

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

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

McIlwain Rogers

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

Volume 1043
2012

This project was funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration through Mississippi State University-Northern Gulf Institute, Grant Number NA06OAR4320264. Louis M. Kyriakoudes, Principal Investigator.

©2012

The University of Southern Mississippi

This transcription of an oral history by The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage of The University of Southern Mississippi may not be reproduced or published in any form except that quotation of short excerpts of unrestricted transcripts and the associated tape recordings is permissible providing written consent is obtained from The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. When literary rights have been retained by the interviewee, written permission to use the material must be obtained from both the interviewee and The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage.

This oral history is a transcript of a taped conversation. The transcript was edited and punctuation added for readability and clarity. People who are interviewed may review the transcript before publication and are allowed to delete comments they made and to correct factual errors. Additions to the original text are shown in brackets []. Minor deletions are not noted. Original tapes and transcripts are on deposit in the McCain Library and Archives on the campus of The University of Southern Mississippi.



Louis Kyriakoudes, Director
The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage
118 College Drive #5175
The University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
601-266-4574

An Oral History with McIlwain Rogers, Volume 1043

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

Transcriber: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

Editors: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey, Linda VanZandt

Biography

Mr. McIlwain "Wain" Rogers was born September 19, 1946, in Escatawpa, Mississippi, to Mr. Mackie Rogers (born January 17, 1916, in Escatawpa, Mississippi) and Mrs. Lois Kelly Rogers (born in Claire, Mississippi). His father was the owner of a hardware store, a house builder, and a crabber. His father's family from North Carolina were in the sawmill business. His mother was a welder at Ingalls Shipbuilders during World War II. Her family were farmers.

On February 24, 1995, he married his wife Lawanda. They are the parents of Karen Lee Rogers Lyons (born in 1964), Laura Ann Rogers Rice (born in 1967), Kelly Amanda Nicole Rogers Hall (born in 1972), and Leann Rogers (born in 1981).

Rogers is a commercial fisherman who owns a restaurant and a retail seafood store. He completed the tenth grade. He enjoys car racing and football in his spare time.

Table of Contents

Beginning of commercial fishing career.....	1
Marketing catches	2, 7, 11
Crabbing equipment.....	3
Catfishing equipment	3
Boat.....	4
Crawfish.....	4
Shrimp.....	4
Oystering with tongs, dredges.....	5
Fishing for mullet, trout	6
Regulations	6, 8, 10, 15, 20
Gillnets, regulations	6
Cotton nets	7
Cast nets	7
Marketing mullet.....	7
L and W Seafood, including restaurant.....	8, 10
Regulations, crabs	8
Vietnamese fishermen.....	9
No shrimp in 2011-2012 season	10
BP Deepwater Horizon oil disaster.....	10, 15
Corexit dispersant	10
Oysters in Bayou Cumbest, regulations.....	10
Typical day fishing	12
Hurricane Georges, Hurricane Katrina	13
Imports, regulations	15, 19
Vessels of Opportunity	15, 17
Expectations, realities of fishing season after BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill	16
Spillway openings, freshwater intrusion in fishing waters	16
Advice on better implementation of Vessels of Opportunity	17
Lost-income claim against BP	18
Appraisal of future of commercial fishing.....	19
Prices paid for catches	19
Appraisal of health of Gulf Coast Fisheries, based on sampling.....	19
Turtle excluder devices	21

AN ORAL HISTORY

with

McILWAIN ROGERS

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with McIlwain Rogers and is taking place on February 7, 2012. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.

Hester: OK. Just to get started, I'm Barbara Hester with the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage with The University of Southern Mississippi, and I'm here today at the business of Mr. McIlwain Rogers in Moss Point, Mississippi. Today is Tuesday, February 7, 2012, and we're getting started at about 1:40 in the afternoon. Good afternoon, Mr. Rogers. If you would, let's start with would you state your name and your address for the record, please?

Rogers: OK. I'm McIlwain Rogers. (The address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy.)

Hester: OK. And what is your occupation, Mr. Rogers?

Rogers: I'm a commercial fisherman.

Hester: When did you start commercial fishing? (0:01:36.5) How old were you?

Rogers: Ooh, I started commercial fishing back in the early [19]70s.

Hester: How old were you then, if you don't mind me asking?

Rogers: I must have been about thirty, thirty-one.

Hester: Uh-huh. Are you from a fishing family? (0:01:49.2)

Rogers: Yeah. Daddy was a crabber.

Hester: He was a crabber.

Rogers: Um-hm, at the time. That's the reason I got started.

Hester: I see. Did you crab with your dad at all?

Rogers: Yeah, um-hm.

Hester: And you must have been pretty young then?

