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Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

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Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Alvina Nichols

Interviewer: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

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An Oral History with Alvina Nichols, Volume 1043
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Biography

Mrs. Alvina Maudvella Nichols was born on October 21, 1925, in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, to Mr. James Rosemond (born July 4, 1902, in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi) and Mrs. Mattie Bell Johnson Rosemond (born December 29, 1903, in New Orleans, Louisiana). Her father was a fisherman who came from a fishing family, residing in Bay St. Louis. Her mother was a seafood processing factory worker. Her mother's family originated in New Orleans and migrated to Bay St. Louis in the early 1900s.

Nichols attended St. Rose de Lima Catholic school from which she was graduated from eighth grade. She earned her GED in the 1980s and attended Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College where she studied Hotel, Motel, and Restaurant Management. She has owned a catering business, nightclub, and restaurant. In her early life, she worked at some of the Mississippi Gulf Coast's many seafood processing factories.

She has five children, Russell Nichols (born July 14, 1947), , Sylvia Nichols (born September 10, 1951), Eric Nichols (born March 18, 1956), Goldie Fairconnetue (born March 10, 1953), and Lylie Nichols (born August 17, 1959). Her husband is deceased.

Nichols enjoys fishing, traveling, and singing in the St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church Choir. She works for the Hancock County Poll Workers/Democratic Party. She is a member of Disabled American Veterans, Purple Heart Women's Auxiliary, and the Ladies of St. Peter Clavier. She received the St. Rose de Lima Catholic Church Dedicated Parishioner's Award, the Krewe of Diamonds Lifelong and Dedicated Member Award, and the Operation Wake Up for Excellence in Church and Leadership Award.

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

ALVINA NICHOLS

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Alvina Nichols, and is taking place on April 9, 2012. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArme.

Scull-DeArme: 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 Mrs. Alvina Nichols, and it is taking place on April 9, 2012, at 11 a.m. in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. And the interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArme. And first I'd like to thank you, Mrs. Nichols, for taking time to talk with me today.

Nichols: You're quite welcome.

Scull-DeArme: And just ask you for the record if you would state your name, please.

Nichols: Alvina Nichols.

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

Nichols: A-L-V-I-N-A, N-I-C-H-O-L-S.

Scull-DeArme: And when were you born? (0:00:56.9)

Nichols: October 21, 1925.

Scull-DeArme: And where were you born?

Nichols: Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

Scull-DeArme: And where did you grow up?

Nichols: Bay St. [Louis], Mississippi.

Scull-DeArme: Tell us a little bit about your childhood. What was the town like then, and what did you do for fun as a child?

Nichols: Well, all I can understand it is when I was about twelve years old, my [great-grandmother] raised me for about three or four years. And the rest of my life I took care of my mother's children, which was three girls and one boy.

Scull-DeArmey: Were you the oldest?

Nichols: I was the oldest.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember how old you were when you had to take that responsibility?

Nichols: Oh, from about fifteen until seventeen because my mother and daddy had to work. And we moved in 1939, I think, to New Orleans because my daddy had to go there to find work. He was a fisherman in Bay St. Louis, and he had to go find work in New Orleans, and we moved there; stayed there until 1941; back to Bay St. Louis because he got killed in [19]41.

Scull-DeArmey: What happened?

Nichols: He came over here to do some fishing, and he got hit on a bicycle coming—he and a white guy were fishing together on the beach, and they were riding bicycles. And some boys from—they used to call them “Newcomb boys” come from New Orleans on vacations, spring breaks or something like that. And they got hit. Well, the white guy died immediately, but my daddy just got hurt, and he was transported to New Orleans, back where we were. But he stayed there in the hospital about a month and then he died. (0:04:02.7) So we were back to Bay St. Louis.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you-all move in with your great-grandmother?

Nichols: No. My great-grandmother had to move in (laughter) with us then. You know, a whole lot transformed between that. Anyway, we came back to the Bay, and with the money that my mother got from the burial and from my daddy dying, she bought a house, and we stayed in the house until years later. (laughter) And then I was still babysitting, I guess, till seventeen or eighteen. And then around when I was twenty, I got married.

Scull-DeArmey: How did you meet your husband?

Nichols: Well, he came to work on the house that my mother had bought. It needed work, and he was one of the carpenters. He was the same age with me, so we courted and got married.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, great.

Nichols: Um-hm. And he went to the service.

Scull-DeArmey: What year did you marry?

Nichols: I think it was about [19]42, [19]43, something like that.

Scull-DeArmey: Did he fight in World War II?

Nichols: Pardon?

Scull-DeArmey: Did he fight in World War II?

Nichols: Yes. He went to the service.

Scull-DeArmeY: Did he come home, I hope?

Nichols: Yes, he came home. We didn't stay together long after that.

Scull-DeArmeY: Oh, really?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmeY: So did y'all get a divorce?

Nichols: Yes. And I got married again.

Scull-DeArmeY: You remarried.

Nichols: Yes. And I had, how many kids? That's my oldest daughter. She died two years ago; she was fifty-seven.

Scull-DeArmeY: What happened?

Nichols: She had diabetes and hardheaded, and wouldn't take care of herself.

Scull-DeArmeY: Oh, gosh, yeah.

Nichols: Yeah. So she died in California, and we brought her home and buried her.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you have other children?

Nichols: Yes. I have a son right across the street; my oldest. He got a Purple Heart. He was in service, Vietnam. And he's my second baby over there. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Are those the two that you have?

Nichols: I have another girl, a daughter, Goldie. Her name is Golden Ann Nichols. I married a Nichols after that. And I have Eric Nichols and Lylie, L-Y-L-I-E, Nichols.

Scull-DeArmeY: That's beautiful.

Nichols: So that's it for now.

Scull-DeArmeY: Now, does one of these include your—

Nichols: Russell is my oldest.

Scull-DeArmeY: Russell, OK. Are these children all alive, or does that include—

Nichols: Yes. All those alive.

Scull-DeArmeY: And who was your daughter who passed away?

