

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

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Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Robert McDuffie

Interviewer: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

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An Oral History with Robert McDuffie, Volume 1043

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Biography

Mr. Robert McDuffie was born on March 19, 1941, in Semmes, Alabama, to Robert Lee McDuffie (born April 1, 1905) and Oren Moss McDuffie. He and his wife Jerry were married in Moss Point, Mississippi. They have three children, Stephanie Swinea (born January 2, 1961), Jeffrey McDuffie (born January 18, 1963) and David McDuffie (born March 1, 1970). McDuffie has fished all of his life for subsistence. At the time of this interview he had retired from operating heavy equipment for the Jackson County Road Department, and from housekeeping at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College.

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AN ORAL HISTORY
with
ROBERT McDUFFIE

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Robert McDuffie and is taking place on March 6, 2012. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArmey.

Scull-DeArmey: 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/BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster Project. The interview is with Robert McDuffie, and it is taking place on March 6, 2012, about 2 p.m. in Pecan [pronounced pea-can], Mississippi. If you're a Southerner, I guess you would say Pecan [pronounced puh-kahn], Mississippi. But it is pronounced Pecan [pronounced pea-can] by many.

McDuffie: Yeah, Pecan.

Scull-DeArmey: The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArmey. And first I'd like to thank you, Robert, for taking time to talk to me today. And I'm going to get a little bit of background information about you. So I'm going to ask you for the record, could you state your name, please?

McDuffie: Robert McDuffie.

Scull-DeArmey: And for the record, how do you spell your name?

McDuffie: R-O-B-E-R-T, M-C-D-U-F-F-I-E.

Scull-DeArmey: And when were you born?

McDuffie: Nineteen forty-one.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you have a month and day?

McDuffie: Yeah. The third, nineteenth.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, so March 19. You got a birthday coming up.

McDuffie: Oh, yeah; be seventy-one.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow! Are you doing good for seventy-one?

McDuffie: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Good. And where were you born?

McDuffie: Semmes, Alabama.

Scull-DeArme y: That's S-E-M-M-E-S?

McDuffie: M-E-S.

Scull-DeArme y: And where did you grow up? (0:01:37.4)

McDuffie: Well, we moved to Bayou Cumbest in 1951. And I grew up around Bayou Cumbest area and in that area, Moss Point.

Scull-DeArme y: Tell me about your childhood.

McDuffie: Well, I went to school at Orange Lake Elementary and went to Moss Point High School. And we left; I didn't graduate. I think I left Moss Point in 1958. And me and my wife, we were married in 1960, and we been married now, will be fifty-two years the eighteenth of this month.

Scull-DeArme y: Congratulations.

McDuffie: And we had three children. And we raised them, and now they have families of their own. And I worked for Ingalls Shipyard about three different times over the years, (0:03:14.3) and then I worked for Jackson County; I worked for the road department. We were with them for probably thirty years. And I retired in 2005, right before [Hurricane Katrina]. There's so many of them, I can't keep up with them.

Scull-DeArme y: I know. (laughter)

McDuffie: And my wife, she retired from the Gulf Coast Community College, and we're enjoying our retirement. And basically that's about the biggest extent of it.

Scull-DeArme y: Are you going to be too cold? Do you need to get a coat or a jacket or something? Are you going to be too cold?

McDuffie: No, no, no.

Scull-DeArme y: I don't want to make you sick.

McDuffie: No. It's not bothering me.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. When and where did you learn to fish? (0:04:27.2)

McDuffie: Well, I learned Bayou Cumbest. We learned how to fish for (0:04:34.0) white trout and ground mullet, flounders, basically any, just about any type fish we could catch.

Scull-DeArme y: What would you catch besides those three?

McDuffie: Well, we got mullet. I wasn't a commercial fisherman or nothing, but we just fished for the sport of it and for food. (0:04:59.4) And we just basically, when we were growing up, that's where we learned how to fish and to do all of that.

Scull-DeArme y: How old were you when you did your earliest fishing?

McDuffie: I was probably, oh, fifteen, sixteen, something like that.

Scull-DeArme y: Who taught you?

McDuffie: I just basically taught myself.

Scull-DeArme y: What kind of equipment were you using when you were fifteen? (0:05:46.8)

McDuffie: Well, we used poles, cane poles and then later on rod and reels.

Scull-DeArme y: For someone who, in two hundred years, might not know what a cane pole is, can you describe it a little bit for the record? (0:06:04.3)

McDuffie: Well, it's just a long pole. You can get them any size you want, twelve, fourteen foot long. It's just a long, straight pole. And it's cane they grow, and they take them, and they'll try them, and then they'll varnish them and shellac them where they'll last a long time that way.

Scull-DeArme y: How is a line attached to it?

McDuffie: Well, we tied it; the line was tied on the end of the pole, and basically you had a cork and sinker and your hook.

Scull-DeArme y: What kinds of hooks did you use?

McDuffie: Well, we had different sizes. They were number threes, number fours, or maybe number twos, something like that. A long shank hook, some were a silver color. Some were a different type color. I can't find the word I want to say. But anyway, they were just basically a standard hook.

Scull-DeArme y: Now, some hooks have more than one barb.

McDuffie: Well, that's a treble hook. They outlawed (0:07:44.9) those; that's against the law now, to use a treble hook. But we did use those at one time.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, what's the advantage of using a treble hook?

McDuffie: I guess it gives you more of an opportunity to catch a fish.

Scull-DeArmey: Because you hook it more than once?

McDuffie: Well, you got two barbs or three barbs, if you get it in a fish mouth, he's more than likely to get all three barbs.

Scull-DeArmey: Whereas if he's on just one—

McDuffie: If you just got one, you just going to have that one hook in him.

Scull-DeArmey: Do they get away often on one hook?

McDuffie: Well, not too often. Sometimes, you know. If he got off of it, you always, when you throwed it back out there, you had another one waiting on it, so. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: What was the line made out of?

McDuffie: Well, you could get nylon line. Then they had, I guess you could say, a plastic, like a filament like they used when they had those nets, when they set those nets to catch a mullet, but all of that's been outlawed. But most of it now, it's a plastic line. You can get any kind of line you want.

Scull-DeArmey: What did y'all use when you were fifteen?

McDuffie: Mostly nylon, yeah. (0:09:19.5)

Scull-DeArmey: And what kind of bait? (0:09:22.6)

McDuffie: We used dead shrimp, live shrimp. There was squid. And let's see. What else was there? Well, back then, that's basically about it, was shrimp and squid.

Scull-DeArmey: How big were they, the shrimps and squids?

McDuffie: They were just small, probably an inch long, the squid. And then the shrimp, they could be different size, two or three inches long, something like that.

Scull-DeArmey: Where did you get them? Did you catch them yourselves?

McDuffie: No, no. We'd buy them. We would buy them, at usually the place we launched. They sold the bait.

Scull-DeArmey: What kind of boat were you in? (0:10:24.7)

McDuffie: We was in probably a fourteen-foot, wooden boat.

Scull-DeArmey: How deep of water would you need for your boat?

McDuffie: Two or three foot. Say, three foot at least, three foot and deeper. And just as long as you could run your motor.

Scull-DeArmey: About what size motor?

McDuffie: Best I can remember, we didn't have big motors back then. Probably maybe a ten horse, something like that, twelve, something in that area.

Scull-DeArmey: Can you remember about what you would pay for your bait when you were fifteen? (0:11:18.6)

McDuffie: Probably a dollar the container, fifty cents to a dollar, somewhere in that area.

Scull-DeArmey: And what would it cost for the same bait today, do you think?

McDuffie: It would cost you probably three to four, maybe five dollars for some of the same containers.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What about fuel for your ten-horsepower motor?

McDuffie: Well, I mean, you had about a six-gallon tank, and you used regular gas, and you mixed your oil with your gas, as you do today [2012].

Scull-DeArmey: What was fuel, then? Do you remember?

McDuffie: The fuel? Just regular gasoline.

Scull-DeArmey: What did it cost? Do you remember, when you were fifteen?

McDuffie: Yeah. It probably run fifteen, sixteen cents a gallon.

Scull-DeArmey: Golly. (laughter) Now, today I've seen on the cost it's about \$3.60? Is that right?

McDuffie: Anywheres from \$3.50, fifty-five, fifty-seven, fifty-nine, and it's getting worse.

Scull-DeArme y: I went to the cheapest gas in Hattiesburg this morning to fill up, and it was \$3.52. That's the cheapest you can get in Hattiesburg.

McDuffie: Well, now, I saw a sign this morning; it was \$3.47, \$3.48 in Gautier.

Scull-DeArme y: Wow. Excellent. Fill up on that.