Rogers: No, not really. He didn't start till he was late.

Hester: Uh-huh, OK. And was his business here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, or did he have—

Rogers: No, he didn't have a business.

Hester: Well, was he living here at the time, or was he living somewhere else?

Rogers: No. He was here.

Hester: OK. In Pascagoula or Moss Point?

Rogers: Same. We're right at the same place.

Hester: OK. So you started crabbing then? That was your first experience with commercial fishing was crabbing?

Rogers: Other than catfishing. I used to catfish.

Hester: I see. OK. Did you father catfish, as well?

Rogers: Yeah.

Hester: Yeah. OK. When you started did your father have his own boat?

Rogers: Yeah, offshore, um-hm.

Hester: Could you describe it?

Rogers: Well, I don't know. It was just a skiff with a outboard, (0:02:52.6) you know. I think he had a thirty-five- or a fifty-five-[horsepower outboard], something like that.

Hester: I see. And how would he market his catch? (0:03:02.2)

Rogers: He sold them to the crab house.

Hester: OK. And the crab house would have been here?

Rogers: Well, he sold some here, and then we sold some to Bayou La Batre at the time, yeah.

Hester: And so at some point you decided to branch off and go on your own, I guess.

Rogers: Right.

Hester: About when was that?

Rogers: Probably about [19]72, [19]73.

Hester: OK. And when you started with your dad, it's not too many years after you first started working with your dad, so I assume there weren't many changes in the equipment. Is that right? Or was it the same equipment that you used with your dad? (0:03:48.1)

Rogers: Basically, yeah. We was changing over from a different type of crab pot to what they call a Bangs(?) pot. They call it a Alabama pot now, but Buck Bang(?) built it for Daddy and me when he started them pots, the four-eyed(?) pot and the design of the pot.

Hester: When you say, "four-eye pot," could you describe that a little bit?

Rogers: Well, it's just four throats in it. Well, we used to use two. At one time everybody used two throats, and then it went to a four throat, which that caught crabs a lot quicker. They'd get out quicker, but they would get in the pot quicker.

Hester: And so that would be the part where the crab would actually get into the—

Rogers: Right, the throat, right. Most times your throat goes with the current. You know, you have to set it with the current, but with the four-eyed pots, you always pretty well will run in the current.

Hester: OK. And with the catfishing that you did, was that pretty much the same when you went on your own, or did that change, as well, as far as the equipment you used?

Rogers: No, same equipment.

Hester: And could you describe the equipment? (0:04:52.1)

Rogers: Well, all we ever used was traps, and we had them built. Used to be a fellow in Alabama built them for us, Buck Bangs, and he would build them for us as we needed them.

Hester: Was he in Bayou La Batre?

Rogers: He was in Grand Bay.

Hester: Grand Bay, OK, Buck Bangs.

Rogers: Um-hm, Buck Bangs.

Hester: Is he still in business? Do you know?

Rogers: He's probably dead, now. He was old. He'd done got too old to crab. He was an old crabber, and then he got where he couldn't crab, so he built crab pots.

Hester: I see. OK. So you went into commercial fishing about [19]72 or [19]73, and you went out on your own. Did you purchase your own boat?

Rogers: Yeah.

Hester: What kind of boat did you get?

Rogers: I had just a skiff like everybody else, about a twenty-foot skiff.

Hester: And you started with the crabbing and then catfishing. Did you expand and go into other species?

Rogers: I used to catfish before I went a-crabbing, and then I crawfished before I done that, some. And I used to trap when I was young. So I've been self-employed pretty well my—so.

Hester: Yeah. Interesting. (laughter) Well, did you ever do any shrimping?

Rogers: Yes, um-hm.

Hester: You did some shrimping.

Rogers: Yeah. I've had two or three shrimp boats.

Hester: Oh, is that right?

Rogers: Um-hm. I've still got one shrimp boat.

Hester: Oh, OK. You have one now. Can you tell me when you started the shrimping? (0:06:12.9)

Rogers: Well, I started shrimping when I was about eighteen or nineteen years old.

Hester: OK. So about the early [19]70s, as well?

Rogers: No. That was probably in the [19]60s. (laughter)

Hester: Oh, OK. So you were shrimping before you actually (inaudible) with your dad.

Rogers: Yeah. I wasn't doing it commercially then, but I started shrimping.

Hester: And can you talk about the equipment that you used when you started shrimping?

Rogers: Well, we started with a little sixteen-foot net, (0:06:41.0) bought in Bayou La Batre over there. It was Stevey Sprinkler(?) Net.

Hester: Could you say it, again?

Rogers: Stevey Sprinkler, he built the nets over there, and Daddy bought it for me. And we shrimped with that, just more or less for our own shrimp.

