, it don't take much to get a 100 percent of only 20 [percent] that was left.

Hester: That's right. That's right.

Hood: So from my standpoint, I think that the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill had more effect on our oyster reefs than the spillway did. I think, because of the percentages, but the way that they like to put it out there, and NOAA and different ones, I get a little aggravated because our Coast will never be the same. I've been in that fishing industry for nearly fifty years, and I've seen a lot of things transpire over the years on the water.

Hester: Can you explain the effect? (0:14:25.1) How does it directly affect the fish?

Hood: Well, the thing with—let's say, for instance, the oil spill. When the oil spill came, a finfish, a crab, a shrimp, any of that, they can detect what's in that water; they'll leave. You see. So we had no brown shrimp season this year. We had some white shrimp come in later in the year, but we didn't have any brown shrimp. And the reason there were no brown shrimp is because the conditions of the water and—

Hester: So you weren't finding dead shrimp; the shrimp just migrated to a cleaner area.

Hood: They just left. But now in a lot of our areas, finfish, like in some of the river areas and stuff, estuaries where they raise and then come out, there was tons and tons of crab and fish. I mean the banks stunk so bad over in the Pearl River because of [finfish and crab]. (0:15:25.1) And I have a crab boat, as well, and I mean, I won't even put the pots out because it's not worth it, going out there for. I have a friend that has over three hundred pots off of the Pearl River, and he fishes Louisiana waters, and he's making a living, but barely. And he's just one man, running three hundred pots. And I'm not going to make it here for that, so I'm just, I'm just not even going to try.

But he had as much as half of the crabs in his pot, at one point, were all dead. And that's just a tragedy, and I think a lot of it has to do with—and this was before Bonnet Carré Spillway, not after but before. So I think that the oil spill had to do with that. I mean, that's my thinking.

Hester: Right. I understand.

Hood: I think a lot of things is being covered up, if you want to know the truth of it. It used to be like—for instance, when they had us out there in the VOO program, (0:16:29.5) when I finally did get hired. I only got to work, like, thirty or thirty-one days, but that helped greatly. And I don't think I would have got that had it not been for Senator Wicker. But anyway, they had us out there, and when we would come across something, say, if we found a dead turtle or something in the water, we couldn't touch it. They had specific people to come there. So we would have to give them the location, longitude, latitude, line GPS or whatever, give them the numbers so that they could come and pick it up. Now, I found a couple of birds, at different times, that were still alive, so we just sat there and waited till they had a speed boat come and pick them up. But now in the beginning, I think DMR and some other laboratories were able to test, and then they shut it off. They didn't want nobody testing nothing except NOAA. NOAA was the only people that could test. Well, to me, if only one facility is able to test, they've got to be covering up something, or either they're trying to hide something. They don't want somebody else to know what's going on. That's my way of thinking. See. If they wasn't trying to cover up or hide something, why wouldn't they let another laboratory get into it, as well? USM has laboratories; they have ways of testing things. DMR has a laboratory right there in Biloxi. We have laboratories in Jackson. So why did it have to be *just* NOAA testing? See. I don't understand that. So there's various, different things that have transpired, and I don't know; I guess if you can keep it out of the public's eye or keep it out of the paper or keep it out of the public's mind, what they don't hear, or what they don't see goes away. And I think that was the biggest portion of this whole oil spill thing, was trying to keep it out of the public's eye because right in the very beginning, "Oh, our beaches are clean. Our beaches are safe. Our beaches are this or that," because of what the governor said. Here's Haley Barbour saying, "Oh, yeah. Y'all come to our coast. Everything's fine," when in fact it wasn't. So that don't do anything for us. The media doesn't help us, as fishermen. (0:18:58.8) We had a lot of landings here in the State of Mississippi this past year, as far as shrimp and that.

Hester: Can you explain a landing? What is a landing?

Hood: OK. A landing is when a boat brings in—let's say, for instance, a boat has a hundred boxes of shrimp. Well, that's a landing. When he brings it in and crosses that dock with it there at that dealer, that's a landing. But those shrimp weren't caught in our bay. (0:19:23.1) Those shrimp were caught in Louisiana or Texas or Florida, and they're bringing them in on these big boats. I think there ought to be a different way for—because they publish in the paper, "Mississippi's had a bumper crop." I went to a fiftieth wedding anniversary, to some friends of ours in north Mississippi. And, "Oh, hey. Les, I heard y'all had a bumper crop this year. Y'all did real good shrimping, huh?" And I'm like, "*We didn't even have any shrimp!*" We had a few

weeks of white shrimp. That was it. We had no brown shrimp. So the media is publishing something that is not true. They put it in the paper, and everybody thinks, “Oh, it’s great. Mississippi Gulf Coast is just booming,” when it’s not. And that’s fraudulent, and I don’t think that that’s fair for the common fishermen here on the Coast because we work in this bay. My boat’s not big enough to go in that Gulf, but you have a lot of boats in Ocean Springs, Bayou La Batre, and other areas that come here to this state to unload. And some of our big boats, the Vietnamese (0:20:34.8) boats, they go out, and they work in the Gulf. So they’re working in Chandeleur Sound. They’re working off of Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, and then they come here and unload. Well, then we get the evidence, you might say, coming across our dock that Mississippi is unloading all these shrimp. Well, Mississippi ain’t catching those shrimp, though. Our waters didn’t provide those shrimp; somewhere else did.

Hester: Well, what do you think could be done to call that to the attention of the public?

Hood: Well, right now they’re making us, as of January of this year, we have to have what they call a trip ticket, (0:21:14.8) just like as if—on our oyster reefs we have to fill out a trip ticket every day. When we leave and go out to catch oysters, we have to tell them where we’re going; we have to put on the ticket what time we leave, what time we come in—we have to be in by a certain time—how many oysters we caught, and where we caught them at. All right. It used to be years ago, when I used to go to shrimp in Louisiana, we would have to go to the house out there, to the camp, and we’d pick up a trip ticket. If you were a out-of-state boat, you had to go by the camp and get a ticket.

Hester: Where’s the camp?

Hood: Well, it’s at Grand’s Pass in Louisiana waters about—I’d say—roughly ten miles south of Pass Christian.

Hood: And who’s the person?

Hood: That would’ve been Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries. They had somebody at the camp all the time, which that’s not in existence anymore. I mean, the building is still there; it’s stripped. I mean, there’s nothing there. They don’t use it anymore. But it used to be that we would go there. We’d have to get a trip ticket, and we worked so many days; we’d have to come back by the camp, check out, “We’re leaving the state.” We’d have to tell them roughly what size shrimp we had, roughly how many pounds we had, and it stated as to where you were working and those shrimp were caught in Louisiana. OK. Today they’re making us do a trip ticket, and we’re going to have to say how long we’ve been out, what our average was, about what kind of catch we had, and where we caught them at. Now, see, if they do that with the larger boats, and they’re going to have to document where those shrimp were caught, and when they come in, those trip tickets should say where the shrimp were caught. But still that will be some better, but it’s still not going to change the fact that you have landings in Mississippi. They will have to—somehow or another, in the dealers or

with the dealers—get them to document where those shrimp come from, and that way it'll be more honest.

Hester: I understand. How has this idea—has it been received by the commercial fishermen on a whole?

Hood: Not really. I mean, I don't see—I mean, as a kid, I grew up here all my life. I've lived here nearly sixty years, OK, on the Coast; grew up right here in Long Beach. I was able to just go anytime I wanted to, right down to the harbor, go fishing, go crabbing, go whatever, catch what I want; go home. Who would've ever thought you'd have had to buy a license to fish in saltwater? (0:23:57.6) I mean, our Earth is almost completely covered with it; saltwater. Why would you—I mean, it's free. Why do you have to have—you know. So we pay a license to fish in that water. You have to pay a license to crab, to shrimp, fish, oyster, whatever it is; you have to pay certain licenses. OK, understandable. But I think sometimes it just goes overboard. It's pay, pay, pay, pay, pay. And it's—

Hester: How expensive is it?

Hood: I think saltwater license is five dollars. I mean, it's not like it's a big thing. It's just money for the state and—

Hester: Do you have to buy one for each individual species that you're fishing?

Hood: No, just one license.

Hester: One license.

Hood: One license and I don't know what out of state is, sixteen, eighteen dollars, twenty dollars, something like that for an out-of-state license or a three-day license. I don't even really know, so whatever I say might (laughter) not even be right.

Hester: So with the trip tickets and being able to keep track of how many fish, shrimp, oysters are caught in Mississippi waters, as opposed to Louisiana, Alabama waters, the fishermen on the whole are glad to see that happen?

