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

Paul Latapie III

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

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with

PAUL LATAPIE III

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Paul Latapie III and is taking place on May 24, 2012. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.

Hester: This is Barbara Hester with The University of Southern Mississippi, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, and I'm here today with Mr. Paul Latapie the third, and we're at the Los Islenos Museum on Bayou Road in St. Bernard, [Louisiana]. Today is Thursday, May 24, 2012, and we're starting at five after two. Good afternoon, Mr. Latapie. Thank you so much for being here today.

Latapie: You're welcome.

Hester: If you would, just to be a little more official, would you give your name for the record, please?

Latapie: My name's Paul Latapie the third.

Hester: And Mr. Latapie, could you give us your address?

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

Hester: OK. And what is your occupation, (0:02:16.9) Mr. Latapie?

Latapie: I'm a commercial fisherman.

Hester: And how long have you been pursuing this occupation?

Latapie: About thirty years.

Hester: Thirty years. So that must mean you started when you were very young.

Latapie: I was sixteen when I started.

Hester: Sixteen. Was your father a commercial fisherman?

Latapie: My father, my grandfather. I'm a third-generation fisherman. (0:02:33.8)

Hester: Third generation, wow. So can you kind of estimate how far back that would take your family?

Latapie: As far as I know my grandfather started when he was a young boy, so it would be roughly around the [19]20s, early [19]30s, late [19]20s, something like that.

Hester: Did you ever fish with your grandfather?

Latapie: When I was a young boy, yes.

Hester: Could you tell us about the type of fishing he did? (0:03:04.7)

Latapie: My grandfather fished; he was a crab fisherman. He shrimped, and he also fished fish, finfish.

Hester: And what type of boat did he have?

Latapie: He had a old, wooden skiff with a air-cooled motor. It was, I guess it was, I guess you could say it was top-notch for them days.

Hester: Yeah. Where would you go?

Latapie: We used to fish out at Delacroix Island, you know, in the inside waters of Delacroix Island.

Hester: Is that where he lived?

Latapie: No. He actually lived in a little town called Caernarvon.

Hester: Is Caernarvon still populated? I saw it was—

Latapie: It's populated, but it ain't too big. It never was big, really. It's always been probably at its biggest, maybe a hundred and fifty. Now, it might have a hundred, eighty-five, a hundred people.

Hester: So your father and your grandfather, at some point, probably fished together as well?

Latapie: Yeah, I'm sure they—I mean, I don't recall them fishing together when I was young. I mean, as far as I remember, my dad had his own boat already, and I used to go with my grandfather when I was younger, you know, before I started going with my dad, before my grandfather passed away.

Hester: About what year did your grandfather pass away?

Latapie: Nineteen seventy-six.

Hester: Seventy-six. And your father lived in Caernarvon, too?

Latapie: Yeah. My father lived in Caernarvon most of his life, you know.

Hester: And so you probably were born there and lived a good bit of your—

Latapie: I was born in Caernarvon, and we moved when I was young, and then I moved back to Caernarvon when I was about seventeen. And I lived there till Hurricane Katrina.

Hester: Oh, is that right? So when you fished with your father, was it basically the same type of fishing that you did with your grandfather? (0:05:26.3)

Latapie: Pretty much. I mean, with my father it was mostly crabs and shrimp. He didn't mess with finfish too much. It was crabs and shrimp. And in the wintertime, we used to trap fur.

Hester: Oh, OK. Did your grandfather trap as well?

Latapie: Yeah.

Hester: Well, maybe, tell us about the trapping, since it's—

Latapie: It's obsolete, now, I mean, pretty much. There's no market for the fur. Everything's marketed through farms. (0:05:57.6) There's farms for every, pretty much every kind of pelt there is, so there's no market for that anymore. I mean, we used to go when my dad actually had a camp. We used to go spend almost all winter out at the camp. We'd trap furs through the whole winter, and then when the winter was over, and trapping season was over, we'd come back.

Hester: What would be about the last time that you remember going out there (inaudible)?

Latapie: The last, when the market really fell off, it had to be, I'd say the mid-[19]80s, the mid- to late [19]80s.

Hester: What brought an end to the trapping?