Hester: I see. And where was he located, Stevey Sprinkler?

Rogers: In Bayou La Batre, and they still over there, too. Still the same Sprinklers. Sprinkler's Net Shop, they still in there.

Hester: I need to make a note of that. We've done a few interviews over in Bayou La Batre, and I hadn't come across that name. It's a new one.

Rogers: You hadn't heard of Sprinkler's?

Hester: Well, I just, I mean, I'm just starting so—

Rogers: They've been there a long time.

Hester: Um-hm, interesting. Did you do any oystering?

Rogers: Um-hm, I've oystered before, yeah, um-hm.

Hester: What type of equipment did you use in oystering? (0:07:37.8)

Rogers: I always used tongs. Well, I used tongs to start with. I used dredge about four or five years ago, before [Hurricane] Camille. And we dredged, but I hadn't went—now, wait a minute. We have been back one time or twice with dredges since Camille, but last couple of years I hadn't done it.

Hester: So you still do the oystering, as well?

Rogers: It's just got where it's too hard on me. It's for a young man. (laughter)

Hester: It's hard work.

Rogers: Hard work.

Hester: I think it's all hard work—

Rogers: *Hard work.*

Hester: —from what I've heard. (laughter)

Rogers: Hard work, yeah.

Hester: Have you done any finfishing? (0:08:15.5)

Rogers: Yeah, mullet-fishing, trout.

Hester: When did you start that?

Rogers: We started mullet-fishing in about—I don't know—probably about the early [19]90s.

Hester: So are you still doing that, as well?

Rogers: No. We don't fish—well, we used to gillnet, and then the state took gillnets away from us; won't let us gillnet, (0:08:40.2) so we quit.

Hester: So you quit it altogether. Have other fishermen that you know done the same thing—

Rogers: Yeah.

Hester: —as far as the gillnetting restrictions?

Rogers: What, had to quit?

Hester: Yeah.

Rogers: Yeah, um-hm.

Hester: They have? Did anybody continue on?

Rogers: No. As far as I know, ain't nobody does it anymore because they give us a cotton net. You could make it out of cotton net and work, but it wasn't no good; rots on you. You know? They took the monofilament away from us, and they just about killed us, and the half-mile. They took the half mile away from us. You got to stay a half mile off the beach and then took the monofilament away from us, and that just about killed the mullet fishing. (0:09:20.9)

Hester: I see. What would you say is the largest species? I mean, your business focuses on which one of those, more than the others.

Rogers: At the time? When we were fishing?

Hester: Over the course, how did it change? (0:09:39.2) Like for example, maybe in your earlier career you were focusing more on crabbing and then something else took over as being (inaudible).

Rogers: Yeah. Well, I used to crab, I mean, when I started crabbing, which—I don't know. We crabbled from about the [19]70s up to almost the [19]90s, and we got over into gillnetting because we would fish our own bait, too. See? Catch our own bait for the crab pot. And then when roe season would come in, we would catch roe. That's when the fish, they school up, and they easier to catch. And everybody made their Christmas money. We made enough money to do our Christmas, pay our taxes, and everything. And everybody counted on that, too. Now, this was probably hundreds of families on the Coast.

Hester: And about what period of time would this be?

Rogers: Well, ours started in [19]86, [19]87. That's when I started, and we stayed in the fishing till—I don't know—2002 or [200]3.

Hester: When was the gillnet restriction enacted?

Rogers: I can't remember exactly when it was.

Hester: But somewhere around 2000.

Rogers: Yeah, yeah, somewhere around 2000. And we fished the cotton nets a while. (0:10:59.8) We tried it, and we fished two or three years with them. They just got where they wouldn't work pretty much.

Hester: So now, what are you doing, mostly? What is your focus?

Rogers: Right now we just crabbing.

Hester: Just crabbing. OK.

Rogers: Um-hm. Now, we do mullet-fish a little bit with cast nets. (0:11:13.7) That's the nets you have to throw out. That's what everybody's doing now. But you can't make no money at it. (laughter)

Hester: If you catch mullet, where would you go? I mean, do they have mullet processors, or is that just—

Rogers: Oh, yeah.

Hester: You have that.

Rogers: Bayou La Batre.

Hester: I see.

Rogers: Well, now, we cut our own roe here, and we sell it to Bayou La Batre.

Hester: Now, when you say, “here,” you mean?

Rogers: In the back. We got sheds in the back.

Hester: Oh, OK, here in your establishment.

Rogers: Um-hm.

Hester: And I might mention that L and W Seafood is also a restaurant. So do you catch what you sell in your restaurant?

Rogers: We catch a good bit of it. Not everything, but some.

Hester: So some other fishermen will help supply your restaurant.

