

Mississippi Oral History Program

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Walter Eley Ross Sr.

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

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An Oral History with Walter Eley Ross Sr., Volume 1043

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Biography

Mr. Walter Eley Ross Sr. was born on March 16, 1924, in Biloxi, Mississippi, to Mr. and Mrs. Adolph Ross. His father was a commercial fisherman, house builder, and boat builder. His mother was a housewife. Mr. Ross began fishing with his father commercially when he was a teenager, and he continued in that profession for fifty-three years. Ross also served in the US Air Force, achieving the rank of sergeant. He is a Catholic. He and his wife, the late Yvonne Seymour Ross, had five children, Walter Eley Ross Jr., Sandra Lea Ross, Karen Yvonne Ross, Kim Michelle Ross, and Janelle Marie Ross.

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

WALTER ELEY ROSS SR.

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Walter Eley Ross Sr. and is taking place on March 15, 2012. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.

Hester: Well, I just turned the tape recorder on, so I'll go ahead and give a little opening spiel, and then we'll get started. So I'm Barbara Hester with The University of Southern Mississippi's Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage, and I'm here today with Mr. Walter Eley Ross Sr. at (the address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy). And today is Thursday, March 15, 2012, and it's about 11:30 in the morning. Good morning, Mr. Ross. Thank you so much for having [me] here today.

Ross: Good morning to you.

Hester: Would you, just to get started, state your name and your address into the record?

Ross: My name is Walter Eley Ross, and I live at (the address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy). I have four daughters, and I had two sons, but one has passed away, one son. Other than that, well, I'm retired, and I worked fifty-three years as a commercial fisherman. (0:01:20.8)

Hester: About what year did you start?

Ross: I don't remember. I was fifteen. I come out of the eighth grade at St. Michael's School, and I started working then with my dad.

Hester: OK. And you're going to be eighty-eight years old tomorrow.

Ross: You have to talk a little louder.

Hester: Tomorrow is your birthday, I understand.

Ross: Yeah.

Hester: You'll be eighty-eight years old.

Ross: Eighty-eight, right.

Hester: That's wonderful. And happy birthday.

Ross: Thank you.

Hester: Could you give us your father's name? 0:01:52.8

Ross: It was Adolph.

Hester: Was he from the Mississippi Gulf Coast?

Ross: He was born on Dauphin Island, and my mama was born in Mobile Bay, Alabama Port in Mobile Bay. And my dad came here on a schooner his dad had built, I believe. And they came to Biloxi and settled, and my grandfather opened a store, down where St. Michael's old school was, right down on First Street and Pine Street, I believe, on that corner. He was on the southeast corner. And after that I had some cousins, even, when he was dead and gone, that opened that store up and sold groceries out of it, two different cousins.

Hester: What was the name of the store?

Ross: I really don't remember unless it was Ross's Grocery, you know. But my grandfather, he was something else. He was also a soldier during, I guess, the Civil War, and he'd talk about things that he'd done or seen during the Civil War.

Hester: Do you remember any of his stories?

Ross: No, not really. That's been so long. I was about twelve then, and I'm eighty-seven, so that was a long time ago.

Hester: Yeah. And you said he had a schooner? (0:03:21.2)

Ross: Yeah. He had a beautiful schooner, and I had a picture of it. It wasn't real big, but it was a two-masted schooner with a bowsprit, and it was fully rigged with sails, and I don't know if it had an engine or not. Back in those days, most schooners didn't have engines. It wasn't till later days when the factories had schooners built or bought them that they put engines in them so they could dredge all the time without waiting for the wind to blow.

Hester: So did your grandfather have any stories about his schooner and taking it out and fishing?

Ross: It's been so long I don't remember. I know one thing he used to do. He always sat on the front porch after he got old, and when the girls'd come up the walk, he'd grab with his cane and pull them to his lap and set them on his lap. (laughter)

Hester: Oh, my goodness. He sounds like an interesting fellow.

Ross: So he was a rascal. (laughter)

Hester: What was his name? Was it Adolph as well?

Ross: No, no. His name was George. See, back in them days, most people didn't have a middle name. My daddy didn't, and I don't know if my grandfather did or not. See. I had a cousin that knew all of that, but I don't know if he's still living or not. His name's Henry Wescovich(?). And he lives out on either Fourth or Fifth Street. It's one street over from Howard.

Hester: OK. Do you remember what type of fishing that your grandfather did?
(0:05:04.8)

Ross: Well, they came to Biloxi for shrimping and oysters. They were to catch shrimp from the time they started before Christmas and up to December. Then they would go dredging oysters because the shrimp would play out. By December, shrimp would move out into the Gulf or past. But then they'd go dredging oysters, and I shrimped all my life. But after my wife died, I dredged out of Pass Christian. (0:05:34.3) I accumulated more money there than ever in my life, see. The money I live off today, the extra money beside my social security is from dredging oysters. And I enjoyed it. I used to bring oysters home before [Hurricane] Katrina because I was dredging; I had the boat before Katrina. And Katrina (0:05:56.4) washed the little shed away that we put the oysters in; we had a cooler in there to keep them cold.

Hester: So how would you market the oysters? (0:06:06.4) You would take them here to the shed?

Ross: I'd bring them right here, and people would come and block the street up with cars to get them because we always had real good oysters, no trash. And from Pass Christian, they was always salty because they was out in the Sound.

Hester: And how often would you go out fishing for oysters?

Ross: Oh, some days I worked six days out of the week. And you see, I'd go into Pass Christian and unload in Pass Christian because it was such a long ways to come to Biloxi, and we really didn't have nobody in Biloxi that you could go to they dock and unload. Most of them had trucks that they would go to Pass Christian to buy oysters there, see, either from the boats or the dealers.

Hester: I see. What type of boat did you have when you were doing your oystering?
(0:07:01.9)

Ross: This one right here.

Hester: What size is that?

Ross: *Junie-Doffie*, it was fifty-six foot long and seventeen foot wide.

Hester: And the name of it was?

Ross: The *Junie-Doffie* after the two boys, the oldest one, and the youngest one.

Hester: I see that on there. Perhaps I could take a picture of that when we're finished?

Ross: Sure, anything you like.

Hester: And it looks like it's decorated.

Ross: Yeah. It was decorated for the Blessing of the Fleet. (0:07:28.8) We won a prize every year.

Hester: Can you talk about that a bit?

Ross: And who decorated the boat was them girls. Each one of them as they went into high school, that first year was they turn to decorate the boat. It was sort of like something we done.

