

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

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Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Wesley Howard Stork

Interviewer: Barbara Hester

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*An Oral History with Wesley Howard Stork, Volume 1043*

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## Biography

Mr. Wesley Howard Stork was born on December 12, 1926, in Pascagoula, Mississippi, to Mr. Henry Wilson Stork (born in Leavenworth, Kansas) and Mrs. Hattie Belle Clark Stork (born in Pascagoula, Mississippi). His father was a commercial fisherman and the owner of a merchandise store. His mother was a housewife, who worked in the family store. Stork's father's name was Hinklemeyer(?), and he changed his surname to Stork, which was his mother's maiden name.

Stork became a commercial fisherman, and he worked in a seafood plant. At the time of this interview, he was retired. He enjoys baseball, football, sports fishing, and boating.

On January 25, 1951, in Creole, Mississippi, Stork married his wife Genie Mae (born on March 23, 1935, in Chapman, Alabama). They have two children, Wesley Dwight Stork (born December 30, 1951) and Sandra Kay Stork Bryant (born September 10, 1954).

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## AN ORAL HISTORY

with

WESLEY HOWARD STORK

*This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with Wesley Howard Stork and his wife Genie and is taking place on January 4, 2012. The interviewer is Barbara Hester.*

**Hester:** OK. This is Barbara Hester with The University of Southern Mississippi, the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. Today is January 4, 2012, and it's approximately 9:30 in the morning. I'm at the home of Wesley Stork. [The address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy.] Thank you so much for having me in your home, Mr. Stork, for this oral history interview. If you would, would you give us your name and address officially for the record?

**Stork:** Wesley Stork. [The address of the interviewee has not been transcribed in order to protect his privacy.]

**Hester:** OK, Mr. Stork. As I understand it, you are a retired commercial fisherman.

**Stork:** Yes. I learned how to fish when I was a small boy. (0:01:08.3) I'd go with my daddy and brothers. And back then we put the nets out, rowing the boat with oars, and we'd have to row, oh, three or four miles. And when we got back in, we'd use ice water to chill the fish before we iced them. And my dad, he would oyster and catch turtles, terrapins. (0:01:57.1) And that was in the 1930s. And he would ship them, when he got enough to ship. He'd ship them to New York, the Fulton Fish Market. And back then he got a real good price for the terrapins. They was bringing about three dollars each if they measured six inches or more on the bottom shell. And that's how he helped feed twelve children, I guess.

**Hester:** Oh, my. It was a big family. (laughter)

**Stork:** But when I started, it was right after Pearl Harbor. (0:02:46.8) We was out; it was Christmas break at school, and my brother was working on a boat in Bayou LaBatre, Alabama. And he knew I had some experience, so he asked me to go on the boat with them. So I went down there, and we was going to Chandeleur in Louisiana. And that's how I got started. And I guess I worked with him, oh, maybe a year, and then at sixteen I went to work at the shipyard for a year. And then I went back to commercial fishing. And I was on a boat, would run, go work down in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi, until Louisiana closed us from fishing offshore in Louisiana, Chandeleur and Breton Outlet and Mason Keys. So we were still fishing

inside waters, but we couldn't go out there. And I was on several different boats, and I was working for Clark Seafood, and they moved to Louisiana, Slidell, in [19]48, I think it was. And I spent a year over there, and then they moved to Pascagoula. So I still worked with them on the boats. And we was catching mullet, redfish, sheepheads, and speckled trouts, and different types of inshore fish. (0:05:03.6) And we used trammel nets, that was on average about four feet deep and twelve hundred feet long. (0:05:11.1) And we used the oars to put the nets out with until later on we built larger boats and could use outboard motors and put the nets out. And from there in 1952, they asked me to work in the plant. So I went to work in the plant, a-hauling shrimp to Louisiana and fish to Texas, and so I stayed with them until I was—for thirty-nine years. And we had boats that worked offshore. They caught red snapper. And then from there, they used larger boats to catch, to drag and catch butterfish. I was in butterfish for several years. And redfish, they were using purse seines to catch redfish. (0:06:38.3) So we was producing a lot of seafood, butterfish, redfish, red snapper. At one time the company had sixteen boats that worked offshore to catch red snapper. They was a-working the Caribbean and the Gulf [of Mexico]. And the best year we had was about four million pounds. (0:07:16.9) So the laws (0:07:16.8) got so bad on catching the red snapper, they started selling the boats, selling some to Mexico and different places. And had some guys from Florida, came over, and they introduced the purse seine to catch the redfish offshore (0:07:51.4) and the butterfish and different types fish. We caught a lot of drum that was shipped over to Mexico. And one thing about when I started fishing commercially, myself, we was getting six to eight cents a pound for mullet, and that was during the war [World War II]. They had a lot of German prisoners in Camp Shelby and over in Louisiana. So we was producing a lot of mullet for—they'd salt them down in cans, and that's what they'd feed the German prisoners with a lot. (0:08:55.5) But back to Clark Seafood, who I worked for for so many years, we produced a lot of fish, had a lot of fishermans. (0:09:20.5) And they had, at one time, it was about forty shrimp boats (0:09:26.5) would come and unload. Some of them from Louisiana fished the Gulf out here, and they would come in and unload. And I was making—they put me on the trucks, and I was delivering shrimp to the factories at Violet, Louisiana, making two trips a day. So we produced a lot of shrimp there for a few years when they was plentiful. And then I guess the hurricanes made a lot of difference in the producing. I know [Hurricane] Camille [1969] had cut cuts in Chandeleur [Island] and Ship Island. That cut there at Ship Island they call Camille Cut. But the laws (0:10:34.1) got so bad that you couldn't use a net within a half a mile from the beach, so most of the fishermen just quit, found other places to work.

**Hester:** Doing fishing, or going to a different industry altogether?

**Stork:** A lot of them just quit fishing, and they had to find other work because they couldn't make a living, not fishing offshore with nets. But after the trammel net, we started using gillnets (0:11:22.4) if we could fish in deeper water. But still speckled trout and redfish and such as that, they shallow water fish. But that snapper fishing, that's where the biggest money was for the company, but when they stopped all that

and put limits on what you could catch and the size, that really hurt the seafood business. But they still, today they catching butterfish. (0:12:11.4)

**Hester:** I've never heard of that before, a butterfish. What type of fish is that?

**Stork:** It's just a small fish. It takes about six to eight to weigh a pound, but they're really a delicious, little fish.