Rogers: Right. We buy some from different fishermen.

Hester: Got you.

Rogers: Um-hm, shrimpers (inaudible), floundermen, different ones, whatever we need.

Hester: OK. You mentioned restrictions as far as gillnetting. Were there any other restrictions that you had to deal with over the course of your career, so far?
(0:12:13.5)

Rogers: Oh, yeah. Well, crabbing, when Daddy and them used to crab, they could take spawn crab, which that’s the egg, when they get the egg on them. And then come along then about—I can’t remember when now. First, they shut it down, and you couldn’t take them in July, August, and September, or something like that. And then finally, they done away with it. You can’t take a spawn crab, period. So certain times of year, in the summertime, we have a lot of spawn, and they won’t let us come up in the rivers where the male crabs is. See. So therefore we really have a tough time in the hard summertime.

Hester: So the female crabs stay out in the—

Rogers: Um-hm, they stay in more of the salty water.

Hester: I see. The crabs move up the river. I didn't—

Rogers: Oh, yeah. Um-hm.

Hester: Wow. What brings them up the river? I mean, I—

Rogers: The males just stay in the river. They stay in a little more of a fresh water.

Hester: And you can fish the rivers?

Rogers: Unh-uh. The railroad track, the L and N Railroad? That's the line. Can't go north of it.

Hester: I see. So how do you handle your crabbing? How do you get around all the restrictions now? I mean, I guess they're still implemented. In other words, I interviewed a gentleman two weeks ago in Ocean Springs, and—

Rogers: Billy Thiroux? Wasn't him, was it?

Hester: That was it. Billy Thiroux, that sure is. And he was telling me how difficult it is to crab now, so that's where the question's coming from because he gave me a little bit of an understanding of it. So I'm wondering. He was telling me how difficult it is, and he's trying to do some now. I was wondering how, when they first started with the restrictions, I mean, you had been crabbing with your dad, and then these restrictions kicked in, and yet this is the biggest part of your business now. How have you managed to handle it over all these changes?

Rogers: (laughter) I don't know. We just hang in there. It has. It's a lot of changes. A lot of Vietnamese (0:14:24.0) has come into the business since they've come over here, and I seen them when they first come over here. We was in Bay St. Louis, crabbing, me and Daddy. And one day we went down there, and they had them boats all in there. They were shrimpers at the time. They wasn't crabbers, but they've got into the crabbing now, and they'll have, ooh, they'll have four or five to a thousand pots on board at one time. They just work. They working people. They just work, work, work. And it hurts, too, you know, shrimping, too. They done the same thing, shrimping. They just about put the white people out of shrimping.

Hester: Mr. Thiroux had mentioned that some of the other states had different restrictions. How does that affect your operation? Are you able to take the boat into other waters and maybe (inaudible)?

Rogers: Normally, we can go into Alabama, and I'm not sure about Louisiana. (0:15:25.5) Alabama won't let us come over there. I mean, they'll come over here,

and then sometime they won't sell us license to go over there, so it's not really fair on some of the stuff.

Hester: What about the shrimping? You're still doing some shrimping, maybe not as much as the crabbing.

Rogers: Yeah. I didn't do none this year. They just wasn't no shrimp. I don't know. I don't know what happened. They just wasn't no shrimp this year. (0:15:51.8)

Hester: Does it come in cyclical fashion? I mean, you have a good year, and then you—

Rogers: No, no. I mean, some time you have a good year and bad year, but this year there wasn't no shrimp.

Hester: What do you think is the cause of that?

Rogers: I don't know. I don't really know. I don't know if it's the [BP Deepwater Horizon] oil spill (0:16:04.8) or the dispersants they sprayed. They sprayed so much of that dispersants in the water, if the shrimp had to leave or something, I don't know. And we don't really know. We just peons when it comes to that. And even if it was, they probably wouldn't tell you.

Hester: If you could, talk about how the marketing of your product changed over the course of your career, so far. When you started with your dad, you said you brought like the crabs to a crab house and so forth. When did you start your restaurant? I should ask you that. (0:16:51.8)

Rogers: We started the restaurant in probably about [19]88, [19]89, maybe [19]90. When we first moved up here, we had a oyster shop and a crab shop out in Bayou Cumbest. That's about ten miles from here. And I knew a lot about crabbing, and Lawanda, she's my second wife, and she knew a lot about oystering because she was from Texas. And she worked the oyster shop. So I said I didn't know nothing about the—I knew how to catch them. That was it. And so we opened up a crab and a oyster shop in Bayou Cumbest.

Hester: And that would have been about?

Rogers: That was about [19]86, [19]87. And we didn't move up here till [19]88.

Hester: Did you close your business down there?

