

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
VOICES ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NOAA HERITAGE AND THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

AN INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM STANLEY “CORKY” PERRET
FOR THE
NOAA 50th ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY
STEPHANIE SCULL-DEARMEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY
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Stephanie Scull-DeArme: This begins an oral history interview with William Perret. The interview is taking place on May 17, 2010 in Biloxi, Mississippi. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArme.

SS: This is an interview for the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum and the University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Mr. William Perret and it is taking place on May 17, 2010, at 10:25AM in Hattiesburg, Mississippi on my end and in Biloxi, Mississippi on Mr. Perret's end. I am the interviewer, Stephanie Scull-DeArme. First, I'd like to thank you Mr. Perret for taking time to talk with me today. I'd like to get a little background information about you so I'm going to ask you, for the record, could you state your name please?

WP: My name is William S. Corky [Nickname] Perret, Perret [spelled out].

SS: Just for the record, and in case all the labels would get lost and damaged sometime in the future, could you spell your entire name for us on the record?

WP: William Stanley Corky Perret [spelled out].

SS: Thank you. When were you born?

WP: November 22, 1942.

SS: Where were you born?

WP: Cottonport, Louisiana.

SS: Is that all one word, Cottonport?

WP: That's correct.

SS: Louisiana. My mother was born November 22nd in 1917.

WP: Well I was 21 years old the day President Kennedy was -- died.

SS: That's right, that's right. Amazing.

SS: Could you tell us your current position?

WP: Well, I am currently retired but doing some contract work for the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources.

SS: Do you hear the static on that line?

WP: [static] I was going to say [static]. Well it's [static] I've got static how about you?

SS: It kind of comes and goes.

WP: Right.

SS: I'm trying to play with my phone here and see if I can --

WP: Better, it's okay now.

SS: I'm sorry, would you please repeat your position? I think the static really made it inaudible.

WP: Okay, I am doing contract work for the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources since I retired about a year, or so, ago.

SS: Okay and that doesn't sound like much of a retirement. [laughter]

WP: Not these days, not with different things going on.

SS: No, so you retired a about a year ago. When did you start doing contract work?

WP: About a month later. About ten months, or so, ago.

SS: Is it full time? Are you getting any retirement?

WP: No, no. Part time.

SS: So, you are getting a little bit of retirement benefit.

WP: Somewhat, but you know you get involved with an activity and you put in the time you need to put in to do it right.

SS: I would like to get a brief description of two things from you if I can? What you were doing right before you retired and what the contract work involves.

WP: Before I retired from the department I was Deputy Director assisting the Secretary, or the department Head Executive Director, with any and all assignments that I could assist him with. Primarily one of the duties was doing liaison work with the Gulf of Mexico Fish and Management Council, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and congressional, as well as, Mississippi legislative activities.

SS: So, the first two you mentioned are they governmental agencies?

WP: Quasi.

SS: Okay. What is your contract work involve now? How would you describe that?

WP: Liaison with various federal and state agencies, as well as, participating at Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council meetings.

SS: Okay. In the interest of time I'd like to jump right into the questions that the Museum wanted to have answered and if we have time, will go on to the questions that the Center for Oral History would be interesting in. If you can, when we finish with these Museum questions maybe you could give us a comment on the situation with the oil spill out in the Gulf of Mexico? [laughter] That's a sardonic laugh I think that I hear. You just let me know any question that you would decline to answer and we have no problem with that.

WP: Okay

SS: How long do you have to talk today?

WP: How long do your interviews normally take?

SS: They've been running from an hour to four hours.

WP: Okay. I've got at the most an hour.

SS: Okay. I'll try to keep the side questions to a minimum.

WP: Sure.

SS: Can you tell us what role you played in introducing Turtle Excluder Devices to the shrimping industry?

WP: In introducing them?

SS: Ahuh.

