MARITIME AND SEAFOOD INDUSTRY MUSEUM
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

AN INTERVIEW WITH NOAH SAUNDERS

FOR THE

VOICES ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

STEPHANIE SCULL-DEARMEY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

FANTASTIC TRANSCRIPTS

Stephanie Scull-DeArmey: It looks like it's picking me up. Let's see if the volume's all the way up. Okay. Yeah, it's picking me up. This is an interview for the Maritime and Seafood Industry Museum and the University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Noah Saunders. It is taking place on Wednesday, March 3, 2010, at 9:25 AM in Biloxi, Mississippi. I am the interviewer, Stephanie Scull-DeArmey. First, I'd like to thank you, Noah, for taking time to talk with me today. I'd like to get some background information about you, which is what we usually do in our oral history interviews. So I'm going to ask you, for the record, could you state your name, please?

Noah Saunders: My name is Noah Saunders, Jr.

SSD: For the record, in case all the labels are lost and damaged some time in the future, how do you spell your name?

NS: N-O-A-H S-A-U-N-D-E-R-S.

SSD: Okay. When were you born?

NS: 9-21 of '63 – 1963.

SSD: Where were you born?

NS: In Biloxi, Mississippi.

SSD: We're going to launch right into the questions that the museum submitted for us and ask you what challenges you faced, first inventing and developing TEDs [turtle excluder device?

NS: When we was first getting started or whatever, the shrimper men really didn't want anything to do with them or anything like that because it was an added device to their trawls and stuff. That was really the biggest thing that they had. They had meetings and everything. We went to meetings and things with the National Marine Fisheries Service and got the interviews from the fishermen and all that stuff. They would talk about the things they didn't like about it once they understood that they had to use them. Then that's how we started changing the shapes of them and making them to where the fishermen would want to use them easier and more.

SSD: They accepted it more?

NS: Yes.

SSD: Do you remember some of the things that they did not like about them?

NS: They was too bulky, and they was too heavy. Because the very first one was like a box thing that was like three feet by three feet by about four feet long, that was just stuff they weren't used to having in the trawl, and it would swing around. They had a good reason for not wanting it.

SSD: How would you get a box into a trawl net?

NS: Well, it was a pipe device, and it was made into – similar to a box. Then it had a door on it, and it had a grid in it that went on, say, a forty-five-degree angle is what I believe they started off with. The turtles would come in, and they would hit that grid device, and then it would kick them out the door. The door would close back, and the shrimp would keep going through the grid.

SSD: Why didn't the shrimp kick the door open?

NS: Because they're too small, and they won't open the door. It keeps the flow of water going.

SSD: So, you think, really, the main challenge was the resistance of the fishermen?

NS: Yes, because the technology – we could figure it out. They had turtles that they took and that they would raise in Texas. Whenever they would release them, they would give them to the National Marine Fisheries Service. And they would put them through the trawl and see how the devices were working and all that. Once they got out, they were free to the ocean, and they never got them back. They were tagged and all that stuff for later dates, too.

SSD: Were you able to participate in that?

NS: Yes, we went on the boats with them and watched the films. They would film it underwater and everything. They'd come back up, and we'd look at the films and make changes. That's why we could make them – the fishermen was having – they were saying like a fifty to a seventy-five percent shrimp loss. By the time we were done figuring it out and everything, it was less than one percent of shrimp loss, so –

SSD: That's a lot – seventy-five percent.

NS: Yeah. But a lot of them didn't build them right, and they was poorly designed and things like that but – and they weren't losing that much, but that was their argument, so that's why it was so high too.

SSD: Do you think they inflated that figure a little bit?

NS: A lot.

SSD: How big were those turtles that they were releasing?

NS: The Kemp's Ridley were the ones that they were doing. I don't remember how old they let them be before they would release them.

SSD: Can you remember about what size they were, what they looked like?

NS: They were about twenty-four inches, eighteen to twenty-four inches in diameter. It was the Kemp's Ridley that they were doing.