Hood: I can't speak for everybody else. I mean, I think it needs to be regulated, and that way at least maybe somehow or another if it's regulated to the point to where, if this hundred-and-twenty-five-foot super-slab has gone to Louisiana and caught these shrimp and unloads them here in the State of Mississippi, the State of Mississippi shouldn't be counting that as a Mississippi landing, or if they do, these shrimp need to be documented that they weren't caught *in* Mississippi because it makes it hard for us. See, like right now, the DMR is working on a program trying to make it for a—what's the right word? Like a disaster area [federal fisheries failure]. You can't prove a disaster area when you have so many landings in Mississippi. So they're looking at, "Well, you had all these landings in Mississippi. What do you mean there's a disaster?" Well, they can't say, federally, that it was a disaster in Mississippi because they're showing all these landings. Well, these landings weren't caught in Mississippi. So Mississippi did have a disaster in this bay. Our oysters is a disaster;

shrimp was a disaster because all we really had was white shrimp this past year. We didn't have any brown shrimp at all. We hadn't had any hoppers, which is different—

Hester: What is a hopper?

Hood: It's different species of shrimp. So you have a brown shrimp, usually comes first, and it usually comes as smaller shrimp, you know a fifty/sixty, sixty/seventies, and they'll be small. They try to let them grow up to say thirty-six/forty, [thirty-six/]fifty, [thirty-six/]sixties before they ever even open. Then you work the brown shrimp; you work brown shrimp all the way up until they start turning into, like, twenty-one/twenty-fives, twenty-six/thirties, which is a different size of shrimp per pound. You'll have a twenty-six/thirty to a pound, then a twenty-five/twenty-five to a pound, sixteen/twenties. So you have the various different size. And then later in the year, the white shrimp will start showing up. Will white shrimp show up? And then in the cold, in the real part of the winter, this time of the year you'd have still been catching a few hoppers. But there's nothing really to work on. Boats are sitting in the harbor. We're not making a living. (0:27:53.0) These boats can't make a living. And you got dealers down there that are selling IQF [quick frozen] shrimp, which an IQF shrimp is quick froze. They're coming off the freezer boats, these big a-hundred-and-twenty-five and more super-slabs. They go out, and they catch shrimp. They quick freeze them right on the spot. So that's what the dealers are selling right now for fresh shrimp. (0:28:13.8) So they're buying quick-froze shrimp, and they have them at the dock, and they're selling them for fresh. And you can go to Jerry Fort's dock right now, and Randy told me down there just a few weeks ago, he says, "I stay down here every day, all day long. Sometimes I don't sell a shrimp. Sometimes I sell four or five pounds." And I think one day last week he said is the best day he's had in a month. He said he sold a little over a hundred pounds of shrimp.

Hester: And when were those shrimp caught (inaudible)?

Hood: I have no way of knowing. They could've been two, three, four months old. They could've been a year old. See. When they quick-freeze them, they run through a solution, and they're froze, right then, on the spot when they're alive.

Hester: On the boat.

Hood: On the boat. So when they come out—when you thaw them, I mean, they're like fresh shrimp. It's an amazing process.

Hester: So would you say that that's one way that the fishermen are managing to make it through this difficult time where they're—(0:29:17.3)

Hood: Some of the bigger boats, yeah.

Hester: Yeah.

Hood: People like me, no.

Hester: So what do you do?

Hood: Right now, if it wouldn't be for the knowledge that I have in the construction field, I wouldn't be even surviving.

Hester: So are you doing most of your work now in the construction field—

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: —and a little bit in the seafood industry?

Hood: Very little on the seafood.

Hester: When did you start that?

Hood: Construction?

Hester: Um-hm.

Hood: Back in the late [19]70s, early [19]80s.

Hester: And has it always been sort of a fallback from maybe a weak season?

Hood: Yeah. If I wasn't working, on a weak season, or something like that, I always fell back on construction.

Hester: So would you say that this is the period of greatest fallback? Does that make any sense? That may not be a good question.

Hood: I'd have to say yeah because the big boat hadn't been out of the slip but one time in over a year, August of last year. And then the boat's been out of the slip one time. The small boat, I tonged last year all the way up until they closed the season. They opened it for just a few days this year; I didn't even try. Out of fifteen or eighteen boats—I forget exactly how many boats went—over a six-day period, there was sixty-six sacks of oysters caught, and that was it. (0:30:36.6) So they closed the season. Now they're talking about reopening the season in the next couple of weeks, once the Pearl River and that goes down, and they'll test the waters and make sure that it's OK. And they're going to open it for a short time to see what happens with a five-sack limit. Five sacks, that's not much. So you figure a man's got to feed his family, pay his bills, and pay for slip rent and fuel, and everything else for five sacks a day? That's a hundred and fifty dollars. That's not much money.

Hester: No. So how many people do you think will actually go out and go for the five sacks?

Hood: Probably not very many, handful.

Hester: What have you seen as the general trend with other commercial fishermen? You're falling back on the construction industry. What are some of the others doing? (0:31:29.7)

Hood: Some of the others are doing the same thing. There's several fishermen right there in Pass Christian that fall back on construction; some, it's heavy equipment.

There's one fisherman down there he has like three, I think, three small boats and one big boat, and then a fairly good size skiff, a Lafitte skiff, but he has like a tractor and backhoe, and he does carpentry work, too, so. If it wouldn't be for something else, we'd starve. I mean, there's nothing there. It's hard to make a living right now on the water. And I raised my kids on the water. I mean, what I used to do as a young parent with my kids; I mean, the boats was our life. (0:32:16.8) I mean, that was it. It was a whole-family thing. Kids go on the boat. We go shrimp. My kids enjoyed shrimping. Kelsey, in fact, when I had the *Kelsey Nicole*, she would go on the boat. I'd have them operating the winch, and when I'd go to pull up the nets, she'd say, "I'm pulling in my bag, Daddy. I'm pulling in my bag." They enjoyed it. You can't enjoy something that's not there. My kids today, my younger children, the two younger ones, they don't really know that much about the water because there was nothing to take them for. And I mean, conservation is good, but we have to conserve or rebuild what's not there. (0:33:05.1) And so many people over the years have taken advantage of it. And part of my problem—and I guess it shouldn't be because everybody has a right to make a living—Alabama, there's more oyster fishermen out of Alabama that fish our water than Mississippi has. (0:33:28.0)

Hester: Why is that?

Hood: Because they don't really have any oysters in Alabama. So Mississippi and Alabama have a reciprocating agreement because Alabama would allow Mississippi to go to Alabama and fish, we were to allow them to come here and fish. Licenses were the same, which I never did agree with that because if I had to go to Louisiana to fish oysters, I had to pay out-of-state license. My out-of-state license for Louisiana is like thirteen hundred dollars. A license here is a hundred dollars. So right now I can't even get a license to go to Louisiana anymore because they have limited entry. I kept my license for years, but now when I lost my boat in the storm—can you imagine paying thirteen hundred dollars, sixteen hundred dollars because you had to have a captain's license, too? So roughly fifteen hundred dollars a year for five years that I didn't have a boat. OK. because I didn't keep those licenses up and they instituted the limited entry, now I *can't* buy a license in Louisiana, so I *can't* go to Louisiana and oyster anymore. I can only oyster in Mississippi or Alabama. But now let me put this out there. If you have a family coming to your home for a meal, [and] you have one soda, and you got one hamburger, and you got five people, you take and pour that one soda up. Each of you get two ounces of drink, and you get one little piece of this hamburger. That's about what it would be like if you had Mississippi go to Alabama to oyster because they only have like a hundred acres. They don't have really a lot of oyster reefs. Now, a hundred acres may be a figure that's not even close to being right, but they have a very small area to fish [oysters] in Alabama. (0:35:31.2) Mississippi's got hundreds of thousands of acres of oysters. Alabama has come here for years, the last fifteen, eighteen, twenty years. When I started dredging oysters back in the early [19]70s, there was just a handful of boats. Now, there's so many boats on the reef, you're running over one another. And they will actually run over you to get in a certain spot. They will hit you to get in their spot. And it's just, I have seen—they have a limit on the oyster. It's supposed to be three inches long to keep it. And then you'll hit an area out there to where it's young growth, and they'll be two,

two and a half inches. Well, these guys will take and put all that in a sack. Well, they're hauling off the future. You see, to me that's not—Conservation started a year or so ago; they started checking every boat. Well, it used to be that they'd just check one every now and then. Well, all these guys was getting away with hauling off the reefs. And to me, I mean, if you're hauling off two-inch, two-and-a-half-inch oysters, if you left them alone for a few more months, those thirty sacks of oysters would've been a hundred sacks of oysters. So it just really don't—conservation has to be conservation, and if you're going to check one boat, you need to check them all. But there again, being on the Oyster Task Force, (0:37:05.8) I sat right there, and I asked an officer one day, I said—because when we're tonging oysters or we're dredging oysters, you're going through them awfully fast. You're allowed, I think, either thirty or forty in a sack, undersized oysters. So I told that office sitting there, I said, "Now, if I was to ask you, Red," I said, "there's not an oyster fisherman on the water that if you wanted to, as an officer, that you couldn't find something every day. Isn't that true?" And he looked at me, and he goes, "Don't get me in the middle of this." And I'm like, "No." I said, "I'm asking you a serious question." There was a half a dozen DMR people there and about a half a dozen fisherman. And I asked him; I says, "There's not a day goes by that if you wanted to, you could find something wrong on every boat that came in here." And he had to agree because I mean, you can go overboard—I mean—with a law. (0:38:08.4) And you can read into a law sometimes what you want, which can be good, I think, at times, but the other times it's not. And I mean, if you're looking for something, you're going to find it. If you're looking for a hair, you're going to find it. But there has to be a fine line there. There has to be a way that we can work together with officers. But more than not, most fishermen try to cover up or hide things. I try to be honest with all fishermen, as well as any agent, and it's difficult at times because you feel like, "Well, they got something against me. That's why they check me so hard." But for an officer, you come up and you dump a sack of oysters out, and you kick them around, and out of two hundred and fifty oysters, you got thirty that's small, and they write you a ticket. Well, you're trying to make a living. You're trying to make a living for your family. It's one thing. But now if it's a fisherman that comes in every day, or every time you check him he's got small oysters, then that's something to look at. But for an officer to reach, to sit down on a sack and go through every oyster in the pile and measure it, pick it—if he's got to pick it up and measure it, that's too close to start with because we can't, on a reef as an oyster fisherman, we can't measure all those oysters that we put in the sacks because we go through them so fast, it's unreal. Every time we make a wrap, we roll the dredge.