McDuffie: They usually the cheapest. But I got gas the other day; I paid \$3.49 for it. But anyway, all of that's going to be history in just a little while. We going to be paying over \$4.00 before long. But you know, they keep saying that this Iran stuff is the talk of war or attacking Iran or the cost of oil, the demands, it's going to push the price higher. And should the United States and Israel attack Iran, we won't none of us be able to afford gas. But I'm hoping they can work things out without having to go to that. But you're dealing with people that all they think about is killing, killing people. And the man's done told them that he'd like to wipe Israel off the map. Well, that's going to be a big job because he'll never do it, not him or any of those over there because that's God's chosen people. And he'll take care of those people. But this morning, as of this morning, we're all on shaky ground as far as that part of it goes, but all it takes is one wrong move or one whatever you want to call it. But somebody's always wanting to be the big cheese or the big wheel, or they want to be in power. And you know how that stuff goes. But anyway, here we are. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. I hope you're right. I hope we can avoid getting involved in another war.

McDuffie: Well, Obama, of course, I ain't got no confidence in. I'm going to be right up front with you. I don't care for the man because he's got an agenda that don't fit America's style. But he said that we was giving it time for the diplomacy to work, which I hope it does, but I got my doubts because I believe Israel, they getting ready. When they get ready, they done said they wasn't telling nobody. When they got ready to move, they going to do it. When they strike, when they strike these people, them nuclear sites and things, it's going to be on then. And personally I don't think that life will ever be the same, again. I think we all going down the tube. According to Bible prophesy, we're living on borrowed time right now, and America has kicked the only thing out the back door that meant anything, and that's God Almighty. When the federal judges, they want to dictate that we can't say, pray at football games and have prayer in the schools and all of this stuff, I mean, where are we headed? They killing unborn babies. Oh, somebody's going to pay for that. One of the seven things that God hates is shedding of innocent blood, but I see it, and it's every day on the news where somebody killed somebody just in a cold blood. I mean, we have become a nation of heathens. I hate to say that, but the land that we love and that this is our home, but they's a lot of people that afraid to lay down at night to go to sleep because you never know who's going to try to break in on you. But I'll tell you this much. When I lay my head in the pillow at night, I don't worry about it because I'm in his arms. He's protecting me. And he's the only hope for America, but America don't

want him. Oh, it's sad. But I'm seeing our—listen; the Earth is a beautiful, beautiful—oh, when I look across yonder, look at that. Ain't that a beautiful sight—

Scull-DeArmey: It is.

McDuffie: —to behold? (0:18:08.5) There's fish. There's oysters. There's crabs. It would sustain life, keep people from starving to death and going hungry, but what if God sends, what if he sends something in the water that kills all of this? We can't have nothing to eat out of this. I mean, it's possible.

Scull-DeArmey: I'm afraid it's possible humans are going to do it.

McDuffie: Well, that's just like, you get these terrorists, they want to poison the drinking water. They would like to poison food. They'd like to kill us all. And we haven't done nothing to those people, but they hate us because that's just the way it is.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, I think it's because they believe we're infidels.

McDuffie: Well, listen. When Jacob and Esau, Jacob got Esau's birthright. He stole his birthright. From that day to this day, I believe this all started, and that's been thousands of years ago. That all started. And Esau, I guess he was a hunter, but he traded his birthright for a bowl of soup. Well, you know the story. But the Arab nations, they hate the Jews. They hate the Jews with a passion, and I guess that's where that comes from. I mean, why would they hate those people for? The Israelite people, they were good people, but unfortunately they disobeyed God. They got punished, and he scattered them all over the world. But now, they're going back to Israel. But it's something to think about. I mean, how did all of this get started? Something started it, and if I can't live with a race of people and live in peace, I'm in bad shape. But these people want to kill all the Jews. The Arab people, the Muslim, their Muslim religion, unfortunately their religion teaches them to kill, but Jehovah God, that is our God. That's my God, Jehovah God. He teaches life. You give life. Don't take a life, but help keep from taking a life because it's precious in God's sight because he give it to us, not man. Nobody but God give us the life and the breath that we breathe. And I don't have to fear nobody because he's my master. He takes care of me. I wasn't always this a-way. Used to, when I was younger, I was crazy, didn't have no sense. I drank. I did my things out yonder, but there come a time in my life that God Almighty, one night, this was in 2002. It was New Year's Eve, and I'd built me a big, old fire. I had a couple friends coming over, and I was standing by this fire, and I had a fifth of rum. That's what I was drinking. And as I stood there by that fire, oh, it was hot. As I stood there by that fire, a voice spoke to my mind just as clear as if you spoke, "Put your hand in the fire." And I reached my hand as far as I could. I couldn't even get near the fire. I had to draw it back. And this voice said to me, "Think about what hellfire and brimstone's going to be like. That's where you're going if you don't straighten up." When them friends come over, I told them, I said, "Boys, y'all see this bottle of rum I'm drinking? You'll never see me again with it. Never." I said, "As of tonight, I'm going to take my last drink. I'm doing away with

it, but I'm going to let the good Lord straighten my life out, and I'm going to amount to something. I'm on my way." And that's been a little over nine years ago.

Scull-DeArme y: That's wonderful.

McDuffie: Well, the thing about it is, we all—God created and made all of us, and he don't want none of us to perish. His word tells you that. He sent Jesus Christ on the cross to shed his blood that no man would have to die and go to that awful place. But he died for all people's sins. But our nation has become more evil and wicked. The almighty dollar, our politicians are stealing it from little ones to big. Business people in the business world, they are corrupted. It is sad. It's sad, but where are we going? Where are we headed? The only place that I see we're headed, down. But God is fixing to bring judgment on America. It's coming. Believe me. And I'll tell you this much, too. Before this year's out, I personally—nobody's told me this, or nobody—it's a feeling that I have in my heart that something bad is fixing to happen in this country in 2012. I don't know when, where, or how, or what it'll be about, but I believe it's coming. America better pray because it's going to be the only hope that we have. But anyhow, I just wanted to tell you that.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Well, I'm glad you shared that.

McDuffie: We trying to live right. I believe in being gun-barrel straight, straight as an arrow. And if a man's heart ain't straight, then he is nothing. He's nothing. And God is my pilot. He directs my path. I don't lean to my own understanding, but I'm leaning to him. He directs my path because I'm going to do what he says. I sure am. Oh, I'm not perfect. Believe me. No man is, but we have hope.

Scull-DeArme y: That's what gets you out of the bed in the morning. Isn't it?

McDuffie: I pray in the morning. I pray in the evening, and I pray that God will help us all. Not just me, but I want to see other people. I would love to see them do better. I would like to see them have life and have it more abundantly. And I mean, this is not about just yourself, but it's you're concerned about all people, even the people in the jungles that don't even know him and never heard of him. You're still concerned because they're human beings, and God don't want nobody to perish. But I'm glad this evening that I'm headed in the right direction. Should I die, should I leave this Earth before in the morning, I'm going to a better place only because my faith and my hope and my trust is in the Almighty God, my Jehovah God. But if you read the Old Testament, when God brought those people out of Egypt, and he parted the Red Sea, and they got into that wilderness, all the things—their clothes never wore out in forty years. Their shoes didn't wear out, and even when they got—they forgot all the things that God had done and blessed them with and kept them, and he wound up opening a hole, and it swallowed some of them up. And then he told the rest of them, he said, "You'll never see the promised land."

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. It was the children who did. Right?

McDuffie: Yeah. “Those that’s twenty years and younger will see the promised land, but the older, at twenty years up, will never see it.” But I mean, it’s a great story, but I have hope.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, a life without hope is no life.

McDuffie: Well, he’s the last hope because let me tell you something. Man will fail you. Man is flesh and blood just like me, and flesh and blood is subject to fail because we’re human. And humans, they just fail. That’s the way it is. But anyway, so much for that.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Well, thanks for sharing that. Someone will read that or hear that someday, and it will have meaning for them, also.

McDuffie: Well, hey, hopefully we can say something of wisdom, wisdom, knowledge. We got to have that.

Scull-DeArmey: We’ve talked a little bit about the species that you gathered. And you did not fish commercially, but you fished for sustenance, subsistence fishing. (0:28:23.3)

McDuffie: Yeah, for food and for fun.

Scull-DeArmey: Could you put into words what that meant to you and your family? (0:28:29.9)

McDuffie: Well, there’s nothing better than to go out and whatever, if you’re fishing, you were oystering, or whatever you were doing, it was nothing greater to come home and clean it and then prepare it for the meal and set down to the table and enjoy this good, fresh seafood. There’s nothing greater. I love it.

Scull-DeArmey: Free breakfast, huh?

McDuffie: Oh, yeah. And a lot of people, oysters, if there was any left after the meal and got up the next morning, and they were cold, I loved them old oysters. I could eat them cold just like I could hot.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. How were they cooked? (0:29:20.3)

McDuffie: Fried. Well, a lot of people eat them raw, but I never could create the taste for raw oysters, but we always put them in meal and fried them, and that’s how we eat them.

Scull-DeArmey: What kind of meal and oil did you use?

McDuffie: Cornmeal and whatever kind of oil we needed or had at the moment.

Scull-DeArme y: What would be some examples?