SSD: It would be nice to have some of those films at the museum.

NS: The National Marine Fisheries Service has all that stuff. They've got plenty of it. I used to have a lot of it. I can dig stuff out if you like.

SSD: Well, I'll talk to Robin David and see what she says. She's the executive director of the museum, and she might really like to have some of those if you're not –

NS: I've got old pictures and all kinds of things.

SSD: Yes. Oh, I'll bet she would love to have a look-see at those and maybe get some copies.

NS: Yes, that'd be fine.

SSD: Well, how did the early TED models compare to later models?

NS: The earlier ones were flatter. They laid down flatter. They didn't weigh but like seven to fifteen pounds. Like I said, they lost less than one percent of the shrimp, so they made a tremendous change in what they were doing. One of the models – about the middle way through it or whatever – was called the Mississippi Hybrid, and we actually patented that model, but things changed so much and all that it wasn't the one to keep going to. We kept upgrading it.

SSD: When you say we patented it, do you mean –?

NS: Me and my dad. Yes, my dad actually patented it. But we were all working on it.

SSD: [Telephone rings.] I'm so sorry.

NS: No, that's okay.

SSD: I meant to turn this off before we got started. I better take this call.

NS: Yes, ma'am. That's fine.

SSD: Just a second.

NS: No, that's fine.

[END OF TRACK ONE]

SSD: So, you and your father were working together?

NS: Yes, ma'am.

SSD: What was your business?

NS: We built aluminum winches for shrimp boats. And my grandpa was also – my dad and my grandpa's the one that pretty much started the business. And they built winches for shrimp boats and stuff. And we done that. Whenever these turtle excluder stuff came or whatever with the shrimp industry, and they sent a letter – not a letter, but they sent it out in the newspaper, advertising that anybody who wanted to be a part of whatever to come to the meeting that they were going to have. That's how we got involved, by going to that meeting.

SSD: Was that here on the coast?

NS: It was in Pascagoula. Yes. Pascagoula's office had the meeting. It seems like they had them all over the coastline, too. But their office, so happened, was in Pascagoula.

SSD: Do you remember about what year that was, ballpark figure?

NS: It was probably like in '86, '88.

SSD: Okay. Can you paint a picture of a winch? You were making winches?

NS: Yes, the winch is what picks the shrimp trawls up. That goes on the boat, and that's the power that picks up the cables that pick up the trawl and the boards and catch and everything.

SSD: Is it motorized?

NS: They used to be like Laffite skiffs and everything, small boats that would only go out for the day and all. Yes, what we'd put on them was either an electric motor or a gasoline-powered motor. Some of them became hydraulic after hydraulics come about on the boats and things more. That's what we mainly did was that.

SSD: And you said something about a Laffite skiff?

NS: Yeah, Laffite skiff. It's like a thirty-foot boat that's all open. Some of them had a little bit of cabin on them. Some of them didn't. They would run fast, so they could run out, trawl for a while, and come back. It wasn't like the bigger boats they have today.

SSD: It doesn't seem like very much boat.

NS: No. It's just like a little dayboat. But that's [inaudible] –

SSD: Yes, day sailor. Do you have any idea how much shrimp that would hold?

NS: Yeah, they'd catch a thousand, two thousand pounds sometime on [the] way back. But as the boats – as time went on and bigger boats came about, they wasn't as many shrimp, and that's why the little boats just pretty much went out too. So those things were all changing, and we

actually went to building bigger winches for bigger boats and all that kind of stuff to keep up with what was going on. Then, when the turtle excluder laws came about, it was a federal law, which the Kemp's Ridley were endangered, and that's why they had to protect the turtle, which made these devices have to be developed or whatever because the rules were that if we wasn't able to save the sea turtle, they were going to outlaw the shrimping and stuff.

SSD: Amazing.

NS: So that was why it was really more than people realized what all was going on to figure it out.

SSD: So that was not widely known that the shrimping was going to be shut down?

NS: They pretty much told everybody, but nobody paid it no attention and said they couldn't do it.