**Hester:** What is it like? It's a scale fish?

**Stork:** No. It's just a skin fish, but I think they do have some small, little scales on them. And anyway, they just cut their heads off and split them, and I don't know how they cook them. But at first they was selling a lot of them to Japan. But after that, they was selling a lot of them in New York and different places. But Clark Seafood was delivering red snapper and different fish to New York, making two trips a week and all in the Midwest, Chicago, and Detroit, Cleveland.

**Hester:** And did you drive and deliver there, as well?

**Stork:** I made one trip North; went as far as Detroit. But that was it. I got snowed in. I wouldn't go back.

**Hester:** I can understand that. (laughter)

**Stork:** But I still drove local, Florida and Texas and around, but after I—they told me if I could find a truck driver to take my place, they'd take me off the truck, so I finally found one. And so I went back in the plant, and I was a-buying and selling supplies to the snapper boats. I'd buy fishing equipment out of Florida and supplied them with the fishing hooks and lines and everything. (0:14:44.4) And I was in charge of keeping statements of the fuel and ice in the boats. We had an ice plant, and we'd ice and fuel our own boats. And those boats working the Caribbean, they would stay at least thirty days. But the biggest trip that was brought in was about fifty thousand pounds of red snapper.

**Hester:** And there's enough room in the hold of the boat to carry that much fish?

**Stork:** Oh, yeah. This boat was about a hundred feet and deep and wide.

**Hester:** Was that their biggest boat?

**Stork:** No. They had the butterfish boats; they could carry couple of hundred thousand pounds. (0:16:03.6) But they never did catch that many; I don't think.

**Hester:** How many people would man a boat of that size?



**Stork:** Butterfish boat was four, but snapper boats, they had anywhere from six to eight men. You used a hook and line to catch snapper, so they had—

**Hester:** Had to have more people with lines in the water.

**Stork:** More people. Had one man especially the ice man. He would ice the fish down good in the hold. But they eventually, laws got so bad, they just went out of the snapper fish business. Just a few of the party boats would go catch some. So the way it is now, the boats—my son's got a boat now that he takes charter; he's got charter license (0:17:20.8) and captain's license. And he takes people out in the Gulf to catch snapper and different fish when the seasons open.

**Hester:** I see. So he's more in the sport fishing industry.

**Stork:** He has more of sports now, for the snapper.

**Hester:** You have two sons [one son and one daughter], I understand, from Elsa Martin [who] gave me your name. She's from Hurley, and I think she said you have two sons. Are they both in the sports fishing industry?

**Stork:** I got a son that, he owns two charter boats. But now his sons, they got their captain's license, but they hadn't completed all the requirements to charter people yet.

**Hester:** I see. So do you have another son that's in commercial fishing?

**Stork:** No. I just had one son.

**Hester:** Just the one. OK. I see. I see. I might back up a bit and kind of start over and ask you a few questions. When you started with your dad and fished in your dad, in the 1930s—is that correct?

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** About how old were you then?

**Stork:** Well, I would go with them when I was ten, (0:18:50.6) twelve years old, just to be going, and that's how I learned all about it. They would row the boats out and catch oysters or fish or terrapins. And so—

**Hester:** How big was the boat?

**Stork:** It was about sixteen feet.

**Hester:** How many people would it take to row it?

**Stork:** Just one.

**Hester:** Really?

**Stork:** Yeah. You'd have a oar, you know, and (laughter) I rowed a many a mile with a boat.

**Hester:** What would be the capacity of that boat as far as how many fish or oysters it could carry?

**Stork:** Well, if you'd load it heavy, it would hold eight hundred pound of fish up in the bow of it, and with the net in the stern, that net would weigh maybe five hundred pound because they was made of cotton or linen back then. (0:19:59.3) It wasn't no nylon, or—I can't even think—

**Hester:** Is that the filament?

**Stork:** Yeah, monofilament.

**Hester:** Monofilament, yeah. Monofilament.

**Stork:** That's what they use now.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And then you did that. You worked with your dad doing the oystering and catching the turtles and snapper, beginning about ten or twelve years old in the [19]30s. And then you began to work with your brother for approximately a year you said, in Bayou La Batre?

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** About how old were you then?

**Stork:** Fifteen.

**Hester:** OK. Maybe I should ask, if you don't mind telling me, how old are you?

**Stork:** I'm eighty-five now.

**Hester:** Eighty-five. Wow. Then you worked at the shipyard. I guess it was Ingalls then?

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Yeah. And what did you do at the shipyard?

**Stork:** Pipefitting.

**Hester:** OK. And then that lasted one year, and you decided to go back into commercial fishing.

**Stork:** Right.

**Hester:** What actually made you think about making commercial fishing a career? What made you think that pipefitting wasn't going to do the trick? (0:21:15.5)

**Stork:** I enjoyed the outside and a-riding the seas and enjoying the breeze. I just enjoyed the work.

**Hester:** It was hard work, but it was—

**Stork:** Oh, yeah. It was harder than the shipyard, (laughter) but I didn't like shipyard work. So I just made my career in the fishing and the fishing business.

**Hester:** I see. I see. And so you started commercial fishing again. I guess, maybe you would have been about eighteen or so. How old would you have been then?

**Stork:** Well, I was a-commercial fishing all the way to [19]50, [19]51. When I got married in [19]51, I was commercial fishing, but in [19]52, they asked me to come to work in the shop because I had experience in there. I'd been working sometimes in the bad fishing months in the shop, so they hired me in there.

**Hester:** Did you actually trade with Clark Seafood when you were fishing, commercial fishing before you went to work for Clark? Did you actually trade with them? Did they help market your fish?

**Stork:** Yeah. We sold the fish to them before I went to work for them. And the last boat that I worked on was owned by Clark Seafood. But I was captain of that boat, but they closed Louisiana on us. (0:23:13.0) We was at Chandeleur [Island] one day, and a seaplane come in, and they told us they'd give us a chance to get away from there.