Hester: And that's what they're doing? They're actually measuring the—

Hood: Um-hm. Sometime an officer will sit down, and he will measure every oyster in a sack. And if you've got to measure every oyster, there's something wrong with that. And I've stated that before. I've told Scott and others, Dale Diaz and Scott Gordon from the DMR, I said, "It's just not fair. It's not fair to me. It's not fair to any other fisherman." But you can dump a sack and you can tell if a man's got small oysters or not, but if they're all right there close, that's ridiculous to—if you got an

oyster that's an eighth of an inch, or, "Look at this," and they're holding it up there, and they got to measure, that's ridiculous.

Hester: How long would it take them to do that? I would imagine that would be—

Hood: Oh, it takes them—

Hester: —really time consuming.

Hood: I don't know, probably about fifteen minutes or so. But it's almost like—I don't know—like the bully at school sometimes, for lack of a better term. They'll pick somebody out of a crowd, and they'll dump it, and they'll do that, and they don't do it always, but they do at times, and I don't think that's fair for an officer to do a fisherman like that, me or anybody else for that matter. That's just misusing your power.

Hester: I see. You mentioned the Oyster Task Force.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: Could you tell me something about that? When did it start? What is its goal?

Hood: OK. Well, the Oyster Task Force (0:41:19.7) is basically a group of individuals, dredge fishermen as well as tong fishermen. It started before Hurricane Katrina. We started out as a stewardship program. The stewardship program was designed, and all oyster fishermen were invited to be there. The stewardship program started, and we were to try and come up with ways that we can conserve our reefs here in Mississippi. So all the oyster fishermen together started coming up with ideas as to what we could do to conserve our reefs. Part of it is a way that the oyster reef, itself, is fished. A lot of times people would dredge up a big pile of oysters on the boat and then go off the reef to cull them. Well, that's not cultivating a reef. Cultivating a oyster reef is basically just like cultivating the ground to plant vegetables or anything else. If you cultivate it and you work the ground, the ground will produce for you. You have to do the same thing on an oyster reef. You have to turn those shells every so often. Like over in Louisiana and other areas where they have leased ground, they will take, at certain times of the year before a spat set, they'll take the bag out of a dredge, and they'll just, all they do is just turn the shells. They don't harvest anything. They're just turning them to keep them from building up any kind of sludge or slime on a shell, where when the spat does set, it'll have something to set on because it'd be like if it's something that's slimy, usually nothing's going to stick to it. So if you turn those shells and you keep them nice and clean, well, when the spat sets, it's going to set on the oyster, which will, in fact, grow or conserve a reef. So they've been trying to institute things like that in Mississippi, trying to get it to where we cultivate the reefs. Conservation is doing it now.

Hester: And this group would be? The conservationist group would be?

Hood: Well, the Conservation is doing it now.

Hester: OK. But that would be the DMR?

Hood: Right, the DMR.

Hester: Yeah.

Hood: The *Conservationist* is one of their large boats. It has two dredges. So they've been doing that, themselves. But we, as fishermen, have offered. I think that the state, like I mentioned earlier about the disaster relief fund that they've been going after, and they're saying, "Well, it's not really a disaster," because basically, media. If they could get some kind of monies procured, then the fishermen, themselves, could do like we did after the storm when we mapped the reefs. (0:44:02.4) See. They hired all of the boats. If you had an oyster license, you could go out there, and they would give you a specific longitude and latitude line that you had to work on, and you took a pole, and you measured to see whether or not there was shell or mud or live or dead shell. So we remapped all our reefs. Well, the government paid for that; there was funding for that. Well see, right now there's no funding for cultivation. We thought about it last year. We talked about it as a task force. We thought about it again this year. We thought it might happen. There's no funds for it. So therefore it just the Conservation has to do it, just the DMR with The *Conservationist*. So therefore all of the oyster fishermen are still sitting in the harbor. There was no dredge season last year. There's no dredge season this year. So oyster fishermen are hungry. We're hungry. As far as cultivating, if we were to cultivate, I think it would be better, but we don't have any ways of doing that. There's no funds for it unless we just volunteer to go out there, and fuel being the price that it is, you can't do that. We can't go for nothing. But you asked about the stewardship program is how it started. Well, other than piling oysters and going off a reef to cull, that was one. A lot of people were still pulling, like, some of the Vietnamese were pulling cable instead of a chain, and they'd use a short piece of chain on the end of a dredge. Well, they would just dredge like they were pulling a trawl. Well, that was destroying the reef. You dredge oysters by going around in a circle, so you're constantly going in a circle, nonstop, and you don't turn too hard or too less because you'll wind up killing more oysters than you catch. Now I don't know if that makes any sense to you.

Hester: If you could elaborate on it a little bit.

Hood: You set the dredge at about a forty-five-degree angle off the side of the boat. (0:46:17.8) Say thirty-five to fifty-five degrees off to the side of the boat, and you constantly going in a circle with the dredge. And then you roll a dredge each time you go around. If you put out too much chain or not enough chain—not enough chain, you're just not going to catch anything, but if you put out too much chain, and you go around too many times, well, all you're doing is either burying or killing oysters. So you need to be able, when that dredge is full, you need to roll it.

Hester: Meaning?

Hood: Pick it up. OK. So my way of dredging, and always has been, to do that same thirty-five- to, say, sixty-degree-angle off the side of the boat with minimal amount of

chain, and each time I made a complete circle, I would roll the dredge. I would pick it up, whether the table was empty or not. So that's how fast that you have to go through what you pick up. And out of a sixteen-tooth dredge, you're going to pick up about two sacks of shells, two to three sacks of shells each time. Now you might not get but a quarter of a sack of oysters out of it, but you've got to go through that many shells in order to get it. And now if you're in a good area, I have caught as much as a sack and a half in one dredge. So it just really depends on the area where you're working. But we just came up with various, different ideas as a stewardship program. After the storm, after Hurricane Katrina, the stewardship program was no longer in existence. We mapped the reefs and everything, and they came up with something a little different. There's always been a task force for fish. There's always been a crab task force. So the DMR came up with the idea; (0:48:09.0) they said, "Well, we'll just have a task force instead of a stewardship program. We'll just do a task force, and what we'll do is, you'll be a spokesman for the other oyster fishermen in the harbor. If anybody's got anything to say, we can relay it back and forth. If it's just, say, a dealer, two or three dredge fishermen, and then maybe one or two tongers, then we have somebody that'll speak up for ever which part of it." So for one reason or another, I wound up on the task force.

Hester: How many times a month or so would you get together?

Hood: In the beginning when it was first started, we met every other month there for a little bit, and we've only met one time this year. Last year I think we met maybe three times, last year, three or four times last year. We don't really have anything to talk about. We don't have any oysters.

Hester: The program stopped, you said, before Katrina, and you went to the task force after Katrina. What actually brought it to a—what was the event that brought it to a stop? Was it the hurricane [Hurricane Katrina]? (0:49:30.0)

Hood: The storm.

Hester: It was the storm.

Hood: The storm.

Hester: And what about the storm brought it to a stop?

Hood: Well, it just devastated the entire area. After the storm there just really wasn't anything. So pick up, clean up, mapping the reefs. We didn't know what was going to happen after the storm.

Hester: Well, so the storm tore up the oyster reefs?

Hood: That had a good deal to do with it, yeah.

Hester: And what else?

Hood: But it recovered pretty well. Actually there was a whole lot more left after the storm than what some had anticipated.

Hester: And then the BP oil spill.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: So you had oysters coming back after Katrina.

Hood: Right.

Hester: And BP hit the industry again.

Hood: Right.

Hester: And then the Bonnet Carré came and gave it another triple (inaudible).

Hood: And that just gave it another shot.

Hester: Yeah.

Hood: So I mean it was just a domino effect. It's really been difficult.