SSD: The shrimpers didn't believe it?

NS: Yes, they didn't believe they would be able to do that to them. But they can.

SSD: In those meetings with shrimpers, did they ever get heated?

NS: Oh, yes. Yes, they would jump up and down and holler and all kinds of stuff. There was a guy named Tom. He was one of the enforcement officers. One guy stood up, down in Louisiana, and said, "What's the worst thing you could do to me?" He says, "What is the worst thing that y'all can do to me?" Anyway, the guy told him – he says, "If you lay your hands on me, then that'll be the worst thing that ever happens to you." But it never got to them points where it was all just a bunch of hollering going on.

SSD: Didn't really come to blows?

NS: No, not that I know of. I was never around any of it if it did, but I don't think it did – just a bunch of arguing. What they started was shrimpers' associations and different stuff. There was a man named Tee John [Mialjevich] that was the president of it [Concerned Shrimpers of America]. From my view, he stirred it all up to create more members and make him a bigger paycheck and things like that. So without those kinds of people, it would have never went as far out of hand as it would have, I don't think.

SSD: So he was maybe –

NS: People stood up and actually realized what we were trying to do and what the National Marine Fisheries Service was actually trying to do to save this industry, that they just wanted to turn their head to.

SSD: Did you know anything about nets when you started?

NS: Yes, because we'd go shrimping and all too when I was younger, littler.

SSD: Really?

NS: Yes. My dad had a little shrimp boat, like a little boat or whatever, and we'd go on opening days and stuff like that and different times. I'd been around it. I grew up on the Point in Biloxi, and my grandpa [inaudible] in the industry, so I understood everything about the shrimp industry, really.

SSD: Yes. When did they stop shrimping?

NS: They're still shrimping.

SSD: Your –?

NS: Oh, my family?

SSD: Yes.

NS: We never did it commercially. We just did it for fun, just for shrimp.

SSD: Wow.

NS: That was what Biloxi did. They'd go shrimping, fishing – and that's what Biloxi did.

SSD: Did you pull a trawl net?

NS: Yes, we pulled a trawl and all that stuff.

SSD: How much could you catch?

NS: We'd catch like a hundred pounds a day or a couple of hundred pounds a day. It was just a little trawl you'd pull in by hand – just to go play, really.

SSD: Did you have any bycatch in those days? Do you remember?

NS: Yes.

SSD: What kinds of things?

NS: There was croakers, flounders, crabs, squid – all that kind of stuff. We'd take all the fish and stuff too. I mean, it was really just a fun thing to do.

SSD: Because you can eat croaker, crab.

NS: Yes.

SSD: Did you eat squid?

NS: Yes, you can eat squid. That's calamari.

SSD: Did you guys eat it?

NS: Not at that time, I didn't, when I was younger. But as I got older and learned what it was, we'd eat squid.

SSD: Of course, flounder's delicious and wonderful. But when you were a kid, were they selling squid for bait or throwing it back. Do you remember?

NS: Yes, they'd keep it for bait. The guys that went fishing and all that kind of stuff. You keep just about everything. But a lot of stuff got thrown back because, whenever the shrimp industry would open, it used to be that, when you'd go down by the beach, there was all kind of dead fish that would wash up and things like that, so you knew there was a lot of bycatch.

SSD: Do you remember about what year that was?

NS: That was probably in the mid-'70s, early '70s.

SSD: That's really eye-opening. The mid-'70s?

NS: Yeah, around '75 to the '70s.

SSD: I grew up in Gulfport. I left about 1973, moved to Hattiesburg, and went to USM [University of Southern Mississippi]. I didn't plan to stay in Hattiesburg, but –

NS: You did.

SSD: – that's how it turned out. But I'm thinking about all those walks on the beach that I was taking in high school. I remember seeing dead fish washed up.

NS: Do you?

SSD: I guess I thought they'd died of natural causes or something. I didn't know why they were there.

NS: Yes.

SSD: You don't see that many anymore, do you, walking on the beach?