Rogers: Yeah, yeah. We had some problems with, not in the crabmeat, but the oysters, the FDA, Food and Drug Administration, we was on well water out there. We was on just a regular septic tank, and we got in trouble with some Gollotts(?) over in Biloxi. They wanted to buy our oysters, and I wouldn't sell them to them, and it

wasn't a couple days later, all the FDA showed up, put us out of business out there. (laughter) So anyway, that's political things. So I owned this building up here at the time; me and my brother did. So he said, "Why don't you just move up there?" So we did it. We on city water, city sewer here; couldn't say nothing. So that's when we moved up here, in [19]88.

Hester: OK. Well, talking about the changes in marketing your product, I would imagine that that made a big change when you actually went into the shop down on Bayou Cumbest and then moving to the restaurant here. Can you talk about what came before? How did you market your product then? (0:18:58.0)

Rogers: The oysters, we pretty well, we bought local, and used to be, Bayou Cumbest used to be open. They opened Graveline a year or two, and we bought local and opened them and sold, local. We had most of the restaurant, Wayne Lee's(?), a lot of grocery stores and Sea(?) Market and different places, Tiki's(?) Restaurants. And crabmeat we sold. We sold some local, but we sold most of it to New Orleans. Had a man come out of New Orleans that would come and pick it up. So we caught most of our own crabs, and we processed them. (0:19:36.9) We opened up. We boiled them; had pickers that come in, picked them. We packed them, sold them.

Hester: And that was before you started the business on Bayou Cumbest, or was that after?

Rogers: No. That's when we started out there.

Hester: OK. Got you. Could you describe—I guess we'd take it from [19]88 when you opened the restaurant here and up to today—how the marketing goes? Do you take any outside (inaudible)?

Rogers: Yeah. Well, like when we first moved up here, we just moved that crab shop up here. We never opened a oyster shop up here, but we picked crabs here for two or three years, maybe four years. And that's when we opened the restaurant. So we stayed in there (inaudible), and then we just finally got out of the crab business. And at the time we was going into the fishing business, just kind of went over from crabbing to gillnetting. So we would catch the mullet, trout, sheepshead, whatever, and then we had a wholesale out of the back. The trucks would come, and we'd send them to Georgia and different places. Crabmeat, too, we would ship most of our crabmeat up north at the time. We would ship to Maryland, Philadelphia, all up that way, Virginia. Most of it went up north.

Hester: Could you describe what a day would be like for you? When you first get up, do you take your boats out, or do you have somebody else who does that?

Rogers: No. I still run my own boat.

Hester: OK. So could you tell me how do you start your day up till you—

Rogers: Oh, I don't know. I get up about 4:30 and leave, and we usually get on board by 6:30. (0:21:32.5) I go by and pick my deckhand up, come by and get my boat and stuff, and I pick my deckhand up. And we go out, and we run our pots. And then we come in, and then we take our crabs to the crab house. We'll keep some for the shop here, and we take them to Miss Jennifer Lee(?) is the name of it, in Biloxi, and she buys them. And then I come back here and work in here until we leave. (laughter)

Hester: What time you close your restaurant?

Rogers: Seven.

Hester: Oh, my goodness. That's a long day.

Rogers: Long day. And on Friday and Saturday we stay open to eight.

Hester: Do you have any children, if I may ask?

Rogers: Do I have any that comes in?

Hester: I'm wondering if you have any sons that are following in your footsteps?

Rogers: No. I have one grandson that wants to. I've got a lot of grandsons, but I've got one that I'm raising.

Hester: I see. And he's interested in going into the seafood industry?

Rogers: Yeah. That's all he talks about, and we try to talk him into something else, but that's all he talks about.

Hester: Why would you want to talk—

Rogers: Well, I don't know. We want to try to talk him out of it because it's a kind of a dying business. (0:22:43.4) The seafood industry, it'll eventually fade out. Imports.

Hester: Imports.

Rogers: Imports and laws and regulations here, plus the imports. So you got a lot to fight.

Hester: So your advice to him would be?

Rogers: Oh, I don't know. I think it's good to stay in because I've enjoyed what I've done in my life. But I mean, I ain't rich, but we made a living. We've done all right.

Hester: Enjoying what you do is—

Rogers: Right. Now, we enjoy it.

Hester: That's the most—

Rogers: That's what I tell Wanda. I enjoy what I do.

Hester: And that's the most important. I'm going to lead into the effects of Hurricane Katrina, but before I do that, could you tell me if there were any prior events that had a major impact on your business? It's something that really presented a challenge for you?