WP: At the time I was Assistant Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries responsible for marine and fresh water fish, fish activities. My agency and I supported the shrimp industry request for additional scientific information that would justify the need for TEDs [Turtle Excluder Devices], the mandatory need for TEDs. Basically, our position was this that the Federal Government, which is so typical, took the easy way out and required mandatory TED use throughout the range. Where they wouldn't put a man on the moon, we certainly could tell where turtles are and at what time a year. So, we didn't think a complete coverage, mandatory coverage, for all shrimp fishermen throughout all this geographical area was necessary. We felt that they could have areas that, hey, at certain times of the year we'll keep them closed. No shrimping if that's where the turtles are. So, in our opinion, at the time, the government took the easy way out. You got to have a TED unit throughout, and were opposed to that.

SS: Okay, that kind of touches on how TEDs were viewed in the early days but is there anything you would like to add to that?

WP: Well, I think your second question, how were TEDs viewed in the early days -- viewed by whom?

SS: Just —

WP: The industry, that's the way the industry felt. They just felt they were unnecessary, that the science wasn't there to require them throughout, throughout the geographical range.

SS: Okay, so they really took a dim view of the TEDS.

WP: Absolutely.

SS: Okay, so that's question number three, because your point of view is from the shrimping industry. Do you know if any challenges faced in developing TEDs?

WP: Well, early on they were heavy, they were cumbersome, and on rough days they were dangerous. They would tangle with the nets. In rough seas boats rocking, nets swinging there were some concerns about human safety.

SS: Do you know when that changed? Do you feel like that the pressure that y'all brought on the government brought about a change in the design of the TED?

WP: Well, fishermen are pretty ingenious in so far as gear and improving gear. I think with the fishermen's input, that there were some great strides that were made by the government working with the industry that TEDs are no longer as heavy and as cumbersome. They probably are more efficient in so far as reducing the loss of shrimp during the operations now because of the newer TEDs.

SS: Okay. What challenges come to your mind when I ask you what were the challenges faced in getting the shrimping industry to use TEDs?

WP: The biggest thing I think was the fisherman's trust in government and that, why were they needed? They didn't feel that they were the cause, of a major cause, that they were blamed for turtle deaths.

SS: You know it's interesting to me that now as turtles are washing ashore it just so happens it's right after this big oil spill. Right?

WP: Right.

SS: Checking shrimpers' nets for TEDs, it's just that seems so ridiculous to me.

WP: Yeah, well, but the thing is this time of year we've -- you know, this is not unusual. We've had them in the past washing up this time of year and some people claim it's because the shrimpers are duck tying the TEDs, and this sort of thing, but yet, there's no evidence of that. If

you look at Coast Guard compliance and NMFS [National Marine Fisheries Service] compliance on use of TEDs it's extremely high.

SS: Well, you know, turtles swimming through oily water doesn't sound to healthy to me.
[laughter]

WP: Right. Well, that's right.

SS: Are there any other challenges that come to mind besides the fisherman not trusting the government?

WP: Well again, the fishermen, I think, are concerned about the shrimp loss. I mean, if even if it's four, five, six percent with today's shrimp prices and high operating costs, the loss of anything due to a government required device in a net does not set to well with these people.

SS: We've talked about the early TED models compared to the later models. Is there anything you want to add to that?

WP: Well, the more recent models, from what I gather in talking to the fishermen and to the NMFS people, are certainly more efficient. They're lighter weight, they're easier to get into the net and that sort of thing. That, supposedly, they don't have as high a shrimp loss as the original one's did and supposedly fishing and excluding the turtles which is what they are supposed to do.

SS: Okay. Have any of the shrimpers ever talked to you about the TEDs actually helping them get rid of debris or unwanted bycatch?

WP: Yes, and so far as the unwanted bycatch, not necessarily so with the debris. Because following hurricanes they make request to the government agencies and we've filed the request on the national fishery service to let them work with no TEDs in the net.

SS: Is that because bycatch tends to, not bycatch, debris tends to clog the net but TED and cause more shrimp loss?