Hester: Well, can you tell us about what time of year the Blessing of the Fleet was?

Ross: It's always in June before the shrimp season opens, and it runs anywheres from like the fourth of June to the seventh. And sometime shrimping opens a day after the blessing. See, the blessing's usually on Sunday, and it opens on Monday. But then they changed it a little bit because the fishermen complained they didn't have time to get they boats straightened up after the blessing, see. So they changed it to two or three days later, see.

Hester: I see. Could you talk about the ceremony a bit? How did they get the fishermen together to do this?

Ross: Well, it was such a thing that everybody looked forward to it, and then they would, some of them would decorate the boats, but mostly the boats'd go out, just like it's in the procession there, all the way out to the last beacon and turn around and come in. And then the blessing boat was anchored off right by the small-craft harbor, and you'd just pass close by the stern of the boat, and the priest would bless your boat as you went by, see.

Hester: And who was the priest?

Ross: Well, most all of them come from the Point, from St. Michael's. (0:09:04.9) It's called the Church of the Fishermen. It was built by the fishermen in 1917, I

believe; St. Michael's was. And then later on, they moved it down and built a big, round one down on the beach. And Katrina messed it all up inside, (0:09:30.8) but it didn't hurt the building, so they redone everything. A lot of the windows was broke, but it was from the pews coming loose from the floor because they wasn't fastened real good. And they would go against the windows and break the windows.

Hester: Are you a member of that church?

Ross: Yeah. I always have been. We was raised there. My mother was Catholic, and we was baptized and raised from the time we were babies.

Hester: How did they publicize the event, the Blessing of the Fleet?

Ross: Well, usually it was in the paper, on television. But anyway it was always a certain Sunday in June, so it wouldn't be the same date every year because the date changes for each month during the year. Anyway they would advertise in the paper or the television or something. But everybody looked forward to it.

Hester: How many people usually participated?

Ross: Oh, at one time, it seemed like the whole Biloxi fleet would go through it, even people that wasn't Catholic. It was an occasion, sort of like a dance or something. Everybody enjoyed it because it was a boat trip, and I had as many as eighty people on my boat.

Hester: Sounds like a Mardi Gras parade on the water.

Ross: Yeah. Well, it was beautiful because it was so many boats, and they had a plane that would fly over and drop a wreath in memory of the dead fishermen.

Hester: And that would be something that the members of the community would come and participate?

Ross: Yeah. Well, you see, seafood is what built Biloxi. (0:11:23.4) Back when I was a kid, they said they had forty factories here on the Biloxi Peninsula, but I don't remember them, but what it could have been, some went out of business, and others started they business in the same, old place. That's about the only thing I could figure because I could count every one was on the Point.

Hester: Can you talk a little bit about what it was like when they had all the factories on the Point?

Ross: Oh, honey, it was something else, like during the wintertime when dredging season was in, they'd steam these oysters, and you could smell them blocks away from the factories, and it would smell so good, like somebody cooking something. And they was so many oysters, and mostly Louisiana oysters. The boats went into

Louisiana. See, one part of Louisiana at one time was owned by Mississippi, from Pearl River all the way down to Pilot Town(?), Mississippi on the river. You know where that is? You ever hear of that?

Hester: No.

Ross: Well, it's right at the mouth of the passes, below Venice. And right from there back to Pearl River in Mississippi, all east of that was Mississippi land. So then they had so much trouble over that, a federal judge ordered that a fifty-five-gallon fuel drum, empty, would be put overboard at Pearl River, and let it float, and they would be a line. Well, then that cut us out of that part in Louisiana that was from Cat Island, back towards that line from Pearl River down to the mouth of the passes, Pilot Town.

Hester: About what year did that happen? Do you remember?

Ross: No. But it happened way before I even grew up, see, because by the time I started fishing, they had a place at Grand's(?) Pass, and you had to go check in there, coming out of Grand's Pass, whether you were shrimping or oystering, see. And that was ever since I was a little kid, which was eighty-some years ago.

Hester: So do you remember how long the drum was there to mark the barrier between Mississippi and Louisiana?

Ross: You mean the building that was—

Hester: You said they emptied a drum and floated it.

Ross: Oh, yeah. It floated out, right outside of Cat Island, and that's where they made the line, so Mississippi lost all the land area south and southwest of that, back to a line. See, Pearl River's about twenty or thirty miles back west of Cat Island, see. So all that land on this side, we lost it, in Louisiana, but that was all Mississippi at one time.

Hester: Who was the judge? Was it a Mississippi judge or a Louisiana judge? Do you know?

Ross: Probably Louisiana (laughter) because we didn't have hardly any federal judges here.

Hester: And that stands as the barrier today?

Ross: It still is, all those years. And after that happened, to go into Louisiana, before you'd have to have a permit. (0:14:48.4) They had a office here in Biloxi. You'd go get a permit, go out and work, and when you come out of Louisiana, you had to go by Grand's Pass to check out. It's sort of like the days of Hitler. (laughter)

Hester: Where would you report? Who do you report to? How would that be done?

Ross: The place in Louisiana? Yeah. It was a big, big building, and whoever was there, usually it was a family, man and a wife, had kids. They was kids there, too, and a lot of times when we'd come through there and come in, they'd ask us when we come out to bring them a fresh loaf of bread. They didn't have fresh bread, see. But we would do it all the time; my dad would. He was such a good man.

Hester: That's wonderful. And this family lived on—

Ross: My dad?

Hester: No. The—

Ross: Oh, at Grand's Pass. They lived in that big house.

Hester: But the house was on an island?

Ross: It was in the bayou, in Grand's Pass. And usually if it was a man or woman, they stayed there till they got old.

Hester: And they would keep track of who was coming and going? Is that—

Ross: Well, they would keep track of everybody that come out of Louisiana, and they had record books where they'd write it down, and they estimated the amount of barrels of shrimp or oysters they had on the boat, see. Or another thing, too, they was like an inspector. He would go on the boat and inspect it, and if they had too many shells or too much grit in the oysters, he'd make them cull over, which means that they had to go knock the shells off the oysters, see. So what he was doing was to keep from taking all the reefs out of Louisiana, see.

Hester: I understand. Well, how long did this take place, and when did it take place?

Ross: Well, it was long before I could remember, but it stayed like that up until—the house is still there, but there's nobody living there now because it's not that many people that go into Louisiana and shrimp or catch oysters anymore, see.

Hester: I see. Going back to your grandfather, we talked about the schooner, and your dad, he piloted the schooner as well? When he fished, did he use the same schooner as your grandfather?

