

Mississippi Oral History Program

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Roscoe Liebig

Interviewers: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey and Barbara Hester

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An Oral History with Roscoe Liebig, Volume 1043

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

ROSCOE LIEBIG

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Roscoe Liebig and is taking place on October 13, 2011. The interviewers are Barbara Hester and Stephanie Scull DeArme y.

Scull-DeArme y: This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Project of the University of Southern Mississippi, done in conjunction with the NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] Voices from the Fisheries project. The interview is with Mr. Roscoe Liebig, and it is taking place on October 13, 2011, at two p.m. in the Pass Christian Harbor, Pass Christian, Mississippi. And this is your bait shop? Is that correct?

Liebig: Yep.

Scull-DeArme y: And you also fish?

Liebig: Yeah. Well, that's the bait boat. We catch in that boat.

Scull-DeArme y: So that's what you catch the bait on?

Liebig: Probably the biggest bait boat. (laughter) A lot of them use smaller boats, but we use a bigger boat.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah, OK. All right. Well, first, let me say that the interviewers are, I am Stephanie Scull-DeArme y, and—

Hester: Barbara Hester.

Scull-DeArme y: And I want to thank you, Roscoe, for taking the time to talk with us today. I'd like to get some background information about you, and I'm going to ask you, for the record, to state your name please?

Liebig: Roscoe Liebig.

Scull-DeArme y: And for the record, in case we lose all the labels someday, would you spell it for us?

Liebig: R-O-S-C-O-E, L-I-E-B-I-G.

Scull-DeArmey: And when were you born?

Liebig: Five, thirteen, seventy-five [May 13, 1975].

Scull-DeArmey: And where were you born?

Liebig: New Orleans.

Scull-DeArmey: And for the record, what was your father's name?

Liebig: Merrel Liebig.

Scull-DeArmey: And how do you spell it?

Liebig: M-E-R-R-E-L, I think.

Scull-DeArmey: L-I-E-B-I-G?

Liebig: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. And what was your mother's first name and maiden name?

Liebig: Roxeanne Forrest was her first name.

Scull-DeArmey: Would you spell that for me?

Liebig: R-O-X-E-A-N-N-E.

Scull-DeArmey: And Forrest?

Liebig: That was her maiden name, yeah. I mean, her first name. Now she's a Liebig; I mean a Moore, now.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you spell Forrest?

Liebig: F-O-R-R-E-S-T.

Scull-DeArmey: Two Rs?

Liebig: Yep.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So she was Roxanne Forrest Liebig when you were born. Right?

Liebig: Yep.

Scull-DeArme y: And now is she—

Liebig: Moore.

Scull-DeArme y: —Moore? OK. So that would be how we would find her today, and if somebody was doing a genealogy, like your children, they would know that was who they would be looking for. So where did you grow up in New Orleans? Can you tell us a little about your childhood?

Liebig: Didn't live there long. We moved out of there. We lived in Avondale, and we moved over here to the Coast when I was little-bitty. I couldn't tell you how old. We didn't stay in New Orleans too long, though.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, what was it like being a child on the Coast at that time?

Liebig: Oh, we loved it back then. It was fun. Yeah, we had fun. It wasn't like it is now.

Scull-DeArme y: How has it changed?

Liebig: It's hard to say. I mean, it's really hard to—it's different now, you know, to what it was when we were growing up. I mean just more, more people, more buildings, which is normal, I guess.

Hester: Was your father or your parents in the fishing industry, themselves?

Liebig: Nope. Just me. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: So did you go to school here?

Liebig: Yeah. I went to Hancock High and graduated from there.

Scull-DeArme y: Hancock High. What did you do after graduation?

Liebig: I went straight to Pearl River Community College for a welding class. Did that in about a year. Two semesters there, and then I welded for nine years, nine months before I bought this boat here.

Scull-DeArme y: Why did you decide to get a boat?

Liebig: I always wanted to fish, and I was building a boat. And I still have another boat, a little smaller than this one, I built. That one's fifty-two by seventeen-and-a-half. The one I built's fifty-by-sixteen, still in my exwife's backyard. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Is it yours?

Liebig: Yeah. I've just got to get it moved. I got house movers. It's a big boat. We got to have house movers move it. But I wanted to fish. I've been fishing since I was yea big. (0:03:41.2) You know, my grandparents lived up in the Louisiana marsh, and we used to love going there and just loved to fish. I've been fishing every day I could. Now commerciallywise, I didn't really get commercially into it till I bought this boat, which was about seven years ago.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, when you were fishing as a child, were you fishing with a line? How did you fish?

Liebig: Rod, reel, cast-net, trout-line, trawl and you name it. And if we could find a way to fish, we did it.

Scull-DeArmey: What did you catch?

Liebig: Everything from saltwater to freshwater, shrimp, bass, crappie, speckled-trout, redfish, flounder, anything that we could catch.

Scull-DeArmey: What did you do with your catch when you were a kid?

Liebig: We ate a lot of the fish. Yeah. We always ate it. We didn't really do much commercial when we were a kid. You know? We did a lot of trawling, you know, recreational. We'd go out for ourselves and fill our freezers up and stuff. But everything else we just ate or gave away.

Scull-DeArmey: Gave away? To neighbors?

Liebig: Yeah. You can only eat so much fish before you're tired of it. (laughter) I was a good fisherman, too.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah? Even as a kid?

Liebig: Oh, yeah. I love to fish. I've been fishing every day I could.

Scull-DeArmey: You will see me every now and then check this. I'm just making sure it's picking us up. Well, let me—I'm going to go straight to these interview [questions] that NOAA asked us to be sure and cover, and this may be the only thing we get to cover. If we get through all of them, we may get back to my questions. So NOAA's interested in knowing when and where you learned to fish. (0:05:10.6)

Liebig: Well, I was doing a lot, recreationally.

Scull-DeArmey: What does that mean, recreation?

Liebig: Just for myself, not to make a living at it. And then I just, I don't know. I

wanted to commercial fish. So I kind of learned the hard way.

Scull-DeArmey: How did you learn?

Liebig: I actually learned, commercialwise, I had a welding job for Struthers Industries, and every weekend, towards the end when I started building that boat, I would work every weekend on the boat, and then I'd learn. I'd go for free a lot of times because a lot of the boats had crew members and whatnot, and they didn't want to take a greenhorn. So in the wintertimes, I would oyster. Like Saturdays out here, I'd go on a boat and learn oystering, and in the summertime, when I'd get off my welding job, Friday afternoon, I would shrimp Friday night, Saturday night, sleep Sunday, and then go back to work as a welder. And I did that until I got laid off. When I got laid off, I was with the company for nine years, nine months, I think I was with them, and the boat I was building was about halfway built when I got laid off from my job. So I took my retirement money and went to the bank and put a down payment and bought this boat and just been doing it ever since.

Scull-DeArmey: What was the down payment on the boat?

Liebig: I don't even remember. I paid twenty-eight, five for the boat [\$28,500].

Scull-DeArmey: Twenty-eight, five; twenty-eight thousand, five hundred?

Liebig: Yeah. I had to go—well, I had to use one of my rental trailers. (brief interruption)

Scull-DeArmey: You paid twenty-eight, five for the boat. What year was that?

Liebig: Seven years ago, give or take? How long since [Hurricane] Katrina's [August of 2005] been here? Might be eight years ago, maybe. I don't even remember.

Scull-DeArmey: So before Katrina or after Katrina?

Liebig: Couple of years before Katrina.

Scull-DeArmey: Couple of years before Katrina. OK. And what equipment do you use when you fish? (0:07:04.7)

Liebig: We just use a trawl, a double-rig shrimp trawl.

Scull-DeArmey: Double?

Liebig: Rig shrimp trawl. It's two twenty-five-foot trawls. It's all the state'll allow us to pull. We're regulated by our trawl size. In the state of Mississippi, you can either pull two twenty-fives or one fifty and a try-trawl.

Scull-DeArmey: Two twenty-fives. What's a try-trawl? (0:07:24.8)

Liebig: It's a little test trawl that—like these big trawls, they'll stay on the bottom for two hours at a time, but you keep pulling your little trawl up, and seeing how much shrimp you're catching.

Hester: Is it a try-trawl or a trot-trawl?

Liebig: Yeah, a try-trawl. You kind of pull it and count your shrimp, you know, when you're catching shrimp. It's not really a science, but you'll drag twenty minutes, and you pull your little try-trawl up, and you count how many shrimp you have per minute. And that tells you, "Go over here, or stay right here, or get out of Dodge," one or the other. (laughter) Sometimes you can just look at the trawl, but if it gets technical, we'll get down to where you count the shrimp. And then you go by your plotter and just chase them around.

Scull-DeArmey: What's a plotter?

Liebig: It's just a GPS [global positioning system] (0:08:06.5) unit that follows the boat.

Scull-DeArmey: P-L-O-T-T-E-R?

Liebig: Yeah, it's just a GPS plotter. Almost every commercial boat, I don't know of anybody that does it without them now. It's just a screen that shows the ocean. It'll show you in a boat, where you been, where you going, how fast you going, what's down on the bottom, stuff like that.

Scull-DeArmey: How does a GPS know what's on the bottom?

Liebig: Satellite. I mean, it don't show you—the charts'll (0:08:31.3) show you the bottom of the ocean, but your screen will just show you where you're at. But we mark like wrecks and hangs. Like when we drag these trawls on the bottom, if you hit a hang or something, we got little marks there. And they're accurate. I mean, they're from here to that pier back there.

Scull-DeArmey: So you mark them on the plotter, or you actually mark them in the water?

Liebig: No. You'll put them on your computer screen, and you'll be driving the boat, and it'll show you which way you going. And if one of your buddies hits something right here, and you're going straight towards it, you just turn the boat and go around it.

Scull-DeArmey: Because what they posted on their plotter comes up on your

plotter?

Liebig: No. We just tell each other usually.

Scull-DeArme y: You share the information?

Liebig: Well, the wind plot system that we use, a lot of these people use, you can actually burn all of your hangs on a CD [compact disc]. And I can buy a new wind plot and go get my buddy's CD and stick it in my computer, and everything's there. Technology's helped out. Now, I can say that.

Scull-DeArme y: What does a CD like that cost?

Liebig: Well, we all just use it between ourselves; I mean, just the CD. But somebody will burn it on a CD.

Scull-DeArme y: Oh. So you don't purchase it?

Liebig: The wind plot system is about \$720, I think, to \$760. And then you got to have a laptop computer, or you can go with the—there's so many different plotters out there. I mean, just different ones do different things.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. So you're running two twenty-five-foot, trawl nets. And can you just, for the record, briefly explain to us the way a trawl net works? (0:09:58.4)

Liebig: Basically, the doors go to the bottom and use water pressure, and it spreads the doors with the trawls hooked to it. Like when they first go down, they'll be like this, [gesturing] and when the water hits them, it just opens them up. And then you got what you call a tickler chain. You see that stainless chain right there?

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah.

Liebig: You set it about thirty inches, thirty-six inches shorter than your bottom trawl line, and what it does is your trawl will be like right here, [gesturing] and that chain'll run right in front of it. Now, when that chain comes by and hits the shrimp, it [snaps fingers] jumps up. And then the trawl comes up and scoops them up.

Scull-DeArme y: That looks huge to be hitting shrimp, like it would just decimate them. Are they bigger than that?

Liebig: It just tickles them up. Oh, yeah. It just knocks them up. It makes them jump when they come up. The trawls can't drag the literal bottom because you'd tear the bottom up. But if you look at these trawls, there's weights on them.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah.

Liebig: And the weights don't put the trawl slap on the bottom. It just puts it right above the bottom. Then when that chain comes across them, it just jumps them up. You break that chain, you won't catch a shrimp. It's bad. We've had times where we'll be dragging. If you bump something and break your tickler chain? You'll have this much [gesturing] on one side, and you'll have that much [gesturing] on the broken side.

Scull-DeArmey: So typically, how long would it be that you'd trawl before you'd check your real trawl net?

Liebig: Depends on how many fish you catching, if it's clean. Like a lot of times we're peddling the shrimp. You don't want to drag them long, two hours maximum. Three hours is a long drag. But if it's clean shrimp, if you're getting a lot of fish or something, you don't want to drag too long. (0:11:33.8) Now, with the bait, I don't drag ten minutes. I'll be down to five-minute drags.

Scull-DeArmey: Five? Wow!

Liebig: To keep them alive. If you going to drag and drag and drag, they'll die. See, our key thing in our operation is keeping everything we can alive.

Scull-DeArmey: What bait fish are you catching?

Liebig: Primarily croakers.

Scull-DeArmey: Croakers.

Liebig: We catch croakers, shrimp, some pogies sometimes, bream for the snapper fishermen, like to use the bream. That's a spot; some people call it a bream. Especially croakers, shrimp, bream. We do the dead shrimp, but we don't keep them alive. That's about it, alivewise. Sometimes you catch a few pogies, but they're hard to keep alive. Right around this area, the main bait people love is croakers. For a trout fisherman, it's like a drug. I mean, they love croakers. (laughter) That's why we use the bigger boat (0:12:28.0) because you get a lot of tank space to hold them and stuff like that because dead, they're no good to us. We got to keep them alive. So we've been down to making three-to-five minute drags. I mean, just put the trawls on the bottom; make short, little tows; pick them up. But we don't shrimp a whole lot anymore. I mean, you just can't. With the price of fuel, you're wasting your time. I mean, like I said, like I told you a hundred dollars an hour with that boat? You might put twenty bucks in your pocket. (0:12:52.2)

Scull-DeArmey: For the record, can you run through that again? We were talking about that before the tape was on.

Liebig: Which one?

Scull-DeArmeY: That the diesel costs you?

Liebig: Right now, \$3.25 a [gallon], and the boat burns ten gallons an hour.

Scull-DeArmeY: So you were saying what? Seventy-five—

Liebig: It costs about, just for your fuel, at ten gallons an hour—I don't have a calculator with me. Fuel's about thirty-two dollars an hour.

Scull-DeArmeY: So it'd be \$32.50?

Liebig: Figure your ice, oil for the boat, so you can figure about forty bucks an hour, to operate.

Scull-DeArmeY: Forty bucks an hour cost.

Liebig: To operate the boat.

Scull-DeArmeY: And you were telling us that take in—

Liebig: Figure it if you make a hundred bucks an hour. Then it takes you forty dollars to make it. That leaves you sixty bucks. Now, if you do like a lot of us do, we try to put half to supply that boat. That's shipyard, stall rent, nets, rigging, tackle, blocks, the shackles. So that means thirty dollars an hour would go to the boat and thirty dollars for you and the deckhand.

Scull-DeArmeY: You hire a deckhand?

Liebig: Got one deckhand, yeah. Sometimes you can go with two, if you got a lot of shrimp, but a lot of times just one person.

Scull-DeArmeY: And is it conventional to split it fifty/fifty like that?

Liebig: Yeah. It's on the boats because you can't really hire somebody for these boats and say you're going to pay them so-much an hour, because let's say you catch a whole pile of shrimp. Well, they got to work harder for the same money. If you don't catch any shrimp, like sometimes you'll take the boat out and won't catch nothing, and the deckhands kind of know, it's fishing. A lot of boats, I do believe, do on share. Some boats do 60 percent to the boat, 40 percent to the crew. But you got a good crew? Half to the boat, half to you and the deckhand because he works just as much as you work. I mean, you just got to—and luckily I got a guy who's known me for four or five years, so he's a good hand. He does good. He knows the boat.

Scull-DeArmeY: So is it easy for a fisherman to get deckhands? (0:14:50.6)

Liebig: Good ones? No. Geezum. There's a bunch of deckhands out there, but to

find somebody that's decent—a lot of deckhands and barely any captains.

Scull-DeArmeY: Barely any captains?

Liebig: Just a lot of them think they can run a boat, but they go out there, and something breaks. (0:15:07.5) To own a boat and run a boat, you have to be a captain, a fisherman, a mechanic, a rigger, a welder. You got to know how to fix anything on that boat that can break. I mean, it takes a lot.