Latapie: Just the economy, really. I mean, most of the furs that was caught, and everything, used to go overseas. And once it seemed like—I mean, I'm not positive that's the reason, but it seems like it was all in coordinate with the downfall of Russia because that's where most of the furs used to go. And it seems like once that happened, the market just fell apart because that's where almost all the furs from here went. They went to Russia.

Hester: So would you say that the animals are still there, but there's just no market for it? Or are the animals not there anymore?

Latapie: No. The animals really ain't there anymore because the land's not there. (0:07:27.6) [Hurricane] Katrina ate most of the land on this side the river up, where we fish at. I mean, there is hardly no more, really, land left. I mean, you got a few nutrias left, and hey, that's about really it. There's no more muskrat. You get a few raccoons and stuff, but it ain't nothing like it was before the storm.

Hester: Um-hm. OK. So your father and your grandfather fished together, and you were fishing probably at some point with both of them.

Latapie: Well, I mean, when I used to go with my grandfather, I was a young boy. It was just, I'd go for the ride. But I worked with my dad. (0:08:17.8) I mean, I quit school at the age of sixteen, and I went straight on a boat, when I quit. My dad used to run a crawfish farm down in Plaquemines, and when I quit school, I went crawfishing that winter. I quit December; I started crawfishing, and by that spring I had bought my first boat, so I was pretty much, that's what I was going to do.

Hester: Um-hm. Where would you crawfish? (0:08:49.7)

Latapie: Down in Plaquemines. It's about, oh, I guess about thirty minutes from here. My dad ran a farm that had like several ponds, and that's all they did, was crawfish. And we'd work that from like December till April, the middle of April. And then that would be the end of the season for that year. Then we'd start crabbing, again.

Hester: You said that your father gave up finfishing. Your grandfather did that. Is there any particular reason that he gave it up? (0:09:29.8) Do you (inaudible)?

Latapie: As far as I know, no, because I mean, there was still money to be made with the finfish at that time, but my grandfather used to finfish mostly in the wintertime. And I think my dad just rather trap the fur than mess with the finfish. And I did it for a little while, and then they eliminated the gillnets (0:09:59.5) and everything, so you're not allowed to mess with the finfish anymore.

Hester: So that would have been about what year?

Latapie: They eliminated the gillnets, and it had to be sometime in the [19]90s. I mean, I don't remember the dates, but it was in the [19]90s that they eliminated the gillnets.

Hester: Was that a hard hit on your business?

Latapie: Oh, it was very hard, yeah.

Hester: Could you talk about that a little bit?

Latapie: Well, I mean, it really messed up a lot of people's livelihoods down there and not so much that they couldn't catch the finfish no more, which hurt a lot, but it also put a lot more pressure on everything else, like the shrimp. They had people that just fished finfish, and when they eliminated them, well, them people, that's all they ever did in their life was fished, so they had to turn to something else, so they started crabbing, started shrimping. (0:10:54.8) And it put that many more people after that product.

Hester: Yeah. More pressure on it.

Latapie: Right. It put a lot of pressure.

Hester: That makes sense. So your grandfather had one boat?

Latapie: Yeah. My grandfather had one boat.

Hester: And your dad had one boat?

Latapie: My dad had one, right.

Hester: And what type of boat was it? Can you describe it? (0:11:22.7)

Latapie: My dad had a Lafitte skiff. It was twenty-eight foot; I think it was. It had a inboard gas motor in it, and he crabbed and shrimped with it.

Hester: And at what point did you decide that you wanted to be a commercial fisherman? (0:11:44.5)

Latapie: I guess I figured it out when I was fifteen, sixteen. I didn't want to go to school no more, and I mean, I had worked with my dad for probably the last eight, ten years in the summertime when I was off of school. And I just liked it. I mean, it's just something that gets in your blood, I guess.

Hester: Yeah. Well, did you, when you made the decision to go into business for yourself, did you fish with your father in his boat, or did you go out and buy your own boat?

Latapie: Well, like I said, I quit school when I was sixteen. I worked with him that winter, crawfishing. I bought my first boat, and I went and bought my first crab traps. So I actually went out on my own, and later on in life, when my dad started getting sick, [then he started to come on the boat with me. He was my deckhand. He was not able t run his own anymore.]