Nichols: Sylvia.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Is your husband still living?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArme y: No. When did he die?

Nichols: He died in 1996.

Scull-DeArme y: So you've been a widow a little while.

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArme y: You're not going to remarry?

Nichols: No. (laughter) No, never. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Oh, I got married recently to a man I had known for thirty years.

Nichols: What? You courted?

Scull-DeArme y: No. We didn't. I married someone else, and he married someone else, and we were both married thirteen years. And you know, we would see each other and kind of keep up. But we kind of lost touch, and I didn't know he was divorced, and he didn't know I was divorced, but we went to church together one day, I think. We both were at church and started dating and decided to give it a whirl. (laughter)

Nichols: And how long ago that's been?

Scull-DeArme y: Oh, it wasn't long ago at all. I'm fifty-seven, and I guess I was maybe—was it 2008? I can't do that math.

Nichols: That was recently?

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. Yeah. It hasn't been long. It's a pretty big adjustment.

Nichols: How's it working out?

Scull-DeArme y: It's all right.

Nichols: It's good?

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. You know as you get older, things—

Nichols: Mellow down.

Scull-DeArme y: Mellow, yeah, that's right. That's right. And he's ten years older than I am.

Nichols: Oh.

Scull-DeArme y: So.

Nichols: That ought to be good.

Scull-DeArmeY: He doesn't have enough energy to fight much. (laughter) So Mrs. Nichols, where did you work in the seafood industry? (0:09:40.7)

Nichols: Well, while I was here, and about seventeen, eighteen, I started while I was babysitting with the kids. My mother was working, too, in the seafood industry because that's all she knew, you know.

Scull-DeArmeY: Where was the plant?

Nichols: One was on Washington. The first one I remember was on Washington Street [on the beach]. That's a couple of streets over on the beach. [One was on the river in Lakeshore.]

Scull-DeArmeY: Can you just—

Nichols: And that's when my daddy was working in the seafood industry, too, then. (0:10:37.1) My daddy was "rolling shells." They called it rolling shells when they would open oysters, and the shells would fall on the floor. He would shovel them up in the wheelbarrow and roll them out to the beach, to the end of the beach, and that's where I first knew about the factories. And I would sit on the wharf where he was rolling shells, and he would open up the oysters for me, and I would eat raw oysters. That was way back when I was really about five or six years old then, but that's a long story. Everything's a long story now.

Scull-DeArmeY: That's good. Yeah. We want to hear it.

Nichols: Yeah. That was the first I knew of the factories.

Scull-DeArmeY: Did they do just oysters?

Nichols: They did shrimps and oysters. Peeled shrimp and shucked oysters.

Scull-DeArmeY: Is that what you did?

Nichols: Way back, along, after that, after that I did that.

Scull-DeArmeY: When you were seventeen and eighteen?

Nichols: Yes. I started working in it.

Scull-DeArmeY: Can you just paint us a picture of what it looked like?

Nichols: The factories? (0:12:08.9)

Scull-DeArmeY: Inside where you were.

Nichols: Well, they would roll the steam oysters. They'd be partially opened, and you had a knife and a glove, and they would open the oysters, put them in a bucket after they were opened, and the shells would fall on the floor. But they would roll

them out in a big—they used to call them cars. But they would roll them out, the steam oysters, and that's where we would pick them out this car and open them.

Scull-DeArme y: How did you get paid?

Nichols: They paid by the pound. (0:13:02.0)

Scull-DeArme y: Do you remember how much?

Nichols: No, indeed. It wasn't much, (laughter) like maybe you would get a whole bucketful for—the little buckets was like so high, and you would get about fifty cents. Some people would get eighty cents, [depending on] how many you would put in the bucket.

Scull-DeArme y: Did they weigh it?

Nichols: Yes, it was weighed. They had little scales, and you weighed them.

Scull-DeArme y: So you think it was about a foot high?

Nichols: Yeah, about that high.

Scull-DeArme y: And maybe a foot around?

Nichols: Yeah, around. Some were bigger than others.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. What were the hours like for you? (0:13:54.8)

Nichols: Well, the bus would pick you up in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, and you'd work until the oysters gave out that day.

Scull-DeArme y: Gosh.

Nichols: When the boat was empty—it would come in on a boat, and then it would run them through the steamer, and it would go in the car.

Scull-DeArme y: What was a typical time that you might stop?

Nichols: Oh, you could stop any time you felt like it.

Scull-DeArme y: And take a break?

Nichols: You could leave any time you felt like it. You got your money as you, as you weighed. You got your money, so you could leave any time you felt like.

Scull-DeArme y: Wow.

Nichols: Yeah. So you could stay as long as the oysters last.

Scull-DeArme y: Well, I guess they never ran into a problem of everybody leaving before all the—

Nichols: No. They needed the money. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Right.

Nichols: Yeah. When I started, I would make about a dollar a day, two dollars when I started.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you know about how long it would take you to make a dollar in a day?

Nichols: Maybe a hour.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow. You were fast.

Nichols: I learned how to do it pretty good. A lot of them was faster, way faster than me, when I was first learning. But when I started, I stayed in New Orleans for a while around—I'll say before I had my first child I stayed, and before I got married again, I stayed in New Orleans for a while. And I worked in the factories there for a while.

Scull-DeArmey: Seafood?

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: Factory?

Nichols: I stayed with my cousin for a while, for about maybe three or four months, and I worked in the factories in Gentilly. (0:16:16.5)

Scull-DeArmey: Same thing, shrimp and oysters?

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: Was it about the same as working here?

Nichols: Yeah, same thing.

Scull-DeArmey: Exactly?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: So you could control what you made by the amount of time you chose to stay there.

Nichols: Yeah. Yeah, same thing, the bus would pick you up and bring you to work. I worked in Chalmette a month or so. They had a big factory there. So back to Bay St. Louis.