Scull-DeArmeY: Where did you learn to be a mechanic?

Liebig: Just learned.

Scull-DeArmeY: Was it when you were going free with those guys when you were welding?

Liebig: Yeah. I learned to work on boats. That's one of the reasons why I wanted to build my own boat because the first thing I says, "Well, if I'm going to be a fisherman, I need to know this boat from one end to the other end." And I knew if I could build the boat, I could sure enough work on the boat. And I did. When I bought this boat, it needed a lot of work. I mean, we worked on that boat. We still got more work to do, and it's way better shape than what it was. But you just learn. And in this industry, you can't afford to pay somebody, really, to work on the boat. You just don't make enough money at it.

Scull-DeArmeY: What about your nets? (0:15:53.0) Did you build them?

Liebig: No. I'm not really that good on the net part. So we got net menders around here.

Scull-DeArmeY: You buy your nets?

Liebig: Buy them, made.

Hester: Do you have a net mender here in Pass Christian?

Liebig: There's a few here or there.

Hester: I understand from another interview that each area on the Coast has sort of a distinctive style of net. Do you find that to be the case?

Liebig: There's a difference. The Vietnamese (0:16:18.9) make a different style net than some of the other nets. The Vietnamese have really come into the industry, and they're hardworking people. And that's what they know. I mean, they got Vietnamese here that they say can build a better net than this one can. The Vietnamese, what they've learned is they build big boats with a lot of power, and they

like a lot of webbing in their nets. And the smaller boats, you just can't pull those big nets.

Scull-DeArmey: The Vietnamese, some of them have a shrimp net that you can empty on one end while you're shrimping on the other end.

Liebig: That's the skimmer. (0:16:50.0)

Scull-DeArmey: The skimmer.

Liebig: Yeah. Basically, it's two big frames that go down, and they're catching all the time, and you just pick the tail-bag up and empty it out, and while it's still catching shrimp, you just drop it back.

Scull-DeArmey: But your trawl nets, you literally have to stop shrimping or fishing. (0:17:08.2)

Liebig: Yeah. The boat never stops moving. You'll just be dragging, and you'll slow down to a slower RPM [revolutions per minute]. The winch picks everything up. The nets come up the side. You bring them up, pick them up. A good crew, you can pick up and set out in under ten minutes.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow, two [nets].

Liebig: Two nets. Yeah. See, they both come up at the same time.

Scull-DeArmey: And what do you do with the stuff you catch in the try-trawl? You keep that, too?

Liebig: The shrimp you do. See, I don't even have a try-trawl on here. I'm probably one of the few boats. See, we don't need one. My winch broke a long time ago, and the way we do with the bait, we don't drag long enough for it. I mean, the average when you try-trawling, when you're dragging, you either go fifteen or twenty minutes. Our drags don't even exceed that. The maximum we've ever drug for bait is twenty minutes, when it's real slow, and we're not catching barely anything. But for the big boats, the shrimp, you really need a try-trawl because if not, you're just dragging, and you don't know what you're catching.

Scull-DeArmey: Where do you fish? (0:18:03.7)

Liebig: All out here [indicating the Mississippi Sound from the Pass Christian Harbor]. We fish from Louisiana to Alabama.

Scull-DeArmey: How far out?

Liebig: It just depends on where the shrimp are. I mean, here's mostly inland, a

couple of miles off-shore. We don't go too far out.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. And is bycatch a problem for you?

Liebig: No.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you have any bycatch at all?

Liebig: You always get bycatch.

Scull-DeArmey: What kind of bycatch do you find?

Liebig: Bream, little bream, little fish.

Scull-DeArmey: But I thought you kept bream for bait.

Liebig: Yeah, I do. But the trawl boats, they'll just throw them over. See, because we use the croakers for live bait. That's one of the things we catch a lot of. The bream, we will keep a certain amount of them for snapper fishermen, for big fishermen. And really, bycatch is not really much of a problem. And that's one thing, even when you shrimp commercially, usually if the fish are thick, you not going to want to shrimp there anyway, because there's no shrimp there. And that's when that try-trawl comes in play, is when you pull that try-trawl up, and if you got a pile of fish, you just get out of there. Very seldomly are the shrimp thick with the fish. And nobody's going to sit there and dig through a pile of fish on the boat, when you can go find clean shrimping grounds. I mean, so if you find fish, you just move. And a lot of times, we'll know where they're at. From where all like when I used to shrimp, we'll know if the fish are over here, don't go over here, or don't go over there. And you just don't go over there. I mean, there's no reason to. If you're not going to catch shrimp, there's no reason. Sometimes the shrimp are in with the fish, but a lot of times, if the fish is there, the fish is there. But we try to target the fish. (laughter) We do the bait. That's one of the things we like. But the bait industry (0:19:42.7) is a lot different than the trawling industry. I mean it's just to me, I don't know. The trawling was just getting old. I mean, you work all night, and then you got to come in here and beg for a decent price for your shrimp. And the people really do get to the point, like a ten/fifteen jumbo shrimp (0:20:02.5), you sit there and tell them four dollars a pound on your boat, and they'll just walk right on by you. But they'll go buy a steak for nine dollars a pound that you can get 365 days out of the year, and they won't complain about that. But to me, the people just got, they just don't want to pay for shrimp. I mean, somehow, someway, I mean, you should get four dollars a pound for a jumbo shrimp, regardless. And then some of the other boats, they didn't have a choice. They go down to three dollars a pound, but if they go to the factory, because of the imports, they ain't going to get but a dollar and some change a pound. So what are you to do? Give your shrimp away just to make what little extra money you can out of it. I mean, it's the price. I mean, this year it [the season] opened early because of the spillway, and there was a lot of shrimp out there. And a good factory,

they're going to go to a factory; they going to peel these shrimp; they going to get made into po-boys and stuff like that, and we wasn't even getting eighty-five cents a pound, sixty cents a pound. I mean, it's ridiculous. I mean, it really is.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, my God. Yeah.

Liebig: Like me and my crew went out one day. We got all the live shrimp we needed, and the shrimp were running thick. And I said, "Well, this is pretty good." I said, "We'll make a few shrimp drags." And we had 480-something pounds of shrimp for a couple of drags, which is a good catch! A lot of shrimp, 500 pounds of shrimp. Pulled over to the factory and unloaded them, and I got a \$254 check for them, for almost five hundred pounds of shrimp.

Scull-DeArmey: Was it worth it?

Liebig: No! Shoot, no. If you catch factory shrimp, and the price gets down, like it did, again, at sixty cent, seventy cents a pound, you got to catch, to make a thousand dollars a day because it's still going to take you \$400 to make your thousand. Still, you got to catch, at sixty cents a pound, what is that? Two thousand? Eighteen hundred pounds of shrimp you'd have to catch? To make a minimum, that's just to make a little, small paycheck because the price of shrimp and the price of diesel, it just won't match up.

Scull-DeArmey: Those big, huge ships that are pulling huge, huge trawls can afford to sell them like that.

Liebig: No. I mean, you can go to Alabama. I mean, have you been down to Bayou La Batre?

Scull-DeArmey: No.

Liebig: That's where—I mean, the freezer boats, I mean, they're not making any money because they burn twice as much fuel as this boat.

Scull-DeArmey: I thought maybe the volume would—no?

Liebig: You can go to Alabama, and there's just yards; there's boats parked, with trees, growing off the side of them. And you just can't make no money at it. The price of fuel! The main thing it boils down to in this industry, with boats like this, is the price of fuel. I mean, the labor's not going to change because your labor's going to get paid what the boat makes. But farmers, somehow they find a way to get subsidies, whatever, for their expenses, this and that. We have no help at all. I mean, at \$3.25 a gallon to fill that boat up. And I've seen, when it got over two dollars a gallon; it was bad. Three dollars a gallon was terrible. At \$3.25, (0:22:58.7) at that much per fuel, if you don't find shrimp, you go in the hole. I mean, three nights ago I went bait fishing. I had three guys that went out ahead of me, and they were going

for shrimp. When I got here at midnight, the three boats were back in harbor because you really can't afford to go look for the shrimp because the shrimp just aren't everywhere. Back in the day, yeah, when fuel was fifty cent a gallon, you burn ten gallons, what's that? Five dollars? You can afford to go poking around the Gulf [of Mexico] because those boats don't run fast. You got to work this whole area. But I've seen times where if we didn't find shrimp when the fuel was getting higher, I just started anchoring, turned the engine off, and wait till the nighttime, or wait till something shows. But with the price of fuel, you can't even afford to go look for shrimp.

Scull-DeArmeY: Talking about subsidies, too, the government's paying the oil companies the subsidies.

Liebig: Yeah, pay them out their butts. That's money for them.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. And then they charge us! (laughter)

Liebig: I mean, that's the thing, though. The fuel—

Scull-DeArmeY: That's our tax money.

Liebig: The fuel has just annihilated the industry. (brief interruption)

Scull-DeArmeY: Let me ask you, while I'm thinking about it, if you have to pull a turtle excluder device in your nets. (0:00:06.3)

Liebig: Yeah, we have to, yeah. We don't have a choice.

Scull-DeArmeY: You do. You've got one on there.

Liebig: And we lose a lot of money.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you?

Liebig: Oh, yeah. You get a crab-trap in that trawl, and it gets down towards the TED [turtle excluder device], it just opens up, and your shrimp just go right out of it.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you ever get any turtles?

Liebig: Very seldomly. You hear about them. Me, myself, I've never caught one in my nets at all. So I'm lucky, I guess.

Scull-DeArmeY: You could have excluded some.

Liebig: Yeah. That's what the turtle excluders are for. So they do work; I can say that. But I can say for the Gulf boats I can see that, but they cracked down really hard

on us this year. And I think it was NOAA because we actually had DMR [Department of Marine Resources] people going to every boat, checking them, and all this stuff. And I was like, “Geezum!”

Scull-DeArmey: There were a lot of turtle deaths this year. (0:00:56.9)

Liebig: Yeah. Well, that wasn’t—see, they kept saying because of the shrimpers. And this is the thing. I went through this. I took a DMR guy on my boat with me because NOAA was saying, “The shrimpers are killing them.” Well, when the turtles were dying, nobody was shrimping! Nobody. There was no shrimp here. I was catching bait.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you think it was the oil spill? (0:01:13.4)

Liebig: Probably so; got to be. I mean, they never died like that before. I mean, you can look at that. Now, like I said, they kept blaming the shrimpers, blaming the shrimpers. “Shrimpers are killing the turtles.” When those turtles were dying along this coastline, nobody was shrimping because I know because I was going out every other night catching bait. I was the only shrimp boat out there, and I pulled TEDs, and there was one other boat. A lot of times in that season, if you get a new boat, that’s when you want to work it and get the kinks out of it. There was one other boat working, Captain Ray. And he was working. He took the guy out there with him. I took him out there with me and no turtles. I mean, they kept blaming the shrimpers, blaming the shrimpers. These TEDs work. They cost us money, but they work. And then they all, I mean, they were just, “The shrimpers, the shrimpers!” There wasn’t even a shrimp boat—very few boats along this Coast was dragging at the time. And if we’re killing the turtles, when there’s a hundred boats out here, that’s when you’d be seeing turtles wash up. And there wasn’t. I mean, it was crazy. I had the DMR call me, “Hey, Ross, catching bait?” “Yeah, I’m catching bait. “Well, we want to send a guy out with you.” So I took him with me a few nights. No turtles. So I mean, but it’s—

Hester: There’s some other netting restrictions. Some people were talking about gillnets. Do you have any comments about that?

Liebig: They don’t fool with the gillnets. (0:02:26.7) That’s so long ago. They quit doing that. I think Alabama’s got a few gillnet boats that I’m aware. They catch the mullet, I think, for the roe over there, but I think Louisiana—

Scull-DeArmey: For the record, can you explain what a gillnet is?

Liebig: To me, it’s just a long net that hangs there, and the fish get caught in it.

Scull-DeArmey: Is it pulled? It’s not pulled by a boat?

Liebig: I think you just stretch it out with a boat.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. It's stretched out.

Liebig: It's stretched out, and then it sits there. And fish go through it, and it catches them. I mean, it's not a bad thing, long as they don't overfish something. I think they banned it because of the redfish, I think it was. And now the redfish are back everywhere, which is a good thing because the redfish went down. Now, they're back. So I mean, I think I heard something like some states were going to up the limit or something. They took them off some list. I don't know, but redfish are back. The redfish have come up extremely back.

Scull-DeArmey: Good. Let me just look at my—

Hester: Could you maybe, while she's looking at her notes, comment on the effects of [Hurricane] Katrina and the oil spill (0:03:30.3) [Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster]? And you mentioned the—

Liebig: BP [British Petroleum] was worse than Katrina. When BP hit here, there's some of the stupidest things I've ever seen—some of the other things—but you could take, like, this business here. This barge—[the bait shop is built on a barge]—was in the harbor, and we were starting to frame that wall [gesturing] when the oil well blew up. And BP, the well blew up; we held off production of this because within a few weeks, I kept watching the closures coming this way. I said, "I'm not going to build this with closures coming." And within a few weeks, everything was closed. And the craziest thing is the way they did this money (0:04:06.5) or whatever they call it because I know of certain people that's got—I own three commercial boats. I had three commercial boats at the time and a fourth one being built. My exwife got one of the little boats. So I had four boats and a bait business. I know of deckhands that got more money than I got out of it. I mean, it's outrageous. I mean, I got a measly thirty-thousand-dollar check for six months, and my taxes on the water range from \$80,000 to \$120,000. And they really ticked me off. I mean, I had a darn, whatever you want to call a scrub, deckhand on the boat, barely ever *worked* on a boat—I've went bait fishing, and I grab him on the side when I need him—pull up in here, and next thing you know, he says, "Roscoe, I got to go home. I got a eighteen-thousand-dollar check sitting there, waiting for me." And I was adding up. I said, "I get thirty thousand, and I got this. And this guy don't own a boat, nothing, and got 75 percent of what they paid me in comparison." I know of some of them that own one boat; I'm hearing they got a hundred-thousand-dollar check! I mean, the way they [BP] did it, it was ignorant. I call it stupid money because they know these people are going to lie. And what I didn't understand is this big company, the smartest thing, it seemed to me, this company should have did is set these claim sites up for your restaurants and all this stuff. Then you got your water. The land stops; the water starts. What would have been so hard for them to say, "If you got a commercial boat, you're a commercial fisherman. Be in the harbor you're ported out of." And they could have sent five or six representatives to each harbor and legitimately have done it. I mean, they could have said, "Tell all your deckhands to be here." I mean, they could have

had some other way to do it, rather than saying to everybody, “What did you do?” You know a bunch of them are going to lie, and a bunch of them did lie. But does it seem smarter to you? If I was BP, I’d say, “I want representatives in this harbor and every other commercial harbor on the Coast.” And then there ain’t no hearsay because some of them are saying they got boats, that didn’t have boats. I mean, it would’ve been so much easier to legitimately say, “Who had what, and who was hurt the most?” I mean, you can take me. (0:06:16.7) My bait shop was completely shut down. I held off building the shop. So this summer here, I had to catch bait and build this shop at the same time. While I catch bait every night, when it should have been built before the baits even got there. Instead, I had to put this on hold, wait for everything to open up—my divorce slowed it down a little bit, but that’s done there now—and finally get built, and what did I get? A thirty-thousand-dollar check! That don’t even—

Scull-DeArmeY: And is that—that’s the only chance you get to—

Liebig: That was just a six-months, emergency check.

Scull-DeArmeY: Will there be other opportunities for you?

Liebig: The attorneys are working on that. I mean, they did one five-thousand-dollar check. Then they did the emergency money, and it just from there out. But they didn’t—I don’t know. I curse them every day. (laughter) I mean, it really is. Like right now, there’s no white shrimp showing. (0:07:05.7)

Scull-DeArmeY: Is that right?