Hester: Sorry. Do you want to take a break? Let's take a break. I'm going to turn this off. (brief interruption) OK. We're back on the record. Mr. Latapie, you did the crabbing, you said, and the crawfishing. Did you do any oystering? (0:12:56.6)

Latapie: I fished oysters but as a deckhand for somebody else. And I worked with a couple people on oyster boats, but I've never had it on my own, and my father didn't mess with oysters. My grandfather didn't mess with them, so. But it was the only time I messed with oysters, was when I deckhanded on other boats.

Hester: Got you. Can you talk about oystering a little bit? What type of equipment you used and that sort of thing?

Latapie: Well, I mean, we used regular oyster dredges like they use down there in Louisiana. We was on big oyster boats. I was always on a big boat, two- or three-man crew, stuff like that.

Hester: Was there good money in that?

Latapie: (laughter) At the time we went it was better than what we was doing with the crabs and the shrimp. I mean, I don't say it was good money, but it was steady money. You knew you was going to make a paycheck.

Hester: Yeah. Well, you must have had a period when you were finfishing. (0:14:00.8)

Latapie: Yeah. I finfished when I was younger. I mean right after I got my own boat. We was able to finfish for, I guess, about eight, ten years that we was able to. We fished redfish, speckled trout a little bit, garfish. But when they eliminated it, I mean, probably about the time they eliminated it, the only finfish that I messed with was garfish. I mean, and they had cut that out because the redfish was already illegal. Before they outlawed the nets, (0:14:40.1) they outlawed the redfish. They made it a sport fish, and so we was just messing with garfish, and [the net fishermen] was really already a dying breed because they had took the redfish away from us.

Hester: Who, if I can ask, who is they?

Latapie: Well, the Wildlife and Fishery, the GCCA [Gulf Coast Conservation Activists].

Hester: Gulf Coast—

Latapie: Yeah. Gulf Coast Conservation Activists, I think is their name. They was pushing. They almost like a Greenpeace organization. They said that we was killing the redfish, letting them die in the nets, and I mean, stuff does happen. You going to have fish that die, but they was going around, taking pictures, showing, trying to put it on TV that we was just letting the nets out in the water, just catching the fish and

letting them die, just to ruin them. And they had a lot of big, big money backing them up. And they winded up getting the nets taken away. As of right now, there's no gillnets allowed. I'm not positive, but I can almost—I think it's from Florida to Texas, anywhere on the Gulf Coast. It's been taken away, and we was one of the last states to have them. I mean, Florida was first; they eliminated them in Florida. And it's just been a few a years now.

Hester: I know they don't have them in Mississippi. They've outlawed them in Mississippi.

Latapie: Right. They've outlawed them, Mississippi, Alabama. Florida was first; I'm pretty sure.

Hester: Yeah. So out of the species mix, what would you say was your favorite? Let's start with favorite, first. I mean, what was the type of fishing you enjoyed the most?

Latapie: I'd have to say crabbing. (0:16:53.0) I mean, it's what I do now, and it's what I've always done the most. Crabbing would have to be probably my favorite.

Hester: And you have shrimped? You've done the shrimping.

Latapie: Well, I shrimp now. I got a boat that's strictly set up for shrimping right now.

Hester: And shrimping season has started.

Latapie: It's just started, yeah. Monday, it opened Monday, and it's not good.

Hester: Oh. Can you tell us about that?

Latapie: Well, it opened Monday. I went Monday, opening day, and I haven't been back. It's been horrible. I mean, there's not a whole lot of shrimp. We don't know the reason, but there's not a whole lot of shrimp.

Hester: So are you considering just not shrimping anymore for this season, or are you just going to stay back a little while and see how it—

Latapie: Well, I'm going to just wait a little while. I'm sure I'm going to go back and try again. I mean, you got to keep trying. You know what I mean? We got so much money invested in this boat; you just can't let it sit. Whether or not it's a good choice or not, (laughter) I don't know because it's a lot of expense.

Hester: What kind of equipment do you use in a crabbing operation? (0:18:05.2)

Latapie: Well, we have crab traps. We have a winch to pull the crab traps in a (inaudible). And it's me and another deckhand.

Hester: And this is the same method of crabbing that you used when you first started and when you were initially with your father and grandfather?