Hester: You were talking about the brown shrimp and shrimping in Alabama and Louisiana. After the BP oil spill, wasn't Louisiana hit pretty hard? And so I guess they would've had—

Hood: East of the river, yes.

Hester: Yeah. So they—

Hood: West of the river, no.

Hester: Oh, OK. So you would go on the other side, on the west side of the river, and you would be able to get the brown shrimp over there. I see.

Hood: Right.

Hester: I see. OK. I'm thinking maybe we could back up just a little bit, but I would like to return to some of these challenges that the commercial fishermen faced. You went through the boats that you had. And I was just wondering if maybe you could talk a little bit about the type of equipment you used. (0:51:19.4) First of all, you said that you started commercial fishing when you were a fish boy.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: At about how old?

Hood: I was eight years old.

Hester: Eight years old.

Hood: Eight, nine years old, ten years old. I worked on a boat with my brother-in-law.

Hester: OK. And could you describe that boat?

Hood: It was, I think, about forty foot. It belonged to L.D. Gollott(?) in Biloxi. He had a fleet of boats over there. My brother-in-law just ran the boat. It wasn't his. But we trawled. We just had a single trawl, pulled over the stern. And as a fish boy, (0:51:54.7) basically when you're called a fish boy, all I was there for was just to pick shrimp. I didn't have to watch the wheel. I didn't have to do anything except just pick shrimp when we picked up. And all of the fish that were kept, that's what I made at the end of a trip. I didn't make any kind of share or anything like that. So I mean, if we got twenty-dollars worth of fish, that's what I got. If we got a-hundred-dollars worth of fish, that's what I made. So basically I was there for the ride. (laughter)

Hester: And so you were eight years—

Hood: I was a young fellow, um-hm.

Hester: You were eight years old then. And then you were twenty-one, and you bought your own boat.

Hood: Yeah. When I bought my own boat, I was twenty-one.

Hester: Did you stay with commercial fishing—

Hood: Oh, yeah.

Hester: —in the interim?

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: So you were basically working on the Gollott boat up until the age of twenty-one.

Hood: No. I only did that for a couple of years. And then I didn't really get back into shrimping or the seafood industry until I was twenty-one.

Hester: I see.

Hood: I went a couple of times with some various friends. I worked as a teenager, fifteen, sixteen years old on various, different boats in Gulfport; I worked out of a few, on a few boats as a teenager, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen years old.

Hester: So you went to school in Gulfport here?

Hood: No. I went to school in Long Beach.

Hester: OK. Well, I'm forgetting I'm in Long Beach and not in Gulfport.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: So I guess you were, you were filling in summers and (inaudible).

Hood: Yeah, summers and off-time, out of school and stuff, and that, I'd work on a few boats. There was probably half a dozen different boats that I worked on as a teenager. But I bought my own boat when I was twenty-one.

Hester: And that was a twenty-seven-foot Lafitte.

Hood: Twenty-seven-foot Lafitte.

Hester: And could you tell me about the type of fishing you did?

Hood: Shrimping. It was just basically all shrimp. I pulled a thirty-five-foot trawl with five-foot boards. (0:53:44.7) A lot of times, I mean it was an electric winch, and sometimes I would have problems with it. I'd wind up having to pull it in by hand. But as a young fellow, I mean, I didn't have a problem doing that. I made a decent living with it. And I said, "Well, this is what I want to do, so I'm going to build a boat." So that's what I did.

Hester: And you were shrimping year round, so you were catching the brown, the white, and the hoppers.

Hood: Right, um-hm, pretty much year round. You could go just about any time you wanted and catch shrimp.

Hester: How would you market your shrimp? (0:54:17.2)

Hood: I sold them to the dealers there in Gulfport.

Hester: And so in 1975, which would've put you about how old then?

Hood: In '75?

Hester: Uh-huh.

Hood: Twenty what? Let's see. I was born in [19]54, so what's that tell you?

Hester: So you're about fifty-eight now.

Hood: Um-hm. Twenty, twenty-one?

Hester: Yeah, OK. So you built your own boat.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: How long did it take you to build the boat?

Hood: Oh, about nine months, I think, nine or ten months from the time I started.

Hester: How did you get that expertise to do that? (0:54:59.9)

Hood: Another man and I worked together. He had built boats before. And I mean, I had carpentry experience because other than working on boats when I was a teenager, I also worked with a man here in Long Beach, John Taylor; taught me a lot about

building, and wasn't a lot of things back then done with the power tools that you have today, such as chop-saws and all. It was all done with back(?) saws and miter boxes, and you had to actually know what you were doing. So I got taught by some very good people. Carl was a loftsmen, and John was a regular carpenter, so I learned a little bit about boat carpentry and household carpentry. So I had a couple of good teachers. But Carl was basically the mind behind the building of the boat, and I worked side-by-side with him till we got the keel laid and all the ribs put up, and got the side and bottom on it, and then I took it from there.

Hester: And what type of fishing did you do with it?

Hood: Shrimp.

Hester: Shrimping again.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: And did it change from the twenty-seven-foot Lafitte?

Hood: It was thirty-three.

Hester: I mean, did the type of equipment that you used to shrimp with [change]?

Hood: No. It was the same, same equipment. In fact, I even bought the same trawl, same doors and everything that I had on the twenty-seven foot. And then I also did welding and that, so I built my own rigging. It was kind of primitive in the beginning, but I put my own rigging on the boat. I ran that boat for one year, and after I ran the boat for a year, I put it up on the market, and that's when I bought the fifty-six-foot boat.

Hester: And so what drove that decision to go with the bigger boat?

Hood: Bigger boat: stay out longer, pull bigger rig, more money.

Hester: Did you increase the types of species? Did you maybe do something different?

Hood: No. Same species but I was able to go like longer trips, it was comfortable, more comfortable. It had a bigger cabin, had sleeping quarters and that kind of thing, cooking facilities. I could go across to the marsh, had a way to carry more ice, carry more shrimp.

Hester: And you married?

Hood: And I married and—

Hester: She went with you?

Hood: Yeah, she went with me, so.

Hester: OK. So then we go to the *Katrina Marie*. It was built in Bayou La Batre you said, I think?

Hood: No, it was built in Biloxi.

Hester: In Biloxi.

Hood: It went back to Bayou La Batre.

Hester: Went back to Bayou, OK, went back to Bayou La Batre. And you had two children then.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: OK. And this was when it sort of became a family business.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: And what type of fishing were you doing then?

Hood: Shrimping.

Hester: Shrimping again.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: OK. Did you ever do any finfishing?

Hood: No.

Hester: No. OK. When did you change to oystering, or when did oystering—when was it you decided to oyster?

Hood: In the late [19]70s. Mid-to-late '70s, '77, '78, somewhere along in there.

Hester: And did the equipment change at all?

Hood: Well, you went, from shrimping, you went from trawls and doors to a dredge and table.

Hester: But on the *Katrina Marie* when you went from the fifty-six-foot lugger to the forty-foot-foot Biloxi?

Hood: The equipment would've been the same.

Hester: It's the same. OK. OK.

Hood: Now, when I bought the boat originally, the *Katrina Marie*, it was just single rig here in the bay. Later they allowed us to pull two rigs in the bay, so I double-rigged the boat. (0:58:44.6) I put two rigs on it, and after that we started pulling two trawls instead of one.

Hester: And how did that increase—

Hood: That increased the catch, yes.

Hester: Is this about the period of time that Hurricane Fredrick came in? (0:58:58.2)

Hood: Yes, somewhere along in that time in the latter part of the [19]70s.

Hester: And you said that at that period it pretty much shut you down; it was tough.

Hood: For a while, but I mean, we still made a living. I mean, it just was tough, but I mean we got by.

Hester: How did you get by?

Hood: Just by trawling. I mean, we didn't have any oysters for a while, but we were able to trawl and still get by.

Hester: Would you say that for the most part the hurricanes that came after Fredrick or maybe even before, that that was basically the same thing?

Hood: Yeah. It was the same trend. I mean, after a while, right after Fredrick there was a couple of, like in some of the deeper holes where they were, they made a couple of little licks, but for the most part just out on the flats and stuff, it was hard for a while, but they eventually came back.

Hester: So then we go to the *Rene Michelle*, a forty-eight-foot?

Hood: Um-hm. It was also double rigged.

Hester: OK, double rig, as well. Shrimping and oystering?

Hood: Shrimping. Shrimp and oysters.

Hester: Oystering. And the equipment was—

Hood: The same.

Hester: —double rigged the same.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: The *Captain Zeb*?

Hood: *Captain Zeb* was also a double rig.

Hester: OK. And that was a forty-eight foot, as well?

Hood: No. It was only thirty-eight foot, but it was a big thirty-eight foot. (laughter)

Hester: Did you have—

Hood: Cabin on the bow.

Hester: Did you have maybe the *Rene Michelle* and the *Captain Zeb* at the same time?

Hood: No. I had the *Captain Zeb* and the *Michaela Cheyenne* at the same time.