Scull-DeArmey: What happened to the oysters after they were in the bucket? Where did they go from there? (0:17:01.5)

Nichols: In a can. They had cans up in the place, like a balcony, and they would roll them down on a conveyor [belt]. And the cans were in a box, in boxes, and they had someone up there, taking them out the box, putting them on the conveyor [belt], and

they'd roll them down. And the ones that where they weighed them, they had some kind of machine that they would put them in the can and top.

Scull-DeArmey: So they were real metal cans, not glass.

Nichols: Yeah, little cans, almost like they are today. And you know what (0:17:54.6) replaced the people from doing all this was machineries took over.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember when that happened?

Nichols: I don't quite remember the year, but I know we were working in Simpson's in Pass Christian. We worked there. After I was married we worked there. And we worked in Gulfport, Biloxi.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow, from Bay St. Louis.

Nichols: Yeah. And we didn't have a bus bringing us there. All we had was the bus taking us around Bay St. Louis. But we would go in cars.

Scull-DeArmey: How much did gas cost then? Can you remember?

Nichols: Oh, Lord. (laughter) It was cheap, I guess.

Scull-DeArmey: Fifteen cents a gallon, maybe?

Nichols: Yeah, something like nineteen and fifteen. And the oil we put in our cars, we'd go to the filling station where they was emptying oil out of other cars, then put old oil in our cars and keep, kept them running. So we made it.

Scull-DeArmey: What were the oysters like then compared to what you eat now?

Nichols: I don't know. You mean steamed?

Scull-DeArmey: Just do you think they were better then? Or the flavors, or anything that comes to mind.

Nichols: I don't see any; I don't eat them out the can because I do not know.

Scull-DeArmey: But like when you think back to the raw oysters that you ate as a child. (0:19:41.6)

Nichols: Oh, they were good. They were good, salty, nice and salty, but now it seem like they wash them or something before you—if you buy them in a store.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: But usually around here, we get them right out the sacks, right out the water.

Scull-DeArmey: Really?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Nichols: We get them right out the water.

Scull-DeArmey: You can go down to the dock and—

Nichols: [Buy them] only in certain—down in Lakeshore they have them come in on the boats by the sacks, and they have these guys that'll sell you a sack or so.

Scull-DeArmey: How much is a sack of oysters today?

Nichols: I don't know, but they high right now. But last year we had a guy would open them down in Lakeshore. He would open a sack. At least he was selling them by the gallons like twenty-four dollars a gallon.

Scull-DeArmey: Was that in the shell?

Nichols: No, opened. But that's the way—I know they not that now, but he was selling them like twenty-four something last year, but they higher this year, so I heard. I haven't gotten any yet.

Scull-DeArmey: Why not?

Nichols: I just didn't feel like fooling with them. [Sylvia, my daughter,] she's the one would get them. As soon as she'd get here, she'd get a gallon. But since she's gone, I don't worry about it.

Scull-DeArmey: (coughs) Sorry, excuse me. OK. So what about going into a restaurant and ordering on the half shell? Do you ever do that?

Nichols: No. I get a oyster po'boy, though, at the restaurant.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever find any pearls when you were shucking?

Nichols: No. (laughter) Wasn't that lucky.

Scull-DeArmey: Did anybody ever find them?

Nichols: Not that I know of. They probably in those other states where they find pearls at, Hawaii or somewhere.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah, I would think so, yeah.

Nichols: No. I never heard anybody doing that here. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Now, I know my mother would buy [oysters] in the glass jars. And sometimes she would find [pearls] when she was [eating]. She always ate them carefully.

Nichols: They're little, bitty things.

Scull-DeArmey: She would find them.

Nichols: She called that pearls?

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. (laughter) I remember she saved them in a jar.

Nichols: Really? (laughter) Oh, we probably saw a lot of those, but they wasn't nothing to talk about.

Scull-DeArmey: What did you do with them if you found them?

Nichols: Oh, you'd just throw that away.

Scull-DeArmey: Really?

Nichols: I mean, they come out with the—when you opened the oysters, sometime they would be stuck in the shell, and you'd throw that away with the shell.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever use any equipment beyond just your knife?

Nichols: That's all you'd use for the oyster, just a glove and the knife.

Scull-DeArmey: Just one?

Nichols: They had special knives. (0:23:03.4)

Scull-DeArmey: What were they like?

Nichols: I don't know. They had different, different kinds. One was all steel or whatever, and then they had some with the wooden handles, and it was about that long.

Scull-DeArmey: Did the factory supply you with the knife?

Nichols: No. You had to buy your knife and your glove.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember what they cost?

Nichols: No. Probably twenty-five cents, but the knife would be a little higher. But everybody had a couple of knives, and they'd keep them sharp where they could—if the oyster wasn't all the way open, they had to pry them open.

Scull-DeArmey: Was that hard to do?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmey: I was going to ask you something. Oh, how did you learn to do that? (0:24:08.2)

Nichols: By watching the others, the older ones. When you'd go to the factories, you watched the older ones that was doing it before you got there. When I started, we worked with a lot of older people, and they used to have more fun (0:24:31.9) on the bus with us. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: What would they do?

Nichols: Oh, we had one of my good friends; she was a good singer. She could sing real well. And they would ask her to sing. We'd sing all the way to the factories, and all the way back home, you'd be singing.

Scull-DeArmey: What were some of the songs?

Nichols: Oh, the old gospels, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember any of like how they went?

Nichols: How they went?

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah..

Nichols: Oh, my God, no.

Scull-DeArmey: No?

Nichols: No. I wouldn't go through that.

Scull-DeArmey: So did they give you a test before you started?

Nichols: No, no. And when we first started working—when I first starting working at Simpson's in Pass Christian, they started a union, (0:25:31.2) and we started working with the union. And they would tell us what prices that we should work for. I forget what you call it.

Scull-DeArmey: Union wages or—

Nichols: Yeah. So when we start working with the union we got a little better representation.

Scull-DeArmey: Great. Were there dues to belong?

Nichols: I think there was. It might've been a few nickels or something, but most of the time the union would pay it, whatever it was.

Scull-DeArmey: I'm a little bit worried about this. (Referring to recorder)

Nichols: What? It's not working?