Liebig: Yeah. I mean, the first day in Louisiana when they opened their season up, there wasn’t no shrimp. Now, is BP going to get blamed for it? We don’t know. Nobody knows what happened to them. I know that last year in the white shrimp season, they were catching four, five hundred pounds a night at about the same time of the year. And this year here, there wasn’t nothing.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you know anything about the life cycle? Are they out in the estuaries?

Liebig: Right now the only shrimp they’re catching is in the shallow waters of the Louisiana marsh. (0:07:31.6) There’s a few in the deep water, but it seems like the shrimp are just in that one little area.

Scull-DeArmeY: We have a colleague, Linda VanZandt, who interviewed, in Louisiana, some Vietnamese fishermen, and this guy went out and spent forty thousand bucks to go out; caught nothing.

Liebig: Didn’t catch anything!

Scull-DeArmey: Nothing. Zilch.

Liebig: There should have been shrimp there.

Hester: Do you think that—

Liebig: Been shrimp there every other year!

Scull-DeArmey: That's right.

Liebig: But you don't hear about that. The fishermen, the upper hand they [BP] got is, a lot of fishermen are not wealthy, and that gives them [BP] the upper hand. I think right now they're trying to starve everybody out, hold off. (0:08:07.4) They sent me a letter saying they'd give me twenty-five thousand dollars for my whole settlement. And I got a deckhand that got \$18,000. I got another guy that owns one boat, got \$100,000 for a six-month check. I heard of one guy down at Bayou Caddy, had like three little bitty oyster boats; they gave him a hundred thousand. And I was adding up. I was like, "Man, I got fish from Alabama to Louisiana. I got a bait business, four commercial boats." I said, (laughter) "You got to be kidding me!" And the other boat, I bought all the paint right after BP's well blew up, and I still held off on that. I was like, "Man!" I said, "Wait a minute. Let me slow down on all of this."

Scull-DeArmey: So how long did it take before you could start business as usual after the oil spill?

Liebig: Never was normal. When we got done working for the VOO [Vessels of Opportunity] Program, (0:08:49.5) we went back to catching bait immediately, but my sales (0:08:54.3) were a quarter of what they normally would be.

Scull-DeArmey: Your sales?

Liebig: People were scared—

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, people weren't eating it.

Liebig: They were scared to fish! Scared to fish; I mean, didn't want to eat the fish. And I don't know. We're trying to do our claim—

Scull-DeArmey: You couldn't sell it?

Liebig: No. I mean, the fishermen, the people that buy the bait from me—

Scull-DeArmey: They weren't fishing.

Liebig: They didn't want to run out there after BP's oil-well tar balls, washing up on

the shore, to fish. I mean, it was terrible. I was looking at my past sales, and I was like, “Man!” I could look on a Saturday; I can look in this parking lot and tell you what, about, it should be, and it wasn’t. It was terrible. But BP threw a lot of stupid money out. They should have knew these people were lying! They should have knew deckhands on boats, you know, they’re not the highest people on the food chain, I guess you’d say, whatever.

Scull-DeArmey: They don’t have the cost or the risk.

Liebig: No. (0:09:46.9) It would’ve been so much easier, and I argued this with two or three people. I said, “Why in the world didn’t these people—you could have sent to this one harbor right here and got all of these claims done with five people; I bet you, five people. Then you could have set one little trailer up, right here, and say, ‘Anybody ported out of this harbor, go to this trailer.’” And then they could have legitimately—if you say you own an oyster boat and if it’s on a trailer, pull it up here. *Look* at the oyster boat because some people, we hear of people that sold their boats, still making claims. I had a Mexican showed up here about three weeks ago, offering to pay me \$2000 to sign a paper, says he worked for me for cash! I wasn’t here. My deckhand was here, and he called me. I was in Bay St. Louis. He said, “Man, there’s this guy here wanting you to sign something, this.” And he got on the phone. He says, “I pay you \$2000 to sign paper.” I said “No.”

Scull-DeArmey: See you in jail.

Liebig: I said, “You lie!” Oh, I’ve had them call me from Alabama. One lady, her husband died; [she] just had heart surgery. She had the heart surgery, and she was telling them she was painting one of my boats. And they did catch a few of them. And I was like, “Damn! You got to be kidding me.” But if they would have set people up in these harbors—does it seem the right way to you or not? To say, how many harbors you got? One, two, Gulfport’s not there anymore. Biloxi’s three. You got three or four little harbors in Biloxi and Ocean Springs. You might have seven, maximum, commercial harbors on this Coast right here because you got (0:11:17.9) Bayou Caddy. Then you got Pass Christian. You got Biloxi by the Boomtown [Casino]. You got three or four in Biloxi, so you got about eight, maximum, commercial harbors. What’s so hard about sending a couple of people to each harbor?

Scull-DeArmey: That’s the beauty of getting your story because you know that.

Liebig: I looked at that six-months check, and I looked at my taxes, and I said, “There’s no freaking way!”

Scull-DeArmey: You are the expert because you do it every day.

Liebig: But if they’d have done that, then all these people that were saying they worked on this boat, worked on that boat, “Hey, the boat’s right here, and the

captain's right there." And all BP would have had to do is say, "Everybody who owns a commercial boat, works out of this harbor, go in this boat." This harbor would have been full with every person, working out of this harbor because all of them would have come. And then rather than saying "Go to this claim site, and go to this claim site," then you'd have had one group of claims people working on commercial fishing industry. Then the restaurant was another set of claims. That's the regular claims, the restaurants and the businesses. The inland businesses should have been handled by inland people, and these businesses out here on the water should have been handled by different ones. That would have been the easiest way. They'd have been done with all of the in-between because I've heard of vinyl-siding companies getting paid more than fishermen. I mean, so it's—

Scull-DeArmeY: So you were making a fourth—your sales went down a fourth.

Liebig: Easy. They were about a quarter of what they should have been.

Scull-DeArmeY: Have they come back up from that?

Liebig: (0:12:42.4) This year wasn't as busy as it should have been.

Scull-DeArmeY: As it should have been, but was it better than a fourth?

Liebig: This year was probably, I'd say five-eighths back to normal, somewhere, but right after the oil, when the waters got reopened, it was terrible. And then shrimp, what shrimp we were catching, trying to sell, people were scared to eat that, too, (0:13:02.7) because of the BP oil well. I mean, they were scared to eat it after [Hurricane] Katrina, much less a BP oil well because I was catching shrimp, when we finally got the boats back after [Hurricane] Katrina. The white shrimp were thick out here, and we were catching good shrimp. And they were still scared to eat it, from Katrina. So you put an oil well blowing up, tar balls washing up on the shore, I was like, "Man!"

Scull-DeArmeY: Well, and the dispersant is a worry, too.

Liebig: I mean, I don't think we're going to see the end. I think it's going to be years and years. And I still don't think we'll even know the full impact. (0:13:35.3)

Scull-DeArmeY: I agree with you.

Liebig: Because I mean, you got big oil companies. That was the crazy thing. I watched the news this morning, and they said BP made \$25 billion a year. The fine that they were wanting to charge them, twenty-five million? They make that in seven hours. (0:13:51.8) (laughter) That's what they said. (laughter) Seven hours of their profits for a year was supposed to be one of the fines they had to pay.

Scull-DeArmeY: All of the oil companies are making record profits right now.

Liebig: Yeah. Look at the price of fuel. Fuel's running this world. Fuel's running this business out. And then another thing, we talk about this sometimes, are the people, they keep saying, "The economy, the economy, the economy." You drop that fuel down one dollar a gallon, (0:14:24.0) and I can probably guarantee you, in six months time, this economy's going to be better because you're going to spend less money on fuel, more money at the store. You're going to buy something for your house, and you're going to invest something. You got, "Oh, I've got some extra money left." Just a dollar a gallon.

Scull-DeArmey: And think of all the fuel that has to be used to grow our food, to harvest our food, to move our food.

Liebig: Everything.

Scull-DeArmey: And I don't know how the CEOs [chief executive officers] of the oil companies can sleep at night because they're going to bring—

Liebig: They make big money. They don't care.

Scull-DeArmey: —this democracy to its knees.

Liebig: They don't care a lick. That's it, the fuel. Everybody says the economy—

Scull-DeArmey: People are going to go hungry.

Liebig: If they drop that fuel \$1 a gallon, are you going to spend more money?

Hester: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: Absolutely.

Liebig: I would. It went down thirty cents this last weekend, and I finally had a few extra dollars in my pocket. I said, "Man, this is kind of nice." I seen three dollars a gallon, I pulled over and filled my truck up when I had three-quarters of a tank. I said, "I better get it before it drops."

Scull-DeArmey: Right now, people are choosing, "Do I put gas in the car, food on the table, or pay my mortgage?"

Liebig: You take this [business]. If you drop this fuel a dollar, it might not be much, but 120 gallons a night is \$120 a night. And we got a minimum we got to work on. Let's say if we're making \$800 a night and it's taking us \$400 to make it, that only leaves us \$400. That's only \$200 to the boat and a hundred and a hundred. No. It's not even that. Yeah, it would be, \$800 a night. But right now, we're at \$550. You going to add up 120 gallons at \$3.25, \$500, \$550 a night to run the boat. And that

little bit of difference—if you can't make \$100 a night, working a sixteen-hour night, you don't even go. But if you can get that price down, if you can get it down to where you can run the boats, you could take this boat: paint, stainless cables, chains, net-webbing, electronics, everything has about doubled in price.

Scull-DeArmeY: Because it costs so much money to transport it and make it.

Liebig: Everything equivalent to—

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. Because of the fuel.

Liebig: Because of the fuel.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. Bottom line, fuel.

Hester: You made a mention of the Gulfport facility, the port there closing. In another interview—it was Billy Stewart's interview—he mentioned that some of the boats are going to be coming over here to Pass Christian.

Liebig: They're all here.

Hester: Oh, they're all here now?

Liebig: There's no harbor there. The boats that are left from Katrina, that didn't get sold, are here.

Hester: Did you get as many as you expected?

Liebig: About what we figured. They all wanted the [Gulfport] harbor back, but the City didn't want to put the [commercial fishermen in the] harbor there.

Scull-DeArmeY: I feel the barge moving a little bit.

Liebig: Oh, yeah, it moves. It's on water.

Scull-DeArmeY: Wow, it's kind of strange. (laughter) If I have to run and barf over the side, you guys just ignore me. OK? (laughter)

Liebig: Just barf over the side; you'll be fine. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: So let me just get back to these questions to kind of do what NOAA wants us to do.

Liebig: I talk a little fast sometimes.

Scull-DeArmeY: I'm glad. I'm glad. You're doing great. We talked about when

you began to fish, and why you entered the business. But could you say what it means to you and your family to be a fisherman, as opposed to being a welder, for example? (0:17:22.3)

Liebig: I won't let my kids go fishing. There's no way. I mean, there's no future in it. I mean, I got my first child on the way, and she's a girl. If she was a boy, his butt be going to college. Now, I'll tell you what the Vietnamese have learned. Put them kids and get them an education because you don't see barely any Vietnamese kids on these boats. You don't barely see any kid-kids taking over these operations. There's one boat, his grandson is learning to run the boat right now. That's the only one that I know of that has a family member turning it down, generation-to-generation. In this generation here, I'm probably one of the younger ones. I'm thirty-six now, and there's not too many thirty-six-year-old shrimpers left. And I don't see anybody under me, younger than me, coming up to buy a boat, to go into the industry. Why are you going to buy a boat that's in an industry that's dying? (0:18:12.5) I mean, it's something that—if that Anna Grace was a little boy, he'd be going to college. (laughter) I mean, it's just too hard of a life. We were pretty versatile. I mean, since I've owned this boat, when Katrina hit, I couldn't fish, so I bought a bunch of hurricane-cleanup [equipment]. I got a dump truck. I got in hurricane work. I had five rentals. I had other means of income because I'd have never made it with this income. You just about have to have other means to supplement, like usually we fall back on oysters in the wintertime. This year, this has just been declared as a federal disaster through NOAA. (0:18:46.9)

Scull-DeArmeY: No oystering. No oystering.

Liebig: They done filed with NOAA, federal disaster.

Scull-DeArmeY: What are you going to do?

Liebig: I have no idea. My cousin's got a tuna boat that just came from Tampa. He's going to start tuna fishing. I'll probably go with him.

Scull-DeArmeY: You know, there are some tunas that are worth, like, \$30,000. Did you know that?

Liebig: Yeah. These won't be worth that much. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: For sushi.

Liebig: That's what he's doing. He retired from the military. I thought he was crazy. He called me and said, "I'm going to go into fishing." "What are you going to fish for?" "Tuna." And he got the boat, come into harbor two weeks ago.

Scull-DeArmeY: That's great.

Liebig: I'm probably going to go work with him.

Scull-DeArmev: Yeah, good.

Liebig: I done told him because this business here, we about to shut down early November. We're done. I mean, you can see today; we're not selling anything.

Scull-DeArmev: When do you open?

Liebig: Usually end part of March.

Scull-DeArmev: So March to November.

Liebig: Yeah, March to November is our season.

Scull-DeArmev: What would you call a good year in income?

Liebig: Hard to say because we really just finally got the bait shop done and finally got everything—because we worked off the boat for two years trying to get all of this with the City done.

Scull-DeArmev: What would you think would be a realistic expectation?

Liebig: Hard to say. I mean, I'm going to have to look at—I mean, like where I stand right now, just my overhead is up there pretty high. So we got to make a lot of sales. And my exwife's got all the books from the last two years, (laughter) so I didn't get none of that when I left the house. I said, "That's it. I'm done. Adios."

Scull-DeArmev: What ballpark figure is your overhead?

Liebig: Oh, Lord. For this operation? (0:20:06.5) Lease, insurance, just for the business is about six-thousand plus. Stall rent for the boat, that's about \$162 a month for the boat for the stall rent. I don't know what that equals up.

Scull-DeArmev: It's about \$6200.

Liebig: And that's just bare, now. That ain't no maintenance or nothing on the boat. I mean, I've seen, in one year, I've seen me put 30,000 bucks in that boat. Yeah.

Scull-DeArmev: Wow.

Liebig: It adds up; I mean, it really does. My overhead here, I have all this barge. I had to buy the barge; I had to build the shop. We probably got thirty-five, forty thousand just in this, so we got to make that back before we make anything. But I've seen in one year, almost thirty—I think we're at twenty-six, twenty-eight thousand on that boat in maintenance and stuff. The only big thing we had was a new generator,

and that was \$6300. But the maintenance can get outrageous. I mean, you go blow an engine in this boat, you're looking at six to seven thousand. Two years ago, the clutch had a bearing went out. That was forty-eight hundred right there.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you have to get a tow back in then? (0:21:19.4)

Liebig: Usually you get one of your friends, just call a buddy and tow it in. Try to get it running so you can get home. That's one of the big things. It's no fun when you break down. When that engine goes out on that boat in the middle of shrimping, you got two thirty-foot outriggers down; you got 180 foot of cable, two twenty-five-foot trawls, two sets of doors. And if your engine don't run, your winch don't run. So you got to get a pipe wrench. Knock on wood, I've been able to fix it every time. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Good for you.

Liebig: It's like I said, when I told you there's a lot of deckhands and captains that think they're captains. It really takes a lot. And you got to know. That's why I wanted to build a boat. The first thing I told myself, I said, "I'm going to be a fisherman. I don't want to be a mechanic every day, working on the boat, but if the boat breaks I have to be able to fix it." And I wanted a new boat anyway. It's just something that I wanted. I wanted to build my own boat, and I did, three-quarters of the way done, so. I can fix that boat from that tip of the stem to that tip of the stem. I can cut anything out, weld anything on it. And you got to be able to do that because if that boat breaks, just the engine—it's like my little thirty-foot boat. When I bought it, the engine was messed up in it. I think I saved eighteen hundred bucks doing it myself. And then you learn to do it, though. You got to be able to apply yourself. I mean, I've seen people—you got to learn rigging. You got to learn splicing cables. You got to know it all.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. It's interesting—

Liebig: Then you got to know how to fish! (laughter) To own a boat takes a lot more than some people see. I mean, it takes a really lot. I mean, you got to be here. They say a lot of fishermen are dumb. Baloney! I got some Vietnamese that are the best diesel mechanics you could ever imagine. I mean, that's one of the things you have to do.