Rogers: Other than storms, [Hurricane] Georges come along. It was bad. (0:24:00.8) A hurricane's always bad on crabbing and stuff, anyway. You got to go out and take all your stuff up and bring it in and store it. Then when it's over, you got to go put it all back out. And that's the hardest part.

Hester: Did you take a hit in Katrina?

Rogers: Oh, yeah, yeah. We had eighteen inches in here.

Hester: Oh, my goodness.

Rogers: Yeah. The house, it had about four feet in it.

Hester: And your boats?

Rogers: No. All my boats done good. All my boats done good. I had some trucks that got hurt and went under, but my boats done good.

Hester: Yeah. How did you come back after Katrina, having taken a hit on your home and your business?

Rogers: Lord, it was over a year before we got a house, before we could move back in our house.

Hester: Were you able to conduct your business while you were trying to get your house back in shape?

Rogers: No, unh-uh. We didn't even try. We didn't even try. I don't know why. When the storm [Hurricane Katrina] come, we come back in here, and everything was ruined. And I don't know. It just took us a while to—I don't know—just get it in our head what we had to do.

Hester: Did you have any help from anybody?

Rogers: On the house, we had some volunteers come in and help tear the Sheetrock out. And that's about it, though, really. Didn't have no help in here.

Hester: None in here.

Rogers: Mm-mm. And we should have opened back up, but we didn't.

Hester: How long did it take for you to come back in the business?

Rogers: We just opened this thing last May.

Hester: Is that right?

Rogers: Um-hm. I think we was about five years, maybe six years before we opened this back.

Hester: Wow. So in the meantime did you conduct—after the one year that it took you to get your house back in order, you did go back into business at that point, fishing.

Rogers: In the crabbing?

Hester: Yeah.

Rogers: Yeah. I started crab, yeah. I crabbled the fall right after Katrina. Yeah. I never quit crabbing. When the crab house got, when they got theirs going, again, then I went back to work.

Hester: You went back to it.

Rogers: Yeah.

Hester: OK. So was business any different after Katrina than before, when you went back into it? (0:26:08.7)

Rogers: It wasn't as many crabbers to start with. (laughter)

Hester: Was that good or bad?

Rogers: That was a good thing. That was a good thing, wasn't many. I was about the first one went back. I had all my stuff picked up and ready to go. And a lot of them didn't think it was going to be that bad and didn't pick their stuff up. They lost all their stuff. So it took them a while to get recuperated, buy new stuff and get started again.

Hester: What about shrimping?

Rogers: Yep. Now, we shrimped two or three years after that, but the shrimp, it's been fair, but not nothing great. I didn't shrimp right after Katrina; it probably was the next year.

Hester: And it was different than what it had been before Katrina?

Rogers: Yeah, yeah. It hasn't been really as good for us; had a lot of junk, trash out there, you'd catch in your nets and stuff, and it took two or three years to get all that stuff cleaned up.

Hester: And then the BP oil spill happened. (0:27:21.1)

Rogers: Yeah.

Hester: How did you hear about it?

Rogers: I believe I heard about it on TV; I reckon. We was crabbing out there, and they started coming out there with them booms around Bayou Cumbest, Bayou Cassotte. Started putting them orange booms here and here and there, and finally they just told us we had to quit crabbing on account of oil getting too close. So the state made us quit.

Hester: So how did you handle that?

Rogers: Well, it wasn't good for a while, but we done like everybody else. We signed up to go to work for them. I mean, that's what they was doing. (0:28:02.2)

Hester: Was it the Vessels of Opportunity program.

Rogers: Vessels, yeah, um-hm.

Hester: How did that work for you?

Rogers: Well, we thought it done all right, but really it wasn't. I wish I hadn't even done it.

Hester: Can you explain why?

Rogers: Well, I don't know, not really, but I didn't do as good as I thought I would've.

Hester: How long did you participate in it?

Rogers: We was in it probably a couple of months, something like that.

Hester: And what was your job?

Rogers: They put us out there around the islands, barrier islands, and we was putting boom and stuff out. They call it underwater detection something—I don't know—to see if any oil coming under the water. And we had like different stations. I believe we had twelve stations out there; we'd monitor every day. And we run out to Horn [Island], Petit Bois[Island] and Sand Island and checked them.

Hester: Did you do anything else, or was that basically it?

Rogers: That was basically all we did, yeah, because they had our boats; we had to sign a contract where the boats would be tied up with them. They've got them contracted out, so we wasn't supposed to use them for nothing else.

Hester: I see. Backing up just a little bit, when you heard about the oil spill, after it happened, what were your expectations for the season, fishing season? Did you have good expectations for it? (0:29:39.2)

Rogers: For shrimping, crabbing?

Hester: Both.