Scull-DeArmey: Hold on just a second.

Nichols: Are you getting any information you can use?

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, yeah. Yes, yes. OK. It's ticking away. I just couldn't see it without my glasses. So it wasn't too much to belong to the union.

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you think the owners of the factory thought about the union? Did you get any feedback?

Nichols: At first I think they didn't want it, but they couldn't hold back too long. Simpson was pretty good about it.

Scull-DeArmey: Were there any other changes that were made, you think, by the union, like a limit on the hours you would work?

Nichols: No, no, nothing like that. It was just the prices that was questioned.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember who started it? Were they local, or did somebody come in?

Nichols: No. I can't remember that. I think somebody came in, but I'm not sure.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember about what year that was, just approximately?

Nichols: It had to be—let me see—when I had my first child, right after that because I was still working in the factories. He is what? He was born in 1947. So it had to be around [19]48 or something like that.

Scull-DeArmey: Late 1940s.

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: How did you work with children? Who took care of your children? (0:28:34.1)

Nichols: Well, my great-grandmother was still living then, and she'd looked after them.

Scull-DeArmey: She raised a lot of children, didn't she?

Nichols: Oh, Lord. Well, my family was migrated from New Orleans. My great-grandmother brought her daughter and five children to Bay St. Louis. And there they are, all of them right there. That's my great-grandmother on the side. That's her daughter, and that's my mother, next. And she brought her with all her kids to Bay St. Louis. And she died right after I was born in [1925]. She died in 1926 and left all these children with her.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you know what happened to her?

Nichols: I really don't know. I don't know if she died in childbirth again or what.

Scull-DeArmey: You don't remember if she was sick for a time or just suddenly—

Nichols: I wasn't born.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh. I thought you were talking about your mother.

Nichols: Oh, my mother, she died in the [19]80s. But her mother died in 1926, right after I was born. And [my great-grandmother] raised all of her children, which my mother was one of them. And then she turned around, having to raise me.

Scull-DeArmey: And your children a little bit.

Nichols: Yes. So it's come on down.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah, yeah. Do you remember if the factories blew whistles to wake people up in the morning? (0:30:49.2)

Nichols: Yes, they did.

Scull-DeArmey: Is that how you—

Nichols: They would [blow], not to wake people up; to let them know if they had a boat in. So if they had a boat in, they knew we had work.

Scull-DeArmey: Right. Might you hear the whistle just any time of day?

Nichols: No. I don't remember that, but I know it probably would be early in the mornings.

Scull-DeArmey: And you could go if you wanted to or not?

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: If you needed the money.

Nichols: If you needed the money, you better go. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: But if you—

Nichols: And the truck would come around. You know the truck would be coming after you hear the whistle.

Scull-DeArmey: What did the truck do?

Nichols: The truck would pick you up, pick people up. They would come from Lakeshore on down to Bay St. Louis and pick up all over Lakeshore.

Scull-DeArmey: But you had to get home by yourself?

Nichols: No. They'd pick you up and bring you home.

Scull-DeArmey: They would?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: But what if you only worked for two hours?

Nichols: Well, you'd get home the best way you could, if you wanted to leave. The people at Lakeshore and all that, and Waveland and Clermont Harbor or all over, they couldn't walk. Nobody had cars, at that time.

Scull-DeArmey: So if you stayed till the end of the shift, a bus would take you home.

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Did people ever get cut?

Nichols: From the shells and stuff?

Scull-DeArmey: Or the shells or a slip with a knife?

Nichols: No, I don't think so because the gloves protected you. You had gloves that would come up to about here.

Scull-DeArmey: Right. Is there anything else about working for the seafood plant that stands out in your mind?

Nichols: No, not really, nothing but we had a lot of fun. (laughter) (0:33:01.6)

Scull-DeArmey: Like what did you do?

Nichols: It was fun. We would, people would come, bring candies. We had old ladies would bring candies. And people would bring sandwiches to sell and stuff like that. So you could bring your own lunch or whatever.

Scull-DeArmey: What was a typical sandwich?

Nichols: A sandwich of that day would be lunch, bologna, sausage sandwiches. And if somebody was bringing in a sandwich, they would bring hamburgers to buy. And we had a old lady from Pass Christian; she used to make pralines, big nice pralines, was delicious, and they were like five cent apiece. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: For the record for people who don't know what a praline is, can you just describe what the ingredients are? (0:34:06.0)

Nichols: Sugar, milk and cream, pecans, vanilla, that's about it; butter; that's about it.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Five cents each. They're a bit more than that now.

Nichols: Ooh! And you got to know how to make them. That's the next thing. Everybody couldn't make them.

Scull-DeArmey: Not everybody made them?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmey: Are they hard to make? I've never made them.

Nichols: You have to practice to learn. (laughter) They not hard to make, but you got to practice. My cousin, I got a cousin down the street; he was on my daddy's side. And he, when he got out the service, he went to cooking school, and he learned how to make them, and that's all he sold to help provide for his kids. He had about twelve. He just died last couple of months ago. And he made them for the school, and he made them. He sold them every day. He still was selling them until the day he died.

Scull-DeArmey: And he could make a living?

Nichols: Oh, yeah. He made it. Then, also, he worked other places. But with twelve kids or fourteen or fifteen, (laughter) he needed as much money as he could get.

Scull-DeArmey: You'd be working a lot.

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: So these were made in people's homes.

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: And that was OK to sell them. You didn't have to have the—

Nichols: Right.

Scull-DeArmey: —health department?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What would you typically take for lunch if you packed a lunch?

Nichols: Just like I said, sausage, bread and sausage, that's all. Sometime some people just had jelly, peanut butter, something like that.

Scull-DeArmey: Was it quiet? Did they, did the owners of the factory want y'all to stay quiet while you worked? (0:36:38.9)

Nichols: Oh, no. We could sing. They sang all day long. And we had black, white, green, gray; everybody worked together. (0:36:45.6)

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, that's wonderful.