NS: There ain't that much product out there. It ain't so plentiful like it used to be.

SSD: Yes. So, there's not as much bycatch just because it's scarcer?

NS: That too. Yes. Because they don't have the little boats that just go right there. It's bigger boats. They're more offshore because the fish and the shrimp and all ain't on the coast like they used to be. Ain't nothing like it used to be.

SSD: Why is that?

NS: Just because of growth and just kind of overfishing, some part, maybe never giving it rest enough. But it goes on into just the development of creeks and the rivers and just like everybody – just like they know it's happened, changed.

SSD: Human encroachment, somewhat on the –?

NS: Yes, pretty much. Yes, just on everything – it's stressing the whole world with all its natural resources. It's the same thing here.

SSD: Right. Can you paint a picture for somebody who might be listening – compare early TEDs that you guys might have been working on with something that was maybe your final finished product?

NS: In comparison – say, comparing it to a car – it went from a Model T to a Ferrari. Really, it did. That would be a good comparison – to a high-performance – because there was certain things you had to do and reasons why and all that kind of stuff. The shrimper men had built their own didn't understand it and didn't think it would matter that much because it went from the type of webbing we were using to the way we put the knots on it to where there was a lot of improvements done. I'm serious – like the Ferrari compared to what it started out as.

SSD: Yeah. Well, what kind of webbing was used at first and then what kind –?

NS: It was nylon webbing that was used throughout the whole thing at first. Then it went from nylon to certain parts of it being polyethylene. Then there were certain ways that they would stretch the polyethylene that would make the knots all close together and make the webbing seal together. It was real elastic – different type factories – because we would get it from the ones – just everybody'd make the same quality webbing, so we would get it from them, and we actually ended up getting webbing straight from China by the time we were – when we were in the prime of it. To the way it tied on and all that – the floats that was used, how much buoyancy, where you didn't over float it –

SSD: I didn't realize that TEDs had floats on them.

NS: Yes.

SSD: What purpose does the float serve?

NS: That helps take the weight of the frame and the steel. You put a float on it to help equalize it, so it doesn't trawl any differently than what it did before it was put in there.

SSD: It doesn't interfere as much with the shrimping?

NS: That's correct. By putting the float and all that stuff. What it does, rather than the weight of the TED of the frame – the weight of the frame – because in the end, we were taking the turtles and putting them out the bottom rather than out the top. What that did is help buoyance it to where it made it easy. It wasn't dragging hard on the bottom, where he had room to get out of it, because the TED actually wouldn't – if it was performing right, it wouldn't slide across the bottom.

SSD: So, at first, they were sewn into the bottom, and then they started sewing them into the top of the trawl?

NS: Because when you put a grid in there, it's a four-inch bar space that goes into the grid. What it does is, everything that comes down through there, if it don't fit through the bars, it's got to go out. So not everything is buoyant like a turtle, and then it would have to go up and come out, so it was a lot easier to kick out – and this was a selling point for the fishermen. It would kick out the bigger fish – the sharks, all that type stuff – heavy stuff that just rolled down through there – logs, not big logs but certain pieces or whatever. It would let that stuff slide out. Then they didn't even have to deal with it on the deck or whatever, so that got rid of a lot of the bycatch stuff that they were having to deal with, so that was a lot better for them. But by putting that stuff out the bottom, it let it go out easier, and it didn't wear your trawl out because if you got something heavy in there, it would sit right there on the bottom and wear it right there and wear a hole in your trawl and never go out the top. So that was some of the performance that we figured out about how to make it better and more practical.

SSD: Yeah. So, in some ways, it might have improved?

NS: In a lot of ways, it improved for the fishermen. Had they really wanted to be more of a part of it and more involved in it – because by the end, by the time we were kind of – by the time I was kind of getting out of it, they were taking and putting different panels in it, playing with different colors – white and black – to make the fish go different ways, so that it would take them out of the trawl. They were saving all kinds of byproducts to where it was more of a cleaner catch. By having a cleaner catch and not having all that trash back in there, you don't tear up your product, tear up – smash up your shrimp so bad to where you was getting a better quality shrimp out the deal.