WP: Yeah.

SS: Who gets rid of the debris after a storm?

WP: Well, in so far as debris that the shrimp is getting nets?

SS: Well, I'm thinking that if they get an exclusion because of debris is somebody removing it during the time that they don't have to have TEDs in the nets?

WP: I'm not following your question. I know the Coast Guard and contractors and all sorts were involved after Katrina would getting rid of debris.

SS: If the debris is too big to move do the shrimpers kind of get to know that it's there and mark it on their GPS or anything?

WP: They mark it and then the companies, or the contractor's responsible for removing this debris has the location and try to get it out.

SS: Okay. Did you ever have any experiences with protests against the TED regulations?
[laughter]

WP: I had a few.

SS: You were in Louisiana.

WP: Quite a few, yeah.

SS: Can you describe your experiences with that?

WP: Well, I proudly testified before various congressional committees a half a dozen times, or so, against mandatory implementation of that requirement with no success. I attended numerous meetings with fishermen and elected officials in the state of Louisiana. In fact, probably the largest meeting I ever attended with fishermen was in Thibodaux, Louisiana. Protests against the mandatory use of TEDs and I think everybody from the Governor and members of congress on down were there. We had some blockades by shrimp fishermen, you know, boats anchored across passes and that sort of thing. On a couple of times we tried to work with them. The, hey this isn't the way to do it, that sort of thing. But, yeah, there were quite a few demonstrations by certain members of the shrimping community.

SS: Where those blockades in Louisiana?

WP: Yeah.

SS: Ok. Have you ever been involved in enforcing compliance regarding the use of TEDs?

WP: Yeah. Now again, this started with how my involvement was when TEDs were introduced so this goes back to Louisiana. I handled state legislation that prohibited our enforcement agency from enforcing the TED rule until adequate scientific information was obtained and that law is still in effect in Louisiana, though they're trying to change it during this session, I am told.

SS: So, if it is still in effect, maybe I don't understand the law. But it's the law says that there's (Molly?) not enough scientific evidence yet to force compliance with TEDs in nets?

WP: That's what was passed in, I can't remember now it's been too many years but back then yeah. I think it is still on the books though they are trying. There's a bill to do away with it this session over there.

SS: So, if it's still on the books, does that mean it's just not enforced and people are pulling TEDs in Louisiana?

WP: What it means is with these joint enforcement agreements is that if Louisiana guide (Molly?) agent sees it I assume they call either a NMFS agent or Coast Guard.

SS: Okay, okay, I see, alright. Anything also you want to add to that?

WP: That from all the records or all the information the Coast Guard used to give us and NMFS used to give us, and still do, though I don't see it as frequently as I used to, was that compliance was always pretty high and so of course, TED compliance.

SS: Okay, good. Do you know if the compliance has changed over the years?

WP: I should be able to give you statistics but I got so many statistics in my head right now; I can't, but I'm sure it's even improved over the years. Because the TEDs do seem to be more efficient and lightweight and that sort of thing.

SS: Do you know if enforcement of the use of TEDs has changed over the years?

WP: Well, I've been in Mississippi about fifteen years and I know our guys work with Coast Guard and NMFS Agents on enforcing TED rules.

SS: Okay. Can you describe a little bit how that's done?

WP: Well, since the JEA [Joint Enforcement Agreement] has been in effect, our people are doing federal law enforcement work as well as State law enforcement work. On TED violations we are dealing with the Endangered Species Act of these turtles. Our guys, our marine patrol officers in Mississippi work with the Coast Guard and NMFS and on the TED violations. I think, though I'm not sure, that they work with the NMFS guys on how to file those.

SS: Okay. How do you think TEDs have affected the shrimp industry?

WP: Well, it was another burden. Another device they had to put in the nets. It's another cost. Like I said initially, they were 'dangerous', quote-unquote. According to fishermen they were a cause for a loss of a certain percent of shrimp, which means a certain loss in revenue. While that's improved over the years, when these people have to put this device in their net, that's just an added expense.