Hester: OK. And that one was twenty foot wide.

Hood: Yeah. It was twenty foot wide.

Hester: And sixty feet long.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: Could you maybe talk about the equipment there? (1:00:46.7)

Hood: The *Michaela Cheyenne* was a lot bigger boat, and I pulled bigger rigs. Here in the bay you could only pull twenty-fives, but out in any other waters you could pull bigger rigs. If you went on the outside, you could pull forties or either four twenty-fives, but now, most of the time I only pulled twenty-fives. And so just for the sake of conversation, I'd just leave it at that because that's all you could pull legally in the bay was twenty-five-foot nets, but I pulled eight-foot doors up until they changed the law, and then they made it to where you could only pull six-foot doors. (1:01:22.3)

Hester: What was the reason for the law?

Hood: I think the reason for that was, is just for the over-catch or maybe tearing the bottom up or whatever. Eight-foot doors will bust a twenty-five-foot net wide open. And if you've got the power to pull them, you'll catch more with eight-foot doors than you will with six. And so it could've had something to do with conservation. I don't know.

Hester: So how would you say it affected your livelihood?

Hood: Not really that much. Not really that much. The only time that it really came into effect, as far as equipment, pulling equipment here in the bay, when we started having to pull the TED's, the turtle excluder devices. (1:02:02.5) That caused a big problem because you lost a lot of your catch. But now, over the years they've perfected it a little more, and it's not quite as bad as it used to be, but you still lose a lot of your catch. Now, we put what we call zippers in a net. Let's say for instance you're dragging; it's at night, and you don't see it; you catch a crab trap. You catch a crab trap ahead of the TED, well, anything that's caught after the trap, you wind up losing your catch because you try to get everything back in the tail. Well, it can't get through because you've got a crab trap there, so it's ahead of the TED. So when you go to pick up, well, you've lost the drag, so you wind up losing money. You may lose half of your catch. So you pick up; you see you got a crab trap or something in the net, then you take the zipper and open it up and take it out. If you didn't have a zipper in the net, you'd have to cut the net wide open. So in order to pick up and put over, it usually took anywhere from about ten to fifteen minutes to pick up and put over. If you had a crab trap or anything in your net, then it may be thirty, forty-five minutes an

hour or longer, especially if you had to cut the net to take the trap out or whatever, and then sew it back up, so you would lose time.

Hester: Right. When did the TED law go into effect?

Hood: I'm not quite sure.

Hester: Do you remember which boat you had then?

Hood: I think the TEDs went into effect—I'm not exactly sure because I pulled them when I had the *Captain Zeb*. I don't know what year it would've been.

Hester: Do you think it was before Hurricane Fredrick?

Hood: No, not before Fredrick.

Hester: No.

Hood: No. It would've been after that, way after that.

Hester: And so as the modifications and changes in the TEDs came about, then slowly you were seeing your catches improve with—

Hood: Yeah. In the beginning it just really made a lot of us, as far as fishermen, angry because we never had turtles here. (1:04:31.4) I mean, I fished most all of my life right here on this coast and never saw but one turtle in all those years. But now we have turtles. We have a lot of turtles here. So I really don't know what the criteria for them really is. I know they're a beautiful animal; I can tell you that. They're pretty to see, especially if you see one half as big as this table. Now this is a huge table, but I've seen turtles darn near as big as this table in the Gulf, and it's a pretty sight to see.

Hester: What do you think is the reason for the increase and you're seeing more of them now?

Hood: I can't answer that because I don't know. Now I know like in other areas, say for instance across the border there, you go in Mexico; I mean, they're just very prolific over there. And people go out and take the eggs and do whatever they want to, and it's OK over there. But here it's altogether different. I'm all for conservation, and everything has a right to live, but at the same time we need to be able to make a living, as well.

Hester: So you went from the *Captain Luke*, also known as the *Michaela Cheyenne*, and to the *Bama Lady*, a forty-two-foot, Alabama crab boat.

Hood: Right. And that's the one that I lost.

Hester: So this was when you started with crabs?

Hood: Yeah. Well, I was shrimping there, too. I didn't actually crab the boat. It was just the style of boat that it was. I shrimped with the boat and oystered with the boat.

Hester: Did you ever do any crabbing?

Hood: Some. And I have a crab boat now, but I'm not crabbing.

Hester: So you were doing, on the *Bama Lady*, you were doing shrimping oystering again..

Hood: Shrimping and oystering.

Hester: Could you tell us about the equipment? Was it basically—

Hood: Just single rig. It was just single rig.

Hester: Single rig.

Hood: Yeah.

Hester: And you lost—

Hood: Thirty-five-foot trawl.

Hester: Thirty-five-foot trawl, OK. And you lost this boat in Katrina.

Hood: I lost that boat in Katrina.

Hester: You had no other boat, just the one?

Hood: Just the one.

Hester: How did you make do? How did you handle that? (1:06:49.8)

Hood: Well, after the storm, I leased a boat for about a year, the *Elaine G*, and that's what I used to map the reefs and all with. And then the DMR put in effect shrimp testing, (1:07:06.9) so we had to go out and test, and I had a little sixteen-foot trawl that I used, and I pulled it in by hand in order to test to see what kind of fish we were catching, what kind of shrimp we were catching. If I made a fifteen-minute test or a thirty-minute test, you had to time it and then put down exactly what you caught, what size they were, roughly, whether you caught white shrimp, brown shrimp, hopper, whether you caught croakers or white trout or speckled trout or crab. You just had a list that you had to go by on these forms, and you went every day. And as long as you went out, you got paid for doing it. So it was something to give the fishermen something to do after the storm.

Hester: And what was the reason for it?

Hood: The reason for it was just find out what kind of species we had and what was left over and whether or not they were coming back. I think the biggest reason was just to see what the conservation was like and to help the fishermen, as well, because it was a disaster.

Hester: How long did you do that? How many months or years or whatever after the Katrina?

Hood: Well, it wasn't years; it was only so many days the first time, and then they stopped, and then they did it for so many days. I think they just had an X-amount-of-dollar limit. And if you carried a license, if you carried a fish or a seafood license, you were able to do that.

Hester: Was that something that was offered exclusively to commercial fishermen?

Hood: Right.

Hester: So that made it different than the VOO program.

Hood: Right. It was offered strictly to fishermen. And you had to have a valid license when it went into effect. You couldn't just go down and buy a license and go do it. You had to have already your license in effect when it came about.

Hester: So what else did you do in addition to that to make it through that tough period after Katrina?

Hood: Well, they did the mapping of the reefs, which was when I leased the boat, that's what I originally leased it for, and then we did that. And then they had a stop period there for a while, and then they did that again to help out the fishermen, I guess, until the monies ran out. When the monies ran out, that's when it stopped.

Hester: Did you do any construction?

Hood: I did construction on the side, too.

Hester: And when the monies ran out, what did you do as far as using a boat at that point? Were you able to go back into—was it late enough after Katrina to go back in commercial fishing or did you—

Hood: No. After the *Elaine G*, I just turned it back over to the man that actually owned it, and I'd purchased another license for it, but I didn't ever do anything else with the boat. In fact, he brought the boat from Pass Christian to Long Beach, and I don't think I used it but maybe one other time after that. And then I basically just stayed in the building industry up until just before the—let's see. I guess it would've been late [20]04. It was October or November of '04 when I bought the boat that I have now, which is the *Rusty Pelican*.

Hester: And in between—

Hood: And then I took it—I took it to the shipyard, and I worked on it for approximately four months, and then it was [20]05. And just before the—I got to work two weeks; I think it was two weeks, eleven or twelve days, something like that, before the BP oil spill in April.

Hester: Was it '05?

Hood: Um-hm, I think it was '05.

Hester: Katrina was '05, right?

Hood: Yeah, Katrina's '05, and then '06. Now, you see; I get the dates all mixed up.

Hester: Yeah. I'm the same way. (laughter)

Hood: I get dates mixed up, so.

Hester: And in the meantime when you were doing your construction, you had the accident where you broke your neck, and that put you out of commission.

Hood: Yeah, that was in [2006].

Hester: So the—

Hood: That was in [20]06 when I fell. That was March 28, '06. The storm came in '05. I bought the *Rusty Pelican* the latter part of—let's see. Maybe it was [20]09 or '10. The spill was in '10, right?

Hester: Yeah.

Hood: I think around the twenty-first of April in 2010?

Hester: Yes.

Hood: So it must've been October, November of [20]09 when I bought the boat that I have now.

Hester: OK. And you're doing shrimping and oystering with it?

Hood: Right.

Hester: OK, both of them, still.

Hood: Um-hm.

Hester: And the equipment?

Hood: Basically the same.

Hester: The same, OK. All right. Could you tell me, say, prior to Katrina—it sounds like you had some challenges as far as like adding the TEDs and so forth. Can you think of any other events that happened in the commercial fishing industry that presented a challenge to you, you needed to get past?