**Hester:** What is that, a seaplane? What does that mean?

**Stork:** They can land on the water.

**Hester:** Oh, a seaplane?

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah.

**Stork:** Anyway that's the way they would board boats out there.

**Hester:** I see. Why did they—they closed to anybody outside of Louisiana? Is that what happened?

**Stork:** They closed it for everybody, even—

**Hester:** Even Louisiana fishermen?

**Stork:** Just made a sports fishing place out of it.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And that was in what waters?

**Stork:** It's in Louisiana waters, Chandeleur and Breton Island.

**Hester:** I see. Could you go in the swamp area? Or what do you call it? The wetland area and so forth?

**Stork:** Yeah. They didn't close that on us. We could still work the marshes and down west of Louisiana around Grand Isle and Timbalier Bay. But it was a long trip to go over there, but they started a-hauling. We'd unload in Leeville, Louisiana, and they would send a truck to get the fish to bring back to Pascagoula.

**Hester:** I see. What was the reason for closing it? Was there a depletion of the fish?

**Stork:** No. It was plenty of fish out there, but the sports was more powerful. They had a lot more money than the commercial fishermen, so they stopped all commercial fishing out there.

**Hester:** Well, did they have many processing plants and wholesalers out there? I mean, they must have suffered with that change in laws.

**Stork:** Well, the sports fishermen, they call themselves sports, but they was selling as many fish as the commercial fishing was. And they was catching a lot more fish than the commercial (0:25:40.7) because it was so many sports. I know one—

**Hester:** Well, that doesn't make a whole lot of sense. (laughter)

**Stork:** One time we was out there, and it was three guys from New Orleans landed on the island, and after they did their fishing, they went to leave, and the plane nosedived and bent the prop, so we carried them into Gulfport. And a lot of those sports fishermen, they would help us, and we'd help them. Yeah.

**Hester:** Wow. It's the first time I head about that. About what year was that that Louisiana fishing closed?

**Stork:** That was in the late [19]40s or early [19]50s. I think it was about 1950 when they stopped us from fishing Louisiana offshore waters.

**Hester:** Was that part of the reason that you decided to go with Clark?

**Stork:** Yeah. That was one of them, yeah.

**Hester:** When did they open fishing again in Louisiana? Do you know?

**Stork:** They hadn't opened to commercial fishing on the islands, but you can still fish some in the marshes.

**Hester:** So is that the case to this day, that you can only fish in the marshes commercially, or have they opened the islands to commercial fishing now?

**Stork:** They never have reopened it for net fishing.

**Hester:** I got you. Speaking of nets, you mentioned a trammel net and a gillnet. Is it a trammel, like T-R-A-M-M-E-L, trammel net?

**Stork:** Yeah. Anyway, a trammel net had, (0:27:41.1) we called them yokers(?). They was on each side of the webbing, and a fish would bag in it. They had bags, and the fish would go in that bag and couldn't get out. But now, gillnetting, they would hit the gill in it. And that was the difference in them.

**Hester:** Was there a difference in the number of fish that each net would catch?

**Stork:** Yeah. The gillnets, when they started using those, they'd catch a lot more fish than a trammel net would.

**Hester:** About how many? Can you estimate?

**Stork:** Well, the most that we ever caught at one setting with trammel nets was sixteen thousand pounds. That was for four nets.

**Hester:** And how many times would you pull the nets up to get that many fish?

**Stork:** Each net would be equally, I guess, is the way the fish would rush the fish net. They'd hit the nets all the way around. Way we did it, we called them skiffs. We'd tie the nets together. One skiff would be a head skiff, and the other one'd be backing up to that one. They'd be stern-to-stern, and then when we'd set the nets; we'd separate. And we called them hauling, and we'd run the nets out around in a circle, big circle. And then we'd come back together but have the nets close to keep the fish from getting out through, and make big circles inside.

**Hester:** And that's the trammel net.

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Or the yoker.

**Stork:** That was the trammel nets.

**Hester:** OK. Well, where would the bags be?

**Stork:** The bags was in the nets. They could bag on either side of the net. The big webbing was on the outside about sixteen inch, stretched, and the inside webbing would be, oh, about three inches, three to four inches. That was stretch mesh. But like they'd go through the big sixteen-inch webbing, and then it'd make a bag on the other side, in that other big mesh.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Would that serve to separate the big fish from the smaller fish or separate species or something?

**Stork:** Well, the real small fish could swim right through it. But later on they fished with bigger-mesh nets so they could catch bigger fish and work them faster. With the gillnets you could just mostly jerk them on through the net. You know?

**Hester:** Um-hm. What was the easiest to use, the gillnet or the trammel net?

**Stork:** The gillnet was a lot easier. If we'd have been using gillnets when I first started fishing, in the monofilament, it'd have caught fish a lot better than the cotton or the linen.

**Hester:** I see. When did the—they banned gillnets, didn't they? About when was that? (0:32:10.7)

**Stork:** Yeah. They banned them on the Coast. It was, I guess it was in the [19]70s when they banned the nets in Mississippi, close to shore.

**Hester:** How did that affect the business or Clark Seafood?

**Stork:** Oh, it hurt. It hurt a whole lot, but then they allowed the purse seines to work to catch the roe mullet, (0:32:48.7) when the mullet were roeing. They was getting such a big price for the roe.

**Hester:** And can you describe the purse seines?

**Stork:** It was a big net, deep, and it'd circle the fish. And they'd close it up, like a zipper on the bottom. They'd close it up, and then they'd bring the fish closer to the mother boat, and they'd just scoop the fish out of the net.

**Hester:** Did you open the net on the deck like the shrimpers do?

**Stork:** No. It was alongside the boat. They'd have to scoop them out of the purse seine.

**Hester:** I see. I see.

**Stork:** Anyway, it was similar to the pogy nets, pogy fishing.

**Hester:** Yeah. Could you describe, with the changes in the regulations and the restrictions on, for example Louisiana, fishing closer to the marshes and not being able to go out to the islands and then the changes in the net, the restrictions on nets and so forth? How did that change the type of fish that you would catch? (0:34:07.1)

**Stork:** Well, it didn't change the types of fish, but it changed the amount you'd catch. It was always a lesser fish in the marsh, the kind that we was catching. And it'd be more a sports fishermen's. We'd try to stay away from them; didn't want no problems with the sports fishermen. In Louisiana, that's the sportsman's paradise for the fishing, and they have sports fishermen inside all the waters along the coast of Louisiana. (0:35:10.0) And we would try to stay away from it if we could. Didn't want no problems with sports fishermen because they would sure, didn't want us around them, not with the nets. And they was fishing catch with the rod and reels. So that was one problem that the commercial fishermen had.