Ross: Oh, yeah, um-hm.

Hester: And what did he fish for? (0:17:36.5)

Ross: Well, they fished for oysters and shrimp. Even back in them days, they caught shrimp with no power, just sails. Can you imagine that? Sailing around because you can't go but a lot of directions while you're sailing.

Hester: What would happen if the wind would stop?

Ross: Well, then the boat would stop. They'd have to pick the rig up, see. But that was long before my time.

Hester: You had mentioned, before we turned the tape recorder on, that your father and I'm sure your grandfather as well, had to deal with hurricanes, but they didn't get the warnings like we get now. (0:18:21.3)

Ross: There was no radios, hon. The only one they got was the weather. They could see the weather getting bad before they got there, and usually it don't take long for a storm to move in, especially when they used to move from ten, twelve, even as much as twenty-some miles an hour, on they track.

Hester: Did they tell you any stories about any hurricanes?

Ross: Well, mostly what I told you about. You want it on that tape?

Hester: Yeah.

Ross: Well, my dad was seining. Back in them days, before they got power, they used big, old skiffs, (0:18:57.3) about twenty, twenty-two foot long, wide, and they had a seine they kept in that skiff, and they'd put that seine out in a big circle to catch shrimp. Now oystering, they caught oysters in them big skiffs, and they unloaded them on the boat the same as shrimp.

Hester: How would they catch the oysters?

Ross: Well, back in them days, they didn't dredge all that much, so they caught them with tongs. And they'd load these big skiffs, and they'd go to that big schooner and unload them, go back and catch more. That was some backbreaking work. I done some of it, not a whole lot. But once I got another boat I'd owned before this one, it was thirty-seven foot long. I shrimped all year long because shrimping was good at the river during the winter, see, and a lot of people didn't like to go that far, but didn't matter to me. Wherever it had shrimp, I went because I went six hours from Texas and all the way to the end of Carrabelle, Florida, I believe.

Hester: So you covered a lot of territory.

Ross: Yeah. That wasn't all at one time. It was all during the years, different years that I worked. But anywhere they had shrimp, I went to catch them.

Hester: How would your father and grandfather market their catch? (0:20:26.8)
Where would they bring it?

Ross: Well, back in them days, they still had factories. And when they didn't have factories, the first ones, they just had seafood places, a dock where you could go there and unload. They'd load the shrimp or oysters on a truck, take them to New Orleans or to Mobile or upstate somewheres. Usually they'd go, like they'd drive a half a day to go to a city up north, but they had people that had these trucks, and they would go, and they'd unload all the catches on these trucks. And they'd go different places. But then later on they started building factories, and that was before my time. And the factories would bring the oysters into the shop. (0:21:16.3) And they had big, old steam kettles about as long as this room, and they were about this wide, and they had cars that they pushed in them, was about this wide and ten foot long. And they'd load the oysters in them cars right off the dock when they'd pick the big, old container up and dump the oysters in there. It would go down the track, and it would go into that big steam box. And they'd steam them oysters. All right. It had a opening on each end, and when they was through steaming, the new set of oysters that are caught, they'd push them in there and push the steamed ones out. And it would go down to different tracks where they had four or five tracks at the end of it where the women shucked oysters. Other words the oysters steam; they open up, and they'd take them out with a little knife, see. And they didn't have gloves them days that they could buy, so they made what they called finger stars(?), and they put on each finger so their fingers wouldn't get raw, see.

Hester: Can you describe the finger stars? What did they look like?

Ross: Well, the acid on any seafood'll do that. In between your fingers, it'll make you raw, see. It's when you handle a lot, see.

Hester: It's scars that they would get on their fingers. I see.

Ross: Yeah. Even raw shrimp or oysters will do that if you handle a lot of it, you see, which would be most every day for a year or something.

Hester: How many women would be lined up to do this?

Ross: Oh, I guess there would be as much as a hundred. That's how many areas they had where they pulled them cars out, see. And can you imagine if the oyster was that big, by the time it was steamed, it was only about this big. So they had a oyster called oyster cups; it was about this big around, with like a handle over them. They hung over the side of the big container the oysters was in that they steamed them in, see. And they'd just throw the fresh oysters in there. I done that, but I was so slow that my mama would say I'd spend what money I made on candy. (laughter) I'd make about a dollar, a dollar, seventy-five cents a day. That's all I made back in them days. And they had a committee lady there. She'd say, "Ross, you run up to the store and get me a Coca-Cola." Coca-Cola was in its heyday. And I would go, and she'd shuck more

oysters while I was gone than I'd shuck the rest of the day. (laughter) That shows you how slow I was, see.

Hester: How old were you then?

Ross: I wasn't but about thirteen, I guess, or fourteen.

Hester: When they shuck the oysters, and you get the smoked oysters out, where do they go then? What happens to them then?

Ross: The oysters, when they put them in these things, they brought them to a room where they had just a window there, and they'd set them in there, and they'd dump the oysters that the women picked in a scale, and they'd mark down how many pounds of oysters, the oyster itself, that they had from each time they dumped them containers. And they didn't make a whole lot of money; I'll tell you. Back in them days, I can remember when I first got out of school, a baker didn't make but ten dollars a week. So you know they didn't make much money opening oysters, but no matter what it was, it was a help to their living.

Hester: Well, did you work on your father's boat?

Ross: Yeah, oh, yeah. I worked on it before I got out of school, (0:25:11.3) during the time when they didn't have school, see. And by the time we went to work on a boat, we knew so much about it, like grown men did and wasn't nothing but kids, fifteen years old, see, but we had done it all our life. And by the time I was eighteen, I could—my dad got sick, and he had a lot of heart attacks. I could take that boat out and work it and make a living with it at eighteen years old. And today eighteen-year-old kids can't hardly do nothing. But we learned the industry from early on.

Hester: If you were fifteen years old or eighteen years old and you took the boat out on your own, how many—

Ross: We always had one deckhand. And back in them days they had engines that was so old that the cylinders was about this big around, and from the base of it, it was this high, and it'd be like one cylinder was twelve horsepower; two cylinders was twenty-four; three cylinders was thirty-six horsepower. And they had those thirty-sixes in these big schooners. Once they brought them to the Coast, you see. But for a long time, all they had was sails. And you had to be a good captain to maneuver a boat around with sails, shrimping and oystering.

Hester: Yeah. It must have been dangerous.