SS: They are getting to be pretty expensive these days, I hear from shrimpers I've interviewed.

WP: Yeah, I'm not sure about costs but I've heard the same thing.

SS: Yeah. If you have more than two nets, then of course, the cost goes up. Then a lot of people have a spare net and that has to have a TED in it also.

WP: Well, I mean, shrimpers use different types of nets for different types of seasons. White shrimp, brown shrimp, pink shrimp and so on and you've got to have spare nets. Especially the larger vessels that feather out for weeks and even months at a time. You know they got to have, you know, quite a few more than just say just two nets.

SS: Yeah. Is there anything else you'd like to add to that?

WP: Major cost and still some members of the shrimp industry feel they're losing high percentage. When I say high percentage: five percent, ten percent's high if that's money that you're losing. So, they still think it's costing them revenue because of the shrimp loss.

SS: Okay. Do you know how the TEDs have affected the sea turtle population?

WP: Well, we're told the sea turtle numbers are increasing. I know I've been down to the one nesting beach down in Mexico several times where they dig up the Kemp's Ridley eggs. They bring them and put them behind a chain link fence and they monitor them. Then they release the young and so on and so forth. I think that has really added to the comeback of the Kemp's Ridley. I've attended meeting of the group responsible for status of Kemp's and numbered nests and all that sort of thing. There's even some talk about getting to the number where we may up-list rather than B list, though it can't be D listed any more than the Endangered Species Act. It is on the Endangered List but it would be great if it could be upgraded to, say the Threatened List, or even off the list entirely.

SS: Hmm.

WP: You know if the government's right, I have to believe that the TEDs have contributed somewhat to that. Though the fact is, beach development, protection of those nests on the nesting beaches and things of that sort.

SS: Right, so it's not one after at helping them there are many more.

WP: Its multiple, sure. They're taken on long lines, they're taken by recreational fishermen. I mean we get reports so probably two or three, maybe a few more, a year of fishermen hooking turtles while fishing off the some of the piers here along the Gulf Coast.

SS: Right. Yeah. I believe somebody I interviewed was talking about getting called out to go get a turtle off a line.

WP: Yeah. Well, and a number of those necropsies I understand have hooks in their gut.

SS: Wow. They got all the way. They swallowed it.

WP: Yeah.

SS: It went all the way through, and that's probably the cause of death.

WP: Well, you know -- but some -- there would probably be someone to interview, someone who does necropsies could tell you just what they find.

SS: Right.

WP: I know in some conversations with people years ago, one of them had been recent, but there was a fairly large number that had hooks in the gut.

SS: Do you anybody, Mr. Perret, who's involved in doing necropsies?

WP: Gosh. No, not off the top of my head but—

SS: Well, give it some thought and you have my email address.

WP: I was just going to say Jennifer Lee would be the girl. She is at NMFS in the southeast region and I know, or do I have her email address handy? Jennifer Lee, let's see. You ready?

SS: Yeah.

WP: Jennifer.Lee@noaa.gov and she is, I'm not even sure what her title is, but she is the lady that handles this thing for NMFS, NOAA in St. Pete [St. Petersburg] and she'd be a good person for you to talk to.

SS: Great

WP: Tell her I suggested that you give her a call.

SS: I will do that. Thank you.

WP: I'm looking for her phone number and I don't have a phone number.

SS: That's fine, email is easier anyway than just making a cold call.

WP: Just mention that I suggested, all you got to do is say Corky.

SS: Okay, I will do that, thank you so much. Well this is question that I ask everybody just because I think it's interesting to find out why people think sea turtles are important. Why do you think so?

WP: [laughter] Part of the chain of life, they've been around for jillions of years and they've survived over this many, many, years of changing conditions and, so on and so forth, and the long-life history, and that sort thing. They are all part of the ecological balance. In talking to shrimpers in the old days and they were also delicious.