**Hester:** Did it affect you personally?

**Stork:** Well, yes, some. I know when we was working offshore islands, (0:35:53.1) we'd try to fish at night, so to let the sports have their fishing in the daytime.

**Hester:** If you fish at night, does that change the species of fish?

**Stork:** No.

**Hester:** Or can you still catch the same fish, just at night?

**Stork:** Same fish, yeah. But it was a lot harder on the guy using the nets because we had to just feel for the fish. You couldn't see them. We had lights, but after you start to catching fish, you'd knock the light out, throwing the fish. We'd usually get a gaslight.

**Hester:** How did you find where the fish were? I've spoken with a number of fishermen, and they talked about having to search for where the fish were populating at that particular time.

**Stork:** Yeah. Well, the birds helped us out a lot, (0:37:13.0) finding the fish. Pelicans, you'd see the pelicans a-diving; you'd know it was fish there. And the gulls, they would help you finding speckled trout. The speckled trout have the shrimp a-jumping, and birds would be after the shrimp. And that was in the spring and summer.

Wintertime, you'd just hunt the deep waters and put your nets out in the deep water. That's where the speckled trouts would be if it was real cold.

**Hester:** Wow. What season of the year did you do most of your fishing? Was it year-round, or a particular—

**Stork:** It was year-round, but it was a lot better in the spring and the winter. (0:38:15.3)

**Hester:** Is there any reason for that?

**Stork:** The summer, it would be so hot, and the water'd be hot, and that put the fish over deeper water, cooler water. That's why we did a lot of it at night in the summertime.

**Hester:** I see. You said you had taken some trips down to the Caribbean, I think you said, to do some fishing?

**Stork:** I never did go, but that's snapper boats. They work down in the Caribbean.

**Hester:** What is the farthest that you've been?

**Stork:** The farthest I've been is from Pascagoula, was down at Timbalier. I guess maybe twenty-five miles from the Texas line, still in Louisiana.

**Hester:** I see. Did you ever go to Florida?

**Stork:** I never did fish in Florida, but I hauled fish to Jacksonville.

**Hester:** Did you do any shrimping, yourself?

**Stork:** Very little shrimping, very little.

**Hester:** And did you have to have special equipment to do that?

**Stork:** Yes. You'd have to have a shrimp net (0:39:48.7) with a cable and boards to fish the bottom and have a chain from one side to the other of the net to drag the bottom to make the shrimp jump up and go in the net. But I didn't care too much about the shrimping. But they still catching a lot of shrimp offshore, now.

**Hester:** Talking about the shrimping industry on the Coast here, in this area, what would be—the majority of the boats would do what type of fishing? Would you say finfishing, shrimp fishing, oystering? What would be the—the majority of the boats would do what?

**Stork:** They'd be shrimping, the majority of them.



**Hester:** Would that hold true for the entirety of your career, or had that changed?

**Stork:** It's changed. (0:41:00.4) When I started out, it was a lot of trammel-net fishing because it was a big demand for that type fish, mullet. But that's depleted in the last years. They fish for mullet in the winter, November, now, for the roe. They get a bigger price for the roe.

**Hester:** I see. Thank you so much. Your wife just brought some coffee, here. Thank you very much.

**Stork:** They really get a good—was a-getting fifteen, sixteen dollars a pound for the yellow roe. (0:41:54.8)

**Hester:** The yellow roe?

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. And where did you market that?

**Stork:** They would freeze it, and a lot of it went to Japan. I'm pretty sure they used it for caviar.

**Hester:** Yeah. Wow. And did you harvest the roe, as well, when you were commercial fishing, or is your experience with it only through Clark?

**Stork:** I worked with it over to Clark. We had a lot of people getting roe out of the fish, and they would salt down the fish in vats (0:42:44.9) and freeze the roe. But when I was a-fishing, we'd sell the whole fish to the company.

**Hester:** And then they would take it from there and—

**Stork:** Right.

**Hester:** And get the roe and so forth?

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** I see. Let's see. I'm looking over my notes of some of the things that you were saying. You gave a great overview to start with, so it just sort of gives me a context to go back and pick out a few questions to ask. Let's see. Clark Seafood had about sixteen boats you said?

**Stork:** At one time—

**Hester:** At one—

**Stork:** Snapper fishing.

**Hester:** Snapper-fishing boats. And that would have been about what year?

**Stork:** That was mostly in the [19]60s. I think 1962 was the biggest year.  
(0:43:51.5) Well, all through the [19]60s.

**Hester:** How many boats did they have when you started with them?

**Stork:** They started off with just one snapper boat.

**Hester:** And that was about 1952?

**Stork:** No. That was in the [19]50s, but they really went into business in the [19]60s; had boats built in Bayou LaBatre, Pascagoula, and Ocean Springs. So—

**Hester:** Were they all the same type of boat, or did they—

**Stork:** They was all the same type, but there was some a lot larger than the others. The larger boats fished the Caribbean, and we had three boats got captured by some of the countries over there. (0:44:47.8)

**Hester:** Oh, my goodness. What happened there?

**Stork:** Nicaragua and Colombia, but they'd take all the fish and the fishing gear, and then you'd pay a big fine to get your boat and crew back. (laughter)

**Hester:** Oh, my. And so would you just turn around and come home after that?

**Stork:** They'd have to, yeah. They—

**Hester:** They wouldn't have the equipment then.

**Stork:** They would leave you the groceries and the fuel on the boat, but they'd take everything else. And I think it was about three of them got caught over there, and we had to—one boat hit the rocks off of Belize with eight men on it, and they all had their life preservers on and made it to shore.