SSD: If you got rid of some of the debris and didn't get a hole in your net, then you're saving –

NS: Yes. Actually, it works out better because there's no sense in destroying and killing all the byproduct that was happening just to get a few shrimp.

SSD: I read that, in Thailand, for each pound of shrimp, there's seventeen pounds of bycatch.

NS: Yes, that's too much.

SSD: It's too much. On the Gulf Coast here –

NS: It doesn't have to be that way. Technology – we can figure it better than that.

SSD: They just don't enforce it or use it. I guess they don't have the laws.

NS: The way that the United States enforced the turtle excluder stuff – however you want to look at it, but made the different countries use them is that, if you ship shrimp into the United States, it had to be caught through a TED. You had to be on the TED program. And that's the way that the other countries got to using TEDs and that type stuff, so I understand what you're talking about with – there ain't nobody going to nothing unless they're forced into it or whatever.

SSD: Yes. I have to wonder about how much they're enforcing it in other parts of the world. But the figure that was in – Wikipedia, I know, is not the best source of information, but the figure that they used for Gulf Coast shrimp is less than two pounds of bycatch for a pound of shrimp. That's a big difference. Another good reason to buy local Gulf Shrimp. Well, do you know how TEDs have affected the sea turtle population?

NS: It should have made the population come up. I'm sure it has because the sea turtles – I think it's like fifteen years before they're able to reproduce, so that's why they're on an endangered species deal. That's why it takes a little longer. So, yes, I'm sure it's helped them.

SSD: In your opinion, why are sea turtles important?

NS: I don't really know what part they play. It's just that was something we were trying to protect, and that was something that I was asked to help with.

SSD: Yes. Well, tell me a little bit about growing up on the Gulf Coast?

NS: It was good just because being I lived on the Point, they had the bay, and they had the beach, and they had the railroad track area right there, to where we had the whole Point to fish on and play on and all that kind of stuff. For Christmas, we got pellet guns and hatchets and built treehouses and just played, and it was like a paradise, actually, compared to what kids have got to play with now. It learned you a lot of character, and it was really enjoyable.

SSD: Yes. Do you remember learning to swim?

NS: Yes.

SSD: What was that like?

NS: Yes, it was – I don't know. It's just kind of natural. You just wade out, and you played around until you finally went swimming. We would go swimming down at

Weems; Weems was a factory or whatever where the shrimp boats would pull up, and they had a big pier, and we'd go down there and swim off of that pier sometimes. It was deeper. It was something we could jump off of rather than just playing on.

SSD: How far do you have to go from the manmade beach on the Gulf Coast before it starts getting deep? It's a good ways. It's pretty shallow.

NS: Yes. It's probably five hundred yards or so. That's after you get out, probably five hundred yards or so. That's where they dredge to put the sand back. There's a little kind of channel that runs through right off the coast, too. But the whole coast, all the way to Ship Island, it ain't but about twelve feet. And I believe that's how the tugboat channel – that's just gotten deeper. But it's pretty flat across our area.

SSD: You have to wade out a good ways before you're up to your neck.

NS: Yes.

SSD: Well, just for the record, because most people won't know what dredge means, can you define that for the record?

NS: Dredge is where they pump the sand. They got a boat out there, and it sucks the sand up off the bottom and pumps it up to the beach, and replenishes the beach.

SSD: Our beach along the Mississippi Gulf Coast is not natural. It's manmade.

NS: That's correct, so they got to keep replenishing it.

SSD: What kinds of fish were you catching when you were a kid from the pier?

NS: We had cast nets. We'd catch a lot of mullet. When we would go fishing, we'd catch – we'd go off the train bridge. That way, we could get out away from the beach some, and we'd catch white trout. Every now and then, we'd catch some speckled trout and a lot of drum, croakers.

SSD: Did you take it home and eat it?

NS: Yes. Yeah, that was part of it. That's what we were doing. We was down there playing.