McDuffie: Some of that corn oil, peanut oil, stuff like that, just whatever we had when we were getting it ready. Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: So would you say that all your life, since you've been fifteen that you've done that kind of fishing?

McDuffie: Yeah, yeah. Course, I don't do as much today, but we are in the process of—see, I fished here before, but Bayou Cumbest is where I usually go out from, and that's on over toward the west over here. And when the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill come (0:30:39.6) in what was that, 2010? But anyway I had fixed my boat up to go floundering, which I did flounder two times that year, and then the oil spill come, and they shut us down. They wouldn't let us go out there. But I floundered right in the main bayou and got enough flounders, got all I wanted to have a meal. But now, I haven't done any since, and I mentioned about getting a public boat launch. (0:31:14.3) This is to assure that we would have a place to go and launch because the man that owns this boat launch down there at the end of the road, at five o'clock in the evening, he shuts the gate, and you can't go in or out. Well, floundering, you do it at night, and I haven't done any since because of that because I could launch my boat somewhere else, maybe on the other side of the bayou, but if I come back, I might not have nothing left; my truck and my boat trailer, they'd probably steal everything off of it. But we're trying to get this boat launch, a public boat launch where we'll have access anytime we want it.

Scull-DeArme y: Who would finance that?

McDuffie: My understanding is that the Bureau of Marine Conservation, conservation people will probably—I think they call that the tidelands funds. I think that. Now, I'm not sure, but I think they get their money out of the tideland funds, and they build wharfs. They build boat launches, that kind of stuff.

Scull-DeArme y: For the record, Robert, in case in two hundred years, people don't know what a boat launch is, could you just describe one?

McDuffie: Yeah. It's a place; usually they'll have a wharf on each side. It'll be a concrete slab into the water. It'll be a concrete slab, and then they'll be wharf on each side of this slab that you can walk on and step down into the boat or get out of your boat onto the wharf. And usually that's basically the way that runs.

Scull-DeArme y: And for the record, what is a wharf?

McDuffie: A wharf, they got piling, and then they got—it's board where you can walk. Some of them are short. Some are long, different sizes for different places.

Scull-DeArmey: That's like a pier?

McDuffie: Yeah, like a pier. A pier would be basically a part of that.

Scull-DeArmey: When I was in high school, if somebody was annoying you, it was a cool thing to say, "Why don't you take a long walk off a short pier?" (laughter)

McDuffie: I heard that. Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: When you were fifteen and you would catch a fish on a line and pole, where did you put the fish until you were ready to leave? (0:34:08.9)

McDuffie: Well, if you had some kind of a box with ice in it. I can't remember back then if we had—course, they got ice coolers now. But I don't know. Back then I don't think they had ice coolers. They may have had some kind of a box or something, and if they didn't, then they would stick them somewhere or another where, maybe put them on a fish stringer and put them overboard where they'd be in the cool later.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, for the record, again, can you describe a fish stringer?

McDuffie: Yeah. It's a long string. It's got a eye on one end, and when you put your first fish on there, you loop it through that eye, and that way, that fish can't never get off there. And then when you fill up the stringer, then they all there.

Scull-DeArmey: About how long is a stringer?

McDuffie: It's about, maybe six foot.

Scull-DeArmey: That would hold a lot of fish.

McDuffie: So it depends. You can get them shorter, get them longer, whichever.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, if I remember correctly, when I was a kid, my dad would put them on the stringer through the mouth and out the gill?

McDuffie: Now, that's basically, that stringer, that's what we would use. You'd put it through the mouth; it'd come out the gill. You'd loop it through that eye, and that first fish, see, he held everything else from there on. You didn't have to worry about the fish, losing them.

Scull-DeArmey: And they stay alive?

McDuffie: Yeah. Well, some of them does, just according to if they swallow the hook. What we call, “swallow the hook,” it goes down in, on further down in their mouth, and if you try to tear it out, it kills the fish. The fish don’t live as long.

Scull-DeArme y: So what would you guys do, just cut it and leave it in there?

McDuffie: On the fish stringer?

Scull-DeArme y: If they swallowed the hook.

McDuffie: No, no. We’d pull that hook out of them, but now, see they got pliers and things, a tool, you can reach down in there and get that hook out, on down in their mouth. You just got to take a little time a-doing it, but without killing the fish.

Scull-DeArme y: If the fish was dead on the stringer, how long could you keep it before you had to eat it?

McDuffie: Well, usually you gone a couple of hours, two hours, three hours, just depending on how the fish were biting. If you had a good string of them, and they were biting real good, you could come on in, and you’d be safe.

Scull-DeArme y: Could you tell if a fish was bad to eat when you were cleaning it?

McDuffie: No. I mean, I never did run into any—now, I’ll say this. I’ve seen fish that would have sores on their bodies. (0:37:22.0) I don’t know what that was caused from, but we always threw those back. I wouldn’t eat nothing that looked like that, but most of the time, you run into one every now and then, but not too often.

Scull-DeArme y: You talked about floundering, floundering at nighttime. For the record, can you describe how that’s done? (0:37:47.2)

McDuffie: Well, we’ve got two lights. They have two to three lights. Some of them has four, depending on whatever they want, but they are stationary on the front of the boat. Then you got a generator that hooks up to these lights, and when you run these generators, those lights all light up, and you can see, just anything that moves; you can see it. It lights it up like daylight.

Scull-DeArme y: Are the lights directed—

McDuffie: Directed down into the water. You could fix some of them to shine further this way, some out that way, and right down to the water. And you pretty much got it covered when you got that many lights. But I always use two lights. That’s all I need.

Scull-DeArme y: What depth would the water be?

McDuffie: Well, I'd stay about three or four foot off of the bank, and that's where you going to get your flounders, up next to the bank. You push yourself along with your gig. I got a gig about ten foot long, and I push myself along. And then when that light—I'm looking. I'm standing up where I can see, and when I see that flounder, I just ease up there to him and sock it to him.

Scull-DeArmey: Are you looking on the bottom?

McDuffie: Yeah. He's laying on the bottom. That flounder'll be laying. Sometimes they hard to see. Sometimes they'll get in there, and they'll flounce around in there, and that dirt and stuff'll cover them up. You have to look hard sometimes, or you'll overlook them. But sometimes too, where a flounder has laid, and he's no longer there, it'll make a bed. I've been fooled many times. You think it's a flounder laying there, and it's nothing there, but it was a bed where he did lay. But anyway, it's a lot of fun, a lot of fun. I enjoy it.

Scull-DeArmey: What's on the end of the gig?

McDuffie: You got a prong. Some has one. Some has three. Some has four. Mine has got three prongs on it, and it's a stainless steel prong. That way, see, it won't rust. Just regular iron will rust, but stainless steel, saltwater won't make it rust. Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: This is Bayou Heron, right?

McDuffie: This is Bayou Heron.

Scull-DeArmey: Is it pretty salty here?

McDuffie: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's pretty salty. There's some fine oysters out yonder. [Dog comes by.]

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever sell anything that you caught to anybody, even as a kid?

McDuffie: No. Well, I take that back. Yeah, oysters.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah? Tell me about that. (0:41:20.3)

McDuffie: See, back yonder years ago before the BMR [Bureau of Marine Resources] was, we could come out here and go wherever you wanted to, and you could take an area, and you wanted to oyster in that area, well, you got your oysters. If you got three or four sacks or bushel baskets or whatever you wanted, back then, we got them by the bushel. And we'd come in, and we'd open them. We may eat some of them out of that, and then we'd sell them. Back yonder a dollar a gallon or a dollar a quart; I can't remember exactly how much. But it wasn't all that much back then.

Scull-DeArmey: That was the opened ones, after you'd opened them?

McDuffie: Yeah. After you opened them, yeah, yeah. And if you sold them by the bushel, (0:42:22.2) you might get five dollars a basket, a bushel basket. But we liked to always open them and sell them because you get a little more out of it by doing that. But now, they cost you, oysters today cost you, oh, let's see, about eighty dollars or better a gallon, anywheres from eighty to a hundred dollars a gallon.

Scull-DeArmey: So from a dollar a gallon when you were how old?

McDuffie: Fifteen or sixteen.

Scull-DeArmey: Fifteen to a hundred dollars a gallon now.

McDuffie: From eighty to a hundred dollars a gallon. They're gold. But hey, the thing about it is, see, we used to could go out there and get all the oysters we wanted, (0:43:10.7) but since the BMR and the politicians have gotten in control, we can't do that anymore. And we have to buy—they usually getting them from the west side over there around Bay St. Louis and Louisiana. And I think they get some out of Texas, and they get some out of Alabama, but when you have to pay anywheres from forty-five to sixty dollars for a sack of them, then you have to charge. Say, if you get four to five quarts of oysters out of a sack, and you charging—last quart I bought was twenty-one dollars. If you charge twenty dollars, that's eighty dollars right there. So for a man that's doing that to make money, he's got to charge pretty good in order to pay for the money that he paid for this and then making him a profit. He's got to do good. But the way of life as I know it and you know it is slowly but surely being taken. Every day it's this, and every day it's that. I have never seen such—I've never heard of such things as are taking place and happening. Our politicians can't even run a race without slinging mud and cutting throats and backstabbing. I mean, where are we headed? We can't be going good. We got to be going bad. And that disturbs me just like our presidential race coming up. I mean, the GOP, they're up there slamming one another instead of saying, "If I'm elected, I propose we do this to help our people. We want jobs. We want the economy to grow. We want to do this," they're slamming one another.