Scull-DeArmeY: When you think about the seafood industry, and especially in terms of thinking about when you got into it, what does it mean to you personally? (0:23:10.5)

Liebig: I love it. I mean, if it's in you, it's in you. If it's not in you, it's not in you.

Scull-DeArmeY: Would you characterize yourself as an independent person?

Liebig: Yeah, very independent. I'm the kind of person that when we wanted to put a bait shop here, the bait shop used to be Shaggy's. And they did offer for us to go over there. They did offer, "We were supposed to be the bait shop. We'll give you a place." But I was like, "I don't want to be the shop under Shaggy's." I didn't want to be under someone. It's got to be something that you want to do on your own because nobody's going to help you do a lot of these things. It's just something that you learn. You got your fishing friends, your buddies. You always help each other out there. I mean, that's one of the big things about being in this is you don't leave a boat stranded. It's against the law to. And you help people out. (0:23:57.8)

Scull-DeArmeY: So you think there's a strong feeling of community among the people in the harbor?

Liebig: Until you come in and try to peddle shrimp. (laughter) I mean, it's one of them things. I've seen this when I used to sell shrimp. A lot of times we'll come in, my small boat. I still got a stall over there. You'd pull in, put your shrimp sign up, and everybody agree upon a price. That never happened. But the people—and this is why I got out selling shrimp. There's twenty boats here. They know the further they go down that pier, this guy on the end is going like, "Oh, man, please." And by the time they get to there, they going to get cheaper shrimp. The price just gets cheaper. And it's hard for them to stay up on the peddling range, like people selling shrimp off their boat. They're not going to stay the same price. If they got a feeling they're going to move a good order, they'll drop the price a little bit, even though they told their buddy, "I'm not going to drop the price." But you know, if you can move a hundred pounds of shrimp, you're going to come off a quarter just to move them. But there's not many shrimpers left here. I mean, you're looking at it here. And a bunch of these boats don't even move. I mean, I can go down a list and tell you a bunch of them. You can take that big *Sophia Lee* boat; it hasn't moved since BP, before, right before BP. It's bigger than this boat. A lot of these boats just sit here. I mean just the price of fuel.

Scull-DeArmeY: What do you think the seafood industry means to the people in the culture of the Gulf Coast? (0:25:28.0)

Liebig: It'll always be here, but it'll always be a struggle for the people that do it. I can say what has changed. When I was a kid I used to go right out of this Bayou Caddy, (0:25:37.6) and I used to drag a shrimp trawl, right on this beach over here.

Scull-DeArmeY: By hand?

Liebig: No. We'd take a boat and just drag and pick the trawl up by hand. It wasn't nothing on this scale. We used to catch shrimp here. We don't catch nothing there now. Every opening day when I was a kid going out over here, there'd be big shrimp boats, going left and right of you. Come down here on Mississippi opening, and you won't ever see a boat work down here because there ain't no shrimp.

Scull-DeArmeY: That would've been like the [19]70s, [19]80s?

Liebig: Upper [19]80s because I'm thirty-five. Upper [19]80s. There used to be shrimp right out here, [to the west by Waveland] but there's not. Opening day of shrimp season, there'd be double-riggers, going up and down, catching shrimp. And there's no shrimp now.

Scull-DeArmeY: Why do you think they're gone?

Liebig: Nobody knows. I mean, the shrimp are not there anymore, so I guess we'll see. (0:26:29.6) In about another ten years, you'll know what's going to happen with this industry. It's either going to flop on its butt, or people are going to continue struggling, or they're going to make it in a good industry.

Scull-DeArmeY: How has it changed since you were in it as a kid to now?

Liebig: Price of fuel, price of shrimp.

Scull-DeArmeY: What about regulations?

Liebig: I mean, it's about the same. TED, still got to have a TED. Two twenty-five foot trawls. About it. They couldn't put any more regulations. They put anything else on us, we're over with. I mean, what else can they do to us? We got to pull a metal frame and with a hole in our trawl. (laughter) I mean, what else can you do to that poor trawl? You regulate that trawl any more, it ain't going to do anything. I mean, them TEDs cost us a lot. And I understand they're worried about the turtles, but—

Scull-DeArmeY: The problem, I think, that fishermen don't stop and think about is that when you multiply one turtle death by all the boats that are out there—

Liebig: I mean, they got to protect the species.

Scull-DeArmeY: —it's a lot. That's a lot.

Liebig: They don't have a choice.

Scull-DeArmeY: To you, one turtle death in a season, that's not a lot. But when you think about, "There are ten thousand boats," then it gets to be a problem.

Liebig: Well, yeah, I mean, they got to do it. I mean, this is the only design they can come up with. So what happens with that TED when you get a crab trap, if they don't stop early, it gets right in front of that TED, and it don't come out, and it disrupts all the flow, and the flap will open up, and the shrimp out.

Scull-DeArmeY: What about surveillance cameras down on your trawl nets?

(laughter)

Liebig: We couldn't afford it. There ain't no way you could afford it.

Scull-DeArmey: If you'll take me out and put me in a scuba suit, I will go down there and watch it for you! (laughter)

Liebig: "Got a crab trap!" (laughter) But no. I don't know what's going to happen with it. I like the bait. I mean, I got a different breed of customers. The shrimp customers got to the point where they just complained about the price of shrimp. They want cheap, big shrimp, cheap, big shrimp. They want to haggle with you. I like my bait customers. "How many croakers you want?" "A hundred." "Here you go." "Here's your twenty-five dollars, and see you later!"

Scull-DeArmey: Are they commercial?

Liebig: No. Most of them are recreational. We do have some that commercial, hook and line, when the quota's not met, like speckled trout is a big thing around here, when the quota—(0:28:48.0)

Scull-DeArmey: What does that mean, "when the quota's not met"?

Liebig: There's a quota on speckled-trout. It's ridiculously low. It's 40,000 pounds. And that's only a couple of truckloads of fish. And you do have some people that rely on that, and it gets met. Well, they changed them. The date this year, it resets in December. So that will give us—the prime time for catching them would be March, April, May, June, like up in that area. But the way the quota was set, it was always closed right around when the fishing got good. But I do have a lot of guys that go buy a hook-and-line license; you can go catch a trout. And they sell them whole, head-on, fillets, or whatever. But most of them just do them head-on to a dealer, and they get like \$2.25 a pound for them.

Scull-DeArmey: What's the difference in a recreational, for the record, a recreational fisher and a commercial fisher?

Liebig: Not really any difference. They both want to catch fish. We do got some people that do the hook-and-line, (0:29:40.9) but it's so limited. I think next year we'll have a better year in the hook-and-line, but they need to up the quota. The quota's forty-thousand. Might sound a lot of pounds of shrimp. One guy catching a hundred pounds a day, add that up if he goes three or four days a week. If he catches [300] or 400 pounds a week just to make him \$600, \$800, three or four pounds a week. Two weeks, or say, three weeks, he's making a thousand pounds for one fisherman. And the speckled trout are there. I mean, that's just the quota they set it at. But don't know if they'll up it or not.

Scull-DeArmey: What do croakers catch? What do people use croakers for?

(0:30:15.1)

Liebig: Speckled trout. Speckled trout, redbfish, flounder, a lot of them.

Scull-DeArme y: What do shrimp catch?

Liebig: Same thing.

Scull-DeArme y: Same thing.

Liebig: Speckled trout, redbfish, flounder.

Scull-DeArme y: What do pogies—

Liebig: Speckled trout, redbfish, flounder.

Scull-DeArme y: Same thing? What does a bream catch?

Liebig: The trout don't hit them a whole lot, but red snapper. I got a lot of my snapper fishermen; they love them.

Scull-DeArme y: Do different of your customers, say, come in and say, "I just want croakers" or—

Liebig: I got my full-fledged croaker guys, and I got my full-fledged shrimp guys.

Scull-DeArme y: Do they ever just take a mix?

Liebig: Sometimes they do. I mean, but a guy who fishes for speckled trout with croaker is going to a certain spot, like on a oyster reef or something like that. You can take a croaker and go off this pier right here, and throw off the end of the pier, and you won't catch nothing. And you can take a shrimp and catch all the trout you want. (laughter) Or you can go out a little further off-shore on a hard reef, like an oyster reef, like Marianne, and some days they'll be biting the croaker and not the shrimp. And some days they'll be biting shrimp not the croakers. It's a trip. I've had them get shrimp, run out there. The guy next to them's got croakers, and he'll be catching fish left and right. He'll call me, "This guy's got croakers. You got croakers left?" "Yeah." He'd run all the way back in here and get croakers; go back out. I've seen it a week later; the guy'll call me, "I got croakers. I ain't catching nothing. The guy next to me is catching with shrimp!" (laughter) So we try to keep a good variety.

Scull-DeArme y: That's funny.

Liebig: A lot of people thought the bait business was easy, and the bait business is very—you got to be committed. What I've learned in it—I've been doing it about four years now—you got to commit. You can't work it when you want to work it.

We pretty much run seven days a week, five-to-five. (0:31:51.5) So we work all day selling the bait, and we work at night, catching the bait. But if you don't commit, you ain't doing anything. I mean, you got to get that commitment. Like today, I ain't sold—I sold four bags of bait today. But I can't just close the doors and go home because my sales are slow. That's just, this is the end of the year for us, and we're going to keep those few people happy that are still fishing. But it's one of the things. Two or three people's tried it, and it's hard. I mean, it really is. But we learn a lot. I mean, shoot. We learn to work every day. And this year was extremely hard because we wasn't selling a whole, whole lot, but the weather, we usually get a bad weather day. And this year, early in the year, we didn't have no bad weather! I don't know if you remember March and April and May, we barely ever got rain! Going like three months without a day off, I was like, "Man." (laughter) My fiancé, she was like, "You ever get a day off?" I said, "Let it rain!" Some days you get those rainy days. But the bad thing—

Scull-DeArmey: So you don't run your trawls on a rainy day? You don't fish on a rainy day?

Liebig: If the weather's bad, you're not going to sell any fish anyway.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Didn't know that.

Liebig: We got a rule of thumb when we get there, me and my crew, like the sailboats. You ever heard when that wind, and that thing (knocks on counter) hits on, *ding, ding, ding?*

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Liebig: That's our wind-o-meter. If we come in here, and it's going *ding, ding, ding*, ain't nobody fishing in that, so we don't fool with it. But we catch a large volume and keep a lot on hand. And our goal, really, the price of fuel comes in play, again. If I can take that boat out, and if I can fill it up with bait, it's still going to cost me a hundred dollars just to come out of this harbor, go make a few little bait drags and come back in. But if I can catch enough bait to get me by two or three days, I don't have to—it's like shrimping. You got to turn the big numbers here. If I don't turn the big numbers, I don't turn the big fuel bill. But our object—we got such a big boat—is to fill it up with bait, put the bait in tanks, keep them alive, and then you get a night off where you got to go catch bait.

Scull-DeArmey: How much bait can you get on your boat?

Liebig: It just varies on how thick you can put them in the tanks, you know? We try to keep—

Scull-DeArmey: Is there like a poundage that comes to your head?

Liebig: No. I couldn't tell you. I mean, we sell the croakers individual.

Scull-DeArmey: How much for a croaker? (0:33:57.1)

Liebig: A quarter.

Scull-DeArmey: A quarter.

Liebig: Twenty-five cents. We don't cheat the people on the Coast, but we sell more bulk. These people down here are trying to get fifty cents. This one's trying to get thirty-three cents.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you count them?

Liebig: We can count a hundred croakers in about fifteen seconds. We're good.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you net them out of the—

Liebig: Yeah. The way we do it a lot. There's bus tubs, like, see that plastic tub over there, on top of that tank? Fill those with water; then you got your croakers in these tanks. Well, we learned a lot, like when we catch bait, we're pretty good. I'm not going to brag. We're pretty good at this, so. When we catch a croaker with this trawl or bait, it goes in the water tank.

Scull-DeArmey: In the water tank.

Liebig: From that water tank, it goes into another tub or tank, still in water. And it'll never touch a table. And then from there it goes into another holding tank. The idea is to not let that croaker flop around and get scarred up. And then when we count them, they go into another tub of water because we learned quick. When I first started doing this, (laughter) we was scooping them croakers up and putting them there, and they're flopping all over you. So one day I had a tub on there, and I filled it up with water, and I put them in there, and they were all swimming around in their own little water puddle. And I was like, "Man, they're not splashing on me!" (laughter) I told my deckhand, "Try this!" He's like, "I like that!" But you just count them, you know? You just count them. A hundred sounds like a lot, but it don't take us but ten, fifteen seconds. You don't go, "One, two." And if you miss a number, we give them a few extra. They know they get extra.

Scull-DeArmey: The baker's dozen.

Liebig: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: So is it oxygenated, the water?

Liebig: Yeah. (0:35:20.9) These tanks here, there's a big air pump up here. And all

these little hoses you see go down an air stone(?). Now, these tanks over here are run through a filter system, these four tanks over here, and that water's crystal clear. Now, these tanks here, I keep an open system, which I got sump pumps that come off the barge, and they run nonstop water through them, twenty-four/seven. They don't ever stop.

Scull-DeArmey: Do they ever die? How long will they stay—

Liebig: Oh, yeah, they'll die.

Scull-DeArmey: How long will they stay alive?

Liebig: It just depends. Croakers we handle a couple of days easy. They just get better.

Scull-DeArmey: A couple of days? At some point are you ready to just throw them back in, or they're going to die?

Liebig: Oh, we try to do a season of croaker here. We try to put them in the tanks, let them settle, and give them a day or two. They slime back up; they get their original slime on them. They're even better. I mean, a four-day croaker on here, the fisherman is like, "Man, you got some of that good stuff?" "Yeah."

Scull-DeArmey: Slime is good, huh?

Liebig: Yeah. When you catch them with the trawls, they get a little slime wore off of them. The object—

Scull-DeArmey: So the slime protects them somehow?

Liebig: It's fish. I don't know. I know how to keep them alive. We just lived and learned it, you know?

Scull-DeArmey: Do you feed them?

Liebig: We've seen times, if we have some on there a couple of days, if we got some squid or something, throw it in there, and they'll chew on it a little bit. That's about it, though.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you pick up squid as [bycatch] sometimes?

Liebig: We sell them if we catch them.

Scull-DeArmey: Is that right?

Liebig: And I haven't seen barely any squids. Our squids are only this big, though.

Scull-DeArmey: What do they catch?

Liebig: People use them on the piers for ground mullet, croaker, stuff like that they'll catch. Croakers, pinfish, everything eats squid. But we haven't caught much squid here lately. (0:36:58.8) I don't know why.

Scull-DeArmey: Has that changed since you were a kid? Did you catch more squid then?

Liebig: I almost, like, I see less squid in the past year. Maybe since BP's well. I don't know. I mean, they need to do a squid check because a lot of times, like early in the year when we start, we'll catch a couple of sixteen-ounce bags of squid a night. And it seems like after the well blew up, we didn't catch any squid. That might be something y'all might want to tell them to check, the squid population here.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. NOAA's going to listen to this. They're going to get your information.

Liebig: Because that's one thing I did notice is less squid; I have noticed that. I talked to one guy that bought shrimp all his life. He's saying he was seeing shrimp with blisters on them. Did you hear anything on that? (0:37:39.8)

Hester: No.

Scull-DeArmey: No, wow!

Liebig: Yeah. They say they found some shrimp with boils and blisters on them. I think snapper had a problem this year with blisters. You hear about that? Red snappers had blisters on them. I mean, there's no telling what the outcome's going to be.

Scull-DeArmey: I hope they save those fish and turn them in to someone.

Liebig: Well, I think one guy does have some of the shrimp because he was buying shrimp wholesale. And he froze them; sent them off to some people. Shrimp had boils on their shells and stuff. We don't know what the effect's going to be.