Hood: Well, just that the number of boats (1:12:38.1) and the number of, the ability of the catch. I mean, our bay produces a lot of shrimp, and it produces a lot of oysters. But just like with anything else, let's say for instance, you got a pond in your backyard, and it's stocked with trout and bream and whatever, goggle eyes. It's stocked with plenty of fish. And you put five people out there, a family, and you can

fish that pond for twenty years and never fish it out. But if you put a hundred people in that same pond, well, what happens? It can't produce fast enough to take care of a hundred people. That's what happened to our bay. That's what I see because everybody felt like, "Hey, I'm going to buy me a shrimp boat. I'm going to go make a lot of money." And well, let's face it. Technology? I remember when Percy Bradley(?) and I were the only two people in the Pass Harbor back in the late [19]70s, early [19]80s that had a loran [long-range navigation]. (1:13:48.7) So every morning when we would leave and go out with our radar and lorans, and it's so foggy you can't see the bow of the boat, we'd have a nice, little fleet behind us. They'd all follow us out, and we'd drop them off. And when we'd go to go back in, we'd go by and pick them up and bring them back in, and you couldn't even see the bow of the boat. So we assisted other fishermen so as to make a living. People aren't like that today. You're on your own. But then with technology you got GPS [global positioning system]; you got plotters. You got a way to see the bottom. You can see the terrain of the bottom. So with the equipment that we have today, you can fish the waters better. You can see what's there.

Hester: How does it impact—I mean, you fish better, but does it deplete the waters?

Hood: I think so. I think so because of the number of fishermen. But now, it's fixing itself because people have finally come to realize that that's just not the way to make a living anymore. It's a dying industry. (1:14:58.5) It's a dying industry because people have all this equipment, and some of these big, big boats, there for a while, they couldn't build them fast enough. And now if you go to Bayou La Batre, you can drive all around over there, and you see these big slabs just basically sitting up there high and dry. They don't have no fuel on them. They don't have no water on them. They're just sitting there. And the reason being is because they can't make a living. You can't pay the kind of money it costs right now for fuel and oil and go out there and make nothing. And some of these big boats are doing just that. So they're tying them up. Some of those big boats over there are a-million-and-a-half-, two-million-dollar boats. Well, you've got to be able to catch some seafood in order to pay for that and to pay the crew. And the thing with shrimp is, I mean it's not—you don't *know* that you're going to make money when you leave the dock. (1:15:53.8) You may go out there and stay for a week and come in and make nothing. But not only are you not going to make nothing; you're going to pay for all that fuel and groceries and everything else, so you've actually gone in the hole when you come back to the dock.

Hester: I understand. When would you say, yearwise or maybe even just decadewise, would you say that you really started to see an increase in the number of boats? And what brought that about? Was it a gradual increase, or it just happened all of a sudden? (1:16:31.7)

Hood: It was kind of gradual. It was gradual. And then there for a while it just—everybody wanted to be a fisherman.

Hester: Would that be like in the [19]80s?

Hood: I would say in the [19]80s it started picking up, and '90s, '80s and '90s. And then now in the 2000, up till now, it started depleting. Back in the [19]80s when the Vietnamese first came here, (1:16:59.0) everybody bought a boat. And then that gradually changed, too. Some knew how to fish; some didn't. But I mean, that was the way that, when they came, that they made a living, and some stayed in the industry; some did not. Some of my best friends in the Pass are Vietnamese, and they have some really nice boats, and they've always worked hard together, and they stick together, and that's good.

Hester: Could you, over the course of your career, tell me how the way you marketed your catch changed, or did it change? (1:17:39.1)

Hood: I, most of the time, sold my seafood to the dealers up until—I don't know; I guess—I bought the *Kelsey Nicole*. And then I would sell to the dealers and to the public. A lot of times individuals would want—let's say for instance if you came down and I were your friend, or you called me and said, "Hey, I need fifty pound of shrimp," I'd sell you fifty pound of shrimp off the boat. I got to where I was selling all of my catch off the boat. But the point is, is after a while, it got to where you couldn't do that. You go out, and you work all night long, and you come in, and you stay on the boat all day; well, then you couldn't go the next night, so then it wasn't worth it. I mean, there wasn't that much money different. And if I sold my shrimp to the dock at two dollars a pound, he was selling them for three. So that's what we were trying to do. So we got to where, "Well, he's selling them for three; he's paying us two. Well, if we sell them for two-fifty, we're making extra money, and we're going to sell them before he will." It was kind of a who's-going-to-make-the-money?

Hester: Competition.

Hood: Yeah, it was a competition thing. Well, then everybody on the dock is selling their own shrimp. So then ever who was at the first part of the pier—I mean, if you had a slip way down here, it was harder for you to sell your product because everybody bought the shrimp up front first. So I mean it was just kind of a catch-22. And then there were some people that—like, there were some dealers that would—I had a few dealers that came, and they would take everything I had, but then I had to sell them—he paid me like twenty-five cents a pound more than I would sell it to the dock for, but he would come there and take everything I had, so then that was worth it for me. So it's changed. It's been feast and famine—I guess you might say—all the way through the whole industry. Sometime you made good money; sometime you didn't.

Hester: If you were to go out today, and you brought in some oysters and shrimp, how would you market it today?

Hood: You'd just about have to take it to a dealer. Now, the shrimp I could probably sell without any problem, but oysters, you're going to have to sell that to a dealer unless you brought them home, and you had some presold or something because oysters are not, that's not something you play with. Oysters can hurt you, especially if they're not handled properly.

Hester: And you're talking about healthwise.

Hood: Healthwise, that's right.

Hester: Yeah, OK. Let's revisit, if we could, Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill. I just have a few questions because we covered it pretty thoroughly.

Hood: OK.

Hester: And really interesting information, too. After Katrina, did you have anybody that helped you recover from Katrina, or were you pretty much on your own?
(1:20:41.0)

Hood: Pretty much on my own.

Hester: OK. And is there any particular way that the business changed after Katrina that you've noted?

Hood: Well, the bottoms changed; some of the landmarks have changed.

Hester: Can you give an example?

Hood: Well, right after the storm—of course most of it's been cleaned up now, but we tore a lot of rigs up, tore a lot of nets up. There was trash and stuff that was brought out after the storm, rooftops or automobiles, whatever (laughter) it happened to be, but tear a net half in two, stopped the boat, even hit something with a boat one day, running, the boat that I leased, and I left out of the harbor and was running, and I mean, I tore the wheel up. I had to take the wheel off and go have it repaired and put back on. And it was just one thing after another. There were several things after the storm that made it very difficult to make a living.

Hester: Did it ever get back to normal before the BP spill?

Hood: I can't really say because, see, I only had the boat leased. I leased that one boat for approximately a year. I helped map the reefs, and then we did the shrimp testing, and that's all I did up until I bought the *Rusty Pelican*, which I was boatless for about four years. Then I feel like I'm getting my feet back under me. I finally got to where I could buy another boat, put every dime and nickel I had into it, and was basically about to lose everything I had, financially, my home included, everything I worked for all my life, and then I get to go to work. And two weeks later the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill (1:22:29.1) comes along, and now it's just devastated ever since. So it's been real difficult from the time of the spill until now.

Hester: Have you filed a claim?

Hood: I have a claim with BP, and nothing is happening. (1:22:41.8)

Hester: The process, is it—I don't know too much about it.

Hood: Well, I don't really feel like that BP has handled the whole thing properly. First of all, you have a commercial fisherman—commercial fishermen, as far as the

VOO [Vessels of Opportunity] program was concerned, should've been the very first people that went to work. But when this VOO Program was instituted, Vessels of Opportunity, every doctor, lawyer, dentist, crab fishermen, pond fishermen that—I mean, if they had a aluminum skiff and an outboard motor, they went and applied; they got jobs, and they were out there running around with an umbrella and an outboard motor. And here's commercial fishermen still sitting in a slip without—there was no rhyme or reason to how they got their contracts, and how they got their numbers.

Hester: Well, did the commercial fishermen apply?

Hood: Oh, yeah.

Hester: Well, why weren't they called?

Hood: I can't answer that. BP would have to answer that. And I mean, hours and hours and hours and days and days would go by, and then you wonder. You'd go down and even talk to them at the dock, "Well, what's the problem? Why? I got a forty-eight-foot boat, sitting right there. I've been commercial fishing all my life. How come I can't work in this program?"

Hester: And what kind of answers would you get?

Hood: "Can't answer that. You'll have to wait for your MOB number."