**Hester:** I see. Wow. Did they lose the boat completely?

**Stork:** Lost the boat completely, yeah.

**Hester:** Oh, my goodness. So how did they get back home?

**Stork:** The company wired them money to fly back home. Anyway, we lost three or four boats in the Gulf. We lost several different men. One boat I went to Galveston and got the fish off the boat, and they got more ice and groceries and left. And the captain told me, "I'll see you in two weeks." We never did hear or see nothing of that boat no more. (0:46:52.6) It had the captain and four men on it.

**Hester:** And you never heard from the captain or the men, again?

**Stork:** Never have, no.

**Hester:** What do you think happened?

**Stork:** Maybe Cuba captured them, or they hit something and sunk. And they do a lot of their running at night, and we had several that hit oil platforms, but that was the most men we ever lost. Now, another boat hit a oil platform in the Gulf and lost three men on it.

**Hester:** Out of how many men?

**Stork:** It was one, one boy saved his life. He got on the oil rig, platform, but the other three, they went down with the boat, I guess.

**Hester:** Wow. Are there any other stories that you heard from the fishermen while you were working with Clark?

**Stork:** Well, they was several just fell overboard at night, and they didn't know nothing about them, or never did find them.

**Hester:** Wow. Hazardous business.

**Stork:** We had two to die on the boats. One was in Campeche, Mexico, and they just iced him down and brought him in.

**Hester:** Oh, my goodness.

**Stork:** And one in the Caribbean, and it (laughter) took twelve days to bring him in, but they had them well-iced, like they do with the fish, so.

**Hester:** Wow. So I guess when that happened, they just shut everything down and turned around and started heading home, huh.

**Stork:** Well, that one guy, they kept on a-fishing, just iced him down.

**Hester:** Oh, whoa. Well, I guess if they're down there, they may as well—

**Stork:** May as well try to make a little money.

**Hester:** Yeah. (laughter) Oh.

**Stork:** Wasn't nothing they could do with him.

**Hester:** Yeah, yeah. Wow. Do you have any particular stories in your experiences in fishing, commercial fishing, or working for Clark Seafood that you'd like to share with us?

**Stork:** Well, we had several to get drowned right there at the plant.

**Hester:** Oh, really? What happened there?

**Stork:** Well, a lot of those fishermen, they drank heavy, and they would get drunk and had several to fall overboard. Anyway, one boat, they went in the cabin and struck a match, and the gas, somebody'd left the stove on and blowed up and killed one of those. And we didn't have too many accidents with all the people that was around.

**Hester:** How big is Clark Seafood?

**Stork:** It was real large, but they're down to hardly anything now since [Hurricane] Katrina. (0:50:36.5)

**Hester:** So right before Katrina, it was a pretty good size still?

**Stork:** Well, before Katrina, in [19]98 I think it was, we had a hurricane. Every hurricane would tear the place up. It was from the water and the wind, but Katrina really hurt them.

**Hester:** Where exactly are they located?

**Stork:** They're like if you going west on Highway 90, it's just across the Pascagoula River on your right. Lowery Island I believe they call that place.

**Hester:** So it would be across the Pascagoula River from Ingalls. Am I right on that?

**Stork:** Yeah. Across from Ingalls on Highway 90, off of Highway 90.

**Hester:** Yeah. That's about where they're reconstructing the Round Island Lighthouse, I believe. Isn't it? Is that right?

**Stork:** I don't know where they putting the lighthouse.

**Hester:** They've got the base of it, I think, there, as you come across. That's my memory, anyway. It's been a while since I've taken that route, but I don't know

whether they're going to reconstruct it or just leave the base there, or what the plans are. But I think that's where it is.

**Stork:** It could be because I've been blind for ten years now. So I wouldn't know.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. When did you decide to retire from commercial fishing, and what brought you to that decision?

**Stork:** I retired from commercial fishing in 1951.

**Hester:** OK. And then from Clark?

**Stork:** From Clark I retired in [19]91.

**Hester:** And what brought you to the decision to retire from Clark? Was it turning sixty-five?

**Stork:** Sixty-five, yeah, age.

**Hester:** Sixty-six, Mrs. Stork says.

**Stork:** And my eyesight was getting bad, so I was dangerous, driving back and forth to work, so—

**Hester:** Um-hm. I understand.

**Stork:** But I'd have loved to work till I was seventy-five if I could've.

**Hester:** You know, that's one thing that I've heard over and over again, as I interview commercial fishermen. They really love their job. It's almost a part of them. And I sense that in you, as well.

**Mrs. Stork:** Born in them.

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Born in them, yeah. Mrs. Stork said it was born in you.

**Stork:** But as far as oystering, my son, he was oystering down in Pass Christian, (0:53:43.0) but that floodwaters closed everything in Mississippi.

**Hester:** When did he stop oystering?

**Stork:** He went out one day this season. He got his oyster license and then went that first opening day and never did go back because he didn't get but one sack of oysters.

**Hester:** Yeah. What is he doing now?

**Stork:** He's done some charter-boating, and now he's working for a company out of New Orleans. They got a contract with BP to check the waters and the oysters and even the bushes down on Chandeleur. (0:54:50.5) He took some people out there, Army Corps and Coast Guard people and people from LSU [Louisiana State University]. I guess some from Southern [University of Southern Mississippi]. I don't know.

**Hester:** Yeah, could be.

**Stork:** Anyway, he takes all kind of folks out there so they can check the waters and the birds and the oysters.

**Hester:** Does he live here in Pascagoula, or is he living over in—

**Stork:** He's living in Ocean Springs, but his boat's over in Biloxi.

**Hester:** In Biloxi.

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** I might ask you for his phone number when we're finished here, and maybe I can give him a call and see if he would be interested in doing an oral interview, oral history interview with us. That would be interesting to hear about his experience.

**Mrs. Stork:** [He] retired from Northrop Grumman.

**Hester:** I see. How long was he commercial fishing?

**Stork:** He never did.

**Hester:** He never did.

**Stork:** No.

**Hester:** OK. Did you have any children who went into commercial fishing?

**Stork:** No. I had lots of brothers that did, but it's not but one of them alive now. He's ninety-two years old.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Is he here in Pascagoula, as well?