Ross: It was dangerous, far as the equipment, (0:26:42.6) like the winch. People that come on the boats that they hadn't done it before, they'd be careless and get caught in the winch. I had a cousin that was caught in the winch one time, and it broke his legs, both legs, but he was on a boat, running it by himself, and he was putting his foot on

the cable where they wind it on the winch. And well, by the time I went on the boat and I run it by myself, I would leave that winch and go through the pilothouse and go around the other side to get to the other spool. I always remember what happened to him, see.

Hester: It was a good lesson. When did you get your own boat?

Ross: Well, the first boat I got (0:27:30.7) was in 1952, and I had it until this new boat was built in 1965.

Hester: And can you describe the first boat?

Ross: Well, the first boat wasn't but thirty-seven foot long, but it had a big engine in it. It had a hundred-sixty-five-horsepower General Motors diesel. And I got it from my cousin because he wanted to get a bigger boat, see, so he could work offshore. And so after I built this new boat, I took the engine, the shaft, and the propeller out of it and put it in the new boat because the engine was big enough to power that big boat, too, see.

Hester: I see. So then what did you do with the first boat after that?

Ross: I sold it. I practically gave it away, but I sold it to a friend of mine in Alabama for a thousand dollars. And I paid ten thousand dollars for it when it had the engine in it, see, but he was a friend of mine. And people criticized me for that, but I said, "He had to have a start, too." And he used to say after that, he said, "That boat helped Mr. Eley get started. It's going to help me." (laughter) And it did.

Hester: That's great.

Ross: Because he ended up, two or three years later, he ended up with a bigger boat, and a better boat.

Hester: Yeah. What did you fish for when you first started with your first boat?

Ross: Well, I shrimped mostly, and I never liked dredging, but once I found out I could make as much money shrimping down the river during January, February, March, (0:29:19.4) then I just stayed shrimping the whole year, see. And there was a area east of the river from North Pass down to Southwest Pass, all that area on the outside was called the mud lump area, which in essence all it was that it was soft bottom, and it had hills in it, ten and fifteen foot high, coming from inshore, going offshore. And when you'd drag that, they had a lot of shrimp there. If you turned and hit one of those lumps, (0:29:56.9) your trawl boards'd stick in it, and you'd fill the net full of mud, and you'd tear it up and lose it most of the time, see, until you got a depth sounder that showed the bottom, you knew what was wrong, see. After you got a depth sounder, then you could see those ridges.

Hester: And you're talking about the Mississippi River, just to—

Ross: Yeah, outside the Mississippi River that was down from North Pass, and see, at the head of the pass is what I talked about a while ago, (0:30:29.4) was Southwest [Pass], South Pass, and Pass A Loutre. And Pass A Loutre went down to the east, and South Pass went down to the southeast. Southwest Pass went down almost from west to southwest, going on the west side the river, see. And I worked all around, in between them passes like that.

Hester: When did you get the—is it sonar that detects the—

Ross: Well, I never had sonar. That was something new. What we had was just a simple depth recorder, (0:31:07.3) and they got better before the sonar come out where they would show pictures and then color. But the first ones, all it did was just show, just a little line, and the graph wasn't this big. It showed you little lines; it could show you the shape of that bottom. Then you knew what you was up against when you was tearing up all your rigs, see. I'd be willing to say this. People that didn't know how to do it, and when we made a lot of money in there, they'd come in there; they tore up and lost more rigs than what the amount of shrimp they caught. That's how bad it was. But we would put out little buoys. We'd go down until the bottom dropped off. We'd turn the boat back and drop a buoy. And we'd do that up and down that line, and then we'd stay inside that line of buoys. And you could stay there and drag all day. The bottom was flat on that section, see. But now you get up to the east just a little ways, it would drop down fifteen foot, see.

Hester: I understand. So you did shrimping on your first boat, just shrimping. You didn't like to do (inaudible).

Ross: Yeah, most all the time. It was a little boat. I never dredged with it at all. The only time I dredged the bigger boat was when I went to Pass Christian and started dredging on the reefs, there, for sack oysters. And that's when I would bring them home.

Hester: If you could put some years on this, when you started with the detector to determine the mud lumps in the Mississippi River, about what year was that?

Ross: Well, the second boat, I got it in—the first one was [19]52. And thirteen years later, what would that be from [19]52?

Hester: That would be about [19]65.

Ross: All right. In [19]65 I got this new boat, see. And what was the question you asked me? (laughter)

Hester: About what year was it that you were using the equipment to detect the mud lumps in the river?

Ross: Well, you see, I worked in the mud lumps when I had that little boat, and so it was somewhere around [19]53 or [19]54, like that, when I first started. And I was one of the first boats that worked in it. After they seen us go in there, then—that little boat was a ketch boat, which shrimp you caught you kept on deck in the wintertime. They would stay up; they wouldn't spoil. And you'd go to a big boat (0:33:59.4) that had ice on it that was a freight boat; had scales on it; worked for these factories. Each factory had freight boats. And you'd unload, and when you'd unload they'd see how many shrimp you had, and they knew where you had come from, see. So that drug more people into the mud lumps, see. And that's the ones that had the most trouble. You could hear on the radio; back days we had marine radios, and hear the fellows from the factories saying, "Get me a new trawl made. Bring me out a new trawl." See, that was constantly, all day long because sometimes when they bogged, it filled their nets so full of mud that they wouldn't get none of it back but just the lead lines.

Hester: My goodness. OK. So you have your second boat. It's 1965, and are you still shrimping?

Ross: Yes.

Hester: And is it the same equipment? (0:34:57.2)

Ross: Well, basically it was the same because about every year you'd change. You'd get new nets. Every year you'd get new nets, and so you'd get maybe one or two new nets during the year. But a net, even when we went to nylon, after you used it so many times, and you bogged it in the mud lumps, they'd fill up with mud, and you'd pick up, and you'd run with the boards up and the trawl hanging [to] wash the net out. Well, with nylon, it lasted longer than cotton because cotton would tear so easy. And I had some nets ten years old, but once you stretch them out of shape, they don't work as good, see. When you make a new net, you can see how much more that it catches than what the old net catches. And you learn all them things over through the years by doing it.

Hester: So it sounds like in these early years you did most of your fishing right there by the Mississippi River Delta.

Ross: Right. That's right.

Hester: What happened after 1965? How long did you have that boat?

Ross: Well, I had that boat until I was eighty-four, and I sold it to my nephew when I was eighty-four, and that wasn't but just a few years back. And I wished I would have never sold the boat because all I do is sit in that chair. (laughter)

Hester: Is that the boat in the picture here?