Nichols: Yes. We had white people on the bus, black people on the bus; same thing in New Orleans when we worked in New Orleans, same thing.

Scull-DeArmey: You were mostly women, weren't you?

Nichols: No. There were women and men.

Scull-DeArmey: And men.

Nichols: Because sometimes the men would be rolling shells and stuff like that. Some of them would be shucking oysters or picking shrimps, whatever we were doing.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you pick shrimp, also? (0:37:22.9)

Nichols: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Can you describe that for people who are listening and don't, wouldn't know what you did?

Nichols: Well, they would bring the shrimps, boiled and packed in ice, and they'd bring them, pour them out on the table, and then you'd pick them. They weighed the shells instead of the shrimps, so you—

Scull-DeArmey: To pay you they—

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: They weighed the shells?

Nichols: They would say the shells and the shrimp weighed the same amount.

Scull-DeArmey: (laughter) I don't think so.

Nichols: It does, though.

Scull-DeArmey: Really?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Good grief. Did—

Nichols: We couldn't understand it, but that was it.

Scull-DeArmey: Did y'all cut the heads off?

Nichols: No. You'd peel. The heads come off with the shell.

Scull-DeArmey: So you snapped—so the head gets weighed, also?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Legs come off and go with the shells?

Nichols: All that, yes.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. That's very interesting.

Nichols: You've never done that?

Scull-DeArmey: Well, I have, actually. I think that people who listen to this maybe wouldn't have ever done that.

Nichols: Oh. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: But I'm surprised that they paid you by the weight of the shells.

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: That really surprises me. Do you know what happened to all that, the shells when you were done? Did they recycle them somehow?

Nichols: No. I guess they threw them back in the water somewhere.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. I think today they might use them to enrich compost or something.

Nichols: Yeah. And the shells from the oysters, (0:39:08.5) they used to put them in the streets. You remember? Instead of paved roads, they had shell roads.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you grow up with a lot of oyster shell roads?

Nichols: No, because I grew up in town. That was mostly out of town. But before I was born, I imagine they had them everywhere.

Scull-DeArmey: I think so. I've seen photographs and paintings like that.

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: Especially in Biloxi and Gulfport.

Scull-DeArmey: So did the shrimp boats come in like the oyster boats did?

Nichols: Yes, same thing.

Scull-DeArmey: And they boiled the shrimp at the factory.

Nichols: Yes. They had the shrimp boils right there.

Scull-DeArmey: Then after the shrimp had been peeled, where did the edible shrimp go?

Nichols: In a can.

Scull-DeArmey: Same way as the oysters?

Nichols: Yeah, same way as the oysters.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So did you put the shrimp in a bucket, and somebody got the bucket and took it and canned them?

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: The same way as with the oysters.

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Did any equipment change over time while you worked there?
(0:40:32.2)

Nichols: No, not until they brought in all the machines, and then we were all out of work. Somehow or another they found a machine that could peel shrimps like we used to do. They didn't do a good job as we did, but they found a way to do it.

Scull-DeArmey: Were you making a living at that time and depending on the money?

Nichols: Of course. There wasn't no other, no other way.

Scull-DeArmey: How did you cope with that?

Nichols: Well, there wasn't no other way. You had to do with what you had, and it wasn't much, but things didn't cost as much, so you could do it. And then people had gardens to help. We didn't, but other people did. We could go borrow some of theirs.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever think about making pralines to sell?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmey: (laughter) Can you make a good praline?

Nichols: Sometime. (laughter) Sometime they come out good and sometime not.

Scull-DeArmey: My mother swore that it depended on the weather.

Nichols: Yes, too. They say it has a lot to do with it, the altitude or the something. I don't know. Maybe that's why mine don't come out good all the time. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember anything about your father's fishing career,
(0:42:17.8) especially stuff that people will not know in fifty years or a hundred years?

Nichols: My daddy, his family, his daddy was a fisherman, and his children took after him. At least my daddy did, and about a couple of other sons, but that was their living. And we got one left in Bay St. Louis, the best on the Coast. (laughter) He's still here with one leg.

Scull-DeArmey: Who?

Nichols: He's my first cousin. His name is Herman Reix.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you spell it?

Nichols: R-E-I-U-X, I think it is. And he's the last one of the bunch.

Scull-DeArmey: He's still fishing?

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: What does he gather?

Nichols: What does he?

Scull-DeArmey: What does he harvest from the sea? Does he get—

Nichols: Fish.

Scull-DeArmey: Finfish?

Nichols: Fish, period, all fish. I'm going to show you my granddaddy's catch.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow. (long pause) You OK? Wow.

Nichols: That's when he was fishing. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Did he fish with a line and—

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: —rod? OK.

Nichols: And the big nets. And Herman, he still make the big nets.

Scull-DeArmey: He's the net maker?

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: I wonder if I could interview Herman.

Nichols: Oh, he wouldn't do that for nothing in the world.

Scull-DeArmey: He wouldn't. Oh.

Nichols: They been trying to get him for years. He's kind of—

Scull-DeArmey: Well—

Nichols: Because he never went to school. [Grandpa] taught him how to fish. He stayed with him when a little, bitty boy.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you know how he sold his fish?

Nichols: How he sold them?

Scull-DeArmey: Uh-huh.

Nichols: He sold them by the bunch in those days. See, that's bunches of fish. They call them bunches.

Scull-DeArmey: Where would he go? Where would he sell them?

Nichols: They had a market on the beach at that time. (0:45:09.5) What they fighting over the beach now out there, who owns it. And they want to build something out there now. But as I can remember, young, it was a big market out there, and that's where they had a wharf going out to the water. And he would tie his boats up out there, and that's where they caught fish. And he caught fish and brought it in, and he [sold to the market, and he] taught them boys how to fish. And that's his last one living, is his grandson, [Herman].

Scull-DeArme y: Did you ever get to go out on a boat with any of those fishermen in your family?

Nichols: I went with Herman a couple of times.

Scull-DeArme y: Can you describe it for people who've never been on a boat? What's it like?