SS: That's right. People have eaten them for probably as long as people have been around where there were sea turtles.

WP: Yup, that's right.

SS: Do you know what the current penalty is for netting a sea turtle?

WP: They are under the Endangered Species Act so I suspect, I think the number that sticks in my head \$10,000.00 dollars. But, I'm sure it's substantial.

SS: Okay.

WP: Again, I don't know why but I for some reason I got a \$10,000.00 figure in the back of my head.

SS: Alright. Well, Mr. Perret is there anything you'd like to put on the record about what's going on with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico right now? Just anything about how it's affecting fisheries, or fishermen, or endangered species, or even species that aren't endangered?

WP: Well, of course, we are all keeping an eye on doing what we can to get baseline assessments. In so far, in our case, state fisheries, shrimp, oysters, so on and so forth, we're cautiously optimistic. One of the reports I got today is of what they are trying to do to get this thing capped. I think they've capped, again, I heard on the news twenty percent or so of what's been coming out. Well, twenty percent is better than none but I am hopeful that they're able to cap the thing entirely. We're dealing with unknowns. There're various estimates of what's come out. I know there's been reports. While they've been few in number, and that's good, of birds and some of the oil's gotten on some of the beaches, and that sort of thing. Until the thing gets shut-down, then there is no way to really know the impact and it's going to take possibly years to determine. I will say this, a lot of our species, marine species, or spring spawners spring early summer and its that time of year. From the research that has been done, probably the most critical time is the egg and larval stage. Any oil impact, I'm sure, is going to be detrimental. But it's just too early to really be able to say just what that negative impact is going to be on everything from shrimp, to sea turtles, to marine mammals.

SS: Okay. A little too early to tell. Some people have said that they're drilling too deeply. They're drilling more deeply than they have the capacity to repair. Do you think they that they should or should not be drilling that deeply or what's your opinion about how to stop this from happening again?

WP: Well, again, we don't know the exact cause of the accident. From what I read, there were mistakes made. They didn't follow some of the protocol. Government didn't do everything it was supposed to do. Minerals Management is supposed to make an inspection once a month. I understand in seventy-four months of that particular platform, they made forty-eight inspections. So, there's, you know, I'm sure the finger pointing and the blame can go all around but this is an accident. When a plane crashes you don't stop aviation. I spent thirty years working with oil and gas industry and fisheries in Louisiana. In fact, I used to go all over the country giving information that oil and gas and fish can, and do, coexist. But, you gotta have to have the right

rules, regulations and they need to be followed. In this case, I think there was some mistakes made.

SS: Some negligence it sounds like.

WP: Well, as long as we depend on fossil food fuel for energy, you know. I wish we had enough wind power or whatever kind of power to get us away from this but, unfortunately, we don't right now.

SS: It's gonna run out some day and we'll have to do something else. Right? [laughter]

WP: You know we all drive to work. I'm sure that while there are few that use their bicycles, it's just not feasible for a lot of us.

SS: Right, absolutely. Yeah. The Nissan company, I guess it is, has the Leaf. You know it's a new all electric car but I understand that it is limited on how far you can go on a charge. That seems to be one of the problems that still needs to be worked out.

WP: I'm sure that with all the brain power that we've got it's gonna happen. It just hasn't happened as rapidly as lot of us would like to see.

SS: Right, yeah. Well, do you have a time to talk a little bit about where you grew up and what that was like? Let me tell you why we ask that question. If I had been interviewing you strictly for the Center of Oral History, we would have started out with that question because we think that in a hundred or two hundred years people will want to know that. You know, it's going to be interesting and unusual though it seems very ordinary now. If you have time and you're willing to share that, could you just tell us a little bit about that?

WP: Sure. It's eleven, let us let this go a little longer then.

SS: Okay. So where did you grow up? Tell me about that.