Scull-DeArmey: Never seen that before.

Liebig: He said he never did, and he's been buying shrimp, he was buying shrimp when I was a kid that big, watching the shrimp boats come in down there. (laughter) I think that's why I started shrimping. I used to always be fishing down there, and them big shrimp boats would come in. I was like, "Man, I want to do that! Man, I want to do that." Then I bought this boat, and it was a basket case. Nobody wanted to buy it. Those Vietnamese owned it, and it was terrible. I mean, it was just—it's

rough right now because we've been moving around a lot, catching bait. We got to get in this stall or that stall. When I bought that boat, it was a basket case.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, you've refurbished it.

Liebig: Geezum. (laughter) I can give you a list that long!

Scull-DeArmey: When you think about your career on the water, have you seen changes in the species mix? We know that there are fewer squid. Anything else?

Liebig: That's about it. I haven't really noticed. Shrimp? I don't know why it's been fluctuating a lot. (0:39:10.4)

Scull-DeArmey: This year?

Liebig: Every year. I mean, one year you'll have a good crop, medium crop. Then like this year, the spillway was opened up, so they opened up early. Now, normally we'll work the opening two weeks of the season, and you'll catch a lot of the smaller shrimp, fifty/sixties, too small to sell to people. And you'll factory-shrimp them. Now, about a month into the season, it'll get down to where you're catching [300, 400], 500 pounds a night of bigger shrimp. And then you peddle them. You get your premium price, or you can't afford to work. If you went to the factory, you couldn't do it. Now, it seemed like the last two years, there wasn't nothing after the opening. Normally you can go out every night and get you [300, 400], 500 pounds of shrimp, come in, and sell them. This year? Oh, Lord.

Scull-DeArmey: That could definitely be the spill, the oil spill.

Liebig: Yeah. I mean, this year there was one pocket of shrimp right out in front of this harbor, and once it was caught up, it was like over with.

Scull-DeArmey: For the record, what is the spillway and where is it?

Liebig: It's that Bonnet Carre, I think they call it, in New Orleans.

Scull-DeArmey: What purpose does the spillway serve?

Liebig: They say it's to stop flooding New Orleans.

Scull-DeArmey: When they open the spillway, does it have anything to do with the river coming through? Mississippi River?

Liebig: Yeah, all the fresh water comes through. It fills up Lake Pontchartrain, and everybody thinks it's far away. On a slow boat, it's about an hour-and-thirty-minute run to the St. Joe Channel, where it comes out.

Scull-DeArmey: Which affects the salt mix.

Liebig: Yeah, fresh water. Oh, man. This water here was so fresh when they opened that up. I was checking my salinity; I'm trying to remember the numbers. It was like three or four when it should have been eighteen. The salinity was terrible. I mean, it got fresh. I mean, you can look at the water and tell it was different.

Scull-DeArmey: So that affects the health of the marine life.

Liebig: Oh, yeah. Oysters? Good Lord, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Would that be devastating to the oysters? (0:41:00.1)

Liebig: It is. It's 80 percent dead! They don't know if they can blame it on the spillway or not. That's why we just filed with NOAA for the disaster, federal fisheries disaster, I think it is.

Scull-DeArmey: So they were going to close the oyster beds anyway?

Liebig: Well, now it's dead. There's nothing to catch.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. But if there had been anything to catch, were they going to—

Liebig: Oh, we'd be out there. Next month, the end of this month, we would be dredging oysters. That's our primary wintertime moneymaker.

Scull-DeArmey: I misunderstood you. I thought it was closed because there was oil spill, like, residue or something.

Liebig: They're saying it's dead, just dead. Nothing's been tied to it.

Scull-DeArmey: Don't know why, OK. But it's dead, 80 percent dead.

Liebig: Nobody knows why. BP's going to say the Bonnet Carre Spillway. That's what BP's going to say. I mean, it's like 80 percent mortality right now.

Scull-DeArmey: So they're hoping that by closing it, they'll build, reproduce—

Liebig: They're going to send us tonging the twenty-fourth, I'm hearing out here. But they're saying it's 80 percent dead.

Scull-DeArmey: Tell me about tonging for oysters? How do you do that? People who listen to this—

Liebig: (0:41:59.9) You get these big, long sticks, and the average head's about this wide. And you take them sticks and you just—

Scull-DeArmeY: What is that? About five feet, four feet?

Liebig: Big, big heads. Like, some of them make big four-footers, five-footers.

Scull-DeArmeY: So it's like a big salad tong.

Liebig: It's a big, old metal—it's like this, and you go down. You go down there, and you feel for them. And then you just—I felt that little (laughter) rock right there. The first day I was out there, I was going, "I don't know if I can do this, Shorty!" (laughter) But we did it. We tonged. I've always been a dredger. And I've always wondered why them [tongers] would get so mad at the dredgers for going on their little reef because you can go to jail if you go there. But if you can catch them, you catch a bunch of them. But man, it's hard work. I mean, once you fill them oysters up, it gets worse. They're usually about ten foot down there or six foot down there. You got to pick those tongs up. And once you get it out of the water, you have to put it under here, a sixteen-foot pair of sticks. You got to pick them up, put them on the boat.

Scull-DeArmeY: What is the weight, you think?

Liebig: Full, it's hard to pick up! When you get them full, full, I've seen times where I'd be like, "*Shorty, I got a load! Get out of my way!*"

Scull-DeArmeY: What did it weigh, ballpark figure?

Liebig: I couldn't tell you. Thirty pounds?

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. But the leverage is weird because it's on the end of a long stick.

Liebig: Well, you got these big, long sticks that are like sixteen foot. And you just scoop them up. It's more technique. I've learned. Them oysters just ain't everywhere. You'll catch a little, few oysters here, and you'll feel them in there. Well, then you just keep going down till you hit another little spot, and you scoop them up. Then you'll come over here and scoop that one up. And when you get your tongs full, you want to pick them up. You don't want to keep picking them up if you ain't got but one or two oysters in them. You'd be picking up all day. But we did it. We made them almost every day. It was hard work.

Scull-DeArmeY: So where do they go then, once they're on the boat?

Liebig: You got to catch them. You got to cull them right there. You got to clean them, get mussels off of them, small oysters off of them. Oysters is highly regulated.

Scull-DeArmeY: You don't open them, though, do you?

Liebig: Well, you can't open them out there.

Scull-DeArmey: So you put them on ice?

Liebig: No. They go in a sack. We got a metal measurer that's—I got the dimensions—this many inches by this many inches by this high, and you throw the clean oysters in there. And when you get a full sack, it goes in the sack. And then when you go from the sack, oysters are regulated highly. You got leave that reef, go in here, pull up, go to the check-in station. You tell them your boat, where you been, how many sacks you got. That oyster can't leave that boat till it's tagged. Then you got to take your little tags, and you go to your boat, and you got to stamp them with dealer boat, where they going. Then you got to tag them. Then you can unload them. Then they go from there to a refrigerated truck to an ice house, shuck house, restaurant, just depends on where they go from there.

Scull-DeArmey: Because it's pretty easy, I guess, for an oyster to go bad?

Liebig: Well, they can tell you where that oyster came from because they got it down. I mean you pull a sack of oysters off that boat without a tag on it, you're in trouble. This is how it works. This is a trip. I had a young guy who was working for me. The law is you can't start till legal sunrise. You got to be in by a certain time. You can only catch so many oysters. They can only be so big. (laughter) Oh, yeah. If you get 10 percent of a sack that's under three inches, you got to go throw all your oysters back on the reef and get a ticket.

Scull-DeArmey: So when you're culling them on the boat, you're deciding, "Keep this one. Throw this one back."

Liebig: Well, you look at them. A lot of them you look at. You kind of know what three inches is, and you're allowed like 10 percent of a sack. So if they come in with a bunch of small oysters, the DMR, they check us a lot. They'll pour your oysters out, and they'll check your oysters and make sure they're all the right size. And they got a little tool they measure with. If it slips through the groove, it's a small oyster. And he starts throwing a bunch of them out of your sack, and you're going, "Oh, man." And they'll look at it. If you got ten oysters there, too small, you're all right. But if you got twenty-five, thirty, because the average sack's probably 300 oysters in there, then they'll count your oysters, and then they'll count your small ones, and if you ain't got it right, then you got to take your oysters back out the harbor, go back on that reef—

Scull-DeArmey: And dump them.

Liebig: Yeah, pour them back.

Scull-DeArmey: Pour them back.

Liebig: And you get a ticket, too.

Hester: What is entailed with it? Is it a fine?

Liebig: A fine, yeah. You got to go to court, pay court costs.

Scull-DeArmey: Probably if you get more than one ticket, the penalty gets higher.

Liebig: Yeah. Like so many tickets, you lose your license. Go to the tonging reef with a dredge boat, and you go to jail.

Scull-DeArmey: What is a dredge boat? (0:46:32.5)

Liebig: Well, any boat can be a dredge boat. It just pulls a big, steel dredge.

Scull-DeArmey: And what does the dredge do?

Liebig: It just scrapes the bottom, just like this. It's got teeth on it, and it just scoops, scoops, scoops, scoops, scoops.

Scull-DeArmey: What's the purpose of dredging?

Liebig: Just oystering. Tonging's only in one little area. Dredging is everything else.

Scull-DeArmey: Because I was thinking, "Oh, dredging, like for the sand to come on the beach." But this is dredging for oysters?

Liebig: It's a big, metal dredge. We got a certain weight restriction we got to use. But it's got teeth, steel teeth that go down, and it scoops the oysters up. And then there's a big metal bag, and then a rope bag that holds them. And when they dredge, a mechanical winch picks it up. You pour them out, throw them back over, and then pick through the oysters and shells.

Scull-DeArmey: And we don't have any technology like a computer or a robot yet that has replaced the deckhand and the captain culling those things out.

Liebig: No. Now, dredging, sometimes it's complicated, and sometimes it's nice. You got to set your chain a certain length because if you set it too far back, it's just going to fill up with garbage. If you set it too far close, it ain't going to fill up. So we'll actually, when we're dredging, we have steel chain, a big, old chain that holds it. You tie you a little rope on there, and then you look at your rope, and you look at what you catch. If you're catching a bunch of shells, you shorten it up. What it does is that dredge is hooking like this; you just shorten it up, shorten it up till it's barely kind of skimming the top because you don't want to fill up with junk, but you want it

to catch oysters. It's a little technical, but some people can do it; some people not.

Scull-DeArmeY: So this year, no tonging or dredging oysters?

Liebig: They going to send us tonging. They said, I think, the twenty-fourth. But it don't sound like there's anything out there, though. They sent four or five boats out, and it don't look good.

Scull-DeArmeY: How long will the tonging oysters—

Liebig: Well, we usually dredge oysters November, December, January, February, March, April, I think it is, when it ends. There's certain months now we can't oyster. I don't remember.

Scull-DeArmeY: But if it doesn't play out for you this year, you're going tuna fishing.

Liebig: I'll probably jump on that boat with my cousin and go tuna fishing. But I got to be home January for the baby anyway, so I'm taking that month off.

Scull-DeArmeY: Good. Oh, that's great. That's wonderful.

Liebig: Don't tell that to my exwife! (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Have you changed your marketing approach?

Liebig: Yeah, I went to the bait business. (0:48:51.9) I got out of shrimping. I had to. (laughter) I mean, if I shrimped, I wouldn't be down here. I mean, it's not a big business, a money-making business, but it pays the bills. And that's what I seen. I seen the rising fuel costs. I was like, "Man! I got to do something different." And I started selling bait. Just don't turn the big, thousand-dollar nights, but you don't turn the big, four-hundred-dollar fuel bill. It's just you got to put it on paper and make it work like any other business. We keep the expenses down to nothing. Like when you shrimping, you going to be out there two or three days. (0:49:22.0) You got sandwich meat, ice, cold drinks. We go out there with a gallon of water, a pack of sandwich meat to get us through the day. I mean, it's not no big grocery bill. You keep the grocery bill down, your fuel bill down, and your ice bill down. You got to. I mean, if you don't, you just won't make any money.

Scull-DeArmeY: You're smart. You figured it out.

Liebig: I mean, we went out a few nights ago and lost money. I mean, we drug for three hours. We worked for three hours, and we got about \$35 dollars a day. So that's why I'm not going tonight. I'll go tomorrow (laughter) night and catch what I can.

Scull-DeArme y: Roscoe, if you have a time limit, you tell me because I don't. I don't have one.

Liebig: Just keep on going down, asking questions.

Scull-DeArme y: All right. Moving on to [Hurricane] Katrina, tell me about your Katrina experience. (0:50:05.9) How did it affect you personally? What damages to your home, your business?

Liebig: Home wasn't bad; lost a shingle roof. And then the boat made it, luckily. Thank the Lord. We made it through that. We don't have insurance.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you move the boat?

Liebig: Yeah, we have to. When a tropical storm comes, we have to. The best place to go is all the way up to the NASA [National Aeronautics and Space Administration] Space Center. You just drive. It takes about four-and-a-half—give you an idea. We stopped at Port Bienville. For Katrina we stopped there, and I looked, and I said, "Man. Another hour-and-a-half run, and I could be up further north." And we left there; a bunch of us left there, and a bunch of them—everybody that stayed at Port Bienville, one boat stayed in the water, and everybody went all the way up to the NASA Space Center. We all made it. Everybody back here wound up in woods, trees, everything, and NASA made it. But the bad thing is that after that, the last storm we went through after Katrina, I was like, "Man." I was like, Katrina, I was the third boat up there. I come around the bend, "Holy moly!" (laughter) Because you want to get there early to get the good spots. You get there early; you get the good spots. Everybody's going to get the good spots before they get the other spots. But for a storm, there ain't probably any of these boats have insurance. (0:51:04.4) Just can't afford it.

Scull-DeArme y: Interesting.

Liebig: Can't afford it. If it sinks, it's going down. For what you pay in insurance, I could've done bought another boat the years I've owned this.

Scull-DeArme y: You're self-insured, basically.

Liebig: Yeah. I mean, it was like \$5000, \$6000 a year. And if that boat sinks, it ain't that much to get it back up and fix it.

Scull-DeArme y: Right. You could put away half that and have a new boat, yeah.

Liebig: Pretty much replace your boat for it.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. Has your business changed since Katrina? You talked about doing some Katrina recovery after that? (0:51:46.1)

Liebig: Oh, I worked debris hauling for a year and a half after that.

Scull-DeArmey: Who is that?

Liebig: Debris hauling.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, debris hauling, OK.

Liebig: Yeah. We did hurricane cleanup work pretty much.

Scull-DeArmey: What was that like? How did it work?

Liebig: Hard work. Good money, hard work.

Scull-DeArmey: You took your boat out and got debris out of the—

Liebig: No. We worked on land. We just tied this up.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. You were working on land, OK.

Liebig: We were just setting up with this and left this here. We did have some Katrina relief for the oysters. (0:52:08.2) We did some poling. We went out—the boats went out—feeling down, checking what bottom was left because the oysters all got moved around and everything. We worked there. We did some relay work for oysters. We did that.

Scull-DeArmey: What is that, relay work?

Liebig: We took oysters from the Biloxi Back Bay and brought them over to here [Pass Christian]. We basically caught the oysters, put them in a sack, brought them to the big barge, and then they take them over here and blow them out.

Scull-DeArmey: To reseed, basically.

Liebig: Yeah. These are all live oysters. I mean, the oysters over there you can't harvest because of the water bottom. But you can take the oyster over here, in the good water, and leave it there for I don't know how many months; I forgot. And then you can reharvest it because it's a filter-feeder. It cleans itself out. So.

Hester: Talking about the debris cleanup on land, did they do any cleanup out here? I mean, I've heard about it.

Liebig: They say they did, but that wasn't—a Mississippi contractor didn't even get it. An Alabama contractor got it or something another. And none of these boats went to work. We had Alabama boats out here, working. I was on the news for that one.

(laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Good.