Ross: That's the boat in the picture, and I sold it to my nephew, and I gave it to him for twenty-thousand dollars. The boat was worth about thirty or thirty-five, but to help him get started, I gave him that low price.

Hester: Is he still fishing?

Ross: Yeah.

Hester: He still uses it?

Ross: He was young when he bought it; I guess in his twenties. And after he accumulated five or six kids, he said, "I'm going to do like Uncle Eley. (laughter) Educate all my kids with this boat."

Hester: That's a noble—

Ross: And that's what he's doing.

Hester: Yeah. That's wonderful. What is his name?

Ross: Well, we call him Pete, and I think he's named after his daddy, Robert Ross.

Hester: Um-hm. And then after the boat, the second boat that you had and sold when you were eighty-four, the one that's depicted on the wall, a little while after that you said you purchased a smaller boat.

Ross: Yeah.

Hester: Could you talk about that some?

Ross: I did. It was just thirty foot, and mostly what I bought it for was just to be a pleasure boat, see. And it had a shrimp rig on it, and I went out, and there wasn't many shrimp. Another time I went out, after some bad weather, and usually when the shrimp are left alone for two or three days, they accumulate more. So I went out, and I caught about four hundred dollars of shrimp. On the way in, I heard a terrible noise, and the shaft, the bolts broke, and when the shaft went around, it tore all that—it was a fiberglass boat. It pulled all that fiberglass piece. The shaft was up off the bottom of the boat. And it went right down. So then I had my nephew that owned that big boat of mine, was mine, come out there in another boat (phone rings) and helped—excuse me.

Hester: Sure. I'm going to put this on pause. (brief interruption) Well, OK. You were talking about your skiff that sunk when you caught all those—

Ross: Oh, yeah, my little, thirty-foot boat. So some friends of mine went out there and helped me pick it up. And I brought it to the shipyard, and I had a guy that done

whatever they do with fiberglass, seal it back. (0:39:07.2) And he fixed it back for me, and he told me, said, “Mr. Eley, I tell you something you don’t know.” I said, “What’s that?” He said, “This has happened before.” He said, “I can see where it was redone, again.” So it’s something you never know, see. Probably that’s why the guy sold the boat in the first place.

Hester: So how did you make it? If you were on the boat with the oysters and the boat sinks, how did you survive? (0:39:38.1)

Ross: Oh, well, when you’re on the water as long as what we’ve been on it—I stood on the rail. Well, I called my nephew when it went down; a good thing I had my cell phone, see. And he come out there. And he had trouble getting to me because the boat drifted before it sank to the bottom in the shallow water, and he couldn’t hardly get that close, see. So eventually I got overboard, and he threw the rope. I went and got it and brought it back to the boat and crawled back in, and then he pulled me off; pulled me off that lump. And so then he brought me to the shipyard. But see, I was alongside of him when it sank the first time. So by going fast, the propeller raised the shaft up, and it opened up that hole in the bottom about this big. And that’s why it went down so quick, see. So I said, “Whatever you do, go real slow because that’s where I sank before.” So he brought to the shipyard, and when I got off, got finished fixing the boat, he come and got me and brought me back. He’s a good boy. He was.

Hester: Sounds like it. Well, did you take the skiff back out?

Ross: I don’t believe I went back out because it was close to the end of the season, and I fixed it up and had to go through the engine and work on it, clean it out because it had water in it. And I believe after that I sold it. It kind of aggravated me when it happened. So I sold it to a boy, young fellow that I knew, and he let it sink twice. And the boat wasn’t leaking because it was fiberglass, but he had the bow up on the beach, and when the stern went down, they had some plates in the deck. You seen on fiberglass boats. And the plate floated off, and it sank through that hole on the top of the deck. And then he eventually give it away. And I paid ten thousand dollars for it, and my daughter, she had a lady that was in business with her with advertisement, and she sold it to that woman’s son for sixty-five hundred dollars. (laughter) So I lost money on it, coming and going. But it was something I wanted, and I could afford it, and it didn’t hurt nobody else, so.

Hester: And it earned you some good money for a little bit?

Ross: Not the—

Hester: Not the little one.

Ross: Not the little one, no. The big one, now, it made plenty of money because I educated all them kids. I sent them through college, the boys.

Hester: Did any of your children go into commercial fishing? (0:42:45.0)

Ross: No. I didn't want them to.

Hester: Why not?

Ross: Because there wasn't enough money, and it was so hard. Now, listen; both of them boys worked on the boat with me from the time they was big enough to be a deckhand, and they were good deckhands. But it wasn't no way they was going to own a boat because I sold my big boat when I figured it was time for me to quit. And they knew it. They knew that I said, "I want y'all to get as much good education as you can get." And that oldest one's a marine lawyer, and the youngest one is a geologist today.

Hester: That's wonderful.

Ross: And he takes care of his daddy, too.

Hester: That's wonderful. Well, what do you foresee as the future of commercial fishing in—(0:43:41.0)

Ross: When I started, that was all we knew, see. And it was sort of like from the time you was real little that it was a desire to go out on that boat to do what your daddy done. And after you got big enough to do it, you wanted to do it like he done it, see. But what turned my life around was the first boat I got, my cousin wanted, bought a big boat, and he wanted to get off the little boat and run the big one, see. And the name of it was the *Mary Margaret*. It was a schooner that won a lot of races, but it wasn't built like a schooner. It was built like a sloop, but it was the shape of a big schooner, see, with a bowsprit, two masts, and all. But the shape of it made it slide through the water a lot better.

Hester: Can you describe the difference in the shape?

Ross: Well, they look the same, but most schooners, the bow is like that. But the *Mary Margaret's* was like this.

Hester: So it would be more pointed.

Ross: No. It'd be more blunt. But see, the bottom was shaped where it didn't go way down like the other schooners did, see. It wasn't a deep-draft boat. It was sort of like a sail—it was built like a sailboat. It was built where it sat almost on top of the water, with maybe two or three foot down below the water, where most schooners, the back end goes down five and a half foot, see. And the schooner is built like this, and that boat was built like this. It was almost flat underneath, see.

Hester: And the sloop that has a shallow draft, had a blunt nose?

Ross: A blunt bow, yeah.

Hester: Yeah, a blunt bow, OK. Did you ever race any boats, yourself?