**Stork:** Moss Point.

**Hester:** In Moss Point. Yeah? I might see if he would be interested in doing this, as well.

**Mrs. Stork:** Oh, he'll give you a interview.

**Hester:** Oh, good. Good. We'd love to talk to him. That would be great. Wow. That would be wonderful. If a young man came to you today and were to ask you, "Mr. Stork, I think I'd like to go into commercial fishing. Do you have any advice for me," what would you say to him? (0:56:50.9)

**Stork:** I would tell him to stay out of it because it's so many laws against the commercial fishermen now. The environmentalists and the sports fishermen are too powerful for a commercial fisherman to even think about it unless he's a shrimper. Now, a shrimper can do it, but a net-fisherman, inside waters, they couldn't make no living at it.

**Hester:** What about oystering?

**Stork:** Well, they keep the oystering closed so much that you can't make a living at that. Now, out here, Alabama stays open. We're right on the line. And you can step across to Mississippi, and it's closed, and we got the best oysters in the world, right out here. We caught them for a hundred years.

**Hester:** And you can't do it anymore?

**Stork:** No. They say the water's polluted and claim the birds are polluting the water and the animals. (0:58:12.0) Well, we don't have no animals, but wild animals. Used to have thousands of cattle and sheep, but now we don't have nothing but wild animals. And they keep the waters closed. I don't know why.

**Hester:** When were they first closed? About what year?

**Stork:** It's been closed out here since the early [19]90s. But people goes out there, and they catch and eat them out there, as long as the DMR [Department of Marine Resources] don't catch them.

**Hester:** Right. (laughter)

**Stork:** If they catch you with one oyster in your boat, you've had it. (laughter)

**Hester:** Yeah. I've got to ask this question. And I'm going to ask this since Mrs. Stork is sitting here, as well. And your first name? I'm sorry.

**Mrs. Stork:** Genie.

**Hester:** Genie, Mrs. Genie Stork is sitting here, as well. What is your favorite seafood dish?

**Mrs. Stork:** Shrimp.

**Hester:** Shrimp. (laughter) And you, Mr. Stork?

**Stork:** I guess oysters is mine. (0:59:31.8)

**Hester:** Yeah? How would you fix them?

**Stork:** Raw.

**Hester:** And the shrimp?

**Stork:** Shrimp, I like them fried. I like fried oysters, too, but I could eat good, salty oysters, a couple of dozen, raw.

**Hester:** Wow. But no finfish?

**Stork:** Mullet's my favorite, especially if you catch them out there at Ship Island when they're fat. They are good. They got a sweet taste to them.

**Hester:** They taste different in that area, Ship Island, than if you would catch them elsewhere?

**Stork:** Well, they're good most everywhere, but around rivers.

**Hester:** How would you fix it?

**Stork:** Fried. But my son and his boys, they catch some in the cast nets. You can still use those. (1:00:38.9)

**Mrs. Stork:** Got to have a license, though.

**Hester:** Do you have any hobbies or anything now that—

**Stork:** The only hobbies I got is going to Biloxi and gamble a little bit and walk my strings out there in the yard from tree to tree. (laughter)

**Hester:** That's a great idea to get outside.

**Mrs. Stork:** He's got a reading machine.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. That's wonderful. When I talk to some of the commercial fishermen—and this is just amazing to me and again shows me how much commercial



fishermen love their job. I would talk to them about fishing and how hard it is and the fish that they would catch and what the day is like and this sort of thing. And then I'll say, "So what was your hobby? Do you have a hobby?" "Sports fishing." (laughter)

**Stork:** Yeah. When I could go fishing, I did a lot of sport fishing, myself. I enjoyed it. Just being out on the waters, I guess, is my favorite.

**Hester:** That to me is amazing because so many people go to work and come home, and they don't want to think about it anymore. But commercial fishermen are not like that. They're actually living their occupation. I think it's part of them.

**Mrs. Stork:** That's probably why Ike's(?) in it so much, our son, that his dad was in it so much. He loved it. And he'd take him fishing. We have one son and one daughter.

**Hester:** Uh-huh. Yeah. I was going to ask you that. It brings a question to mind, Mr. Stork. You said you were from a family of thirteen children.

**Stork:** Twelve.

**Hester:** And how many boys and how many girls?

**Stork:** Six and six.

**Hester:** Six and six. And of the six—well, women, too. How many of them went into commercial fishing as an occupation?

**Stork:** Not any of the girls did. All the boys did it at one time or another. (1:03:06.4)

**Hester:** Um-hm. I see. So your dad started a tradition in your family.

**Stork:** Yeah. His dad was in the United States Cavalry, and they traveled everywhere, all over. And he was born in Kansas; my dad was, and his dad retired at Mount Vernon, Alabama. And they settled in Grand Bay, and him and his brothers would walk down to the bayou. I guess it was a couple of miles from where they lived, and they got to enjoy the fishing and oystering. So when he moved to, across over in Mississippi, to Pecan, he operated a fish house on the bayou, (1:04:20.6) and they would barrel up the fish and ship them by train. He shipped them to Birmingham, Montgomery and around the Southern portions. And he got to finding terrapins (1:04:41.8) in the wintertime while he was oystering, so he'd always pick them up with his tongs. And we kept them in a warm place till he got enough to ship to New York, and that was his biggest money crop, was the terrapins.

**Hester:** What percentage of his business, would you say, would have been terrapin versus oystering?

**Stork:** I guess in the wintertime, now, it was terrapins over the oysters because oysters wasn't but about thirty-five cents a quart (laughter) back then.

**Hester:** Big difference.

**Stork:** And the terrapins, he'd get ten terrapins; that was thirty-six dollars.

**Hester:** Wow. That's amazing. (laughter) Wow.

**Mrs. Stork:** They owned a grocery store, too.

**Hester:** Where was the grocery store?

**Stork:** At Pecan.

**Hester:** Is that the name of the bayou, Pecan Bayou?

**Stork:** Bayou Heron.

**Hester:** Bayou Heron, OK.

**Stork:** Anyway, Pecan was just a little settlement up north of the bayou, had a train station. You could catch the train there, ride to Mobile for twenty-five cents or Pascagoula for fifteen cents. (1:06:12.6) And that's the way people traveled, with horse and buggy and then the trains. I think he got his first truck in 1929, and him and my oldest [brother], they would go in Montgomery and Birmingham, selling fish. But that didn't last too long.