SSD: Who cleaned them?

NS: We did. We'd clean them and give them to my mom, and my mom took them and [would] make a meal out of it. That was part of growing up.

SSD: So, how old were you when you cleaned your first fish?

NS: I don't know. Probably about seven. Probably after Camille, after the Camille storm, because I was about seven then or whatever. We started venturing out further after Camille because we was getting older, but something like that.

SSD: I'd like to talk about Camille. I'm just going to make a note of it, so we can come back to it. So how does a cast net work?

NS: It's just an eight-foot net that's got webbing on it, and it makes a circle. It's got a bag in it, which has got a lead-line. Then, when you pull it, it makes a loose part of the sac, a webbing, so that the fish gets caught in it. It's just a net you throw.

SSD: What depth of water do you do that in?

NS: Do what, now?

SSD: What depth of water?

NS: Where we were at, we was right there on the bay; it was probably three, four foot of water. The water was dirty. It ain't clear. Because mullet will run out from under a net when you throw it, he'll the shadow and run out from under it, so you got to throw it where you don't see the shadow of the net coming, and you can be more productive that way.

SSD: So, if the water's clear, you're not going to catch many mullet?

NS: That's right, because they'll see it coming and be able to run out away from it.

SSD: Now, when I took science in high school, they told me that the reason we don't have clear water in the Mississippi Sound is because the barrier islands trap, I guess, flotsam in there.

NS: That's true.

SSD: And that it's really an organic soup. It's not dirty so much as it's –

NS: That's correct.

SSD: – just got a lot of microorganisms in it that feed our seafood.

NS: Yes. That's why the shrimp were so productive around the bays and all that stuff, because they had so much of that, and that's what they ate.

SSD: Were your parents ever concerned about the water out there –

NS: Bad water?

SSD: – might not be good for you?

NS: No, because everybody grew up in it, and it was all there was to play in.

SSD: Yeah. Mullet are also called Biloxi bacon, aren't they?

NS: Yes, that's right.

SSD: Free breakfast.

NS: Yes.

SSD: Okay. So white trout, speckled trout, drum, croakers, mullet. Anything else?

NS: That was pretty much – a bunch of catfish, but you'd throw them back. You don't eat them type catfish.

SSD: Why?

NS: I don't know. Just nobody never ate them. They're not freshwater catfish. They're saltwater catfish but –

SSD: What do they look like?

NS: They're slimy. They go on the bottom. They're scavenger fish. They got three prongs on them that's barbed, and if they stick in you, they're hard to get out. Anyway, we always throw them back.

SSD: So, you have to handle them, get the hook out?

NS: Yes. Yes, you got to.

SSD: Did you ever get barbed?

NS: No. No. I didn't want that. You grab ahold of them and handle them. But you do from time to time get – not really barbed – when I say barbed, not stuck in there, where I had to pull it out of them barbs or whatever. You get poked with them and stuff like that, but – and normally, it would infect you because there's slime on them, and so you really didn't deal with the catfish.

SSD: Well, one of the stories I heard growing up was, if you stepped on crab shells, they tended to get infected too.

NS: Yes, I'm sure they did.

SSD: Did you ever hear that?

NS: No, but it would make sense.

SSD: There was another question I was going to ask you. Did you ever handle anything dangerous? Did you catch sharks or stingrays?

NS: No. Stingrays every now and then, but you just get you – if you had to deal with them, you got you a rock and took him off your hook.

SSD: Wow. Yes. The only thing I ever caught was a silver eel.

NS: Yeah? [inaudible] they was all out – I forgot all about those kinds of things.

SSD: [laughter] Did you catch a lot of those?

NS: Sometimes, from time to time, you'd catch them. They'd be like a snake, just not silver. You said silver, huh?

SSD: Yes, they were really silver and –

NS: Yes. I've seen those or whatever. But in the bay, we never caught them. The ones we caught was more just an eel. He's more like a snake, round, and that was a different one but –

SSD: I've heard that silver eels are used for bait sometimes.