Ross: No, no. Oh, I would race boats, running back and forth. But far as that, I got involved. And they used to have races (0:45:51.1) with powerboats back when I first got, after (inaudible) the first boat I had. And you'd go to Ship Island and back, but there was some boats, the way they was built, they went through the water easier and faster, see. So I built a thing on the stern of my boat like this, where it helped raise the boat up out of the water, where it'd run faster. And I was beating them boats. All of a sudden I heard a noise, "Remph, remph, remph, remph." That thing come lose and come off. (laughter) Then the boat settled down. Then they passed me up. I said, "Well, that didn't worked too good." We just didn't have it fixed strong enough.

Hester: Over the course of your career as a commercial fisherman, as I understand it from other fishermen, there were regulations and laws and rules and procedures that you had to follow that sort of changed the nature of your equipment. And can you talk any about that?

Ross: Well, you always had that. Now, when I first started fishing in Mississippi, (0:47:09.2) there was no limit on the size trawl you could pull. Well, later on they made it a fifty-foot rule, that you couldn't have a net in the Mississippi Sound larger than fifty foot on the cork line. So you had to follow that rule. But since everybody had to have that, then it didn't make a lot of difference of what you caught, see, because you'd catch so much anyway. And actually I never saw any difference in moneywise or the amount of shrimp we caught because it just seemed that, well, that was all you was going to catch was so much, see.

Hester: It didn't diminish the size of the catch any.

Ross: Well, no. It seemed like you caught just as much. You see, shrimping is like this. (0:48:07.3) One year is good; catch a lot of shrimp. The next year it's bad, or it might be two years is bad. And then you get another good year, and you'll get a couple of years that's kind of poor. So it's never the same, but it's always that theme that it does get bad and get good, see.

Hester: What do you think is the reason for that?

Ross: What I think causes that is the amount of food that the shrimp get to eat. If there's a lot of plankton, which is what they eat, well, more'll survive. But if there's less, and it could be from droughts, from storms—I used to know a lot of that, but here lately I've forgot a lot of it. But most of it I remember is drought and storms where you wouldn't have as much food come in. And plankton is a little microscopic animal that shrimp eat.

Hester: Are there different types of shrimp? (0:49:12.8)

Ross: Are they different types? Oh, yeah. There's like the first shrimp you catch in May is big, white shrimp, and they'll get about this long, some of them.

Hester: Wow, about five inches maybe, huh?

Ross: Oh, no, about seven or eight. And then the next one you catch would be a brown shrimp with a red spot through the first section of meat, all the way through the body. And the fishermen call it a hopper, and the reason why they call it a hopper, the first ones we caught, when you dumped them out of the net—the net come over the side—they'd hop up and down about this high. So you called them hoppers. So the next one was brown shrimp without that spot in it, and that's what you catch when the season opens in June, yeah, June. And you catch a lot of those. But now, these spotted ones, these hoppers, you only catch a few in between the white ones and the brown ones.

Hester: So they would come in seasons.

Ross: Yeah. They would come in different, but they never mixed up. They always stayed separate. When you had a lot of white shrimp, very seldom you'd see a brown one, maybe a few in it. But it would be very few. And the same thing with the hoppers and the same thing with the pink shrimp.

Hester: Would they all market the same?

Ross: Yeah. And they taste the same, too.

Hester: Is that right?

Ross: Good! (laughter)

Hester: Amazing. And they were all, they would get to a nice size.

Ross: Yeah. All of them would get big, about this long, about seven inches.

Hester: Yeah. Any other changes in the equipment that you can remember? (0:51:21.5)

Ross: Well, back in the beginning all nets had loop chain on the lead line. Oh, well, the first ones had lead, lead balls about every foot. And then it went to chain, three/sixteenth chain. And then in the mud lumps, you couldn't pull either chain or the leads, but you made a mud rope about this big around, out of old trawls.

Hester: About the size of an orange?

Ross: Maybe about this big around, and you tied it on that lead line, and that would keep the lead line from digging in the mud. And that's how you got by the mud lump, see, what we called the mud rope. But a lot of people hurt they backs with it because when they'd take it off to go put it up on top of the house, they would strain and twist their back and ended up with back trouble. I never did, but a lot of people did.

Hester: Can you recall any other changes in equipment?

Ross: Any other changes? Not hardly. It was always the same. On a hard bottom you used chain. You didn't lose lead anymore. And in the mud lumps you'd use that, what you call a mud rope.

Hester: And then in the boat that you had from 1965 till you were eighty-four and sold it, you'd use basically the same type of—

Ross: Same thing. And I just shrimped, so I just used trawls with chain on it, but when I went down the river, I'd use a mud rope. I was one of the first ones to go in the mud lumps, and we made some money because there was so many shrimp in there.

Hester: And you drew a lot of people there?

Ross: Oh, yeah. It did. And a lot of them come there, and they didn't know what to do, and they tore up a lot of nets. That's when I said there was more that was bought and lost in there than the amount of shrimp that come out.

Hester: I understand. What is your earliest memory of a hurricane that you had to deal with? (0:53:29.6)

Ross: Well, I was never caught in a hurricane because back during my time, we had radios by the time I got on a boat. And the first was just simple receivers, see. But we would always take our boats back up the river or back up the river, back up towards where you live, up further to the north. And it would be almost by I-10 where we would go, see. Didn't have I-10 then, but we'd take the boats way up there, and they got big, wide passes, say like about a thousand foot wide, but they got little bayous, go off on the side. You take your boat in there and get where they got trees. And you tie the bow up to a tree in the front and the stern at a tree in the back. Well, if the wind blew real hard, you wouldn't go up on the beach. And there would be a lot of boats that would get piled up in a bayou by themselves, and a lot of them was company boats. Well, we stayed on boats to watch them, see, but these company boats, now, people would go on home. And they would swing back and forth and break their lines and swing around, and some of them would end up on the beach. And that was carelessness because they wasn't there to watch them.

Hester: And what could you do if you stayed on your boat during a hurricane?

Ross: Well, you could run the engine and back the boat up if you had to or go ahead. Say, like if you was by a bank, you'd go ahead and just hold the boat tight against the bank, see. But these other boats, they would break loose; they'd go on around. But we always put anchors out in the stern if it was a wide bayou, or we'd tie up to trees. These other boats would just tie the bow, and that's what their trouble was. When the stern lines'd break, they'd swing around. Three or four would go on the beach at one time, still tied together, but there wouldn't be nobody on them. Then they had to get a company come down there and dig a ditch and haul them out of there.

Hester: Did they threaten your boat, swinging around like that?

Ross: No, no. Never had any problem like that?

Hester: Do you remember a storm prior to [Hurricane] Katrina that you had trouble with?