Rogers: Yeah, yeah. We had been doing real well, but we hadn't done as good since the oil spill. For why, I don't know. (0:29:53.0) I mean, it could have been dispersants or whatever. And right now, this winter's been real hard on us, and also some of the crab shops, I've heard, is closing down. They can't get the crabs.

Hester: Is that because of the restrictions more so—

Rogers: Not necessarily, no. I wouldn't think so, mm-mm, because they hadn't changed no restrictions in several years.

Hester: So it probably has more to do with the dispersants and the oil spill?

Rogers: That's what I think. That's just my opinion. I don't really know that. It could be a number of things. It may not be the dispersants. It might be what comes out of these rivers (0:30:32.7) because we done pretty good there, but now, last three weeks, when the water started running out of the rivers, we can't find no crab nowhere. So I'm thinking maybe something flushed out. You never know. You know?

Hester: Yeah. I can understand. One thing I should have asked about the Vessels of Opportunity program, how did you hear about it, and how did you apply? (0:31:02.2)

Rogers: One of the fishermen called me and told me. No. Matter of fact, it was one of my nephews was telling me about it.

Hester: So then what did you do?

Rogers: Well, it sounded pretty good, and we wasn't doing nothing. We'd done had to pull our pots up, and we was starving to death at the time. So we went down there and signed up on it.

Hester: There was a place to sign up?

Rogers: Yeah, um-hm.

Hester: Here in Moss Point?

Rogers: In Pascagoula.

Hester: In Pascagoula. Do you know if they had a good turnout? I mean, I don't—

Rogers: Well, they said they was going to use all the commercial people, but they didn't. They just used a few of us, and a lot of sports, just people come out of the woodwork everywhere. Everybody went over there and bought commercial license that, they wasn't commercial fishermen. We see the commercial fishermen during winter. Might be four or five boats down there all winter. And you ought to seen the boats that come in there, after that money.

Hester: Isn't that something. So I guess if I asked if it was implemented fairly—

Rogers: No, no, no. Not nowhere close. Nowhere close.

Hester: What would you have suggested to make it better? If you have any suggestions.

Rogers: Well, I would have thought that we'd put the fishermen back to work, to let them work, work at it a lot longer. But they just—seem like the people that had real nice boats and real fancy boats, that's the one they put to work. And see, our boats, we work them every day, and we don't have real pretty boats because we don't keep them painted. We hard on our boats, and every day they go (inaudible), and every day we work them, and we don't have time to keep them prettified. (laughter) You know what I'm saying.

Hester: I understand, absolutely.

Rogers: We keep them shipshape.

Hester: It's a tool of your trade. It's something you use every day.

Rogers: Right, right, right. And it wears. And you could paint them every month, but we don't have time.

Hester: And it would get expensive, too; I would imagine.

Rogers: Very expensive. And anyway, they wanted the fast boats, the pretty boats, because the Coast Guard rode in them and all that. So they didn't treat us fair. (0:33:19.3) And we were some of the first ones that got cut out of the program.

Hester: How long did you do it?

Rogers: About six weeks.

Hester: Six weeks. And then some of the others were—

Rogers: Yeah. Some of them stayed in there a lot longer than we did. They stayed in there till probably December.

Hester: I see. How are things now for you as far as your catch? I mean, are you back to normal?

Rogers: Almost, almost, from the storm [Hurricane Katrina, 2005].

Hester: From the storm, from BP, from regulations, from whatever.

Rogers: No. Now, BP, I'm still in debt from BP. (0:34:00.3)

Hester: How's that?

Rogers: Taxes. (laughter) So I owe more now than I did when BP come.

Hester: Do you have a claim?

Rogers: Yeah, I had a claim, but what I mean, the taxes, they hit us pretty hard. I think we had to pay about forty thousand dollars in taxes. And so we didn't keep out enough money to pay the taxes. So I'm in debt with taxes now, that I wasn't in debt before we started. So I say, I'd have been better off not to done that. So.

Hester: I understand. So you mention you have a claim. Has it been satisfied to your expectation? (0:34:40.3)

Rogers: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we went ahead and had to take that quick claim just to hang on, to keep by.

Hester: I see. What do you think is the future for commercial fishing in this area? (0:35:01.2)

Rogers: The future. I think it's still a good future in shrimping. Fishing is about like shrimping. You got to have bigger boats; you go further offshore to get your stuff. That's just the way it is.

Hester: I hear a lot of fishermen that are going further out are having to battle these high gas prices.

Rogers: Right, right. That's true. That's true. And that's another thing that hurt the shrimping, is the high fuel prices. (0:35:32.9) When you pay three dollars a gallon, [and] you burning a hundred gallons a night, you got to catch shrimp.

Hester: Can you talk about, say, in the instance of shrimp, over the course of your shrimping career, how the prices of shrimp changed? Have they decreased, increased?