Hester: What's a—

Hood: You had to have that number in a contract with BP in order to get hired, and you'd have to wait for a phone call. There was nobody you could call. It got to where you had a phone number; you had an eight-hundred number that you could call and ask how it was, or where your contract was, or this or that. And at first it was working. And after that, you would call the number; it'd been disconnected. You couldn't even get through. There was nowhere to—nobody to talk to. So I got pretty upset one day, and I went to the office, the claims office, and I walked in, and I said, "Look. Somebody's going to talk to me *today*." And they said, "Well, you can leave your name and number." I says, "I ain't leaving nothing." And there was an officer standing there, and I just told him, I said, "You can sit down over there." I said, "You can sit down right here with me," I said, "but I'm going to talk to somebody before I walk out of this office." And I says, "I want to know what the deal is." I took one day; I said, "I'm going to do this." I says, "I'm going to call Channel 13. I'm going to call somebody." And I said, "I'm going to have them at Pass Christian Harbor tomorrow morning." I said, "When the sun comes up, I'm going to show y'all what y'all got hired down here." And I said, "And then I'm going to show you the boats that aren't working." I said, "There's a lot of us down there that are commercial fishermen, that's sitting here waiting for months to get hired on, on the VOO program, Vessels of Opportunity, and you've got ten-, twelve-, fourteen-foot, sixteen-foot aluminum skiffs and Boston whalers and Lord knows what all else you got." There were some people that were fairly wealthy; they just went off and bought a whole bunch of what they call Carolina skiffs, as many as four or five of them, and put

somebody in it, and say, “OK. There you go.” And they were all hired on. Why were they hired on? Because they got money and got connections. And for the just the regular old fishermen that don’t have anything or any backing or anybody, they’re still sitting in the slip. Well, after the deal with the meeting that we had at Shaggy’s with the senator and several other people and the press, some of us did get hired, me included. But I only got to work for about thirty, thirty-one days. And during that thirty or thirty-one days I got hired, I worked pretty much all the way through two weeks and then got laid off, and then I went back for two or three days and got laid off, and then I went back again, and then that was the end of it. Whereas some boats—there’s one fellow in particular. I won’t name any names. He had like six boats. He was one of the very first people that were hired. His boats were hired on, were never laid off, and we figure he made somewhere in the neighborhood, with those six boats, probably about a million and a half dollars. And we know that to be true. And there was no rhyme or reason, the way they handled things, and you couldn’t get any straight answers. There was no one to answer questions for you. If you had a complaint, you could turn it in, but you never got any response. There was no number you could call, or nobody you could talk to. And the same is true now with the claims facility. (1:27:31.9) They have put me off and put me off and put me off so long, I lost over a hundred thousand dollars last year, dredging alone. They offered me fifty-seven thousand dollars to just sign off and be done. And I said, “Why would I do that? I’ll take my chances and wait,” I said, “because there’s no way.” And now some of the fishermen have—they’ve almost lost everything they have and anybody, any commercial fishermen with their license can call right now, and they can settle for twenty-five thousand, and some of them have done that. Their hand is being *forced* to do this, and I don’t think that’s fair. You got a company that comes in here, and they’ve devastated our waters. We will suffer here. This coast will *never* recover. When I’m dead and gone thirty years from now, we’ll still be picking up tar balls off that beach and mainly because of dispersants. (1:28:39.6) There’s one chemical, from what I’ve been told and everything that I’ve read, there’s only one chemical different in what they’ve sprayed on that water out there from antifreeze. And you know what antifreeze will do to animal life or anything else. It’ll kill them. It’ll kill you or me. So I mean, they sprayed millions of gallons of dispersants to get rid of that oil. And this coastline as well as coastlines even across the border to the east from us, maybe European countries or whatever, they going to suffer that oil spill, too. And all the way down through Florida, the barrier islands (1:29:26.0) that we’ve always prized so much, BP bought half of Cat Island. You can’t even go on the—they own the south side of Cat Island now, and mainly because of the oil spill; the same with Horn Island and some of the other barrier islands.

Hester: Why would they want to buy some of the barrier islands?

Hood: Because of the oil and the composites that are there; I mean tar balls and stuff. I mean, I’ve had friends of mine that tell me they go out to Horn Island, said they used to wade fish out there all the time and say you can’t even do it now; said, “You can’t go and wade there.” Said, “You can’t even walk on the bottom it’s so nasty.” So I mean, there’s a lot of pros and cons to everything, regardless of what it is, whether it’s in the fishing industry, whether it’s in the commercial industry, the printing industry.

It didn't matter what kind of industry you're in. In life, there's always going to be pros and cons. But sometimes because of other companies people suffer for it, and they suffer drastically. Well, our fishing industry here on the coast has suffered drastically, and somebody ought to pay. Now who? Well, that's another story. And whether they ever do, or are made to, that will be a question, too. I don't feel like I've been dealt with fairly, and I know a lot of—I'm speaking for a lot of fishermen. There's a number of fishermen that I could call, and they would all tell you the same thing, that they have not been dealt with fairly. And I mean, you don't just draw numbers out of a hat. If when the spill happened—and everything are accidents. (1:31:20.6) I mean, I don't think they anticipated that to happen, but I think it could've been handled differently. I mean, I watched it through the whole thing. I think it could've been handled differently. I worked in the oil field as a young man; I know what blowout preventers and things like that are. And I know corners are cut from time to time. They save billions and billions of dollars by taking chances. But look what it's cost us now because of trying to cut corners. You see? Look what it's cost not just us physically, but look what it's cost the environment because of cutting corners. So I mean cutting corners at times, I guess there's a time for it, but there's other times that you just don't cut corners. Lives are lost. Those, what was it, seven men, I think, that died on that rig? Why? Because somebody wanted to make more money. Greed is the biggest problem on earth today. People want to make more, and they don't matter who they push down to get it, as long as they get more. And I don't agree with that.

Hester: Yeah. I agree with you there. So I think you've answered this question already, but I'll pose it just to make sure we've covered it as much as you'd like to. What do you see for the future of the seafood industry? (1:32:46.3)

Hood: I don't really see a whole lot of a future for the seafood industry. I think you could go just about right now in Pass Christian Harbor—I know I have two boats for sale. The *Northeastern Dead Rise* that I have is for sale. My wife just mentioned to me this morning; she said, "Well, maybe you need to put a sign on the *Rusty Pelican*, too." I don't really want to sell the *Rusty Pelican*. I've always had boats. I've had boats all my life. I raised my children on a boat. Now it's my grandchildren's turn, and there's no turn for them. What can I show them? There's nothing like it used to be. I used to like to take the boat and go out just, just to go for the evening and take all the kids, put the nets out, pick them up, dump on the deck, and let the kids play in the fish and the shrimp and the crabs and just have a good time. You can't do it. There's nothing there. So now it's time for my grandchildren to enjoy what my children enjoyed, and there's nothing for them to enjoy. It's just not the same. I don't ever foresee, in my lifetime, this Gulf coming back, this bay. Now in the Gulf, it may be different, but in our bay, what I've raised my family on, I don't foresee it. I don't foresee this bay making a living for the hundreds of fishermen on the Coast that—or thousands. I don't even know how many fishermen we have on the Coast right now, but they're dwindling. Fishermen are dwindling because they can't make a living any more. Their boats are—both of my boats right now need to go on the shipyard. I can't afford to put either one of them on the shipyard. So if you can't take care of your investment, it can't take care of you. It's like your automobile. If you don't

change your oil and you don't check your oil, it's going to leave you on the side of the road. It's the same way with a boat. If you're not using it, it goes down quicker than it is if you're using it every day. So I mean, we can't afford to work on our boats. We can't afford the repair. We can't afford new equipment. We can't afford boards. We can't afford trawls; can't put the boat on the shipyard because we don't have the funds to do it. And a wood boat needs to go on the yard every year. A steel boat you can get by sometime two to three years. But a wood boat needs to go every year. My boat's been in the water right at two years; I can't put it on the yard. I don't have the money. So what do you do?

Hester: Your son, how old is he? (1:35:33.1)

Hood: My son's nineteen.

Hester: Nineteen. What occupation does he have. Is he still in school?

Hood: He's graduated. He's a full-time minister, and he wants to become a first responder. He wants to become a paramedic and fireman, so. He don't want anything to do with fishing. He don't want nothing to do with it. Now, he likes going fishing, but he don't want nothing to do with boats. None of my family want anything to do with boats, except me. My wife don't want me to sell it, but she—you do what you have to do.