Latapie: No. My father, when I first started with my father, it was before the crab traps came out. They didn't have crab traps. We used to use—well, the people down here call it palangla(?). It's a long, long line, sometimes almost a mile long. And you tie baits on it, and you run it on side the boat with a little hook. As the line comes out the water, the crabs are hanging on it, and you scoop them in the boat with a wire scoop net. But it's like everything else; it advances. And that became obsolete.

Hester: Is that a good advancement?

Latapie: Well, it's hard to say. I mean, it made things a lot easier. It made the catch a lot more productive, but there's so many crab traps in the water right now, it might have been something that really hurt us in the long run. I mean, it's hard, hard to say. It made it a lot easier, but they might be the downfall of the fishing industry, too, for the crab industry, anyway.

Hester: Yeah. Can you talk about the changes in the shrimping equipment over the course of your grandfather, and your father, and what you've used? (0:19:55.7)

Latapie: Well, I mean, the shrimping equipment hasn't changed a whole lot. I mean, I remember when my grandfather was telling me when he was a little kid, they didn't have the trawls and everything. They used to go out and bait. They'd take and break crushed clams and put them all in one spot on the bottom and wait a little while, and they'd throw cast nets to catch the shrimp. I mean, and then the trawls came out, and probably the early [19]70s, the butterfly nets came out to work at night. And then I'd say somewhere in the early [19]80s, the skimmer nets come out, which was, it's basically a trawl put on a frame that you don't have to pick up every—you can just stay dragging and just pick the tails up and dump them out.

Hester: How do the shrimp get captured in the net?

Latapie: Well, it's just like a trawl. I mean, it drags the bottom, and everything drags the bottom just like a regular trawl. And it's just things—I mean, it's just like computers and everything else. Everything just advances to make everything easier.

Hester: And how do you feel about the changes in the shrimping equipment?

Latapie: Well, I mean, I don't feel that the shrimping equipment really hurt much, I mean, because you still got the same amount of boats. It's just it made things a lot easier, where with the crabbing, when things got easier, the boats almost doubled. Now, it's, since the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill, (0:21:42.0) the boats probably

tripled or quadrupled because every deckhand that was ever on the water, working the cleanup for BP now owns a boat, which was messed up, but the Wildlife just went ahead and issued everybody commercial fishing licenses now. So I mean, you got, in the last four or five years, you probably, your license, the numbers in commercial licenses probably tripled in the last few years.

Hester: So there are no restrictions on the number of licenses that are issued? (0:22:17.2)

Latapie: No, not right now. I mean, before the spill, there was a moratorium on the licenses, but they dropped the moratorium. Everybody was allowed to buy a license again, and like I said, after the spill, there was every deckhand that ever worked on a boat, now owns a boat.

Hester: So are you talking about the Vessels of Opportunity program when BP hired (inaudible)?

Latapie: Right. For the cleanup, yeah.

Hester: And so how did these deckhands get—did they have boats themselves to participate in the program?

Latapie: No. They was working for somebody else, but I mean, the deckhands was actually allowed to work more. Some of the deckhands made more than some of the captains because if you was a captain, at a certain point you was only allowed to work a couple of days out the month, in the beginning of the cleanup where the deckhands could go work every day. They could jump; they could work their three days, four days on this boat. When that rotation was over, they could just go jump on another boat that needed a deckhand, so they could work seven days a week if they wanted. And a lot of them did that, and they went bought they own boats, and now they all fishing.

Hester: If you don't mind me asking, about how much would the deckhands be making per day, say per day?

Latapie: When it first started, it was three, sixty, I think. The deckhands was making like three hundred and sixty dollars a day. And I mean, it's a decent day's work; it is, but if it wouldn't have been for the Vessels of Opportunity job, where they was working the cleanup, there's no possible way they could have made the money they was making.

Hester: So what kind of jump in salary were they looking at with that?

Latapie: I mean, you're looking at about twenty-eight hundred dollars a week. Most of these guys was a thousand; it was at least double, maybe triple their salary. I know a lot of guys quit their jobs to go work this because it was way more money. People

that worked jobs for eight, ten years that was on the job, just quit to go do this, knowing it wasn't going to be long. But I mean, it was just such a great opportunity for them to make money, they couldn't pass it up. And a lot of them didn't go back to their jobs. (laughter) They wound up coming fishing.