Scull-DeArmey: Instead of sticking to the issues.

McDuffie: And the Democrats are sitting there—I'm not Democrat or Republican. I guess you could say I'm an independent, but I vote for the man; I don't vote for the party. The man that tells me that he's going to do what he intends to do, and he may be lying, and he may get my vote on that, but if he's telling the truth, I'm going to stick with that kind of stuff because all I have is his word. And you're no better than your word is. And unfortunately—once upon a time when they shook hands—if they lent you money, you shook hands. Now, you got to sign papers of all kinds, which, that's business because—

Scull-DeArme y: Pretty soon you're going to start having to give blood. (laughter)

McDuffie: I'm telling you. But the thing about it, where are we going? I mean, cannot people stop and smell the roses? Something is wrong. Something is happening.

Scull-DeArme y: If gas prices keep going up, people are going to be buying food and gas, and that's all they can afford, and all these other consumer products that our economy is built on, nobody's going to buy because they can't afford it.

McDuffie: Look at the people that are on minimum wage.

Scull-DeArme y: I don't know how they make it.

McDuffie: My heart breaks for these people.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. Yeah, me, too.

McDuffie: Oh, I wish I could help; I wish I could do something. But I can't because I'm nothing, but my heart is in the right place as far as they're concerned. These people, they only make minimum wage. OK. Gas is going up. When gas goes up, everything else is going to rise. OK. When all of this happens, where are these people going? I mean, they won't be able to afford to go to work. Well, how are they going to live? Our nation, they're wanting to—I'm getting off of it a little bit.

Scull-DeArme y: That's OK.

McDuffie: But our nation, that's what they're wanting: a socialist nation under the current administration. Our news media are so liberal until it hurts. What's wrong with being conservative? I believe in conservative. I mean, what I have at my house, if I got a little money in the bank, I'm conservative with it because I'm not going to throw it away because that's stupid. Why not be conservative on everything else to a certain degree? I'm like this, too. If I want a cold drink, I want to stop at the store and buy me a Coke, I'm not going to deny myself that even if it's a dollar and a half. If I want it that bad, I'll go ahead and buy it, but I mean, I'm not going to do it because I don't drink that many cold drinks anymore. I'm trying to stay away from them. Course we keep cold drinks in our icebox out under the shed, and my wife she drinks them Mountain Dew diet. I wish you could see that. Man, that woman! And she'll say, "I got to quit." And she'll quit a little bit, and then she's right back. I said, "Man!"

Scull-DeArme y: They've got a lot of caffeine in them.

McDuffie: I know they are, and she—well, anyway.

Scull-DeArmey: I'm addicted to caffeine. If I don't get two cups of coffee a day, I get a headache. I go into withdrawal.

McDuffie: I drink my coffee in the morning. And sometimes she might put on a pot of coffee during the day, but they drink that, what is it? That noncaffeinated.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, really? Yeah, decaf.

McDuffie: I mean, as far as myself, I could drink all except instant. I don't like instant. But the rest of it, I mean, I can drink it all, but anyway just—

Scull-DeArmey: Well, it's a good thing she's drinking decaf, if she's drinking Mountain Dew because she'd be crawling out of her skin with all that caffeine. (laughter)

McDuffie: Man, I just don't understand her, and I'll get on her about it and say, "I thought you was quitting." And, "Well"—(laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: It's hard to quit.

McDuffie: But anyway, make a long story short is I wanted to tell you, too, this. Where we're living at, at this day and hour, the stage is being set—I don't know if you've read the Bible and you understand what you're reading, but the stage is being set right now for what they call the antichrist. I know you've heard of that, and I know you've probably read it, but antichrist, what they going to do—and this antichrist, these Bible preachers, they believe that this antichrist is going to come out of the Mediterranean area. He's going to be part of the European Union. Well, we all heard of the European Union; that is the revised Roman empire. Britain's in it, France, all those, Germany; all of those are part of that. And there's just a little bit further to go, and they'll have just about all the nations in it. Very few that's not in it. But the antichrist, when he comes to power, and unless you are living right and you're doing right and your name is written in the lamb's book of life, the Bible says you will take that mark, three sixes. If you take that mark, there's no more hope for you. It's over. It's done. But people don't seem to pay nothing attention. I mean, hey, this thing's going to end. It's got to. Our economy is on the verge of collapse right now. Greece, you hear about them. They getting up a loan for this nation, that nation. And the European Union, they're getting this money together to bail them out of trouble. And no matter what they do, no matter what they say, no matter what they do, and no matter what they say, this thing, it's coming. And the only hope that I got is God Almighty. My name is written yonder. I have nothing to fear. Well, look at the tornadoes that they just had. Destruction, that's just a taste of what's coming. Earthquake, I heard the other day, yesterday, I believe, it was a earthquake in California, but it was a small one. They was one in Argentina, and they was some somewhere else they had. But let me tell you something. When God sends all this destruction upon mankind, there ain't going to be no place to hide. A complete family was wiped out in one of those storms. I forget now if it was Indiana, Ohio. A little

baby, just several months, what? Twelve, fifteen months old, it picked that child up, and they found it ten miles in a field. Well, it died.

Scull-DeArmev: She died, yeah.

McDuffie: Yeah. They took it off of life support. But the thing about it is this. Destruction is coming. He said, “When you see all of this coming,” he said, “It’s got to come. Don’t worry and don’t fear.” He said, “I’m in control.” But he said, “It is the beginning of sorrow.” And I’m telling you this evening; there is sorrow coming like we ain’t never thought about. I want to be ready because he’s going to take care of me. Hey, I got to die one day. This old body’s going to go back to the Earth. That’s all right. But I’m going yonder. I’m going to another place, another world. And it won’t be hellfire and brimstone.

Scull-DeArmev: Well, I know that’s comforting to you.

McDuffie: Hey, I’m telling you because blessed assurance. I got to have that assurance. If I walk with God and he walks with me, I have nothing to fear, nothing, not no man, what he can do to me, no matter what comes, no matter. A storm comes, if I lose my life, I’m just going to step off of this Earth, and I’m going to step into another world. Oh, it’s all coming. But I mean, if man would only—he said if people would repent of their wickedness, and I feel like he’s talking to the church. He wasn’t talking to the world. If people would repent and turn from their wicked ways, I’ll hear from heaven, and I’ll heal the land. But I’m telling you this evening, the church world is in a world of trouble. We are. We’re in trouble. How many people that go to church on Sunday morning, that while they at church, you wouldn’t believe what they do when they get home, how they talk. Bitter water and sweet water don’t run out of the same fountain. I hear men take God’s name in vain, and they say they’re living right. No, no. That’s one of the commandments. Thou shall not take the Lord’s name in vain. You don’t do them things. You have no desire to do that. After all he’s blessed me. He’s give me what I’ve got. I don’t have much, but I’ve got a lot more than some folks have got.

Scull-DeArmev: Just sitting here today is—what more could anybody want? It’s just incredible.

McDuffie: I’m telling you. Look what God Almighty made for us. But man, he’s devised every means to keep us from enjoying and to be a part of this, and I quit oystering because of the BMR because they issued this; (0:56:37.9) they issued that. “You can’t do this. You can’t do that.” Finally they closed the season. Now, nobody can’t do nothing. But I used to buy a oyster license every year. I don’t buy them anymore.

Scull-DeArmev: What do they cost now? Do you know?

McDuffie: I have no idea.

Scull-DeArme y: What about the last one you bought?

McDuffie: That's been so long ago I can't remember. (laughter) Somewhere probably between five and ten dollars, maybe. It could have been more.

Scull-DeArme y: And that was for a season?

McDuffie: Yeah. The old season run from September through April. All your months that had Rs in them, that was the good months. See, now, in May and June they spawned. What they call a spat, (0:57:29.3) those oysters will open up in that time. They will open up, and they give off this spat, and it gets on the top of the water, and it'll float. Some of it may be under the water. But it floats, and whatever it comes upon, makes an oyster. Ain't that amazing? How can come from spat and it makes a oyster with a shell on it? It's unreal.

Scull-DeArme y: I know. Yeah. Well, think about when we began. We were two cells, and everything we needed was in those two cells, everything you needed to make a human being. That just blows my mind.

McDuffie: Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: When you were a young man, and you were marketing some of your oyster catch, how did you do that? (0:58:18.7)

McDuffie: Well, usually, back then, we'd put them in quart jars, or if a pint, if somebody wanted a pint, we'd put them in jars. And if they wanted them, we'd deliver them to them, or sometimes they'd come get them.