WP: I grew up in a very rural area of central Louisiana. Cottonport, Louisiana. Cottonport was named because Bayou Rouge, which goes right through town, would go into the Atchafalaya River, and then into the Mississippi. That's how they shipped the cotton from there to New Orleans.

SS: Okay. What was it like when you were a little boy in that rural area?

WP: Well, I had my own horse right in the middle of town.

SS: Wow.

WP: It was a town of about 1,600 people and my father was the only dentist in town. We also had a small farm so we had our own chickens, pigs, goats, guineas, horses, cows, you name it.

We had just about every domestic animal you could think of. We picked our own eggs and milked our own cows and as kids, I sold eggs and milk to the neighbors. [laughter]

SS: That's terrific. That sounds like a fine way to grow up.

WP: It was quite different than things today.

SS: So, you were born during World War II.

WP: Correct.

SS: Do you remember anything about rationing or hardship due to the war?

WP: No. Well, I can list, (Molly?) you know, as a kid a few things stick in your mind. I can remember one Christmas my mother, grandmother and maid putting those little lightbulbs, all white, in various colored paints to have different colored light bulbs for Christmas. I do remember that. I remember my father would come home for lunch every day and remember the day he walked in; I, in fact, remember exactly where I was in the house. My father's name was Stanley and my mother's name, was Olive. Of all things, Stanley and Olive. I remember him walking in and saying, "Olive, the war is over".

SS: Wow.

WP: He had heard it on the radio that morning. Other than those two experiences I don't remember anything else about it. But I do remember that the war is over and them dipping those light bulbs in a can of paint so we'd have colored Christmas lights.

SS: Cause you couldn't buy colored Christmas lights.

WP: I guess, you know, I never --. I assumed --. I assume now, whatever the reason was they were dipping those, and it was those little round small lights, lightbulbs. You still see them kinda as night lights or something like that.

SS: Yeah. Did you grow your food? Do you remember eating out of a garden?

WP: Well, we had tenant farmers on the farm. Daddy was a dentist and we owned it. We got all kinds of vegetables but we did have the milk, have the cows and the chickens in the yard. They'd butcher a calf about every three, four months and we'd eat our own beef for the most part and hogs too.

SS: Did y'all have electricity, refrigeration pretty much all your life?

WP: I always remember that, though I do remember my grandfather for some reason, they delivered block ice ever so often. Why, I'm not sure of because we did have electricity and we had a refrigerator.

SS: Did your tenant farmers farm cotton?

WP: Primarily cotton.

SS: Wow. Do you remember how much acreage your father had?

WP: A couple a hundred.

SS: So, yeah, it was a pretty big working cotton farm. What's happened to it, is it still in the family?

WP: Yup.

SS: That's great. Do you still have horses?

WP: No animals left, because we still own the family home which was built about 1875 as a Catholic school for the town. That's why I'm so smart, I grew up in a school. [laughter] My grandparents bought it and then my parents had it and now I've got it.

SS: Well, that's fabulous.

WP: Yeah, but it's a cancer to keep that big thing up.

SS: I'll bet, yeah. Is there anything else about your childhood that you'd like to put on the record?

WP: I guess it was just typical. Yeah.

SS: Yeah?

WP: We went to a local school. Catholic school up to eighth grade then a local public high school. Finished there then went off to school -- college.

SS: Where did you go to college?

WP: Where I went to college was the University of Southwestern Louisiana, which is now the University of Louisiana, Lafayette.

SS: Ok. That's close to the Texas border, isn't it?

WP: No, no, that's in Lafayette, Lake Charles is closer.

SS: Oh, Lake Charles is closer. Okay.

WP: Is your last name Millet [spelled out]?

SS: It is, it's actually my ex-husband's.

WP: Well, I was going to say that's a good Cajun name. Isn't it?

SS: For sure, yeah. French Settlement Louisiana.

WP: Okay, well there you go. But that's north Louisiana, isn't it? French Settlement. I'm trying to remember where. It's around Baton Rouge.