Liebig: Yeah. I mean, I think it was Katrina, or it was another hurricane because the way they decided it, the FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Administration] money, anybody could bid on. It didn't have to be a state, which is bullshit. You know that. I mean, it should be the state that has the disaster; a state contractor should get it, but it didn't work that way. I caught trees, rooftops, wood, all kinds of stuff.

Scull-DeArmey: What happens when you catch—do you catch it in the trawl net, or with the boat?

Liebig: Oh, yeah. They destroy your trawl net. Put one through that trawl over there with the root ball and everything. You could see all the way up that top rig, and it was higher than that. I caught the whole tree, the root, ball, everything.

Scull-DeArmey: And you were dragging it in your net. Could you tell?

Liebig: Yeah! The whole boat's falling over.

Scull-DeArmey: What happens on the boat when you catch—

Liebig: It spins around. We were dragging, and we just hit it hard, and the trawl cables are like this because of the doors, so it went *plink*.

Scull-DeArmey: How did you get it out?

Liebig: We had a skill saw and a hatchet.

Hester: Did you have to cut your net?

Liebig: Oh, yeah, just sliced the net all over. The net was gone. It was probably about a five-hundred-dollar net, gone. We hit it, and we were in shrimp, too. Man, we made a drag. We had like two hundred and some odd pounds for like thirty-something minutes. "Oh, we in the shrimp. Turn around!" We the only ones out there. About ten minutes into the next drag, we're grabbing shrimp, "We in the shrimp!" *Wham!* "Oh, man!"

Scull-DeArmey: They were all congregated around that tree.

Liebig: We hit it; we caught it. But it was all kinds of stuff in there, trees.

Scull-DeArmey: I couldn't take the frustration. I don't think I could.

Liebig: Oh, we were dragging after the storm. Like when we were out here, and we finally got the boats back, man, the shrimp were thick because nobody shrimped them. Everybody was out of pocket. And we got back in, and a buddy of mine went and found them shrimp on the beach. And I was dragging out there, and you'd be dragging, and you'd hit something, keep going, catching tree limbs, all kinds of stuff, pieces of roof.

Scull-DeArmey: Refrigerators?

Liebig: No. I didn't catch nothing like that. One guy did catch one. He caught a deep freeze. I remember he did catch one of them. We had a little bit of everything out there.

Scull-DeArmey: When you were hauling debris, how was it on your psyche? Were you hauling things you recognized? Were you afraid there were bodies in the debris? (0:55:21.9)

Liebig: No, not really. I was a hard worker. When Katrina hit, everybody was running around, "What to do? What to do? What to do?" And I did a little bit of cleanup work in Alabama. And I just jumped on as soon as I got an Internet service; I found loaders and trucks and went straight and got lucky. I hired up with some good people, and we did debris hauling for months and months. We stayed in Pass Christian till it was about done. We worked for Ashbritt [Environmental, Disaster Recovery, Engineering, Special Environmental and Waste Specialists]. It was a good company to work for.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, Ashbritt, yeah.

Liebig: Yeah, we worked for them.

Scull-DeArmey: Where did you take it?

Liebig: Demolition houses went to Pecan Grove. C and D [construction debris] and trees went to Menge Avenue.

Scull-DeArmey: What's C and D?

Liebig: Construction debris and tree limbs and stuff like that. All the houses with the asbestos thing and everything had to go to the Pecan Grove landfill. It was a pain. You had to water the house down while you tear it down. I mean, they wanted the safety. I can understand that.

Scull-DeArmey: You had to water it down in case of fire?

Liebig: No, asbestos.

Scull-DeArmey: Asbestos?

Hester: To keep the fibers from floating in the air.

Liebig: Yeah. Every time we'd demo [demolish] a house, you had to hose it down. We did good. I had a good crew.

Scull-DeArmey: Of course, it was dry after Katrina. It didn't rain for months.

Liebig: Yeah. And then we got some rain. It's a swamp here. You don't see how nasty it is until you go in somebody's yard with a track hoe, trying to tear their house down. But we did really good after Katrina.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, good. That's great.

Liebig: But it's one of them businesses that takes a lot to get in it. I mean, we had \$150,000 in equipment, and that really wasn't a drop in the bucket of what you needed. So luckily I had some. My exwife got half of that, too.

Scull-DeArmey: So you kept the equipment?

Liebig: Most of it, yeah. I had it all paid for, and she got half, and I got half of it, so.

Scull-DeArmey: I should've married a fisherman. What was I thinking?

Liebig: Mine was trying to get me bad. I can tell you stories about that one, but I ain't going to say it on the camera. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: No. We don't want to—

Liebig: I think BP drove my exwife crazy.

Scull-DeArmey: Really?

Liebig: I think it really did. The money that they threw around, I think it drove her plum crazy. I was making—had three boats hired with VOO [Vessels of Opportunity], and she took and went and set the money in an account without my name on it, had the billing routed to a PO [post office] box and was really out to get me. So I file for a divorce, hire a lawyer, lock all the accounts up, and let it go.

Scull-DeArmey: What is VOO?

Liebig: That's that Vessels of Opportunity.

Scull-DeArmey: Vessels of Opportunity, OK. You didn't lose anything in Katrina then.

Liebig: Well, shingled-roof of the house, and all five rentals made it. Yeah, we did good. We were all right for Katrina. Boats made it. I don't know. I've always been the kind of person; I'm going to do something if something happens. If another storm happens, I'll buy more equipment and go back to work. (laughter) That's the only thing you can do. If you're self-employed, you got to find another way because fishing, you ain't going to make it with that.

Scull-DeArmey: Thinking about the oil spill, what were you thinking when you learned about the oil spill? What was going through your mind? (0:58:12.9)

Liebig: I was driving to the bait shop. I left the house that morning, and I got halfway to here, and it said, "BP's oil well blew up," on the radio. And I said, "Damn. That ain't good." Then there wasn't anything. And it wasn't until we seen that footage of that oil pumping on the bottom, I was like, "This ain't good." And I kept watching it, oil pumping, oil pumping, oil pumping. "This ain't good." Then they started saying, "Shut down. This is shut down. That's shut down." I said, "This ain't really good." (laughter) I mean, that's all we could do.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you have a chance to harvest anything before the waters were closed?

Liebig: We were catching bait, but that was just, it would be right in the beginning of our year when it hit. Yeah. [Hester takes photograph.] Well, I'm rough looking now.

Scull-DeArmey: You look great.

Liebig: I got to get a haircut.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you participate in the VOO Program? (0:59:08.2)

Liebig: Yeah, I worked.

Scull-DeArmey: What was that like?

Liebig: BP needed the boats to go to work, so they wouldn't look so bad. I think it was more politics, what you would call. P and L, I guess you'd say.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Kind of a PR [public relations] move.

Liebig: Yep. What's it called, P and R. What's that? I forgot the exact name, P and R is.

Scull-DeArmey: Public relations.

Liebig: Public relations. I think that's what it was, more than anything else.

Scull-DeArme y: What did you do? What was the actual work?

Liebig: We did a little bit of everything. We did monitoring, subsurface and monitoring. We had this boat set up with the booms to pull the booms if the oil did get here. You name it; we did it. Observation. We did everything from sightseeing to pulling underwater. We were taking our dredges and pulling them underwater with oil pads. Went through a pile of schooling. That was a trip.

Scull-DeArme y: What is that?

Liebig: They sent us [HazMat, hazardous materials], all kinds of stuff.

Scull-DeArme y: For hazardous materials?

Liebig: Yeah. We had three boats working, so I had seven crew members on that one.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Let's, for the record, define some of this. What is monitoring?

Liebig: They had us pulling—we would take, like, a dredge, and put a oil-absorbent pad, and pull it so many feet down, and drag it slowly, to see if anything was there.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you document that? Were they on the vessel with you?

Liebig: We had a log. Every boat had a logbook on it. Every day we turned in. They pretty much said where they went, the coordinates. Well, we were sent in groups, and there was like five boats to a group. And like the bigger boats would go offshore. We would send them outside the islands. And on observation, report what you see. That's about it.

Scull-DeArme y: What about subsurfacing?

Liebig: That's when we were going, pulling that oil boom up under the water.

Scull-DeArme y: What's an oil boom?

Liebig: It's a suck-pad that they collect with. Like when you see the pads, they always have around stuff? We were pulling them down.

Scull-DeArme y: Down?

Liebig: Below the water. We would take like a steel dredge we used to oyster and put the booms in it. Then drop it off the boat, ten feet, five feet, whatever depth, and then drag it and then check it.

Scull-DeArme y: What was the purpose?

Liebig: I guess to see if there was any oil down there.

Scull-DeArme y: Was there?

Liebig: We didn't find anything on the booms, but they scooped up a lot on the surface. But the booms, I don't think they would have caught any oil anyway, myself. I mean, you're going through the water, I mean, really, them booms need to be saturated in the oil to really judge.

Scull-DeArme y: I thought a boom was inflated? Why would it even sink?

Liebig: No. It's just a material that sucks oil up.

Scull-DeArme y: It'll sink?

Liebig: You put it in a steel dredge, it will. But we got it down with weights and chains and stuff like that. But I don't know if it would work or not. They didn't really come and say, "We drug this through an oil slick, and it sucked up oil." We don't know. (laughter) P and R [public relations]. (laughter) And I set this one up with the booms to pull in case the oil did show. You've seen the skimmer boats? We had this one set up for that.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Tell us a little bit about a skimmer boat, for the record. If somebody's listening to this 500 years from now, paint them a picture.

Liebig: I couldn't tell you. We took a shrimp boat and put some booms on it, the floating booms. See, you're thinking about the floating, plastic booms.

Scull-DeArme y: I guess that's what I saw, the orange—

Liebig: Yeah. OK. Those float, yeah. But the ones, they got certain material that go in water and oil and just suck up oil. That's what we were pulling below the water. It's a sock really, and it's got certain material. Like we keep them in our bilges, to keep our bilge clean.

Scull-DeArme y: What's a bilge?

Liebig: Where the oil and water in the boat is, up under the engine. You throw some of them down there, and if you do get any oil, it'll suck it up.

Scull-DeArme y: So it does work in the bilge?

Liebig: Yeah. It works fine in the bilge. You can throw them down there, them

little, white pads, and they suck that oil up and no water. They work good.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Hazardous materials, what did you learn about hazardous materials? (1:03:11.0)

Liebig: Safety, safety, safety. All of our crew went to the forty-hour HAZWOPER [OSHA Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard], the three-hour safety classes. We went through all that.

Scull-DeArmey: What was hazardous about the oil spill?

Liebig: We never really touched much oil to say. I mean, one or two boats came in with some oily stuff that they found out there. It wasn't a whole lot, that I seen.

Scull-DeArmey: What about the dispersant? (1:03:35.6)

Liebig: Never seen it. (inaudible)

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever smell it?

Liebig: It looked different; the water did look different.

Scull-DeArmey: How?

Liebig: I don't know, just different.

Scull-DeArmey: This is how it looks different to me. When I was a kid, I grew up in Gulfport. We would go down, and you couldn't see bottom because—I learned in science class that—barrier islands create this organic soup in the Mississippi Sound. And it's not dirty; it's full of organic matter. And that's why there's such diverse marine life in it. Well, now it's clear.

Liebig: Might be. I mean it's—

Scull-DeArmey: When I go to the beach now, and I look at the water, I can see the sand.

Liebig: It ain't often you can see the bottom of the sand of this beach. (laughter) I know back when I was a kid, you'd never see the sand.

Scull-DeArmey: In Gulfport you can.

Liebig: It's clear.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Liebig: Might've killed all them organisms. Dispersal didn't go away, and the oil didn't go away. I mean, you got a storm just came through here, and they got tar balls washing up. So I mean, that's just a—

Scull-DeArmeY: I mean, that's my observation from a lifetime on the Gulf of Mexico.

Liebig: We won't know for years and years from now, if it gets better or if it gets worse.

Scull-DeArmeY: And the only way we'll know—and I'm not supposed to do this as an interviewer, but I'm going to anyway—is if the scientists, you know, if a team of scientists does the work. Not if BP does the work. Hello?

Liebig: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmeY: I can predict what they're going to find (laughter) already.

Liebig: Better hope they don't pay the scientists off, that's doing the work, without them knowing.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah, there's that, too.

Liebig: Big money, I mean that's just—they make \$25 million in seven hours. That's a trip!

Scull-DeArmeY: Nice work if you can get it. OK. NOAA wants to know how you found out about the Vessels of Opportunity program. (1:05:22.9)

Liebig: I went, and this friend of mine called me, a shrimper, [and] said they were going to have a meeting. There wasn't no advertising or nothing. It was just one word-of-mouth, from one fisherman to another fisherman. And we all went down to Biloxi, and they had a little meeting there.

Scull-DeArmeY: Did you guys kind of get together and talk about the oil spill as a fisherman community?

Liebig: It was so early in the year. It was right when our stuff's kicking off.

Scull-DeArmeY: What was going on in people's minds?

Liebig: Nobody knew; just wait-and-see.

Scull-DeArmeY: Wait-and-see.

Liebig: Just a waiting game is all it was.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. You must have felt pretty helpless?

Liebig: Wasn't nothing you could do. Wasn't nothing you could do at all.

Scull-DeArmey: How did you apply to participate in the VOO?

Liebig: I just filled out an application and turned it in.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. How long did it take them to let you know?

Liebig: We were early. I don't remember the dates, but we were the second group to get hired in this harbor.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Went to work right away?

Liebig: Yeah, I guess you'd call it that; it was pretty quick.

Scull-DeArmey: Were your paychecks coming into—

Liebig: I don't know. My exwife set it up in an account without my name on it! (laughter) They did pay, but what I had on my accounts I couldn't—I froze everything up. I let the VOO keep working when my divorce started because you didn't want damn, frigging BP to know you're going through a divorce. And it took them a while to get all these boats hired. I mean, we were a fortunate group because there was one little group that got hired, and then I got a phone call to get hired. Drove my exwife crazy, too, because they called me. (laughter)

Hester: How long did you do it?

Liebig: We worked seventy-two days with them.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you feel like it was implemented fairly? (1:07:04.7)

Liebig: The VOO? Hell, no!

Scull-DeArmey: Why not? Tell me about that.

Liebig: Because there's a guy that owns a pawn shop's got a sports-fishing boat parked right next to my bait shop that got hired before me, longer than me, and made probably more money than I did in the pawn shop. And he bought the boat on pawn. And he fished the boat; I've seen him fish the boat two or three times a year. And this guy got hired. He was the first group to get hired. And you going to hire a guy that owns a pawn shop, or a commercial fisherman? I mean, it was a trip. You had people going and buying boats that never had a commercial day. They should've been commercial. And then they should've had something, if they were smart about it,

again, put the commercial fishermen to work, number one. There was a bunch of uncommercial fishermen working before the commercial fishermen got hired. They had one guy, had to go down to that office down there and said, "I'm not leaving till you hire my boat." He was the last one to get hired, bless his heart. We're over here, making this big money, working for VOO, and these fishermen are just going, "Waiting for the phone call." Like I said, again, BP would have sent one or a couple of representatives to each harbor. If they're going to do VOO, why didn't they send five, a group of five people to say, "We're going to start a Vessels of Opportunity program. What boats do you have here? If you got a commercial boat, bring it up here." Then they could have put all the commercial boats to work first, and then the charter boats got to work, and then check these people because they had recreational people buying four, five, six skiffs, and then they going to work. And then they had the commercial guys that make their living, sitting there, going [gesturing]. And watch. It hurt them guys, I mean, to watch these boats go in and out. I was pissed. I sat right over here, and that freaking pawnshop owner, owns a pawnshop, come walking down there, "Oh, I'm hired!" I'm over here, going, "I own three damn commercial boats, a fourth one being built"—

Scull-DeArmeY: "Can't fish, because BP ruined my waters."