Scull-DeArme y: Just from your home?

McDuffie: From the home, yeah. And see, they got so bad on that, the BMR after they got control of everything, (0:58:51.6) you had to have a shop with stainless steel sink, running water, and all of that, fixed where the flies couldn't get in there and all that stuff. But I'm going to tell you something. I've been in those places that they are like that, and some of them, especially the bigger shops, it was hard to keep those flies out of there.

Scull-DeArme y: Over your lifetime, Robert, have you seen changes in the species that are caught? (0:59:28.5)

McDuffie: Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: Can you talk to me about that?

McDuffie: All right. On the fish, OK, just like the white trout, we used to catch what they called the yellow-mouth, the big yellow-mouth. It'd have a big, old mouth, yellow, and that's what we called them, white trout, yellow-mouths. And them things would grow a pretty good size. But now you don't catch those kind of fish. Most of the fish you catch now are smaller. I don't know how to describe them other than they're just not big fish anymore. Now, they tell me if you go outside, that you can catch, you're more prone to catch bigger fish, whether it be white trout or speckled trout or whatever. But overall, yeah, the fish has changed because you could fish anywhere you wanted to on this Coast. It didn't matter where you stopped. You'd catch them old, big yellow-mouths. You don't do it anymore. So I don't know why. I don't understand it. Once in a great while, you might catch a yellow-mouth, but it's not very, very often. Well, the last fish I caught last year was over here, right off of Chevron. You can see Chevron, what they call Bangs(?) Lake. I fished in Bangs Lake in there, and once in a great while, a big yellow-mouth might show up, but most of them were just small- to average-sized fish.

Scull-DeArmey: So they're smaller, and there are not as many as there used to be.

McDuffie: Well, I don't know about as many, but they're not as big as they used to be. I feel like they's probably still a lot of fish, but they just not as big a fish as they used to be. And I don't know if that's true on all of it or not. I don't guess it is, but I fish for white trout and ground mullet, and flounder is about the only other kind of fish I fish for.

Scull-DeArmey: Have there been changes in ground mullet and flounder over the years?

McDuffie: Well, I can't really say that—the ground mullet is smaller, too. But the flounder, I imagine they probably about the same. I mean, you have a good night; you might catch some big flounders.

Scull-DeArmey: How big is big?

McDuffie: Well, shoot, they have been caught up to nine, ten pounds, flounder. And you're talking [gesturing size with hands].

Scull-DeArmey: What is that? Four feet?

McDuffie: Every bit of it.

Scull-DeArmey: Five feet?

McDuffie: Every bit of it. Nine to ten pounds, that's a big fish. The biggest one I ever caught—well, I giggered him, that flounder, one night—was five pounds. And he was pretty good size.

Scull-DeArmey: Do people eat them when they're nine pounds? Is that good to eat?

McDuffie: Yeah. They can either fillet them or cut them in steak. And to me, I mean, flounders, I don't know how big they'd get before it wouldn't be no good to eat.

Scull-DeArmey: I didn't know if they were like chickens; they'd get old and tough.
(laughter)

McDuffie: No. Now, I haven't eaten too many big flounders because I mean, I didn't have them. Now, that flounder, that five-pound one, we steaked him up. And he was good. There wasn't nothing wrong with him. I mean, he was plenty good.

Scull-DeArmey: Where'd you catch that? (1:03:43.7)

McDuffie: I giggered him in a bay out there one night. Me and my father was out there floundering, and we was in some pretty shallow water, and he was laying there. And I'll tell you what. He liked to drowned me. Got me wet. I had to get overboard to get him.

Scull-DeArmey: You couldn't pull him back up in the boat without getting out of the boat.

McDuffie: No, because, see, them things, if you don't hit them in the right spot, they'll pull off. You got to gig him somewhere around the gill. A flounder, he's a flat fish to start with, and you have to gig him around the gill part, something hard that won't pull out because if you gig it in the soft meat, that thing'll pull right out. I've lost several flounders like that. But my father-in-law, he used to flounder. Oh, he was crazy about floundering. He always had flounders. He'd go out there all the time, and we had flounder all the time. But course, he got old, and he couldn't go, and he finally died. But there's still a lot of fish out there. And it's great to be able to go out there. But see, now, they've got a limit. (1:05:05.1) They have put a limit on our flounders, fifteen per person. And the reason of that is is to keep you from selling flounders. See, some people go out there, and they gig them to sell. Well, I've never sold nobody no fish. I've give people fish, but I don't sell them. If I raise vegetables or anything else, I give it. I do not sell it because I'm from the old school. I'd rather give my neighbor—I asked God when I planted tomatoes last spring, "God, if you bless my tomatoes, I will share with my friends and neighbors." My cabbage I planted this year, my collards, whatever I planted. And he blessed my garden, and I share it. And I don't regret it. But I've seen people that they wanted money. "Give me some money." Money is nothing. I mean, we all need it, but—we all need the money, but—I hope they ain't going fishing this windy, like this.

Scull-DeArmey: Is this a bad time to catch fish?

McDuffie: Man, that's rough, trying to fish in this wind.

Scull-DeArme y: Is that boat too small to stand this kind of wind?

McDuffie: No. He's not going far out yonder; it's all right. Now, if he was going on out on the open waters out yonder, I'd say, "Unh-uh. Better get your behind back to that shoreline."

Scull-DeArme y: That looks like a huge engine for that little boat.

McDuffie: Yeah. That looks like about a fifty, sixty-horse, maybe a forty. Yeah. I believe it is a forty. That's the right size for it.

Scull-DeArme y: Is it the right size? I once worked for a woman who had a lot more money than I did. She and her husband were both attorneys, and they sold their—they had a little sailboat that was nineteen feet, and they sold it to a little, old lady who then had it modified so she could sit in the back and sail by herself. So she'd had these lines put on, pulleys. And my husband and I bought it from her for, I think, a thousand dollars. It was great. It was nineteen and a half feet. It was a lot of fun. But it only had a four-horsepower engine on it in case you got stuck.

McDuffie: If the wind, where you couldn't go on wind power. You always had that for a backup.

Scull-DeArme y: I mean, that boat that just went past us was nowhere near nineteen and a half feet.

McDuffie: No. That's probably fourteen, no more than fifteen.

Scull-DeArme y: Forty horsepower, that's ten times more than what we had on our sailboat.

McDuffie: But it's plenty of motor for that boat. They can only stand so much. And I got a boat. I got a seventy-horse Evinrude on mine.

Scull-DeArme y: How long is your boat?

McDuffie: It's a fifteen foot, fiberglass. Then I got that sixteen foot, aluminum. That's my flounder boat, the aluminum boat is.

Scull-DeArme y: Will that go in a more shallow draft than the fiberglass boat?

McDuffie: Yeah. It'll go in shallower water.

Scull-DeArme y: What's the minimum your aluminum boat will float in?

McDuffie: I don't know. I hadn't really tried it to see, but I'm sure it'll go up in pretty shallow water, maybe a foot, eight inches, something like ten inches.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. That's amazing. Our little sailboat had a swing keel, and I mean, we could go in, I'm sure it was a foot of water, just no depth at all. It was amazing. Well, looking at Hurricane Katrina, (1:09:21.3) Robert, do you know how the seafood industry was affected by Hurricane Katrina?

McDuffie: Well, really I can't really say too much on that, but I'm sure it affected it to a certain degree because any time you have a storm, like crabbing, when you get a hurricane in here, it does something to the bottom of the bay or the bayous. It does something. Well, for one thing it blows stuff in. Where it comes from, I don't know. But it may blow stuff in here, and it puts it on the bottom and everything, but in 1969, I was crabbing for a living. (1:10:15.7) This was before [Hurricane] Camille, and I was crabbing off of Bayou Casotte Channel out yonder, and when Hurricane Camille come, I lost my crab pots, and it affected the crabbing. The crabbing wasn't no more good after that as far as I know. But I lost everything, and I couldn't get back in it because I didn't have no money back then.

Scull-DeArme y: What's the crabbing season?

McDuffie: Now, let's see. This is March. Next month, May, they'll begin to show up a little bit. That water, see, once that water temperature starts warming up, somewhere around in that area through October, November. Now, they tell me in the fall of the year in Mobile Bay (1:11:32.6) that you'll catch nothing but male crabs in the Mobile Bay. But the crabs, they go from east to west. In the wintertime, they tell me that crabs will stack on top of one another. They'll start in the mud, and then they'll come up. They stack on. Now, how high they get, I don't know. That's what I've been told. But now, these crabs, from what I've been told, they go from east to west. And there's people in Louisiana over there, you have to go offshore, twenty-five, thirty miles offshore, but some of them fellows make good money. They catch a lot of crabs that time of year. But around here in the winter months, it ain't hardly anything here. You might catch one or two here or yonder, but you ain't going to get no whole lot.