**Hester:** Heron Bayou, that is—

**Mrs. Stork:** Bayou Heron.

**Hester:** Bayou Heron, that is in the Escatawpa Estuary, isn't it?

**Stork:** In the Grand Bay (1:06:57.1) Savannah.

**Hester:** In Grand Bay Savannah.

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** And is it close to where Grand Bay NERR [National Estuarine Research Reserve] Facility is now?

**Mrs. Stork:** Straight down there.

**Hester:** Straight down there, OK. Was it where the boat launch is?

**Stork:** Yeah. That's Bayou Heron.

**Hester:** OK. And his business was right there—

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** —where the boat launch is now.

**Stork:** Well, it's close by there.

**Hester:** Close by, OK. Interesting. So you've got a strong heritage in this area. Your family goes back a long ways.

**Stork:** Yeah. Had to row all the way, about three miles to the fishing grounds out there, and the oysters.

**Hester:** I have had some experience with the shell middens down there. That's why I know a little bit about it. You know all those big shell heaps, oyster shell heaps down there that are left over from the Indians?

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** It's amazing down there.

**Mrs. Stork:** That little island we used to fish from. (laughter) He'd row me down there to fish.

**Stork:** Yeah. They used to—

**Mrs. Stork:** Shell Island they'd call it. Didn't they? (1:08:20.7)

**Stork:** Yeah. They'd go out there and dig around in the shells and find arrowheads and such as that that the Indians used.

**Hester:** Yeah. Did you ever find anything, yourself, down there?

**Stork:** I never did look for none. (laughter)

**Mrs. Stork:** Too busy, fishing.

**Hester:** Yeah, (laughter) too busy, fishing.

**Stork:** This guy from Florida, him and his wife would go down there, and they'd go out on Barton(?) Island and the shell bank just out from the landing there. They'd go dig around all day and find different pieces of Indian stuff.

**Hester:** Wow. Well, I know a few people at USM [University of Southern Mississippi] that would like to take a look at that. They've done some archeological work down there, and it would be interesting to see.

**Mrs. Stork:** Probably from NERR you could go out with them.

**Hester:** Yeah. Actually I'm going to go down and speak to the people at NERR after I'm finished here. We've got a annual meeting coming up next month for the Mississippi Archeological Association, and we're going to see if they'll give us some transportation and take some of the people out to see the NERR area.

**Mrs. Stork:** Oh, yeah. They will. They do.

**Hester:** Yeah. Well, this has been a great interview. Thank you so much. But before I close, I'm going to just give you the opportunity to say whatever you would like. We'll give you a copy of this, and you can keep it for yourselves, pass it down to your children. I've asked you a few questions, but I'm sure there are things that you could have talked about that I didn't even think to ask you about. Is there anything you would like to put on the record?

**Stork:** Well, in this part of the country, around Grand Bay Savannah, they call it now, they used to have bear hunts. That was before my time. They would have bear hunts. (1:10:34.0) They'd have hunters out of Mobile and around, to come to go bear hunting. And I know, living up there in Pecan, on a still night, you could hear cattle a-bellowing that the bears was after them. I know one day me and my brother was walking through the woods to Bayou Heron, and we seen a big steer with a big chunk took out of his hindquarters where a bear had got a-hold of him. And you could see in the wintertime, your cattle would be bogged down in the bayou, and they'd just stay there till they died. And all that pollution, that didn't stop the oysters on the outside. So the waters was more polluted (1:11:42.2) back then than they are now, and they won't let you catch an oyster. So it's a problem for the people who lives—well, nobody lives over there no more, but people loves to go catch oysters, and I don't know why our elected officials don't try to get that opened up, (1:12:17.7) but nobody'll try. They blame it on Biloxi for the seafood dealers in Biloxi a-wanting to keep this closed, but I don't believe it's the seafood people.

**Hester:** Why would they want to keep it closed?

**Stork:** They claim they don't want nobody over on this side to be in the oyster business.

**Hester:** So they can harvest the oysters outside of Biloxi?

**Stork:** They get theirs out of Louisiana mostly, since Pass Christian's closed. Well, all the oysters are dead. My son took the DMR out there, and they dredged, and 80 percent of the oysters was dead from that flood, when they opened the—

**Hester:** Bonnet Carre Spillway?

**Stork:** Yeah, spillway, all that freshwater come in there and killed 80 percent of the oysters. (1:13:26.4)

**Hester:** Did it come this far?

**Stork:** No, not over here, but it did over there around Pearl River. But they still got some oysters. They'll come back, but it'll take a couple of years.

**Hester:** How long does it take for the oysters to come back when they've been impacted like that?

**Stork:** Like I say, two years it'll be plenty of them if something else don't happen. A hurricane, that does damage, too. That covers the oysters with mud, (1:14:09.6) and it kills them.

**Hester:** I see. In order for the oysters to come back after an incident such as opening the Bonnet Carre Spillway, does the fishing industry folks need to do anything, intervene in any way to get it started, or does it naturally come back?

**Stork:** They'll move oysters from different places and plant more down there to spawn, to bring them back. (1:14:46.7) I would imagine they'll start that soon, or maybe they already started. But they'll come back. That's just the way Nature is.

**Hester:** It replenishes itself.

**Stork:** Yeah. They'll replenish themselves. I know when the conchs get so bad, they'll kill lots of oysters, but when we get enough rain to take care of the waters out there—see, the oysters, they need a little brackish water. Real salt, they can't live in brine water.