Ross: Yeah. We had them off and on, but never like Katrina.

Hester: Could you talk about Katrina?

Ross: I live down here about a block from the beach, straight down this way. That's where I was; most of my life I was raised. And we would go down the beach, and the water would come up on the beach. But you could still walk on the sidewalk close to the houses on the beach. You could walk all the way down the beach, and the water would be up on the road on the opposite side. I've seen that happen. But there was one other storm I don't remember, but the [19]47 storm (0:56:43.2), the water was up to the windows in this house. And that was the one that I was down the river and went ashore on the beach in one. And my dad come down there and got us on his boat.

Hester: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Ross: Well, I had just bought a boat from my cousin, and I was on that boat when it went up on the beach. And I was there with my uncle and two other cousins, and we were scattered out. You barely could see one boat. It went way down the river, but we were anchored in Pass A Loutre, and when the storm come out, it didn't bother us coming in as much as it did when it passed us. Once it passed us, it drove us up on the beach, and I ended up with my boat, seven hundred foot up on the beach. And so we had to dig. After that, we went back; we had to dig a channel about eight or nine foot wide and about three or four foot deep to float them boats out through that channel, see. Then they had two or three boats out in the river with lines on it, pulling on it because when it got right to the end, we didn't open it all the way up. When it got to the end, they just jumped over it, into the river, see.

Hester: Who helped with that? Was it somebody you hired?

Ross: No. Back in them days, hon, you didn't have to hire nobody. People would volunteer to help you, but you don't see that today. People just don't take time to do it.

Hester: So everybody would work together and dig out the boats.

Ross: Well, see, in the family was about ten boats, see, from my different uncles and cousins and stuff. And they would always come. Anybody that's in trouble, they'd go help them.

Hester: So you're from a large family of fishermen.

Ross: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Hester: How many brothers and sisters do you have? (0:58:49.5)

Ross: I had seven sisters and five brothers, counting myself.

Hester: Big family.

Ross: Yeah. And we lost one baby, too.

Hester: Did they stay in this area?

Ross: Yeah, most of them. Now, one of the girls is in Monroe, Louisiana, but three of my sisters lives in Gulfport, and two of them lives on Courthouse Road. And one lives out in Stanton Place; that's right off of I-10 to the south a little bit.

Hester: And your brothers.

Ross: And my brothers, they all gone, but they lived in Ocean Springs. And all of us married girls from Ocean Springs. It seemed like when we were young, going out dancing, because we all danced. (0:59:45.7) My oldest brother, he was like Arthur Murray. Man, he could dance. He'd dance, and he'd strut when he danced. And young girls (laughter) stand there with their mouths wide open, see. But we all learned how to dance from him, watching him. But every one of us danced different. It's just whatever come to you to do, see.

Hester: Where would you go dance in Ocean Springs?

Ross: Well, it was mostly Ocean Springs, and that's where we met most of our wives. They had a place, say, if you go out Washington, and the first street before you go over the bridge on the right, there's a road that goes to like a community center. And they would have it there. But back in them days, all the girls, when they went to them dances, their mothers went with them. And nobody had cars. We had a car, but we

wouldn't take it there. We'd walk with them, and we'd walk down the street. Their mothers would be behind us. (laughter) They wanted to take good care of them girls.

Hester: I understand. Was that around Gulf Hills?

Ross: No. That's before you go over that bridge to Gulf Hills. Gulf Hills would be on the left after you go over the bridge.

Hester: OK. Let's talk about Katrina a bit. How did Katrina affect you? (1:01:11.6)

Ross: Well, it demolished; it moved the house about one inch on the southeast corner, but the rest of the house, it just swayed it a little bit, see. But we had to tear everything out of the inside, and there were volunteers that came down and done that, and then I had a cousin of mine was in the construction business, and he redone the house. And I believe it cost me fifty-eight thousand dollars to redo the floors and the ceilings and the walls and the equipment, too. All of that was in that fifty-eight thousand.

Hester: You said that everything came out, all the way to the rafters?

Ross: To the rafters and the siding and the ceiling because the waterline, the old house had like a little molding up in the corner of the roof, on each side. And you could see the water marks on that roof.

Hester: So it was all the way up to the roof.

Ross: Yeah.

Hester: Were you affected in [Hurricane] Camille? (1:02:23.0)

Ross: Camille was the one that was up to windowsills.

Hester: And how did you make it with your boat through Camille? Did you stay out on the boat?

Ross: Well, no. Sometimes I would stay, but other times if I was with my brother, he always stayed on the boat. So I tied my boat alongside of his, and he watched both of them, see.

Hester: And where would you go?

Ross: I would go up north, in Woolmarket. I had a nephew lived up there, and my wife left to go buy some groceries, when we heard about the storm, see. So when she gets home, I said, "Well, get ready. Get enough clothes for all the kids,"—because we had most all our kids then—"three or four days, anyway. And we're going up to my nephew Buddy's house up in Woolmarket." I already called him, see. Oh! I just

about had to hogtie her to get her out of this house. She wouldn't go. I said, "We got to go because it's going to be bad." They talked about ten foot tides at first, and then they kept going up and up all the time. I said, "We can't stay here. There'll be water all over this Point." And it was up to the windowsills. We come back, but then we had paneling in the house, then. So we just swept it out and cleaned it; had some young girls come, and they cleaned the walls down. So we didn't have to change anything, but now, we changed all the furniture and stuff. But now, when this other one come, it had Sheetrock in it then, so we just tore it all out, see.

Hester: What about the boat? How did the boat make it through Camille?

Ross: Well, the boat was way up in the river, way north of where you live, where the Back Bay turns and goes towards the north. We was up there a good ways. On the left there was a bayou up there, and a lot of boats went in that bayou. And that's where we was at. See, there's a main bayou that goes under I-10. Well, this little bayou is off to the side, and it's got shelter, more than the big one because the wider the area of water you got, the more the waves can pick up and swing the boats around, see. But the one we went into might have been like a hundred and fifty foot wide. The one out in the main, like you seen the ones from I-10, oh, they about four hundred, five hundred foot wide.

Hester: And when you were talking about where I used to live, before we went on the record here, before we turned the tape recorder on, we were talking about the effects of Katrina, and the area where I lived was also affected by Katrina, and that was around Brickyard Bayou. It's the end of the Back Bay. Yeah. So the boat in Camille did OK. What about Katrina? How did you make it through Katrina with your boat? (1:05:29.0)

Ross: Well, Katrina, I had sold the boat then to my nephew, so he had it. And he went up behind Ocean Springs, almost to I-10, back up—where is it? When you're going east from Ocean Springs, the next little town you get to, it's a good ways up there. Well, they would be north of that, see.