Hester: I understand. I think that I've pretty much exhausted my questions, so, but before I turn the tape recorder off, I'm going to open the floor to you because I'm sure there are many things I didn't think about to ask that may be important to you, or you'd like to make a record of. This is going to be at the Center [for Oral History and Cultural Heritage] for way beyond my lifetime. So if you would like to say something on the record, please say it. (1:36:39.1)

Hood: Well, the only thing that I'd want to say is that for the fishing industry and for boats, I think it's been a wonderful career. It's been a challenging career because the water is something that you can't really—I mean, you leave some nights; it'd be absolutely beautiful, but before the night was over, it turned into a monster. The water has—you have to have a lot of respect for the water. And it's biblical. If you've ever heard the saying, "A red sky at night is a sailor's delight; but a red sky in the morning, sailor's take warning." And it's very true. Usually if you have a red sky or kind of a pinkish-looking sky, it's going to be a beautiful night. Some of the most enjoyable times in my entire life was spent on the water with a trawl overboard, just listening to the engine in the background and laying out on the ice hold, just looking up to the stars at night, or see a meteor shower, or anything like that. It's just absolutely beautiful. But then other times, like I said, it's been tragic. I've seen people lose their lives on the water. I've actually had to help look for someone that had lost their life in the water, drowned during the oyster season. So the water is, it's to be respected, like maybe getting behind the wheel of an automobile or on a motorcycle. You have to respect the water, not take chances and that kind of thing, be safe, take care of your children. But my oldest daughter—she'd probably kill me if I said this, if she knew I was saying this. My oldest daughter is thirty-three years old now. She learned how to

walk on the boat, using a trawl cable. She would hold onto the trawl cable and walk back and forth on the ice hatch. The ice hatch was eleven feet long, and she would walk back and forth, and I just thought that was just absolutely amazing. At that time I didn't have what we call a picking table. We sat down on the deck to pick out, and we were single rigged, so we'd dump on the side in the wing, and then we would pick into a basket. Well, when we picked up, shook the tail out, tied the tail, put it back overboard, and Katrina was probably about, probably about a year old at the time. And we had a pallet on the other side and had her laying on the pallet. Well, she was real quiet, and some time had gone on, and I said, "Well, she must be asleep over there." "Aw, she's OK," my wife said. I said, "Well, you better check on her." "Ah, she's all right." So eventually I got up, and I turned the wheel, and I walked around and looked, and she had a pogy fish about six inches long, and she had already ate the whole belly out of this thing. (laughter) So I guess you might say at a year old she started enjoying sushi, so. (laughter)

Hester: That's a great story.

Hood: So I mean, from learning how to walk on the boat, my second child learned how to walk on the boat, as well. All of my kids enjoyed the boats, all the way up through my third child. And the last two got to work a little bit, very little on the boat, at a young age. Michaela was probably five, maybe, on the *Michaela Cheyenne* and, four or five, because she was just a little, bitty thing when I bought the boat. And then I sold that boat before the storm. I sold it in April of [20]05, and she's sixteen now, so she wasn't but what? Eight, nine years old maybe when I sold the boat. So she didn't get to enjoy the boat much. And then my son—they both went with me when I'd go dredging. It was a lot of fun to watch a child get up in the middle of the table. Now my son, he didn't really have that much to do with it until she did. Now, here she is four or five years old, standing up on top of an ice chest, going through a dredge table, picking up oysters. And I have pictures of all that, and it's so fun, but yet now, like I say, with my grandchildren there's just nothing. It's not the same, and my number two daughter, Melissa, lives in Connecticut now. And last year when the *Rusty Pelican* went out of the slip that one time in a year, she came down to visit from Connecticut, her and her husband. "I want to take out the boat, Daddy. I want to go on the boat." So I mean even at her age now, and she's almost thirty-two, she'll be thirty-two in June. I mean, she remembers that childhood, and she always loved the boat. She wanted to take the boat out. So when they came down, I carried them to Cat Island, and we went fishing. But I mean, the boats have been my life, and now it's almost like drudgery. I mean, I have two boats sitting in the harbor, and I almost don't even want to go down there. And that's a large investment just sitting there and can't do anything with it, and it makes it tough.

Hester: I understand.

Hood: So you look for answers, and there don't seem to be any answers. You ask questions, and there's no answers. With BP (1:42:20.2) you ask questions; there's no answers, or the answers they give you is the same answer every time, "Well, it's because of this, or it's because of that." I've given them so much information over the past couple of years, they probably have thirty pounds of paper, boxes of paper,

documentation. It's just unreal that the questions that they have asked. And then you got somebody, the economist or accountant, I guess you might say, sitting here, trying to tell you what you did, or what you didn't do, and what you're capable of. And this man, I guess you might say that was one of my largest complaints with BP.

(1:43:07.4) All of these people that are working for BP don't know nothing about this fishing industry. They came here. They're paper pushers, and they push a pencil around on a piece of paper and calculate numbers. They don't know this man. They don't know what he's capable of. They don't know even what kind of fishing he does. They see he's got a fishing license. Well, I give you one example. They had a man with a—a commercial fishermen, he's got a twenty-foot, twenty-two-foot, outboard motorboat, but he's a charter fisherman. He charters his boat. He's got a six-pack license. He charters his boat. He goes right here in this bay and around a couple of little islands, runs out to the rigs occasionally on good days, and he speckled-trout fishes. That's all he does. But now on the same token, you got a man here with a six-pack license, and a two-hundred-thousand-, two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar boat. He's carrying charters for days. He's going sixty, seventy, eighty miles offshore, a hundred miles offshore, but yet when it came down to the paperwork over at the BP claims office, they were both getting categorized as the same fishermen. So how does this man in a twenty-foot boat and a man over here in a forty-foot boat with a big charter boat, and this man being compared? That's not an apple to an apple. That's a grape to a grapefruit difference, but yet they don't understand that. You see. And that's the same with the commercial fishermen, as far as I'm concerned, as far as shrimping. You can't take a skiff, a tonging skiff and a forty-eight-foot lugger and put them in the same category. You can't take this man's worth and this man's worth and put them in the same category. But that's what they're doing. So there's no rhyme; there's no reason. It's almost like they're blindfolded. They just reach in there, and they take out a number and say, "Oh, OK. Offer him twenty thousand." I don't understand what it's all about. And if you go try to get an attorney, then that's just more red tape. It's just more, you know—so I don't know what to do. In the meantime I'm suffering financially. (1:45:36.6) I mean, I have my home that I've built sixteen years ago that I'm in. Well, in fact, my payment's late right now. I don't know where the next payment's coming from, so. I get out there. I'm trying to advertise. I'm trying to do whatever I can do to make a living, and it's just tough.

Hester: I understand.

Hood: So you got sixty-, seventy-thousand-dollars worth of investments, sitting at the harbor that can't make you nothing.

Hester: It has to be frustrating.

Hood: Oh, yeah, very frustrating. And the economy don't help none, either. So seafood industry is a dying industry. I mean, it's a dying industry, and more and more people are getting out of the business. More and more people are selling their boats. I just don't foresee it ever coming back the way that it was when I was younger. I don't. And I lived on that water all my life. My mother couldn't keep me out of the water when I was a child. I lived right here on Third Street in Long Beach, and every

day I was in that harbor, fishing. I used to say, “If you cut my wrists, most—cut your wrists, most people bleed red. Cut my wrists, they’d probably bleed saltwater.” So.

Hester: That’s great.

Hood: Takes a special person to be a commercial fisherman. Can’t just anybody be a commercial fisherman. And if you’ve ever got it into your blood, that’s what it is; it’s saltwater in your blood. You just can’t get away from it. And that’s been difficult for me, but I still enjoy it; I mean, but the joy is not the same as it was. It’s just not the same. Now I go down, and I open the cabin up, and I go in, and I sit down at the table, and my wife and I sit there and play cards, in the harbor. We’re just sitting in the harbor, turn the radio on. But it’s *something*. I’m on the boat. I’m on the water. It’s better than sitting at the house, watching TV. I don’t know if I’ve answered any of your questions, but—

Hester: You have. You have answered (laughter) all my questions, very, very well. There is one thing that had just occurred to me that I should’ve asked in the beginning, and I forgot to ask you. Was your father a fisherman?

Hood: No.

Hester: No. What did he do?

Hood: My father was a mechanic.

Hester: OK.

Hood: And like I said I fished all my life. My mother and father divorced when I was an infant, and my mother raised me by herself. But I loved fishing. I always loved fishing, and at a very young age, you couldn’t keep me out of the Long Beach Harbor down there. (1:48:15.0) We used to call it “the rock pile” when I was a kid, and that’s really all it was. It wasn’t a harbor. You had some of—if you’ll look at some of the old, old pictures along the coast, there’d be a post drove in the ground out there and a skiff tied to it. That was our harbor. It was just a big pile of rocks. And I had started out with a little fishing pole and go from there. I used to go to the Sunflower on Jeff Davis Avenue when I was a kid. William Skelly owned the Sunflower. The mayor of Long Beach right now, Billy Skelly, he was a meat cutter for his dad. And I’d go down there, and I’d walk around the meat counter back there, and Billy’d say, “Hey, what do you want?” I says, “You have anything I can use for bait?” “Come on around here.” And he’d have a box down there, and I’d get chicken necks or whatever out of the box, and I’d go to the harbor. I didn’t have money to buy nets and things, so I just had a—I’d tie strings on a—I’d put two poles down with a string between them, and I had one net, and I’d catch crabs. I’d put them in my bicycle basket, and I’d pedal them around Long Beach and sell them, as a child. So my mother raised me by herself, and she was a waitress; made a whole, big twenty-five dollars a week. So I mean, I had to do something. You might say I was a little entrepreneur. I made my own business. And so even as a young fellow, my love was always for the water. And it’s just, it’s different now. It’s not the same.

Hester: Well, thank you so much, Mr. Hood. I sure appreciate it. This has been a great interview. Thank you for the opportunity. And I'll turn off the tape recorder now.

Hood: OK. Thank [you].

(end of interview)