Scull-DeArme y: So maybe from May through August was the season that you got to crab in 1969. Camille was in August of 1969.

McDuffie: Yeah, that was [19]69, but like I said, we didn't, after we lost our pots and everything, we was out of business.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, a couple of follow-up questions. For the record, could you describe a crab pot? (1:12:57.5)

McDuffie: Yeah. It's a wire basket. It's got a throat on each side. It's got a compartment where you put your bait, and then it's got two more throats inside of it, that those crabs'll go in. They'll come up in there after that bait, and once they get in there, they can't get out. OK. Now, the Vietnamese, (1:13:28.6) their pots are

different. Their pots are just one big pot. They got a throat on each side. They got the bait box either on the top or the bottom, whichever. And those crabs goes in there. Well, it's a lot easier doing it that way than the other type, and the pots are cheaper to build, or they cheaper. But a crab pot now, you looking at twenty-five, thirty dollars apiece if they already made. If you make them yourself, you can get by cheaper, but they must be making money at them because they still crab.

Scull-DeArmey: So what did you use for bait?

McDuffie: Mullet.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you have to buy it, or did you catch it.?

McDuffie: Yeah. Yeah, we had to buy it. There was fishermen that fished for mullet. We'd buy our bait from them. I forget now how much it was back then a pound; wasn't a whole lot. We'd get whatever. I don't even remember how many pots I had at that time, but you'd get so many pounds per day because you run them every day, and when you run them, you bait them each time.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, what do you mean by running them? (1:15:00.3)

McDuffie: That's when you started at one end of your line, you would pick up the first pot. Then you'd empty those out, and you'd bait it up, and when you come to the second pot, well, you'd throw your first pot where your second pot was. That way you kept yourself moving. And you'd run your line all the way out, and sometimes you might have two or three lines. Just depended. But we was making a good living before the storm. Well, they had a crab plant here in Bayou Casotte at that time, and that's where we sold our crabs. (1:15:44.5) Course all of that's been closed. That's been out of business for years and years now.

Scull-DeArmey: What did [Hurricane] Katrina do to that crab plant?

McDuffie: Oh, I imagine it was already closed down. I hadn't been in there in years and years. But I would—

Scull-DeArmey: Did I say Katrina? I meant to say Camille.

McDuffie: Camille, no. I think the plant was still standing, but it wasn't used anymore because that pretty much put a lot of people out of business.

Scull-DeArmey: How long did you crab?

McDuffie: Well, let's see. We built our crab pots in April. We started probably somewhere in May. Then it started off, it wasn't that many, but as we progressed along, they began to come in more and more. And we crabbed from say, May till that August.

Scull-DeArme y: But I mean, how many years?

McDuffie: Oh, that was the only year.

Scull-DeArme y: Oh. That's too bad. You invested money in those crab pots, and Camille just wiped them out.

McDuffie: But anyhow, I took my losses and went on and got me a job; went to work. And I haven't fooled with it since.

Scull-DeArme y: How did you know where the crab pots were in the water?

McDuffie: You had a cork that you'd have a cork that floats on top of the water. You'd have that string, that line; it would run from your, tied onto your crab pot up to your float. When you threw that over, that float, it was on top of the water, so you'd know where your pot was at.

Scull-DeArme y: You probably didn't have a GPS [global positioning system] back then.

McDuffie: No, no.

Scull-DeArme y: But I mean, how would you know kind of where you'd left all that, to go back and find it?

McDuffie: Well, you usually mark it somewhere off of the land. If you was pretty close to the land, you'd mark it about how far off, half mile, whatever you was from, quarter of a mile, and you'd pretty much know where your line was at.

Scull-DeArme y: So maybe there was a landmark on shore that you could sight?

McDuffie: Yeah. See, back where I was crabbing, we had what they call a mud lump. That's off down there now, where that, what is that? That LPG, that gas plant. You heard of Greenwood Island? But anyway, when you go out of Bayou Casotte Channel, on out past where Chevron and them, they was a mud lump, what they call a mud lump out there. That's where they dredged the channel over a period of years. Well, back then, it done grewed up. It had grass and stuff on it and all of that, but I usually run my line, I think one of my lines was running right down beside the channel, and I won't forget. One evening we was running the line, and there was a ship coming in, (1:19:06.2) and he was pulling some swells. And man, we was up here, and then we was down there. We was up here, and we was down there. He was pulling some swells.

Scull-DeArme y: What does that mean, pulling swells?

McDuffie: The speed of the boat. Course he wasn't running; he done slowed way down because he was getting close to the channel; I mean, close to where he was going. And them swells, that wheel, just according to what speed he was turning. But the faster a boat goes, the more swells it pulls.

Scull-DeArmey: So is a swell a wave?

McDuffie: Yeah. That thing, shoot, it was higher than this building.

Scull-DeArmey: What kind of boat were you in?

McDuffie: We was in a little, old, small skiff. That's what we run our crab pots in.

Scull-DeArmey: How long?

McDuffie: It must have been about probably sixteen foot, fifteen, sixteen. Yeah. Long as you head into it. Don't never get sideways with it because that's when you got to—but you head into it, you can just ride it out. Well, it don't last that long, but you just got to be careful.

Scull-DeArmey: Could you pull your pots up while the swells were coming like that?

McDuffie: No, unh-uh. We set there till they got by us. Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: How many crab pots would you have on a line?

McDuffie: Well, it may be thirty or forty. Some of them could be fifty. Some people probably have more than that. It determined on how many pots you had and where you had. If you was in a good place, that's where you'd want to keep them, but if crabs got to fall off and everything, you might pick them up and move them somewhere else. But it just determined where you was at.

Scull-DeArmey: What did you do with the crabs after you got them on board the boat? How did you store them? (1:21:06.1)

McDuffie: They had boxes, and you put them in them boxes, and they'd have those old sacks. What's the name? I want to say burlap. Well, you wet those down, and you put them over the top of the crabs, and that way, see, it kept them cool.

Scull-DeArmey: They weren't on ice?

McDuffie: No, no, unh-uh. And you'd come in with those and you'd get rid of them as quick as you could. And even at that, some of the crab underneath, you'd always have a dead crab or two.

Scull-DeArmey: Did they have to be alive when you sold them?

McDuffie: They supposed to be alive, but now, I've bought crabs. St. Andrews, that's way on over yonder, going toward Ocean Springs. I bought crabs last year from that guy over there, and he had people working for him. He supplied the bait, and he bought the crabs. He supplied the bait and stuff. They had the boats and everything. They'd go out there, and they'd run their crab pots. Well, they come in, and they would sell them right there to individuals, or they had a dealer, I guess, that probably come from somewhere else that would pick them up, too. Well, I bought some from Bozo's, but this was at St. Andrews.

Scull-DeArmey: I think I already asked you about bait. You said you used mullet. Right?

McDuffie: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. The mud lump and dredging. For the record, what is dredging? (1:23:03.9)

McDuffie: That's when they go in a place that's filled in, like the shipyard, the Pascagoula Channel. They have to keep that at such a depth; they go in there. They got, usually, the corps of engineers will go in. They got the equipment and everything and the knowhow. They start, and they got a pipeline that may run for a quarter of a mile, that it pumps it out into a certain point.

Scull-DeArmey: The sand and mud and everything, the soft bottom?

McDuffie: Yeah, sand. It gets it off the bottom. It cuts it down, whatever they're going to do. It cuts that bottom down, and it makes it possible then for a ship to be able to go and come. Every so often they have to do this. Now, it's been a while since they've dredged them channels down there. They probably have to do that again before too long.

Scull-DeArmey: Those are manmade channels?

McDuffie: Yeah. They're manmade channels.

Scull-DeArmey: So the mud lump then is actually the material that came out.

McDuffie: It's the material that come off of that bottom that made that mud lump. They got several. Well, matter of fact, where Singing River Island is, that's all that is, is where that dredge material was put. They built all of that on that island. Isn't that something?

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. And the islands are important. They're kind of nursery grounds in the waters around the islands, so they're important to us.

McDuffie: Yeah. They can be very important to us.

Scull-DeArme y: How did Hurricane [Katrina] affect you personally, Robert?
(1:25:05.9)

McDuffie: Well, I lost a car. I lost lawn mowers. Anything that was on the ground, I lost it. Well, my house got damaged. I had about thirteen inches of water in my house. Well, my shed, all of that got flooded bad. There was three or four foot of water out there. And because my house sets up on blocks. If it had been setting on the ground, I'd have got a lot more damage, but we survived everything. I've had some problems underneath my house because it rotted some pieces of lumber under there. And I've had to go under there, and I've had some new, different type material put under there, like four-by-fours, setting on blocks. But anyway, the inside of my house, we redone my house, redone the floors, all the materials for the walls, thirteen inches of water will ruin a wall. Well, that and the thing about it is, the government didn't do none of it. I took care of it. We were just blessed. God blessed me that I was able to do it. And today we living pretty good.

Scull-DeArme y: Good. That's great.