Liebig: Couldn't fish. And here it is a pawnshop; boat never chartered before. He bought the charter; he bought the boat. And I ain't going to say no names. It was a nightmare. (laughter) Never commercial chartered or nothing. Went fishing once in a blue moon. Took his family out once, every very once in a while, and the boat just sits there. And he worked longer than any commercial boat in this harbor, with the same first group. There was like ten commercial boats with him. He got rehired again with BP on the second hiring, went through that couple of weeks. And then a couple of months ago, he got hired again. (laughter) I said, "You got to be"—I sat down there, and here they come, wearing life vests. I said, "You got to be kidding me!" Then my boat backed into his boat, and it wasn't good. It was an accident, though.

Scull-DeArmeY: An accident?

Liebig: Shifting linkage come off, *wham*.

Scull-DeArmeY: Well, that's unfortunate.

Liebig: Forty-foot, sports fish. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: That's unfortunate. Did it hurt your boat?

Liebig: No. It hurt his pretty good, though.

Scull-DeArmeY: Did he stick it to you?

Liebig: Well, it was a screwed-up deal because the boat backed into his boat. And I said, “I will pay you to fix your boat.” “OK.” And then all of a sudden, it turned into, “I need a little depreciation on my boat.” Well, it wasn’t hurt that bad. It went right over the top cap, crushed the top cap in. Next thing you know, I had a fiberglass man ready to fix it, and the boat cost \$2400 to fix, and he went running to his insurance company. His insurance company wrote him a forty-thousand-and-some-change check. So I got a survey, and I said, “The insurance company sent me a bill.” And the boat was fixed in the harbor, right over here for twenty-four hundred, total, to fix the whole boat, everything. And his insurance company sent me a nasty letter, and I found the survey, and the survey came up as \$45,000 in damage. I said, “That ain’t right.” I went to Donnie. He said, “I fixed the boat. Here’s the invoice where I fixed the boat and everything else.” I called that surveyor, and I said, “I want to know one thing. How in the world did you come up with \$40,000 in damage when the boat’s fixed right here for \$2400?” “Well, well, well.” He was kind of upset. And his insurance company, we sent them a letter saying, “We’re liable to fix this boat. This is what it cost to fix the boat. Whoever you got to do this survey, you should have got another survey.” And I ain’t heard back from them since. So now I got the lawyer working on all that now, with the VOO and all that BP stuff. I just couldn’t get anywhere with BP on a claim, so I just let the lawyer deal with it. So the exwife’s going to get half of that, too. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Oh, boy. That is really frustrating. Really frustrating.

Liebig: What else you got?

Scull-DeArme y: So have you gone through a claims process? (1:11:36.1)

Liebig: I went through the little claims thing, got that little thirty-thousand-dollar check, and that was pissing in the wind. They kept wanting this deficiency letter, that deficiency letter. So I finally went to a lawyer and said, “Here.”

Scull-DeArme y: So at this point, is it in litigation? Are the attorneys—

Liebig: The attorneys are working on it.

Scull-DeArme y: Working on it, OK. You’re still in the industry. That’s one of the questions here. And it wants to know what do the waters look like? Do you still see oil? (1:12:07.2)

Liebig: I ain’t seen the oil, but I work at nighttime anyway. I wouldn’t see it if I went through it.

Scull-DeArme y: But you said you saw some tar balls recently.

Liebig: When that storm came by, they [tar balls] were washing up all on Horn Island. (1:12:15.6) Front page.

Scull-DeArmeY: The storm was when?

Liebig: That tropical storm that grazed us and went up at New Orleans.

Scull-DeArmeY: Was it [Hurricane] Irene?

Liebig: About two months ago.

Scull-DeArmeY: That must have been Irene.

Liebig: Whichever one went right there to New Orleans.

Scull-DeArmeY: There have been so many of them this year.

Liebig: They're [tar balls are] still coming up at Horn Island. They got crews working out there. They're still there. They didn't go anywhere.

Scull-DeArmeY: So that makes sense because the barrier islands act as protection, somewhat, for the Mississippi Sound. OK. From your perspective, how is the health of your fishery? (1:12:47.4)

Liebig: Terrible. BP just went the last, the last dagger, I guess. The only thing BP—it made the industry worse. They hired the boats for that VOO, paid them a bunch of money, and that's it. And then they probably knew half of them ain't going to know how to manage money, didn't make money like that before. And then tax season comes around, and they're all, they're broke anyway. So now they can just hold off a little bit longer. And hopefully a bunch of them will settle out for that \$25,000 and be done. They offered it to me. I mean, that's—

Scull-DeArmeY: You have to sign something, though, that says this is the last money—

Liebig: You won't sue them or nothing. That's it, twenty-five measly thousand dollars. And they paid a guy \$100,000, owns three little, measly boats, no bait shop, no nothing, no business, catches oysters maybe three or four months out of the year. Like I said, it's stupid. I mean, it's just the way they did it. Does it make sense to you?

Scull-DeArmeY: No.

Liebig: You got commercial harbor, commercial harbor, commercial harbor. So what do you do? A: Let's go set one building up so everybody can come to it. Or let's do this. Let's see. Let's take the water part, where our stuff happened. The vulnerabest one is the fishery. And then let these people do the land businesses. I was sitting in there for my claim. There was a guy owns a stucco company. A stucco

company! And there's another lady, and she's an African American—I'm not prejudiced—in a walker, seventy years old, coming up to the claims desk. I was like, "You got to be kidding me!" But the guy next to me owns a stucco business! Stucco! He didn't build any different houses because of the oil spill.

Scull-DeArmeY: Maybe he was building stucco boats?

Liebig: No, they don't make them. That was a trip, now. I tell you. The way they did it, does it make sense to you to do it that way? Because I know if I owned a billion-dollar company, I'm not going to go to some town and say, "Here's the claims office. Everybody come!" (laughter) Because if they could have sent just a few people to each harbor, it wouldn't have took a big group here. Five people could have handled all of this right here. And they'd have got all the deckhands out of here. And if there was any question—because I had them call me before and use such-and-such name. "Did he work for you?" I said, "Yeah. He worked for me for one or two days. He made \$75 one day, \$50 one day." And they were still paying them people money. But if they'd have sent some representatives out here, talk to the fishermen, and sit them down right here, "OK. You own a commercial boat." Rather than bringing documentation up there, they could have went right up there and said, could have come to me, "What do you own?" "There's my bait shop. There's my boat. There's my other boat. And there's my other boat." "Where are your taxes?" "Here's my taxes, right here." "Does this guy work for you?" "He worked for me. He worked two days for me. He worked four years for me. He worked one day for me. I don't even know that guy right there." (laughter) Could have went down a line. But they didn't do that. I don't know. It's crazy. You'd think a billion-dollar company would have a little bigger head. Geezum. BP was probably saying, "Man, there's some fishermen down in that little community. Where'd they come from?" (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Right, yeah. They had to do something that looked good for the press.

Liebig: (1:16:02.8) The bad thing is my little guy's been with me four years, worked for me four years; gets a 1099 [claims form]. He's a little slow, and I tried to help with, through the claims process. He got nothing. And the crack-head that worked on my boat three days out of the year got \$18,000. He kept going down there and couldn't get nowhere with them. I wrote letter after letter, "Shorty's worked for me for this many years. He makes this much. He gets paid a 1099 every year." So.

Hester: He just needs more organization it sounds like.

Scull-DeArmeY: God. It sounds like FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] after Katrina.

Liebig: They have cooks in restaurants that made more money on the six-months check than I do on four boats, making a living on the water, and my industry was completely closed; commercial, recreational was completely closed for months. And

they got cooks at restaurants that got more money than what I got.

Scull-DeArmey: Plus, your industry may be negatively affected for years.

Liebig: Years! There's somebody still going back to that restaurant, now.

Scull-DeArmey: It may be even be affected for centuries, for all we know.

Liebig: I heard a stripper got a whole bunch of money in New Orleans.

Scull-DeArmey: Who did?

Liebig: I heard a stripper got a whole bunch of money in New Orleans. (laughter) I really did. Now, you hear all kinds of stories.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, what do you see for the future of the fishing, shrimping, oystering industry on the Mississippi Gulf Coast? (1:17:13.0)

Liebig: Oysters, it's going to be years before it gets back, if it does get back. Shrimping, if the price of fuel goes up, it's going to annihilate it completely. And that's about it.

Scull-DeArmey: And as you said, you wouldn't want your children to continue in this business.

Liebig: I'd give them a college education if I could afford it.

Scull-DeArmey: They'll get scholarships.

Liebig: Anna Grace better learn because the only thing I'll have for her is out here counting bait. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Teach them to swim, to go on a—

Liebig: Nobody knows what's going to happen. We'll know eventually. I mean, we still never really will know. I mean, I can tell you, the white shrimp this year should have been here. (1:17:50.5) Well, I'm like you. Don't send BP scientists out there. The government needs to bill BP for the scientists and put these scientists on lockdown. You don't get a phone call in. You don't get a phone call out because all they going to do is pad people's pockets. If you making twenty-five billion? It ain't no telling how many people they paid off. I mean, there's no telling. I mean, don't think people didn't get paid off. I mean, that's a mess. You know? But like I said, the way they went about it, it's like the VOO program, that was a outrageous thing. They should have, number one is, went, "Charter boats, commercial fishermen." That's all commercial. They make a living at it. Then they should have went from there. And I've seen people go, buying skiffs, recreational people that had jobs. I

mean, they should've did the charter boats, commercial fishermen, that group, commercial fishermen, charter boats, the people who make a living on the water out. They should've did a whole separate claims process for the people who make a living on the water versus the land.

Scull-DeArmey: I think you've got the right idea there.

Liebig: They'd have saved money. I mean, they'd have saved millions by doing that.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. I think that's a great idea.

Liebig: And then BP's over here, saying, "Well, these people are lying to us." Of course they're going to lie to you! Because it would have been so easy. I could have every deckhand that worked on my boat here, that legitimately worked. I had people calling me that worked on my boat one day, "Hey Ross, come here. I need you to sign a letter saying I worked for you." I said, "You didn't work for me." I said, "I'll write you a letter that says you worked one day on my boat." I mean, "If you want that." But if they'd have done that claims process, it'd have been a dramatic difference. And it wouldn't have took them that many more people. And then people that had the restaurants claims, and the hotels, and all these inland claims, if you'd have took all the fisherman's weight off of their shoulders, the commercial fishing industry, charter boats, commercial fishing industry, off of their shoulders, there ain't no telling how many more claims would be done right now because it wouldn't be this deckhand, going and hiring a lawyer because they could have, five claims people could have did this whole harbor. It would've been faster. It wouldn't take them no time. "Oh, you got a boat? Let me go see your boat. Let me see your tax paperwork. How do you make a living?" Let's see what happens. Then they could have set an office up here that all these claims, five people here; five people over there.

Scull-DeArmey: Just a little, like RV [recreational vehicle].

Liebig: That's it. Like my trailer. An office trailer with an Internet hookup. And OK, "Give me a list." They could've come to me and said, "I want a list of all the deckhands that worked on your boat." I could have went through my tax paperwork and said, "This one worked; this one worked; this one worked; this one worked; this one worked." And I could have went down and said, "This guy worked and made \$400 on my boat because"—

Scull-DeArmey: Well, this is good. The next time they do it, this may be the way they do it because you've thought it up.

Liebig: I mean, you think the money that BP would have saved in fraudulent claims in doing that.

Scull-DeArmey: For the record, Roscoe—you talked about a skiff a couple of times.

What is a skiff?

Liebig: Just a smaller boat.

Scull-DeArmeY: Smaller. How big?

Liebig: Skiffs average from fifteen, ten foot to thirty foot, forty foot.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do they have motors?

Liebig: Yeah. Most of them are like—these are all just regular boats here. But like your skiff style. There's none really here. (laughter) Like this little boat right here. See that little, red one?

Scull-DeArmeY: How long do you think that is? Twenty feet?

Liebig: Twenty-five foot. Yeah. It's just a little skiff, what we call a ski boat, just a smaller—my exwife got my skiff.

Scull-DeArmeY: So about a twenty-five foot, ten to twenty-five?

Liebig: Twenty, twenty-five foot. I mean, they range from sixteen foot. They call a twelve-foot a skiff.

Scull-DeArmeY: Going in a little bit of a different direction. If we were to define sustainable as being that you leave as much as you take out so that the resource is going to be there forever, based on your experience, what would it take to keep your fishery sustainable? (1:21:46.3)

Liebig: Hard to say. I mean, shrimp's always just been an open fishery. You got jam-up years. You got slow, slow years, and you got middle years. But you know, the strangest thing; it don't seem like every year is the same. It's not like, "This year we caught a boatload of shrimp, and then this year we had no shrimp." It's usually you'll catch a boatload of shrimp this year. This year you catch a good crop. This year you don't catch barely anything. Maybe this year you might catch a pile of them. So I mean, it's hard to say. A shrimping industry, there's really no way to regulate (1:22:20.0) unless you go by pounds, and that'd just shoot us the rest of the way in the foot. I mean, but like finfish, yeah, I see they have to have that. I mean, there's only so many fish out there, like there's only so many shrimp out there. But now, you have less boats shrimping the waters. And the shrimp, it's a hit and a miss. I mean, shoot, the year after Katrina, we caught some pretty good shrimp. I mean, we caught so many shrimp—there's a picture in my thing in there, and Shorty and the shrimp nets stayed full. I mean, we caught shrimp.

Scull-DeArmeY: One thing that had happened after Katrina is there were fewer boats. So many boats were damaged.

Liebig: Oh, yeah. All them boats were out.

Scull-DeArmeY: So yeah, there was less competition. So the pie was bigger, actually. Or the pie was the same, but you got bigger slices of the pie.

Liebig: Oh, yeah. Any fishery, if you can get less boats in it, you're going to have a better fishery. I mean, that's any fishery, ever, the less fishermen. It's really a good thing; a controlled fishery is good because you could take somebody that makes his living on the water, if they can control the amount of boats, the people that's dedicated to it, has put their time into it, can make a living. The downfall is that some young guy can't come up and do what he wants to do in the United States of America because of control. But if you control an industry, your boat's worth more money because it's got a controlled permit with it. (1:23:39.2) I mean, you sell the boat with the permit.

Scull-DeArmeY: Because it's up to code?

Liebig: It would be hard shrimpingwise. I don't know how they'd ever do that. They got a federal moratorium. You can't go to federal waters, and I had one on my boat that I had built, but I lost it because between the divorce and everything else, I didn't have time to renew it. But federal waters, you just can't go shrimp over there. But you can go buy a permit for dirt cheap because the industry's so terrible nobody needs a permit because nobody even works federal waters any more anyway. There are a few big, slab, [freezer] boats in Bayou La Batre, and that's it because of the price of fuel. I mean, them boats take 30,000 gallons of fuel when they go, so I mean, they—

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. And those are the boats I was thinking maybe could make a little money selling shrimp at eighty-five cents a pound.

Liebig: Yeah. You got to sell a pile of them. You got to catch a bunch of them.

Scull-DeArmeY: You got big, huge numbers of shrimp that we're talking about. Do you think we should care about, try to save threatened and endangered species of marine life?

Liebig: Well, yeah. You got to keep up with it.

Scull-DeArmeY: Why do you think? How and why should we, and how would we do that?

Liebig: We don't want the turtles dead. Only thing you can do is like you do with the turtles. Find out what's killing them, and if the shrimpers are killing them like they think we are, they give us TEDs to use, and we use them.

Scull-DeArmeY: Why do you think sea turtles are important?

Liebig: Sea turtle just is. I mean, it's been here probably years before we were here. So I mean, it is an important thing. You should have them. You shouldn't go annihilate them. I mean, that'd be dumb.