Hester: So that's really increased the number of fishermen on the water?

Latapie: Oh, it's doubled, maybe tripled the fishermen in the water, and it's really taking a toll on the catch.

Hester: Yeah. That makes sense. Well, let's talk about the captains. What kind of restrictions were on them that they could only go a certain number of times? (0:25:12.6)

Latapie: Well, I mean, the Vessel of Opportunity program was ran down here; in the very beginning it was ran by the parish leaders. They was the ones putting the people to work, and it was supposed to be commercial fisherman first. And it wound up not being. I mean, they put all kind of people to work. They had all kind of sport boats, just a lot of their friends was getting jobs, working, where it was eliminating—it wound up being so many people in the pool that they couldn't work everybody, every day, so in the very beginning, you'd work like three days, four days, and then you'd be off like fifteen or sixteen. And then you'd work another four days. Well, they had a lot of commotion caused because they knew a lot of the people that was taking these jobs wasn't commercial fishermen; it was just a lot of recreational fishermen. I'm not talking about people that charter-fish for a living, that they make their living on the water, too. I'm talking about people that work a job, and, "Oh, I got a boat. I got a friend that's got a little pull." They got on this job. And, well, a lot of commotion was caused with this, so they eliminated a bunch of the people. Well, then they started working the commercial fishermen a little bit more. Instead of working like I said you'd work four days and be off sixteen, then they started working you seven days on and seven days off, which was a lot better. I mean, it helped us out. And it eliminated a lot of the sports from in it, and by that I mean, the deckhands were still working steady. But I mean, the commercial fishermen got to make a little bit more because we was shut down completely. (0:27:22.3) We couldn't go out and catch nothing, crabs, shrimp, oysters, fish, nothing. You wasn't allowed to go catch anything.

Hester: So how did the captains do? How did they come out financially on this? Were they making more, about the same, less than commercial fishing?

Latapie: We probably made a little bit more. I mean, there's some that made a lot more. I mean, it was with anything. It's who you know, not what you know. And there was guys that got to work every day, a handful anyway. But normally, most of the guys that worked the days that they was supposed to work, yeah, they probably made a little bit more for that year, but I mean, it's been a downfall ever since. And I mean, this was the worst crab season, this winter, that we had in a long, long time. (0:28:24.9) And we don't know why. I mean, the biologists say there's nothing

wrong with the water. The seafood's safe to eat. And I don't say the oil hurt anything. I'm not saying it didn't. But you can't tell me the dispersants (0:28:42.7) that they was spraying out there on that water didn't have some kind of effect on the reproduction system of the seafood. I mean, I really, truly believe that because the little crabs haven't been there, and the adults haven't been there. I mean, this is the worst season we had in a long time.

Hester: What was the second thing you said? The what?

Latapie: The small crabs.

Hester: And then you said—

Latapie: The adult crabs.

Hester: Oh, the adults. Yeah. How was it last year?

Latapie: Last year wasn't too bad. It was a little bit less, but it wasn't bad. Now, this year, starting in the wintertime, we usually fish female crabs in the winter, and they have no females this winter, hardly at all. I mean, you can go once a week if you was lucky.

Hester: So not only—you've got a double whammy there, I guess, because you have more fishermen on the water harvesting the crabs, plus you said the dispersants—

Latapie: Right. I mean, I'm not blaming anybody because it might not have been the dispersant. It might be just the effect from all the pressure, so many fishermen. It could be that. We don't know. I mean, and it might be ten years from now before we really know what was the cause and what's going to happen because if you look at the *Valdez* incident, Alaska, it took them people ten, fifteen years before they figured out what was going on. And I mean, there's no way to have a idea of what the effect's going to be, the long-term, until you get there.

Hester: Well, we talked about—well, let me ask you this before we move off of BP. Do you have a claim? (0:30:49.4)

Latapie: I have a claim.

Hester: Do you think that the claims process was fair, or was it sort of like the Vessels of Opportunity situation?