Nichols: (laughter) You ever been on a boat fishing?

Scull-DeArme y: Not a fishing boat, I haven't.

Nichols: Well, I went out with him a couple of times. I didn't catch a fish, and I can fish. And he caught a boatload of fish.

Scull-DeArme y: With a rod and—

Nichols: Rod and reel.

Scull-DeArme y: He wasn't pulling nets?

Nichols: No, not when I went with him. But he'd go out at night and set out his nets. He done got caught out there with sharks and everything else and survived. And then he gets caught on a lawnmower and cut his leg off, and he'd been out with all them sharks and stuff out there in the lake. We was looking for him to get drowned at any minute. He'd stay out there for weeks by his self; he wouldn't fish with nobody else, commercial fishing. He commercial fish. He sell his fish to big dealers all over the Coast, New Orleans, everywhere.

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah. Did you ever watch them make nets? (0:47:17.7)

Nichols: Yeah. He made them right out there in his yard.

Scull-DeArme y: How did they do that?

Nichols: He would string them from tree to tree, out there in the yard. Got a big yard over, a couple of blocks over.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you ever want to become a fisherman when you were growing up?

Nichols: I fish now.

Scull-DeArmey: But I mean—

Nichols: Not commercial, no.

Scull-DeArmey: —to do for a living?

Nichols: No, no.

Scull-DeArmey: You don't find many women who are fishermen, fisher women.

Nichols: They have them. They mostly out on the bayous. They got them out there on the bayou.

Scull-DeArmey: I'd love to find one.

Nichols: Yeah. (laughter) Oh, Lord, they, I guess all the older ones is dead, and after the hurricane, it moved a lot of them away.

Scull-DeArmey: Hurricane Katrina?

Nichols: Yeah. My brother's building one, building a home out there on the bayou right now. I have one brother. He got a dome he's building. He built one. Katrina took it, so he's building another one.

Scull-DeArmey: A dome shape?

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Nichols: And he's right on the water out there. He's working on it now. He's almost finished.

Scull-DeArmey: He's brave to build back.

Nichols: Oh, Lord. He decided after all these years; he just started. Everybody else built back there. He look like the last one back there. He started not to, but he said he'd better go ahead. He wanted to stay on the water.

Scull-DeArmey: I don't think I would—

Nichols: And that's where we all go right now. That's where we're fishing at.

Scull-DeArmey: Is that right, where his house will be?

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: Where it is.

Scull-DeArmey: Which bayou?

Nichols: On Jourdan, Jourdan River.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you catch out there? (0:49:22.0)

Nichols: We catch crabs. Sometimes the shrimps come in. And we catch all kind of fish when they're biting.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you catch?

Nichols: Croakers, redfish, speckled trout, white trout, drums, anything that's coming through there.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you use for bait?

Nichols: Shrimp.

Scull-DeArmey: Are they live?

Nichols: Sometimes live and sometimes dead. Live bait, dead bait, cut-up fish, when we run out of bait, (laughter) when we run out of shrimp.

Scull-DeArmey: Maybe just take a fish that you caught?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you know how to use the cast net and catch shrimp, you yourself?

Nichols: I don't. I got a sister that does. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Have you seen her do it?

Nichols: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Can you kind of describe what it looks like?

Nichols: What, the net?

Scull-DeArmey: When she's casting the net.

Nichols: Oh, she just pick it up, put it in her two hands, throw it out, and pull it in. She love to do it. Her name is Marcella; that's my sister.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you spell that?

Nichols: M-A-R-C-E-L-L-A, that's my sister. And my brother is Rudolph. He wouldn't be nowhere but on the water, too.

Scull-DeArmey: R-U-D-O?

Nichols: U-L-P-H, that's my brother. And they're all fishermen. And I got a grandson, which is Goldie's son; he just told me yesterday he just bought a boat.

(laughter) And he goes out there, right off from where my brother's place is, and that's where he fish at. And he told me yesterday, "I just bought a boat."

Scull-DeArmey: Great.

Nichols: So.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: He'll be out there every day. He works on garbage trucks. And he'll be out there every evening; when he get off, he'll be out there.

Scull-DeArmey: There are a couple of follow-up questions I want to ask you. When you were growing up, did y'all bring fish home to eat?

Nichols: Oh, what you mean?

Scull-DeArmey: I'm just wondering if you brought fish home, how you stored it.

Nichols: My daddy would bring fish home.

Scull-DeArmey: How did y'all store it?

Nichols: We wouldn't store it; we'd fry it. (laughter) And eat it. We had to eat fish, whatever he had leftover. He'd sell it in the yard by the bunch or whatever, fifteen cents a bunch—I can remember. And whenever people would pass by and buy, and we would fry the rest and eat it.

Scull-DeArmey: Tell me how you fried it.

Nichols: How you fry fish?

Scull-DeArmey: Well, some people don't know, so this is for the record for years to come.

Nichols: (laughter) You put grease in a frying pan, (0:53:16.5) and if you have cornmeal or flour, cornmeal is best to fry fish. And you'd clean the fish, dip it in the cornmeal, and fry it in the grease.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, when you were growing up as a little girl, were you expected to clean fish?

Nichols: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah?

Nichols: Yes, I learned. They learned early.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So for people who don't know how, how do you clean a fish? (0:53:56.0)

Nichols: You scrape it, the scales; they call scales on the fish. And you take a knife, and you clean the scales off the fish. You can either cut the head off the fish, split it down the back or front, and clean out the insides, and you got a clean fish.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you leave the bones in?

Nichols: You can take the bones out or leave them in, either way.

Scull-DeArmey: So y'all never had any leftovers. You ate—you were efficient, weren't you?

Nichols: Right.

Scull-DeArmey: So that was the protein he fed to his family.

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: The fish that he caught.

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: That's probably why you're so healthy. (laughter)

Nichols: Eating all that fish.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah, fish is so good for you.

Nichols: Oh, Lord.

Scull-DeArmey: So when your sister is casting her net for shrimp, is she standing in the water?