McDuffie: But now, if another one comes like Katrina, it's just about going to be the end of a lot of us.

Scull-DeArme y: You know [Hurricane] Irene last summer?

McDuffie: Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: Irene was just like Katrina; it was a hundred miles, no, four hundred miles wide, and it just didn't come in the Gulf.

McDuffie: I mean, I don't know how you think or you believe about this, but I believe this. Katrina came in the daylight hours. Most storms come at night. Well, I think God allowed that to come in here in the daylight hours to show the people the awesome power and the might. If that thing would have come at night, they would have been a lot of people drowned. They would have been a lot of people didn't know what was—I mean, they would have, especially your older people—there was enough died in it as it was. But I truly believe he let that come in the daylight hours for us to see. The next one that comes, he might not send it in the daylight hours. It may come at night. But where does a person go? I mean, we all got enough sense to get out of the way. Now, I rode Katrina out at my house, and I stood there and watched the water. It come from nothing in a matter of minutes; it was up there. Well, it finally, when it got as high as it was going to get, it quit rising, but it took a while for it to go out. But think about the people that was on this side of the track. (1:28:36.9) It was water up to the roof. Some of those people had to get up on the roofs before they could get rescued. But had that been at nighttime, what in the world would—oh, Lord. It'd been bad.

Scull-DeArme y: You wouldn't be able to see your roof or anything.

McDuffie: But that's the reason I'm telling you; tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes. What will he send next? He's going to get your attention. And some people might not—"Well, that's just a coincidence." No. It ain't. Everything that happens upon this Earth, God has control of it. He allows it. And I know a lot of people say, "Well, if he's a good God, why does he let people get killed and stuff?" Hey, it's just, that's one of them things. I couldn't answer that question.

Scull-DeArme y: Maybe when your time comes, you're going to go.

McDuffie: Well, we all got a set time in our life that this life is going to be over. And it's coming as surely—well, he said, "Life is uncertain, and death is sure. Life is a vapor. You're here today. You're gone tomorrow." Some people are here today and gone today. And it's appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment. It says that, also. So that tells me I'm going to stand before a judge, the almighty judge. Ain't nobody going to lie their way out of it. They can't buy their way out of it because he owns everything. He owns money. He owns it all. He owns our life. And who am I but a little weakling, human being, that I stand before God? But I want to make my calling and election sure because I'm telling you; it's going to be a payday here shortly. It's coming. When a man thinks he's done something in the darkness, he said, "It will be revealed in the light. When a man thinks he's pulled off something, he hid from the people, but he didn't hide it because he knows all; he sees all; he hears all. He never sleeps. That's my heavenly father who watches over me. That's the reason I can lay my head in a pillow at night. I don't have to worry.

Scull-DeArme y: That's wonderful.

McDuffie: I don't worry.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, if we moved on then, Robert, to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill, what thoughts did you have when you learned of the spill? (1:31:35.6)

McDuffie: Well, I thought, "Well, surely this is going to be it. This is going to be our destruction, part of our destruction that he has allowed this thing to happen, and it's going to have a bad, terrible ending on our seafood. People are going to be put out of their livelihood. They won't be able to take care of, make their families a living. It's going to have such an effect upon people's lives." And it did, some of them. Had I been a commercial fisherman or a shrimper or whatever, I would have been affected. But I wasn't. And it never really, as far as the fish deal bit, the crabbing was still good, and even the oysters, we even got to eat oysters after the storm.

Scull-DeArme y: After the spill?

McDuffie: Yeah. I mean after the spill.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you have a chance to do any fishing or oystering before the waters closed?

McDuffie: No. But I went floundering; twice I went floundering before they stopped us and told us we couldn't go out anymore because I guess they figured, just like I did, that this was going to put us, that oil on the bottom and oil everywhere, but it didn't get as bad as I thought. And we come out good.

Scull-DeArme y: There was something I meant to ask you earlier about the limit on flounders. You said there were fifteen each.

McDuffie: Fifteen per person, any person.

Scull-DeArme y: Could you go out every day and get fifteen if you wanted to?

McDuffie: Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Well, that seems pretty good if you're eating, if it's something you're depending on to eat and put in your freezer.

McDuffie: Yeah. But see, (1:33:44.7) if you got two people in the boat, you can get thirty. That's fifteen per person in the boat, and that was in order to keep—a lot of these people, see, they sell those flounder. They go to like Bozo's down there. They sell those flounders to Bozo, well, hey, they wanted to put a stop to that. But let me ask you this. Do you think a man, when he's having good luck, and he's getting a good amount of flounders—it's going to be hard to stop at fifteen. (laughter) But basically, though, when I floundered those two times before they shut us off, I didn't get too many, and I was real happy. I was pleased with what I had. But you got people, they want to take advantage of every situation.

Scull-DeArme y: Are there people who do flounder commercially? They are allowed to buy a license?

McDuffie: Yeah. You can buy; it's \$75 per license for commercial fishing license. Sure is.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, I guess if everybody could get all they wanted, maybe it would just decimate the founder population.

McDuffie: Well, it'd probably take its toll if every body was floundering; it would take a toll just like anything else. See, back yonder a few years ago, they wasn't as many people as they is today. OK? I remember the time when back in [19]56, [19]57, they wasn't that many cars on the road. Now, you get out there on the highway, and that place is loaded with traffic. Get on the interstate. They going every way and coming from all places, but I mean, that's progress. That's the way life is.

Scull-DeArmey: In 1972, I was taking a class at Jeff Davis Junior College, and it was required; you had to take a sociology class. It was just an introductory sociology class, and I remember in 1972, the teacher saying that in the next twenty years, the projected population boom for everything south of Hattiesburg was so much greater than anywhere else in the state. It was all going to be down on the Coast. That's where everybody was coming. And it happened. It did happen that way.

McDuffie: Yeah. It did.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you participate in the Vessels of Opportunity program?

McDuffie: No.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you do any BP work at all?

McDuffie: No, none.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. How do the waters look to you now? (1:37:04.1)

McDuffie: The waters?

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

McDuffie: Well, they don't look bad. I mean, far as I can tell, they look in pretty good shape.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever see any oil?

McDuffie: No, not really. I didn't.

Scull-DeArmey: That's good.

McDuffie: Yeah. It really is. They tell me that in certain places, them tar balls and stuff are still coming up. And you know good and well, on out yonder, there's probably oil on that bottom. If it stays there, that's fine. But what worried a lot of people after that oil spill, if a hurricane come in there, (1:37:43.9) in this Gulf, and see, it picks that water up. And it would bring all that mess in here, and that's what people was afraid of. And it was something to think about.

Scull-DeArmey: There was an awful lot of oil that leaked out.

McDuffie: Ooh, there was millions and millions and millions of gallons that was leaked out, and it wasn't just here. It was way yonder to way yonder. And look at the damage it could have done. But we come out; hey, we were blessed.

Scull-DeArmey: Louisiana got it bad. (1:38:25.1)

McDuffie: Oh, they got it bad. Those marshes down there. I've been in those marshes down there. My brother-in-law used to oyster down there in what they call Buras and Empire. That's down below New Orleans, down there on the Mississippi River. And them marshes down in that area, they got hit bad. Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. We interviewed the Sunseris who own P&J Oyster Company, and for the first time in a hundred years, they could not get enough oysters to fill their orders in New Orleans. So that was after the spill.

McDuffie: Well, you know that had to hurt because they probably employed a good many people, and that took away their livelihood, and it wasn't something beyond their control. And personally, I think, BP and whoever's responsible, they need to pay every penny of it.

Scull-DeArmey: They do.

McDuffie: I mean, right now—some lawyers out of Jackson come down here that year, and if we bought a fishing license, they wanted us to file a suit against the oil company. (1:40:04.0) But the thing about here is, they was a lot of people that showed up, and they filled out papers and stuff, and they've just had a meeting over here in Moss Point on that, and they's all kind of people that's going to be involved in it. But I mean, I didn't lose no great, as far as—I mean, I filled out the paper at one time, but I threw it in the garbage; let it go. I mean, I'm not hurting. Just let it go. Somebody else needed it worse than I do; let them have it.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, that's very generous of you.

McDuffie: Well, money, it's good to have money. Unfortunately we can't do nothing without it. But money gets a lot of people in trouble. They kill for it. They steal. They lie, and they cheat for it, and if I got to have it like that, I don't want it.

Scull-DeArmey: I don't think it buys love, either, and I think love is the most important thing.

McDuffie: Money can't buy happiness. It cannot buy love. Only a love out of a man's heart, if he's got love in his heart, money didn't buy it. And I mean, it's just amazing. It's just amazing.

Scull-DeArmey: Robert, what do you think the health of the fisheries is now?