Scull-DeArmey: For example, if your child never got to see a real sea turtle, would that be a—

Liebig: Heck, yeah! Any kind of species, I think every species in the United States and world, should be, if it's endangered, find out what's killing it. The bad thing is, the shrimper's always the downfall for a sea turtle. (1:25:17.4) They started floating up, and we wasn't even shrimping. I couldn't believe it. And I was like, "Man, what do you mean, blaming us?" I said, "I been out here shrimping every night." I mean, I'm *not* shrimping, either. I'm going out, making five little, ten-minute bait drags. I'm not dragging from one end of this Gulf to the other end. And I'm looking around me, and there's not another boat in sight. And we like it, you know? We're just by ourself out there, doing our do. And I was like, "Who's killing the sea turtles? It ain't the shrimpers! There ain't a shrimp boat out here!" I was working. One boat in Biloxi was trying his gear out, and one other guy here was trying his gear out. And they kept saying, "The shrimpers are killing the turtles; the shrimpers are killing the turtles." And the shrimpers wasn't even shrimping over here. I mean, that was the thing. And I took the guy with me. So then they come up measuring all our TEDs and everything. Shoot, they sent one NOAA guy over here; he was supposed to be from NOAA, after the BP's well. And he's like, "I'm going to check your TED." I said, "You can check it. It's legal." He was measuring me for a Gulf boat. He didn't even know it. He said, "Oh, this is wrong. Man, this is wrong." I forget what numbers he told me. These are like forty-eight inches. I said, "Man, what you're telling me is the whole of my TED has to be," and I was stretching the tape measure, "this big!" He, "Oh, this is wrong. This is not big enough." And I said, "Man, you need to check your regulations." (laughter) "Oh, I'm telling you, sixty-something-inch TED, this or that." And I said, "Man, I'm not a Gulf of Mexico shrimp boat. You're talking about a big [freezer trawler]."

Scull-DeArmey: Is that how you figured it out?

Liebig: He was measuring me for a Gulf boat! I said, "I'm in state, Mississippi waters." He was measuring me for them big boats you see, the hundred-footers with the two-twenty- and two-fifty-foot trawls, dragging everything else. He had to call his boss. And he come back, "I'm sorry." I said, "Man, I know them TEDs are legal. I just had them made up a couple of years ago. The same guy that makes that TED makes every TED in Bayou La Batre, everything." And he was over there, "This is wrong." And he was telling me the numbers, and I was holding mine out, and I forgot the numbers on it. And I said, "Well, what you're telling me is my hole's got to be this big!"

Scull-DeArmey: That's bigger than my net!

Liebig: And it's only this big! (laughter) I said, "That net, you couldn't make that hole that big!"

Scull-DeArme y: We talked a little about the kinds of technology you use. Are there ways that governmental agencies could help you make use of your technologies? (1:27:37.5)

Liebig: This industry's pretty simple. Put a trawl down; pull your little trawl; count your shrimp; find shrimp.

Scull-DeArme y: But you talked about your GPS.

Liebig: Yeah. Everybody's got them.

Scull-DeArme y: Is there anything that—

Liebig: Only thing you need to catch shrimp are a boat, here (gesturing to head), a good running boat, tide.

Scull-DeArme y: Your brain, OK.

Liebig: You got to go by tide, and you go by your plotter, and you go by your try-trawl.

Scull-DeArme y: How do you find out about the tides?

Liebig: There's little charts on these plotters. They got them all built in. You can look at a button. "Tide's rising." You can tell where the tide is, everything. And sometimes, the catch varies from it, different tides.

Scull-DeArme y: Are there partnerships that would improve the quality of your work here?

Liebig: Just go catch shrimp. This is probably why it's one uncontrolled fishery there is, I mean, because we're not wiping the species out. The reason we're not wiping them out is they don't let us go where they breed. I mean, we're restricted half a mile off-shore; don't go back up in the back bays or anything else. I do live bait, but I don't even use a bait license because the restrictions are so heavy because they're protecting those shrimp. They're protecting the grounds where the shrimp breed and everything else. If you got a bait license, you can go in there where you can't go. But the way I do it, I just use my commercial license.

Scull-DeArme y: Unfortunately, they did not protect it from the oil.

Liebig: Nope.

Scull-DeArmey: If you could tell everyone anything about this living marine environment in the Gulf of Mexico, what do you think people need to know about? (1:29:18.7)

Liebig: Eat more seafood, and don't be afraid to pay for it. It's seasonal. I mean, if the people make a living, if you like seafood, and you like the marine stuff, pay for it. I mean, I've seen it. That's why I quit selling shrimp. You can get a steak 365 days out of the year, and you'll pay nine dollars a pound for a rib-eye steak. A jumbo shrimp is better than the rib-eye steak, and they just don't want to pay for it. I mean, I imagine people in northern states don't mind it, but the people that live on the coastal communities, it just turns into, "How cheap can they get them for?" But eat more seafood.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Are you familiar with a dead zone in the Gulf?

Liebig: Not really. You hear about it, but not too—you just hear articles about it, and read this and that.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you think the threats are to the living marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico?

Liebig: As far as annihilating it?

Scull-DeArmey: Any threats to the health, or any way you read the question.

Liebig: Healthwise, there's nothing you can do. Mother Nature's going to do whatever she's going to do, unless manmade stuff does it. I mean, that's pollution is really the only thing that'd die it. Mother Nature's red tide, I guess, whatever they call that, red tide or whatever. I mean if it's something that's coming from pollution or something, they need to fix it. But if we don't pollute it, (1:30:40.2) it's natural. It's been here for years and years, hundreds and hundreds and thousands of years. I mean, Mother Nature's pretty tough.

Scull-DeArmey: Did it worry you at all, the chemical mix that came from Katrina's surge, coming back out into the Gulf of Mexico?

Liebig: Worried everybody I tried to sell shrimp to. (laughter) I was catching the heck out of shrimp, and they were like, "Can I eat those shrimp?" I was like, "Yeah. If Mississippi's going to let me come out here and catch these shrimp, they're OK." I mean, I don't know what to say on that. Didn't really concern me none.

Scull-DeArmey: Didn't seem to kill any shrimp.

Liebig: No. If anything they did better. I mean, like I said, it didn't hurt—Katrina didn't hurt the fishery. I don't see where it did. I mean, we caught shrimp like

wildfire after it. The year after it—well, we left them oysters alone a couple of years—we had a good oyster year. And like I said, we moved a lot of oysters and stuff to add to that, but I don't see where it messed the industry up much. Not as bad as BP's oil well did (1:31:40.2) because now, I mean, look at first year, first white shrimp season since BP. Now, last year after the oil, we did have a decent white shrimp year.

Scull-DeArmey: But they were already grown.

Liebig: We've already been told by different scientists and this and that, that what I'm hearing out of it is, "You'll have a good first crop right after it, but it's from that point on that you're going to see the changes."

Scull-DeArmey: Because the estuaries is where the nymphs of the shrimp are, and those estuaries have been polluted by the oil.

Liebig: Uh-huh, exactly. I mean, next year, watch there not be a brown shrimp. And then what's going to happen?

Scull-DeArmey: The little nymph is more vulnerable, actually.

Liebig: Oh, yeah, it's just a little, bitty—

Scull-DeArmey: Because it's just like a human [embryo]. It's got fewer cells that are going to divide and reproduce, so it—

Liebig: The next three years'll be the years to watch. If we don't have no brown shrimp next year, when we were catching what pocket they had, 4000 pounds a day right here, for a couple of days—they were catching real good—then you'll know. I mean, unless they go hire some BP scientists.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. You know what, unfortunately, I see, is that there are such a plethora of imported shrimp, (1:32:48.4) they're just—

Liebig: Everywhere. They got antibiotics that's illegal to use in the United States.

Scull-DeArmey: They're probably 85 percent of the shrimp market in this country, so people are—

Liebig: Yeah, they are! Go to Wal-Mart. Look at every bag on Wal-Mart's shelf, and it's going to say "Thailand, Vietnam, China," everything.

Scull-DeArmey: So BP could kill every shrimp in the Gulf of Mexico, and people would still be eating imported shrimp, and they just wouldn't care.

Liebig: They don't even know it. They don't know it! When BP's oil well hit, Jerry,

this guy that's got the seafood place right here, people were going crazy, buying shrimp, and they were buying frozen shrimp that's been packed in the freezer for a few months on a freezer boat. All they know is, "I got to get my last little bit." And they're frozen shrimp; wasn't even fresh shrimp, but they were just buying it up. But I think if the people knew more—but people don't want to pay (1:33:34.3) for seafood! It comes down to that. Shrimp is just one thing that people, especially people that live near coast land, they just—we got people come from Jackson and stuff, it's a haggling game to them. And you're over here, going, "Man, I'm paying three dollars a gallon, and twenty-five cents a gallon for fuel. I'm paying ten dollars a block of ice. I used to pay a dollar, fifty for fuel. I used to pay six dollars for a block of ice. And this is the same shrimp, the same size I was catching, and I just want what I was getting then." But it got worse.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. And it doesn't have any antibiotics in it.

Liebig: Yeah, I mean it's—but if you look, I think the price—I'm trying to think of what it was. I had 400 maybe. I think it was fifty-five-cent-a-pound it got down to. That's what they got down to, and that was two quarters for a pound of shrimp. I told Shorty I was selling shrimp for a quarter a piece. I said, "Shorty, that's two shrimp!" So we got all our shrimp; we got our live shrimp; it was funny. We made a few little drags, and man, (1:34:29.1) it's hard when you're not set up right to really catch some small shrimp. You got to salt-barrel them, get the fish out of them. It's a lot of work to make a little bit of money. If you're only making fifty cent a pound, you not only got to catch that much shrimp, you got to catch, cull, ice, and unload that much shrimp for fifty cent a pound, sixty cent a pound. When we got done, then we went over here and made a little drag, had another good, little drag, and broke the cable. Got all our trawls back on the reef.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, no.

Liebig: We knew the cable was about to break. I was like, "Well, let's go dump these shrimp off." And I dumped four-hundred-and-eighty-something, seventy-something pounds, and I had a \$254 check. And I brought that back, and my deckhand looked at that because he knows all he made out of that shrimp's \$254, half went to the boat. What's that, \$125? Then the \$125 split, he made like seventy bucks to catch 500 pounds of shrimp.

Scull-DeArmey: It's pretty sad.

Liebig: Shorty said, "We going to stick to doing what we do best."

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah, bait.

Liebig: We sat there and watched them boats where we were, back in the corner at the time. And he said, "What if they catching shrimp?" I said, "You want to go drag on them shrimp?" "No." We'll wait for this next bait customer to come. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Do you think you're impacted much by regulations? Can you think of how? (1:35:39.5)

Liebig: Yeah. Every fishery is impacted by regulations. But if you didn't have them, no telling what would be. If you didn't have TED regulations, there probably wouldn't be a turtle left. So you going to have to regulate some. If you don't regulate something, it's just going to go to the end. I mean, you turn a bunch of people loose with no regulations, what's going to happen? Overfished to death. I mean, turn us out, give us no regulations where we can go catch wherever the shrimp are, we're going to go find them, small, big, or large, and then harvest them. And if they didn't regulate oysters, we'd catch every oyster out there. That's the bad thing about some fishermen; they want to make the buck, and that's it. They don't look down the road of it. That's why I tried to build this. I want something substantial that over the years, I got a business, not just a boat where I can go catch shrimp when I need shrimp. I got a steady business coming in. It was a good choice. I like it.

Scull-DeArme y: How have you been affected by the importation of seafood that's marketed in the US? (1:36:33.7)

Liebig: Terrible! Shoot, no. You won't see me sell shrimp to that factory ever again! I won't even catch them when they're small, again. I mean it's just not worth it to me to do all that work.

Scull-DeArme y: Because the imported seafood is cheaper?

Liebig: Yeah! You need to do that for this study. You need to find out what the going shrimp price was ten years ago, fifteen years ago, and etcetera, etcetera, but compare that to the fuel. And figure an average, fifty-foot boat burns ten gallons of fuel an hour. And compare that price, like what the price of fuel then was, now, how much more an hour it was because I mean, it's just shot it out.

Scull-DeArme y: I don't understand. They have to ship those shrimp over. They have to pay fuel costs. I mean, how is it working out that it's so much cheaper?

Liebig: It must be. You got to figure what it costs that boat, \$400 a night, to go out and catch shrimp, when they could raise it in a pond. They don't have the fuel; they don't have the boat, none of that. But they inject it with antibiotics that are illegal in the States to use, and they still get away with it.

Scull-DeArme y: They're not supposed to, but they do still get away with it.

Liebig: Yeah, you know they do. They got to deny it.

Scull-DeArme y: What are your hopes and fears for the future of the seafood industry?

Liebig: I hope it gets better, is all I can do. One way to make the industry better is to do something with the fuel. (1:37:49.4) I mean, some kind of, I don't care if it's a government kickback. Give us something back. I don't know if they'd do it for the—I know they always help the farmers out. That's the crazy thing. You always hear about, "Bad crop? Government's going to help pay." They get a bad crop, the government helps pay. We get a bad crop? (gestures) Hard!

Scull-DeArme y: No help.

Liebig: None. No. We get a bad crop or good crop, we have no help whatsoever.

Scull-DeArme y: Can you see any hopes of the shrimpers and fishermen forming lobbyists to help to get those kinds of subsidies?

Liebig: Fishermen are not wealthy. Some of the things, the fishermen are not really educated collegewise. I mean, you don't have somebody with a three-year college degree out here catching shrimp.

Hester: If you had a voice, an association—

Liebig: They trying to get one little group going. I don't think it's going to get much headway. I mean, you got to have money, funds and all that. And there's just not enough of them left here. I mean, you're looking at it. You walk around these piers, and it's dead.

Scull-DeArme y: What lessons have you learned in your experience as a fisherman that you could share with an audience? (1:39:05.5)

Liebig: You work your butt off. That's one of the main things. I mean, it's hard on the family life because you out there on the water. When we shrimp, we don't take no time off. And you work all night long, shrimping. Then you either sell shrimp during the day, or sleep. So you don't get much family time. You got to discipline yourself. I mean, you really do. Luckily, I didn't have kids with my first wife. But now I got one, so I'm going to work a little less. Be a little smarter, and hopefully, now all the kinks worked out of all this. It works good.

Scull-DeArme y: I interviewed a shrimper named Fred [Frank] Parker in Biloxi, and he actually saw it as an advantage with his kids because on the seasons that he wasn't—

Liebig: Oh, yeah!

Scull-DeArme y: —as busy, he was free. He didn't have to go to that forty-hour-a-week job.

Liebig: Yeah, and I mean, that's the good thing, you know? If you can make the money. But you got to make enough money to have that free time.

Scull-DeArme y: Although I guess it was just in the winter when he wasn't shrimping, that he had the time off.

Liebig: Yeah. He probably doesn't oyster.

Scull-DeArme y: I don't think he oystered. He ran crab traps, but I don't know what their season is.

Liebig: The goal to it, you know, if you can make enough at it, is to take the time off. Work hard when the shrimp are there. When them shrimp are there, you don't miss a day. You don't miss a day because there are going to be way many more days that the fish are not going to be there to take. Mine's more slow-and-steady. Like I said, I sat there and watched them boats catch 4000 pounds a day. They were cracking them. Usually they were getting twenty boxes, which is 2000 pounds a day. But I just do a little different business. I just got out of that drag, drag, drag, shrimp, shrimp because I mean, we used to work all night, sell shrimp all day, work all night, sell shrimp all day, just to make a dollar. I mean, if you added the hours up, it was cheaper to go to McDonald's and spend eighteen hours of your day there and make more money (laughter) without the hassle. It just, it's expensive.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. Well, the last question that we always ask on an interview is this question: is there anything you'd like to put on the record that we have not talked about?

Liebig: That's about it. Tell NOAA, "Kick BP's ass."

Scull-DeArme y: Tell NOAA, "Kick BP's ass." OK. I'm glad we got that one on there. (laughter)

Liebig: I mean, the way they did it was terrible!

Scull-DeArme y: I know, yeah.

Liebig: I mean, I'm a prime example. I own four boats, a bait business, and deckhands got almost what I got. I got people towing one or two boats that only do a little bit, and I work usually several months straight out the year at this. This is my livelihood.

Scull-DeArme y: It seems like it could have been—I'm going to go ahead and turn this off.

Liebig: I'm not a sue-happy person, but I—

(end of interview)