Nichols: No. You stand on the bank—they call it a bank—or back there by my brother's, she stand on the wharf. He got a wharf. So it's like a pier, but it's long. Instead of out to the water, it's over the water.

Scull-DeArmey: Can she tell if the shrimp are there, or does she just cast and find out? (0:55:48.1)

Nichols: No. You see them.

Scull-DeArmey: You can see them.

Nichols: When they come in; they jumping all over the water.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you think they come in about the same time every day?

Nichols: No. They surprise you. They'll be there when you see them and when you don't. What are you doing after this?

Scull-DeArmey: I'm just supposed to meet my brother. He lives in Gulfport.

Nichols: Oh, I was going to take you out there by my brother's place on the bayou.

Scull-DeArmeY: Well, let's see how the time goes. I should've brought a camera.

Nichols: Oh.

Scull-DeArmeY: Is there anything else you remember about fishing in your family when you were a child, working at the seafood industry that you'd like to get down on the record that people would—like if you don't tell us, we'll never know.

Nichols: Well, I'd just like to say for some people mostly like my parents, that was a source of income. That's what we lived off of, the water. That's what we lived off of. And when my daddy and mother moved to New Orleans to find work, he got a job with the WPA [Works Progress Administration].

Scull-DeArmeY: Works Progress?

Nichols: Yeah, was in New Orleans. And that's when he would come over here fishing on the weekend. That's how he got killed; I just told you that. So we moved back to the Bay [St. Louis]. But at that time before we left here, his source of income was fishing.

Scull-DeArmeY: So did it get difficult for him to make a living fishing and that's why he—

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmeY: —took you to New Orleans?

Nichols: Yes, yes. It was.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah. How did he get from New Orleans to Bay St. Louis?

Nichols: You really want to know?

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah.

Nichols: Freight trains. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: OK, OK.

Nichols: He'd take freight trains. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmeY: Well, that's a very efficient way to do it.

Nichols: Yes. He'd come on freight trains, go back on the freight train.

Scull-DeArmeY: And he rode a bicycle after he got here.

Nichols: After he got here, yeah, because his family was here. His sisters and all was here.

Scull-DeArmeY: Oh, boy, your life would've been different if he hadn't gotten hit that day.

Nichols: Yes. We probably would've still been in New Orleans. I don't know because that place!

Scull-DeArmey: You think you would've just stayed there?

Nichols: I have no idea; I really don't.

Scull-DeArmey: When you were that age, what was your preference for where you wanted to live, Bay St. Louis or New Orleans?

Nichols: Back to Bay St. Louis.

Scull-DeArmey: Why did you like it better?

Nichols: Because it was—all my cousins in New Orleans used to call this the country, "We going to the country, going back to the country." So I wanted to be in the country. I didn't like the cities, too much hustle and bustle.

Scull-DeArmey: There's a lot of natural beauty around in this area.

Nichols: Yeah. We have more freedom. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Because it's safer?

Nichols: Yeah, much safer, much, much. *Now*. At that time, New Orleans wasn't that bad, but—

Scull-DeArmey: Really?

Nichols: But now, it's terrible.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. It is one of the worst cities for crime.

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. Do you remember any hurricanes occurring when you were working in the seafood industry? (1:00:07.1)

Nichols: No, not really, nothing but that [Hurricane of 19]47, that's what the one—and Camille.

Scull-DeArmey: Were you still working in 1969 in the seafood industry?

Nichols: I don't know, 1969—no.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. In the 1947 Hurricane, do you remember what happened to the docks and boats and the factories?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: What happened then?

Nichols: They didn't have factories then.

Scull-DeArme y: They didn't have the seafood factories in [19]47?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArme y: OK.

Nichols: I don't think. I don't think because I had just had a baby then. My baby was still in the bed when the hurricane came. We had moved back from New Orleans, and we were staying on Sycamore Street. That's not far from here.

Scull-DeArme y: Is it pretty close to the water, Sycamore Street where you lived?

Nichols: Yeah. It was about a couple of blocks.

Scull-DeArme y: So what happened at your house? Did y'all stay there?

Nichols: Yeah. We didn't have nowhere else to go. The neighbors next door had a tree fall on they house, and they had to come over to our little house and stay because the water went in they house. The trees was uprooting; I remember that, coming out the [ground]. All our pecan trees we had in the backyard, they were unrooted, uprooted rather. You ever seen trees come out the ground?

Scull-DeArme y: In Hattiesburg.

Nichols: Yeah?

Scull-DeArme y: In Katrina.

Nichols: Yeah?

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah, all over town.

Nichols: Really?

Scull-DeArme y: Yeah, yeah.

Nichols: We went to, after Katrina we went over to—it was another storm after that.

Scull-DeArme y: Rita, Hurricane Rita?

Nichols: Yeah. My brother was building a house out there. He bought a house in Vicksburg, and we went flying over there to Vicksburg, and the weather was worse in Vicksburg than what we left in Bay St. Louis. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Katrina was bad, and Rita was a big storm, too. They affected huge areas.

Nichols: Yeah. We saw a lot on the way to Vicksburg, on the highway, where it was bad. So you can't run from them too much. You don't know where you're going. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: What were your feelings and thoughts when you heard about the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill? (1:03:08.8)

Nichols: Oh, my goodness.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you remember?

Nichols: Yeah. We couldn't go fishing anymore for one thing. But we didn't know it was as bad as it was until it was when we couldn't get out there anymore, to go fishing. But it wasn't too much in, back here in the bayous. It was mostly out front that was the worry.

Scull-DeArmey: Would they let you fish in the bayous?

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Hm. They didn't close them.

Nichols: Unh-uh, not where my brother is, they didn't.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever see any oil?

Nichols: No, I didn't.

Scull-DeArmey: And you caught fish and ate them?

Nichols: Yeah. I still did, but my sister wouldn't. (laughter) She wouldn't eat them, but we did, what we caught out here.

Scull-DeArmey: How was it? Were they different at all?

Nichols: Well, some of them seemed like they had—like the crabs I had (1:04:19.5) were dark meat.