McDuffie: I don't know. I feel like this part of the country, our seafood industry as far as on this, out of the state of Mississippi, (1:42:02.6) which we don't have a whole long coastline, see. From Alabama border to Louisiana border, it's not that far across there. But Alabama right over here, what they call Bayou La Batre, they got shrimp

boats over there. They got a big fishing fleet that they go to Texas. They go all over shrimping, and they do mighty well. But now, this part of the country, they catch some shrimp, but they got to go somewhere else; got to either go to Louisiana or go further out or what. But I'm just not sure on Mississippi shrimping any more because I'm telling you, see, we were once, when the industry, before the industry started coming in, like First Chemical, those plants down here in Bayou Casotte, Chevron and all of that, we used to be more of a commercial type fishing community or area. And after all of that got established, well, now, you can't go and get oysters out of Bang's Lake—that's right in there behind Chevron—because that big—I don't know if you've ever seen it, like you going to Chevron, you see that big pile of white-looking stuff on the right hand side over there. That stuff, over a period of time it washes, and it gets back into the water. (1:43:42.3)

Scull-DeArme y: What is it? Do you know?

McDuffie: It's a—

Scull-DeArme y: A byproduct?

McDuffie: A byproduct, the remains of it. I don't know just exactly what they call it, but it ain't no good for nothing.

Scull-DeArme y: Is it something we should be eating?

McDuffie: No. That's where they made the fertilizer and stuff, I guess. That's where that byproduct comes from. But it's a mountain of it.

Scull-DeArme y: And that's going into the waters of the wetlands?

McDuffie: Whenever that washes off, see, you have these big rains. After so long a time, that stuff, it'll wash and wash. But behind Chevron out there, they was a lot of pine trees in there. And it killed a lot of trees in there. That stuff washing around, and I mean, I'm going to tell you something, too, talking about Katrina. (1:44:49.5) I meant to tell you that earlier. But they was stuff; I don't know where it come from. I don't know if it come from Chevron or what, if it was chemicals or what, but I've got grass growing in my yard that I never seen before, stuff that come after that storm. There's a—I don't know how to describe it, but it's a small-looking leaf on it, and it gets real thick, and it grows in the wintertime. It don't grow in the summer. It dies in the summertime, but in the winter it comes back out. And I don't know where it come from. I don't know where; it blew it in here from wherever. I don't know, but it's just amazing what things can come out of that. It is something else.

Scull-DeArme y: In your opinion, where does the Gulf Coast seafood industry stand now? (1:46:00.9)

McDuffie: Well, I tell you what. I just don't think it's in no great, big, good shape. I think that a lot of businesses, that they're just hanging on, hanging by a thin thread because of—I don't know if it'd be because of the laws, the way the law is set up to keep people from being able to do. That's like shrimp boats. The government requires (1:46:38.2) that they have what they call a TED (turtle excluder device) in those nets. Well, that right there, that, I mean, there's a lot of shrimp gets through there that those shrimpers, they lose because of these things that the government requires to keep the turtles from being killed. But I don't know.

Scull-DeArme y: What has been your experience with sea turtles? (1:47:09.8)

McDuffie: No. I haven't had any. I haven't really ever had no dealings with them. I've never seen one.

Scull-DeArme y: I don't know if sea turtles like bayous or not. I know that people in Biloxi, like there's a fisherman named Eley Ross who's in his eighties, and he remembers when the sea turtles nested in Biloxi. They came and laid their eggs. And they would gather the eggs. The women liked to bake with them because they were so rich that they were really good for baking. But no sea turtles in the bayous that you've ever seen.

McDuffie: Them turtles, I guess they like to go to them beaches because they bury their eggs in the sand and stuff, but as far as ever seeing a sea turtle up in one of these bayous, I never saw it. I'm not saying that they didn't because they could have, but I never seen nothing long as I was around the water.

Scull-DeArme y: And of course the sea turtles have flippers instead of feet. Did you know that they're the only turtle that can't retract their limbs inside?

McDuffie: I'll be dog.

Scull-DeArme y: They stay out all the time. They can't retract them.

McDuffie: Well, of course, they always at risk of being, like a shark or something like that. Course I think a shark and stuff, they more or less stay with the fish or something on that line, but I'm sure there's things that it does eat them once in a while.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. I think that a lot of those endangered sea turtles would probably be gone if we hadn't started hatcheries for them. It's really helped them out. One of the ways that sea turtles get sabotaged is when they're eggs. And by protecting the eggs and making sure they hatch and setting them into the ocean, that's really made a big difference.

McDuffie: But I mean, like we talking of the sea turtles. They go to that sand, and that's where they lay those eggs, and that's where they get hatched, but only a certain

amount—I mean, I’ve seen programs pertaining to all that. A certain amount of those little turtles are going to make it back. And they’ll make it, to grow to a lifetime. Most of them get eaten by something.

Scull-DeArme y: Right, yeah, when they’re little.

McDuffie: It’s like I’ve always said, “The big fish eat the little fish.” And the big people get the little people. And there’s always somebody at the top, somebody always ahead.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, Robert, our office is getting ready to have a project on regional foodways and foods of different communities. So we’re asking everybody: what is your favorite seafood? (1:50:17.6)

McDuffie: Well, I like it all, shrimp, crabs, oysters, fish, any kind. I love it all. And I guess you could say I don’t have no one special thing over the other because I like it all.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, OK. Tell me how you prepare a flounder. What’s your favorite way to cook up a flounder?

McDuffie: Fry it.

Scull-DeArme y: And how do you do it? Once you take it out of the water—

McDuffie: All right. Once I get it home, I clean it. You have to scale it. You clean it, cut the head off, and get the guts and stuff out it. Then my wife’ll come behind me, and anything that’s left inside that fish—I didn’t get all of the old blood out—she will take and get all of that out. And then if it’s a good size flounder, she will cut it up, steak it, and then put the cornmeal to it and fry it. Now, I’ve eat them baked, and they’re good baked, and some people eats them stuffed. I don’t think I’ve ever eat one stuffed. I never really—I’ve always liked them fried. That’s basically my best way.

Scull-DeArme y: How do you know when the fish is done when you’re frying it?

McDuffie: Well, she done fried so many of them, she just about tell you whenever. Just like anything else, you can overcook something or undercook it.

Scull-DeArme y: What’s it supposed to look like on the outside?

McDuffie: Well, when it’s fried, it’ll be a brownish-looking color.

Scull-DeArme y: Not blackened.

McDuffie: No. Now, if you leave it a little bit longer, it’s going to get a little bit. I mean, I don’t want mine burned, but I like it well done.

Scull-DeArme y: Is it crunchy from the cornmeal?

McDuffie: Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: It sounds good.

McDuffie: And the meat, the meat itself, it's got a great taste to it, and it's one of the best saltwater fishes, in my opinion, that they is, a flounder.

Scull-DeArme y: Is there anything that we have not talked about that you'd like to put on the record?

McDuffie: No, not really. I think we about covered everything pretty much that we've done in our life, fishing. I mean, I ain't done enough of it. I'd like to be able to, but it's like anything else. The older you get, you don't really feel like getting up, jumping around like you was when you were younger. A lot of mornings I wake up, I might not feel like doing very much of nothing. And then there's other times, I gung ho. But you go with however you feel. But I would love to fish more. Matter of fact, I am going to try to fish more this year because I didn't do hardly none last year. And like that floundering and stuff, I would come down here, but I'm afraid to leave my truck parked over there because we got people that, they thugs that ride up and down this road; they hunting something to steal. And I don't want to lose my truck or my boat trailer and all of that stuff.

Scull-DeArme y: Oh, your trailer, yeah. They could just hook it up and run off with it.

McDuffie: Well, they could break windows out of my truck. Man, people, they mean. They vicious. I don't understand why people do the way they do. I never wanted to bother somebody's stuff. I never wanted to go harm a man's—knock windows out of his vehicles and take his battery and just do—I did a lot of things in my life, but I never had no desire to do that because that man worked hard for what he's got. And I respect him. But these people, these young hoodlums, I tried, when my young'uns was coming up, of course, I had two boys and one girl. And I told them; they'd come to me, "I want a car." "All right. I tell you what let's do. Get you a job and save your money because I ain't buying you nothing, simply for the fact I don't have the money, and you're young. You get you a job." And I was in a position that I could help them to get them a job. So they saved their money. I told my daughter the same thing. All of them bought their cars. They did.

Scull-DeArme y: Learned the value of a dollar.

McDuffie: They get up, and they go to work. I got a boy that works at Chevron out there. If they got a shutdown, he may work twelve hours, seven days a week. He gets

up and goes to work. That other, oldest boy, he goes to work. My daughter, she lives in Slidell, Louisiana. They work, and they have something.

Scull-DeArme y: They're lucky they learned it early. They're lucky they didn't have to wait until they were fifty or sixty years old.

McDuffie: Me and my wife, we taught them. We told them when we was raising them, "Get up and go to work. You want something, you work for it. Don't wait around for somebody to give it to you." And they took us at our word. So I'm glad. I am glad.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, I want to thank you so much for doing this interview.

McDuffie: It's all right.

Scull-DeArme y: I'm going to turn off the recorder.

(end of interview)