Rogers: They've actually decreased. (0:35:56.3) Used to, back in the, ooh, I'd say the early 2000s or maybe the late [19]90s, we used to get like two dollars and something a pound for forty/fifties. Now, you lucky to get eighty cents. Imports, imported shrimp. (0:36:15.2)

Hester: Got you. And is that the same with crabbing?

Rogers: Right. We got a lot of import crabbing, Argentina, different places, China. (laughter) A lot, a lot. I mean, I can show you some of my price lists from the people I buy from, what they carry. And a lot of it's Argentina, China, Vietnam, different things, Mexico. We compete against a lot of people, now, and they get their gas like two dollars, and we pay almost three, three/fifty, three/forty-nine. Yeah.

Hester: Well, have you seen any oil out there? (0:37:05.7)

Rogers: No. I hadn't seen no oil since the oil spill. I did see oil in the oil spill.

Hester: Especially when you were working out, I guess, on the Vessels of Opportunity.

Rogers: Right, right, right. We seen some first coming in.

Hester: And what would you say is the health of the fishery, from your perspective today?

Rogers: Well, far as I know, everything looks good. But see, we do research. Twice a month I take the research lab [Gulf Coast Research Laboratory] out. (0:37:32.2) And they go out with me, and they monitor the crabs, and they take so many species and samples and stuff like that. And so far everything's been healthy.

Hester: And that's the Gulf Coast Research Lab?

Rogers: Um-hm, yeah. And I been doing that for, 2004. So we've been doing it since 2004, before the storm [Hurricane Katrina, 2005].

Hester: Yeah. That's about eight years.

Rogers: Yeah. Sure have. Matter of fact, we was doing it before the storm, and this is 2012, and I'm still doing it with them.

Hester: Great. That's great. Just monitoring the waters to make sure everything's—

Rogers: Right, right. They test the waters. They test salinity; male and female, they test from year to year to year and just see how many we catching per pot in the average, and they do it in Jackson, Hancock, and Harrison Counties.

Hester: That's interesting. So as a final question—and I think we touched on this a bit—or a final question from me, at least, what do you see for the future of the seafood industry (0:38:51.8) in the northern waters of the Gulf of Mexico?

Rogers: Well, the fish is still good. We've still got plentiful of fish. Mullet's plentiful. They just won't let us catch them a lot. And redfish is plentiful, speckled trout. We still good. Everything's good. Now, we need to wait this year to make sure, since the oil and the dispersant and stuff, and see how everything comes back this spring. And then you'll see more.

Hester: And what are your expectations for this spring?

Rogers: Well, I'm thinking they going to come back. I'm hoping they are, anyway. If they don't come back, then we'll know something. If you put that dispersant out, and then the fish try to come back, and they don't like it, they'll go somewhere else. They'll go to Texas. They'll go to Florida or maybe in the Atlantic side.

Hester: Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense. Mr. Rogers, this interview will be archived with the Center for Oral History at [The University of Southern Mississippi] long past my lifetime, and so before I turn off the microphone, is there anything that you would like to state on the record, that you would like to be part of your interview, maybe a question that I haven't thought to ask, but something that you've got on your mind, or just would like to say, in general?

Rogers: No, not a whole lot. What the fishermen need down here is (0:40:25.7) for them to work with us and let us have some more tools back to work with, some gillnets to catch our own bait, so we don't have to import our bait and stuff from the East Coast and everything. And it would help us a lot, even if you couldn't catch nothing but just a mullet and stuff. Most people don't eat mullet, but we do, and that

would help a lot. And another thing, on the shrimping, we've had to put these TEDs (0:41:01.0) on the net, and that hurts the shrimping, too. It saves the turtle, but it lets a lot of shrimp out. So that's some of the things they putting on us. So that's about it. But I believe the seafood's going to hang on. It'll be through my lifetime. I won't see it. It'll be going. Maybe my grandsons'll be into it. So that's about all I got to say, I reckon.

Hester: Well, I sure do appreciate it, and I'm sorry I took you away from your restaurant. I know how busy you are.

Rogers: Oh, that's all right. We got through quicker than that. It wasn't that long. Or has it been that long?

Hester: I don't know. Let's see. We started about—

Rogers: An hour maybe?

Hester: Yeah. It's been about forty minutes.

Rogers: Oh, OK.

Hester: Yeah. Yeah, so it's—but thank you so much, and I appreciate you inviting me into your business to do this interview, Mr. Rogers.

Rogers: Oh, OK. I should have cleaned up in here a little bit, but—

Hester: Oh, you're fine. I'm going to go ahead and turn the tape recorder off now.

(end of interview)