Scull-DeArmey: Oh, really?

Nichols: Yeah, some of the crabs was dark meat.

Scull-DeArmey: And is that unusual?

Nichols: Yes, that was unusual, but that didn't last long. It didn't last long.

Scull-DeArmey: What is the health of the fisheries on the Gulf Coast now? For example, the shrimp, the crabs, the oysters, the finfish, what do you think is happening from your experience fishing and the people you know?

Nichols: I think the fish is not as plentiful as they was, (1:05:07.1) and the shrimps doesn't come in like they used to because we used to go down on the end of the beach this way, and every year those shrimps come in, in droves. And people would be down there like this with search lights and gas lights and all kind of nights, all night long, shrimping.

Scull-DeArmey: So they'd take lights out with their nets?

Nichols: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: Or on their boats?

Nichols: With the nets and they'd throw the nets right off the seawall.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, were you pointing toward the west or east?

Nichols: What is that? See me, I don't know east. I know we—

Scull-DeArmey: Which way is New Orleans?

Nichols: We are east from New Orleans.

Scull-DeArmey: Is New Orleans that way?

Nichols: That way.

Scull-DeArmey: So that's east, towards the east.

Nichols: That's where—

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: That's where.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: This is east coming this way.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: This is Cedar Point we call, down here. But at the end of the seawall is down here this way, at the end of the seawall, behind the casino. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: So it's not as plentiful down there—

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmey: —as it used to be?

Nichols: No. They used to have people down there like that.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you think—

Nichols: All night long.

Scull-DeArmey: You think that's since the oil spill or before? Was that starting before the oil spill?

Nichols: That's since the oil spill.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What do you see for the future of the seafood industry on the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Nichols: Hm, I have no idea. I really don't. It should be better. It couldn't be worse. It should be better because they building all kind of—I don't know what you call it—to make it more plentiful of the seafood. They're building all kind of stuff out there in the water.

Scull-DeArmey: I know they are building some reefs for the oysters, too.

Nichols: Yeah, yes.

Scull-DeArmey: The oysters have had a hard time from Katrina and from—

Nichols: The oil spill, too.

Scull-DeArmey: The oil, yeah. We have been asking people about food because we're getting ready to put some things on the radio about foodways. So we're asking everybody what their favorite seafood dish is.

Nichols: (laughter) Gumbo.

Scull-DeArmey: Gumbo. OK.

Nichols: Don't leave gumbo out.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you prepare gumbo? (1:08:08.8)

Nichols: Oh, my God. (laughter) How many ways.

Scull-DeArmey: What's your favorite way?

Nichols: Oh, I make okra gumbo. I like okra gumbo. And the way I make it is not the way a whole lot of people make it.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you make it?

Nichols: Well, you want the recipe?

Scull-DeArmey: Just from your memory, tell me.

Nichols: My memories every day are simple. Okra, tomatoes, and I make a roux.

Scull-DeArmey: How do you make a roux?

Nichols: Flour and oil, that's a roux. And you have seasoning.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you use for seasoning?

Nichols: Onions, garlic, bell pepper, and that is my main seasonings, what I use. And what else?

Scull-DeArmey: OK. We've got okra, tomatoes, roux, seasoning.

Nichols: And your seafood.

Scull-DeArmey: What kinds of seafood do you put in there?

Nichols: Shrimp and crab, ham, that's it, for mine. And then a lot of people make filé gumbo.

Scull-DeArmey: Now, what is the difference?

Nichols: Filé, you do not use okra. Oh, you have to have your bay leaf.

Scull-DeArmey: Bay leaf, in your gumbo?

Nichols: Yeah. Bay leaf and thyme. That's the secret ingredients for that. Same thing with that.

Scull-DeArmey: The bay leaf and the thyme.

Nichols: Yeah, with this.

Scull-DeArmey: And the filé.

Nichols: Filé. OK. You make a roux; same thing. And [make a long gravy] that's the biggest portion of that and the filé.

Scull-DeArmey: What is filé?

Nichols: Filé is—let me see if I've got some. I'll show it to you.

Scull-DeArmey: OK.

Nichols: I got one daughter, don't eat okra, so I have to make the other for her. Oh, Lordy, my legs is giving out on me. (long pause) All my spices. I know I've got filé somewhere. Thyme.

Scull-DeArmey: Gumbo filé, so it's a powder. (1:12:13.4)

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: And it says that it's ground sassafras leaves.

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow. I know I've smelled that before. (laughter) I can't remember where.

Nichols: Yeah, they usually, after you make the gumbo—and the older people used to put your gumbo in a plate, and then you sprinkle the filé on it.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you put with the gumbo? Do people usually put rice with it?

Nichols: Yeah, um-hm. Oh, yeah, rice go with everything.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Nichols: This is a Louisiana [kind], but they had a load of people used to make their own filé.

Scull-DeArmey: Is that right?

Nichols: Yeah. And we'd buy it in little jars. They'd put it in little jars, and you go to they house and get it, like a dollar a little jar.

Scull-DeArmey: Did you ever see anybody make it?

Nichols: Yes, I've made it.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, how did they do that?

Nichols: A old lady showed me how to do it. You put the leaves—they had trees with the leaves in the yard, and they put it in the oven, and dry it out, until it gets hard. And then you take a roller; they used to use the rolling pin and roll it and grind it and grind it till [it's powder].

Scull-DeArmey: Till it gets fine like that.

Nichols: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Nichols: And that was the best.

Scull-DeArmey: I'll bet, really fresh.

Nichols: Um-hm.

Scull-DeArmey: Right off the tree, a lot of flavor. Well, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you'd like to put on the record?

Nichols: No.

Scull-DeArmey: OK.

Nichols: Nothing else I know of.

Scull-DeArmey: All right.

Nichols: Unless you can think of anything.

Scull-DeArmey: I'll turn off the recorder, and I'll just say thank you very much.

Nichols: Oh, I hope it's something you can use.

Scull-DeArmey: It is.

(end of interview)