**Hester:** One question, when you were talking about the bears. Did your father tell you about bears in this area?

**Stork:** Well, he hunted them, too. (laughter)

**Hester:** He hunted them. Well, did you hunt them when you were a young man?

**Stork:** No. I didn't hunt no bear.

**Hester:** But did you see any down here then?

**Stork:** I hadn't never seen any, but people has seen them.

**Hester:** That's interesting.

**Stork:** I know my uncle; he was younger than my daddy, and he said he set a bear trap one time and hung a piece of beef on a limb up above the trap. And he said that night that bear reached up to get that piece of meat, and when he sat back down, he sat in that trap. And he said that he had it chained to a tree, that trap. He said all the way around that tree, it was just clear where he went around that tree so many times and finally pulled himself a-loose and had a big hunk of meat and hair in the trap.  
(laughter)

**Hester:** So he broke loose and left part of his—

**Stork:** Yeah. (laughter) So he didn't catch the bear.

**Hester:** Yeah. That's interesting. I just never would have thought there would have been a bear just—wow.

**Stork:** But you better, if you see a bear, you better not kill him now.

**Hester:** No, no. They're protected now. Aren't they? (1:17:20.6)

**Stork:** I think it's about a hundred-thousand-dollar fine. (laughter)

**Hester:** Wow. No. I don't want to—I'll leave them alone.

**Stork:** Yeah. I listen to New Orleans every Saturday morning. They tell about "the bad boy." And there've been two or three bears killed over in Louisiana, but they finally caught one guy that killed a bear, and he's really in trouble. I haven't heard how many years he got, how much fine, but every Saturday they catch and telling about the fishermen a-catching a lot more fish than the limit, and killing more deer and not tagging them and everything, too many ducks. They really been getting them on ducks this year because they got so many ducks over there. But they're strict on their hunters over there.

**Hester:** I should have asked you this question. I know that you retired before the BP oil spill, and you said your son is involved in working with BP on checking the waters and so forth, but have you heard anything else from, say, local fishermen about how the BP oil spill impacted their business?

**Stork:** Well, I heard Saturday morning that a lot of the sports fishermen think it helped (1:19:07.8) because they closed the season for a year, and the fish got bigger. They catching bigger specks [speckled trout] than ever before and more of them

because they didn't catch the fish as they usually catch, and they got more plentiful and bigger. So they're enjoying a good season.

**Hester:** What do you think is the future for the fishing industry down here?

**Stork:** It's a good future for charter boats and sports fishermen, (1:19:47.7) and I'd say shrimpers, too. They'll do all right, but it won't be no more net fishing, not on the Coast in inside waters.

**Hester:** Has anybody worked on a replacement for the monofilament?

**Stork:** Yeah. They got a new type webbing out now for nets. (1:20:20.0) It'd decompose quicker than the monofilament. That monofilament, it'll stay almost forever in the waters, if you lose it. I know my son had to repair a outboard motor because the people he took out fishing, they just let their line go in the propellers, and finally it got the leaders in there, and he had to redo the whole foot of the motor; cost him about five thousand dollars. But you got to put all that stuff in a—have a bucket in your boat and put all that scrap in there instead of letting it go overboard.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Yeah. That would be the thing to do for sure.

**Stork:** Yeah, especially just like those plastic that your drinks—you could pull your drink out of that plastic and just drop it overboard. The fish'd get in that thing, and they've caught fish that was growed and a lot smaller in parts of their bodies and even turtles that had got in that stuff, and they just kept growing. (1:22:10.2) It wouldn't break and let them go, so that's dangerous to throw all that stuff overboard.

**Hester:** Yeah. I take it you were happy to hear about the regulation to ban monofilament.

**Stork:** Yeah. That was one bad thing about the—a lot of folks would just, they'd lose their nets, and that really did some damage. I know I was a-fishing out here before I went blind, and I was a-running my outboard motors, and I ran into a net that somebody'd just set it and left it. And it was fish in it, and they was already rotted. And that's something I know; the DMR caught several people, setting their nets and leaving them overnight.

**Hester:** You're not supposed to do that?

**Stork:** No. You supposed to hold onto the end of that net until you took it out of the water.

**Hester:** Switching back to the BP program, did you know anybody who participated in the Vessels of Opportunity program? (1:23:47.2)

**Stork:** My son, he worked for them about, oh, six or eight weeks, a-taking people out to the islands and checking things during the time that they was putting out the boom and all that.

**Hester:** How did he find out about it?

**Stork:** About—

**Hester:** —the program?

**Stork:** Well, he signed up over in Biloxi to start with, but he never was called till the last part of it, but it was a lot of people made, oh, thousands and thousands of dollars, a-working with them.

**Hester:** Many commercial fishermen?

**Stork:** Most of them had been commercial fishermen and charter boat captains.

**Hester:** Um-hm. Did you know anybody other than your son? I mean, it's mostly your son that you're familiar with that participated in Vessels of Opportunity program? Are there others?

**Stork:** Yeah. I knew quite a few that did it.

**Hester:** Did they think it worked out well? Were they happy with it?

**Stork:** Oh, yeah. They was well satisfied with the pay. And I know a lot of them that's got lawsuits against BP, but they claim that they didn't get what they should have got. So I guess I know one thing. They're arresting a lot of people for lying about things, even lying about a business that had never been a business, they was a-working for. I know several over in Alabama's been arrested for scams like that. But it's going to cost them in the long run. I know the mayor of Bayou LaBatre, they got him and his daughter indicted.

**Hester:** Oh, wow.

**Stork:** Yeah.

**Hester:** Is that recent?

**Stork:** Yeah. Over a piece of land they sold to BP.

**Hester:** Wow. Well, the people that have gone through the claims process, that you know, have they viewed it as being a fair process? Has it worked for them?



**Stork:** Some of them has, and some of them hadn't. I know my son's got a claim in, but they hadn't never gave him anything yet for the time he lost. He lost a lot of business, charter people; they called and cancelled. I know even, there was a group from somewhere up North, Tennessee, north of here, called and cancelled. They wanted a weekend, Friday, Saturday, and Sundays. They cancelled, and several more of them cancelled. But he didn't lose no whole lot like some of them. Some of them big charter boat captains, they lost a lot by not, for the Gulf a-being closed.

**Hester:** I think that's it, Mr. Stork. I do appreciate it. It's been a great interview. I guess I'll turn the tape recorder off now unless you have some final thoughts.

**Stork:** Well, I'll say I enjoyed it, and glad I could help some.

**Hester:** Thank you so much.

**Stork:** Like I say, I really enjoyed the commercial fishing and working with seafood and eating it. I hope we'll have good seafood on the Coast for the rest of time.

**Hester:** I agree with you there. Thank you so much. And I'll turn the tape off now.

**Stork:** OK.

(end of interview)