SS: Yeah. It's not too far from Baton Rouge. I can't remember what the real name, Gonzales is the neighboring—

WP: Ah yeah. Alright. That's right, I was thinking of Prince, Prance—well anyway, I know where it is. Yeah.

SS: I grew up in Gulfport.

WP: Oh, did you?

SS: I did.

WP: I had a place in Highway 90 that is gone.

SS: What was it? Was it a business?

WP: No, no. I was renting in Waters Edge Apartments.

SS: Oh?

WP: It's totally gone.

SS: Wow, yeah. Where was that on 90?

WP: Right near Courthouse.

SS: Courthouse Road?

WP: Yeah. Right by the VA [Department of Veterans Affairs]. In Fact, the back of the fence the VA was one side and the apartments were on the other.

SS: Wow. Where did you spend Hurricane Katrina?

WP: In Cottonport.

SS: Okay. Did you feel it over there?

WP: Yeah. We lost power and that sort of stuff.

SS: Isn't that amazing that it had such a huge effect. So, you were still working when Katrina came through?

WP: Yeah.

SS: I might call you back some time and see if I can get a Hurricane Katrina interview.

WP: It seems like I did that and I've been taped somewhere about that. I can't remember. We lost the house in Louisiana and the lost the whole darn apartment complex in Mississippi, it disappeared.

SS: We might have already interviewed you.

WP: You might have. Somebody from Southern I think did.

SS: Was it, Linda VanZandt?

WP: Oh gosh. [inaudible] I just don't know. I know I gave lots of interviews because, in fact, my best experience was I testified a couple of weeks in Washington for a committee and a chairman. I lived it, man, I was in a borrowed sports coat, borrowed tie, anyway I had lost everything and the chairman said "Mr. Perret, if you're schedule will allow the members would like to talk to you in private after the committee meeting is over". I wanted to say, man, I'll stay up here as long as you want, I got an air-conditioned room, I don't have to wait in line for food. [laughter] You know I'll eat. You guys have at it. That was an interesting experience they wanted info off the record.

SS: Wow.

WP: Yeah well, the damn goofy governor of Louisiana and the two senators were up there with their hands open wanting everything in the world blaming poor education system on Katrina and all that. When they started I said, look let me apologize, I, born, raised, educated in Louisiana worked for thirty years. And just about everybody I know from Louisiana is embarrassed by what those three people are doing.

SS: Wow.

WP: Then it got better. [laughter]

SS: Amazing, well you had a big effect.

WP: Well, I personally think they -- that hurt the whole effort. Governor Barbour summarized a lot more tactfully than me but when you get your two senators that are disagreeing on the Senate floor you are not going to get a whole lot.

SS: Yeah.

WP: That's what Louisiana's got right now.

SS: Yeah, you need a united front. Don't you?

WP: Uhuh.

SS: Well why did you choose your career path?

WP: That's a good question. We had a camp on Grand Isle. Grand Isle is the only barrier island in Louisiana you can drive to. I guess if it had been in Mississippi it would have been called a summer home. But in Louisiana it is called a camp and I'd go down there with the family for the summers. My grandfather, uncles, Daddy, they were all doctors and dentists. There were no doctors on the island so when the Perrets would get there all the locals with ailments would come and they would help a might to take care of them. The locals would bring us fish, crab, shrimp, oysters and take us fish and I used to go out, or I would go with my father and Uncle Graham [sp?], whoever it was at the time. I'd get on this boat, this old shrimper had these bottles with these weird, with alcohol were these weird looking animals. [laughter] I used to sit there and hold those bottles and think look at this thing and, you know today, I'd probably know what most of that stuff was. I really think that's what probably got me first interested in fisheries.

SS: Wow.

WP: I think, you know. Who knows.

SS: Yeah.