Hester: Is that Gautier?

Ross: Yeah, Gautier. See, some of those things, I can't remember them right offhand.

Hester: I have trouble remembering them, too, Mr. Ross. (laughter)

Ross: Yeah. But that's all the time with me, see?

Hester: Well, can you talk about the BP oil spill? Happened not long after Katrina. (1:06:18.8)

Ross: Well, it was bad because it affected a lot of things, and they had oil in the [Mississippi] Sound. I don't remember any right on the beaches here, but just south of

us in Louisiana, man, it would be yards and yards of it, all over the Louisiana marsh. But there was some in the Sound and outside of the islands, pretty bad outside the islands.

Hester: And you had a claim, you said. (1:06:47.8) Before we went on the record, you were talking about that you had a claim, or you were able to recoup some damages.

Ross: Yeah.

Hester: Could you talk about that a little bit?

Ross: I'll be honest with you. I don't remember how much it was, but now, there's something else coming up about it, now. And we might get some money out of that, see, because BP made a mistake in how it was written out. Something was wrong, and the case went through court and was finished. So whoever makes a claim now don't have to go to court because the court claim was finished, see. It's been on television the last few days.

Hester: Yeah. I'm not sure that I heard about that.

Ross: Yeah. It's telling people to file a claim. And if you know anybody that it affected on the water, I could give you my daughter's telephone number because she handles a lot of that, see.

Hester: She works for BP?

Ross: Yeah. Not directly with them, but she collects this information, see.

Hester: Well, when you went through your claims process, did you think everything was handled fairly?

Ross: I think it was.

Hester: Did you participate in the Vessels of Opportunity program, (1:08:13.0) the VOO program, the Vessels of Opportunity? Did you have a boat that you could send out to check the oil that BP hired?

Ross: No. I wasn't in that.

Hester: Have you heard from any of the commercial fishermen in this area about their impressions of the oil spill and how it was handled?

Ross: No. My daughter, she was trying to get people that had suffered problems during that oil spill, and far as her, well, I don't get out of this house, much, see, so I don't know. Back when I was on the boat, you listened to the radio; you could hear

everything you wanted to know. (laughter) See, fishermen, they'd pick up something; they'd put it on the air, see. And my daughter, she takes these claims, and she brings them to people that files them.

Hester: When did she start doing that?

Ross: I really don't know, but it's just recently she's talked to me about it, see, because anything I have done, she does it, see. I never have to worry about getting anything done.

Hester: I understand.

Ross: And she's the only one didn't go to college or school. She's smart as a whip.

Hester: Good for her.

Ross: Her mama was that way, smart as could be. A lot of my nieces and nephews that get in trouble over something they bought, and they'd come get her to go talk to the person that sold it. (laughter) They could get around them other ones, but not her. She had an answer for everything. She was extremely smart, but see, she come from a family that had a crab business, see, so she was used to that, used to having answers directly to put out right away.

Hester: And this would be who?

Ross: My wife.

Hester: Your wife. What was her maiden name?

Ross: She was a Seymour, and her mother and father owned a crab shop in Ocean Springs, right across from the police station on Dewey(?) Avenue.

Hester: Are any of her family members still in the fishing business?

Ross: She's got a brother that lives there in the family home, bought it, and she's got a couple of sisters that's still living, but I believe the other brothers has passed on.

Hester: Does the family still have the crabbing business?

Ross: No, no. No. He was a carpenter, this brother of my wife's, and he done construction work on his own, building houses and stuff on his own. And he was a good carpenter, see. He made more money in that than he did in that crab business, and his wife didn't do too good in it, see. Before, my mother-in-law run the business, see. My father-in-law, he caught crabs and all, but my mother-in-law, she had women to come in and pick the crabs, for to pick the meat out of the shell. And she was a pretty smart woman.

Hester: So they were in the crab-processing business.

Ross: Yeah, um-hm.

Hester: They would take it from the fishermen when they would come in.

Ross: Well, no. My father-in-law went and caught his own crabs. Now, they would buy some at times or hire somebody, during like a peak season or something. But most of the time my father-in-law caught the crabs they used, see.

Hester: I think that I've pretty much covered all of the questions that I planned to ask, but this tape will be archived at the center and will be there longer than I'll be around, so if there's anything that you would like to put on the record, please—

Ross: Well, if they ask me a question, I can answer it. There's very little about my business that I don't know, see, because I spent a long time in it from the time I was fifteen up to I was eighty-four, see.

Hester: What do you see for the future of commercial fishing? (1:12:50.7)

Ross: Well, let me tell you how commercial fishing is. I've heard this from my old cousin, and he was pretty smart. He's dead and gone now. He was about fifteen years older than me. He says, "People talk about these bad times and this and that," he said, "but we've had bad times and good times since time eternal." So it goes to show you; it's nothing new. It's just something that happens almost every year, see. And some years you get good seasons. Other years you don't. And you asked me what I thought about what made the difference. Well, I think what it is is the amount of food that they get, and the more of them survive. Now, I used to could talk a whole lot more about all that plankton and everything because I used to read books a lot, see. But it's been so long since I even touched a book. And I'll tell you what I did. My son who is a marine lawyer, he collected me about ten books on seafood. And I give them to different organizations. They begged for them because they didn't have nothing like that, and even schoolteachers that taught classes on that, I would donate it to them. Finally I ended up with none, but it was a good cause. And I was a person, never say no to anybody. If I could help you, I'd help you. I said, "I'm not here to hurt you. I'm here to help you."

Hester: Well, that's wonderful. Well, Mr. Ross, thank you so much for doing this.

Ross: Well, you quite welcome. I enjoyed it, too.

Hester: And happy birthday. I understand you're going to have dinner with your daughter today to celebrate.

Ross: Well, listen. Nobody says anything about anything, (laughter) so I'm looking for something big. (laughter)

Hester: Well, we'll keep that as a secret.

Ross: But always, always they have a party for somebody, and everybody'll give them presents, and usually that's how it is. And I guess me it'd be more so since I'm the daddy. (laughter)

Hester: Yeah. Well, you have a wonderful tomorrow.

Ross: I will. Thank you so much.

Hester: And a nice dinner tonight. And I'll go ahead and turn this off, now.

(end of interview)



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JUNIE-DOFFIE



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