Latapie: It was pretty much like the Vessels of Opportunity. I mean, what they going to do is hard to determine because it's when they going to do it. There's so many people got paid that really shouldn't have got paid, and yet there's so many people that deserved to get paid that hasn't got a dollar yet. I mean, I received some emergency money, they called it, but it's just so hard to deal with these people. You go; you file a

claim with these people, and once you file your claim, you're not allowed to talk to anybody. I mean, you can go in and talk to people at their office, but they all tell you the same thing, "Well, I don't know nothing about it. We not handling the claim. We just following the paperwork." Once you file your paperwork, there's nobody you can talk to.

Hester: So obviously that hasn't been settled. You're still waiting.

Latapie: No. My claim's not settled, no.

Hester: Let's back up a little bit to [Hurricane] Katrina. (0:32:19.3) That was a pretty hard hit on the commercial fishing industry as well. How did you do with Katrina? Did you lose your boat?

Latapie: Yeah. We lost everything.

Hester: The boat, too?

Latapie: The boat, too. Yeah.

Hester: So how did you come back from Katrina?

Latapie: Well, I mean, for me it was a long process because I was sick when Katrina hit. I mean, I was still working, but I was already in the process—I guess you could say—of being as sick as I got. Katrina hit. We left. We moved to Texas for a few months. We was up there in Texas, and I got worse than what I was. My situation started decreasing. I had congestive heart failure that was diagnosed before I left, before the storm. And when I got up there, not working, not doing anything, just sitting around the house all day, my situation got worse. I wasn't exercising. I wasn't working. I wasn't doing anything. And when we came back, I was in bad shape. Well, I wound up getting operated on. I had the tracheostomy [tube] put in. I had sleep apnea to go with the congestive heart failure. It was real bad. I think that's what caused the congestive heart failure. I got operated on in June of [20]06, and I had bought a motor—I'm sorry. I didn't lose the boat for Katrina. I lost everything on it. We came back, and I had just a empty hull. Well, when I came back, I bought a new motor. I put the motor on the boat. I still wasn't able to fish yet. I got operated on, and my condition started increasing, started getting better, and when I thought I was able to go to work, I had a church step in. And they bought me like seventy-five crab traps. OK? Well, when they paid for the seventy-five crab traps, the people where I buy my crab traps from, the guy said, "Well, look. I'll go ahead and give you a hundred. You pay me when you get the money." So that was able to put me back in business. I had a hundred and seventy-five traps I could go run every day. And just from that, I just been increasing. Since then I bought two boats. I probably have in the neighborhood of six hundred traps right now.

Hester: Do you have three boats, now?

Latapie: I have three, yes. And I mean, it's just everything we make, we put back into the business, just trying to get it to where I think it needs to be. (0:35:25.5)

Hester: So you can say that you made it through Katrina with all the issues you had to deal with, you came out on your feet, back in commercial fishing.

Latapie: Yeah. You could say that. I mean, I didn't come—it was a hard struggle to get back where I'm at, but yeah, I'm back, and I mean, it's just—

Hester: How long did it take you to get the boat back (inaudible)?

Latapie: It was probably six to eight months after I got operated on, I mean, because for the first three, four months—it was six months after I come out the hospital because I was in the hospital two and a half months. And about six months after I come out the hospital is when the church stepped in, and they bought them first traps for me. And the guy that I buy the traps from donated—well, he didn't donate, but he fronted them to me to pay on time. And so yeah, it was six or eight months after, which was about probably a year after Katrina.

Hester: How was the fishing then when you came back? Was it good? (0:36:47.8)

Latapie: It was OK. I mean, it was decent. I'm not going to say it was great, but it wasn't bad.

Hester: Compared to what happened before Katrina, was it better?

Latapie: The crab situation probably was a little better. I mean, right after Katrina, not for me, but right after the Katrina, the people that was able to go back to work actually did real good. I mean, the waters was stirred up. I guess the high waters blew crabs in, and they did really good for a few months, and then it leveled off to where it was like normal. But yeah, it was probably a little bit better, for those that could fish, because I was one of the lucky ones. I mean, I got my boat back, and I was ready to go back to work, but there's a lot of people, till today, that ain't back yet.

Hester: Really? From Katrina?