WP: I was always interested in outdoor types stuff. As a kid I'd catch perch in Bio (Molly?) Rouge and I'd take them by bucket and put them in a pond that had been dug, thinking I'm gonna have all the fish I want to catch in this pond [laughter]. Not knowing about food chain and all that kind of stuff. I was just always interested in anything outdoors. I was probably initially more interested in the wildlife until -- that's easy -- wildlife is easy. Marine fish is tough. That's where the issues are. So, I got into the fisheries thing.

SS: Okay. What did you get your degree in, in college?

WP: Undergraduate was Zoology and Masters was Fishery Science.

SS: Where did you get a Masters in Fishery Science?

WP: At USLU, yeah USL [University of Southwestern Louisiana]. There was a guy who had come, a fish guy come from our state and he started a program and I was his first graduate student and he was there and then he went on to Institute of Marine Science at Miami. At USL, I don't even know what they got now, if they've got a fish program at all.

SS: So, you were so interested in all the outdoor living resources you went ahead and formalized it and studied it in school.

WP: Yup.

SS: Well, that's really cool. I'm glad you got to do that and enjoy something.

WP: Well, it's been an interesting career, I never in my wildest dream would have ever thought about the politics of fish. [laughter]

SS: Who knew fish could have politics.

WP: Fish don't vote. People vote.

SS: I'm looking at these other questions and most of them have been fully answered by other people and I know you are really, really busy. So, can I ask you just one more thing? Could you just walk us through typical day of work so that on the record we'll have what it's like in 2010 for you to do the work that you do.

WP: Well, last week — each week's different. Each day really is different. That's one thing I've really enjoyed about this field. You've got everything from A to Z to take on. You never know, everything changes. We've got brush fires. Right now, we've got a forest fire with the oil thing, but there's things that are always changing. Last week I was committed. I was at Morehead City, North Carolina, University of Duke's Marine Lab where I participated in a fisheries leadership forum put on by Environmental Defense Fund and Duke and Stanford. So that was Monday through Friday, flew back Friday night. I'm in the office today helping some of the fisheries people with various aspects of monitoring. Tomorrow we have a commission meeting and the rest of the week I plan on taking off. Next week I have a conference where I am involved with the LSU group Center, the Challenges of Natural Resource Economics and Policy. You know, it's one thing to be a biological scientist but just what is the social impacts, the economic impacts, ecological impacts of this stuff? Those disciplines are getting more and more involved with management of our renewable natural resources. Again, this diversity of activities from day to day is what's always fascinated me about natural resource management.

SS: What are our natural resources, what shape are they in, Mr. Perret?

WP: First off, renewable natural resources as opposed to depletable. Renewable are the fish and shrimp and all that kind of stuff. Our state fisheries are in a healthy state. We've got some older fish species that I'm involved with, or we're involved with the federal fisheries. For example, the red snapper has gotten a lot of attention in recent years. Goliath Grouper, which was formerly called the Jewfish, but that is politically incorrect, is considered. While the fishery for the Goliath Grouper has been closed since the late '80s. Red Drum is a state fishery. Only now, the federal agency again shut it down in the '80s and we're attempting working near the process to reopen it. We feel that that species is no longer overfished and our fisherman should be able to harvest a red drum, or red drum in the EEZ, the Exclusive Economic Zone. But by in large, our fishery sources are healthy.

SS: Great, I was going to ask you something else.

WP: You said one more. [laughter]

SS: I know, I know. I know you're busy. I know what it was. Are we still fishing out in the Gulf of Mexico off the Mississippi coast?

WP: Some of it, part of it. Yes. There is a closure. A federal closure off some of the area but the issue; you go south of Mississippi you're in Louisiana waters. Whoever -- however they drew that line way back then Mississippi lost out to Louisiana. There are some federal waters more to the east that is open, yes.

SS: Okay. Well, is there anything that we have not talked about that you would like to put on the record?

WP: Well, I just appreciate being contacted. I apologize for the difficulty in getting the interview time set up with you and I wish all of you luck with your project.

SS: Thank you so much, I really appreciate it. I'm going to turn the recorder off now.