Latapie: From Katrina. I mean, I had a small boat, which was a lot less money, but I know people that lost hundred-and-fifty-, two-hundred-thousand-dollar boats. It's hard to replace that when you don't have anything.

Hester: I know [Hurricane] Rita came after [Katrina]. You probably were still in Texas when Rita came.

Latapie: I was in Texas when Rita hit, yes.

Hester: And then you had the—I was talking to Mr. Jackson this morning, and he said that [Hurricanes] Gustav and Ike had impacted this area. (0:38:29.7)

Latapie: Right. It did.

Hester: So how did that affect you?

Latapie: Gustav wasn't too bad of an effect for me. I mean, my house was OK. I didn't lose my boat. This time, I had my boat; I brought it to high ground, made sure it was safe. And again, actually the crabbing picked up a little bit right after the storm for the first couple months, and then it leveled back off. But I mean, I don't find that Gustav had—it didn't affect me as much as it did some people. I mean, it did affect the area a little bit, but to me this area was so messed up from Katrina, it's hard to say what Gustav done because there was so much land loss from Katrina; it's just unreal.

Hester: Can you talk to me a little bit about the land loss and all the factors that contributed to it? (0:39:38.9)

Latapie: Well, I mean, factors. To me it was just be like the tidal surge. I really don't know (inaudible). I wasn't here. They tell me they had tornado after tornado, everything. I mean, down where I keep my boats at Delacroix Island, there was only like three houses left out of maybe two hundred on the whole island. Everything else was gone, and most of it was caused from tornadoes.

Hester: I've heard that not just the hurricanes but also some of the pipelines and dredging—

Latapie: I mean, the pipelines do take a toll because they eating up the heart of the land. They passing through the heart of the property. And they digging canals. Also these freshwater diversions, (0:40:45.3) because if you was to get a map and you was to check everything from Delacroix Island to the west was mostly destroyed—I'm talking about the marshland—where from Delacroix Island to Mississippi to the Sound, most of that land's still there, the reason being—I feel—is because through Delacroix Island they opened a diversion out of the river years ago, and the freshwater actually ate up the saltwater grass and the roots. Now, it did form its own grasses, the freshwater, but the grasses that it formed don't have the root system that saltwater grass has, and it don't hold the marsh together. So I feel it weakened the marsh substantially. And when the storm came, there was nothing, no roots left, to hold the mud, and that's the reason that we lost most of the property.

Hester: Is anything being done about that? Do you want to take a break?

Latapie: No. I'm good.

Hester: Is anything being done about that?

Latapie: No. They not doing anything about it. In fact, they trying to open another spillway system, even bigger than what they got. And it looks like they going to get their way.

Hester: So how is that going to affect the area, do you think?

Latapie: Well, let's put it this way. When we first started, I used to live—like I said, I lived in Caernarvon. I used to be able to crab right out my back door, literally a thousand yards from the highway. They opened the freshwater diversion system. Now, we crab out of Delacroix Island, which is twenty-five, thirty miles from Caernarvon. If they open this, we'll be out in the Gulf to be able to make a living.

Hester: So with all of these impacts, for the opening of the freshwater intrusion and the pipelines, the hurricanes, the BP, and so forth, what do you see for the future of commercial fishing in this area? (0:43:15.6)

Latapie: A lot of imports. A *lot* of imports.

Hester: How is that going to impact this area?

Latapie: Oh, well, that's what I'm saying. This is going to be totally eliminated. I mean, it's only a matter of time if things keep going like everything's going. I mean, a couple more disasters like we had, and nobody'll be in business anymore. They're going to have to import shrimp, crabs, everything. It's not going to be able to work here no more.

Hester: This is sort of a wide-open question, but what does commercial fishing mean to you personally? (0:44:03.0)

Latapie: For me it's my livelihood. I mean, this is what I do. This is what I've always done, and without it, I really don't know where I'd be. I mean, I have no clue, especially now. I mean, before I went to little, odd jobs. I worked jobs here and there a little bit, but now with this thing in my throat, I can't go work in a plant. I can't go work on a job where there's safety rules. I mean, it's not going to happen. This is all I can do. And without it, I'm done. I might as well give up.

Hester: Do you mind if I ask how old you are?

Latapie: I'm forty-six.

Hester: And you've been fishing for?

Latapie: Thirty years.

Hester: Thirty years.

Latapie: Right.

Hester: (inaudible) So maybe could you talk about what commercial fishing means to your family?

Latapie: Well, I mean, like I said, it's our livelihood. That's the only thing to say about it. I mean, it's the way of life for us.

Hester: And your wife goes out sometimes, I understand. She's sitting here in the room with us, as well as your daughter.

Latapie: Yeah. My wife goes sometimes. She's not a big boat person. (laughter)

Hester: When you go out, is it usually a day trip? Take us through a day. What would a typical day be like for you? (0:45:36.0)

Latapie: A typical day for me, crabbing, I get up 4:30 in the morning, get in my truck, drive down to my boat, go load bait, gas, boxes. Go out. We run our crab traps, usually get back to the dock, 2:30 in the afternoon. Load the crabs on my trailer; bring them up to the crab dock; sell them, and go home. I usually get home 3:30, four o'clock in the afternoon.

Hester: And where is the crab dock? Is it here?

Latapie: Well, there's several. Yes. I sell right now in Chalmette, Paris Road.

Hester: I should have asked you this before. We were talking about your grandfather, your father, and then your evolution through your profession. How has the marketing changed over the course of your family's career in commercial fishing? (0:46:40.6)

Latapie: Well, I'd say it changed substantially. I mean, when my father done it, my grandfather done it, most of the crabs they caught back then, most of the crabs was kept local. Now, I'd say 90 percent, if not higher, of the crabs that's caught in Louisiana is shipped out of state. The factory crabs, which is picked for the meat, most of that goes to Alabama. Everything else that's bought and sold, like to boil, probably 5 percent might stay here. The rest is shipped, Baltimore, stuff like that, where they have a bigger seafood market up there. And since Katrina, it's really hurt, I mean, because there's still a lot of places up there that won't serve Gulf seafood. There's a lot of places up there that have signs in their building, when you walk in, "We do not serve Gulf seafood," (0:48:07.7) because the people up there are still scared to eat this, and that's really hurt the market, the seller's market, which drives the prices down.

Hester: I understand. Let's see. I think I've pretty much covered everything, but I'm going to look through this for just a minute and see if I'm missing anything. And

while I'm doing that, I'll just open it to you because there's no way that I'm going to be able to think of all the questions that I should ask you. And I'm sure a lot of things that I'm overlooking, that you're thinking, "If she would ask me about this, she'd find I've got a wonderful answer." So please feel free to say anything. This record will be kept in the Center [for Oral History and Cultural Heritage] at USM [University of Southern Mississippi] longer than I'm around to listen to it. So it's going to be there, and researchers will be listening to it. And so it's open to you if you have anything you would like to add.

Latapie: The only thing, I mean, that I could really think of is, out of all of this, I hope somebody takes it to where they do enough research to find out what can be done to prolong the business, I mean, because it's not just a job; it's a way of life.

Hester: Yes. I hear you. I have to ask this question and feel free to give your thoughts on it, Mrs. Latapie. What is your favorite seafood to eat? (0:49:54.6)

Latapie: Mine's shrimp.

Hester: Shrimp. How do you fix it?

Latapie: Any way I can imagine. (laughter) I'm like Bubba Gump. (laughter)

Hester: Do you have any special recipes, Mrs. Latapie.

Mrs. Latapie: No, not me. (laughter) I eat shrimp (inaudible). He loves shrimp.

Hester: Loves shrimp, and I do, too. I think crab is my favorite, though. I absolutely love crab.

Latapie: Mine, too, probably, boiled crabs.

Daughter: I'd rather fish.

Hester: What kind of fish?

Daughter: Fried fish I think. Well—

Latapie: Trout, catfish.

Daughter: Any kind. I eat pretty much any kind of fish.

Hester: Any special fish recipe that you have?

Latapie: Just fried, battered and fried.

Daughter: I like the baked fish, too, with the stuffed crab on top. I like crab meat. I don't like crab cakes.

Hester: Well, I sure appreciate this, and this has been a wonderful interview. And I'm going to go ahead and turn the tape recorder off unless you have something further you'd like to say.

Latapie: No. That's about it.

Hester: OK. Thank you so much.

(end of interview)