NS: They may be. When the Vietnamese came here, because they caught offshore or whatever, they would take them and stretch them out and dry them and eat them some kind of way. I never did know how they ate them.

SSD: [laughter] Anything else you can think about growing up that you'd like to put on the record for people in the future?

NS: It's a shame that the kids don't get to grow up like that because it was really fun, and it was a really nice time.

SSD: Why do you think it's changed? How has it changed?

NS: I think a lot of the reason – I think about it all the time because I got two kids myself. I got two girls, (Noelle?) and (Nicole?). I think that we tell them that we don't want them to have it as bad as we did and all that stuff – and whenever they start to believe that – and it's changed their whole character of kids growing up. They get more spoiled, and they get more – everybody's got to do things. I think it's a shame that they missed that part of their lives of going and learning and just being able to play and not have to worry about things that they have to worry about today with the drugs and the people and the predators, and all that kind of stuff. I think it's really sad just how we've came to be.

SSD: It's not so safe to send your two girls down there to fish.

NS: No.

SSD: You'd have to be with them every minute?

NS: Well, yes. It'd be good to have them – it ain't good for nobody to be out no more hardly.

SSD: Even adults, you think?

NS: Well, no, it's all right. I mean, it ain't that bad. But things happen. It's just a whole different – when we were kids, everybody's parents took care of everybody's kids. Everybody knew everybody. They knew, "Oh, you better not be over here. You better go home." And you went home. And you listened. That type of family or neighborhood or whatever you want to call that the Point had – it's not there anymore because nobody hardly knows who anybody is anymore. They can't take care of their kids. So, I think it was a whole lot safer then because you had so many people watching over you, where you don't have that anymore.

SSD: Do you think the casinos have anything to do with changing the character?

NS: The casinos changed all of Biloxi because whenever casinos came, the people – so many people came to where, when you went to the grocery stores, you're seeing people you didn't know. Just the whole place grew. There was Wal-Marts, and everybody got divided up (inaudible) where they went to stores at, to where everybody was right on the Point, and it was a lot – that's why it was like it was. It was more of a family community rather than just a community.

SSD: Is all that gone now, since Katrina hit?

NS: Everything. Every bit of it's gone. My mom still lives on the Point. Her house is there. That's where I shop and where I grew up at. And there ain't but two or three houses around there that's people that was there before the storm in a six, eight-block area.

SSD: What's going to happen there, you think?

NS: What everybody's wanting to happen is they want to sit back and wait for casinos or whatever to buy the property. Being the rules have all changed from Katrina with your heights, on how high you got to build and all that kind of stuff, people ain't going to build back.

SSD: Individual homes are not coming back there?

NS: No. And that ain't no place for it. The way they're wanting it to go is through tourism and the development of condominiums. Everything's got to move forward. That's what that area of that part of the land's going to be used for is what they're looking for it to be.

SSD: Is your home near here? Are your kids away from the beach now, growing up?

NS: Well, I lived on Iroquois Street, which is about three or four blocks off of the beach. But it's on the north side of the railroad tracks. For Katrina, I stayed there and kept going down to

the beach and watched the houses wash away and all that kind of stuff and was right thereafter everything. That way, I could go down to the Point and check on my shop and my mom and them's house and all that type of stuff.

SSD: So, did you take your children to the beach a lot when they were kids if you were living that close to it?

NS: Yes. We had boats, and we always went on the water, went on the river. We had ski boats and just did the family [inaudible] –

SSD: That sounds like a pretty good way to grow up. [laughter]

NS: Yes.

SSD: A little different, maybe, than your childhood but still good.

NS: Yes. Yes, I did a lot of stuff with them. And their grandpa owned a boat to Ship Island, so they would get to go to the Ship Island thing a lot.

SSD: That is so funny. I've taken that boat ride so many times.

NS: Yes. The one out of Biloxi was their grandpa. The one out of Gulfport is their uncle, Peter.

SSD: Yes, the ferry. Why did you choose your career path?

NS: I really didn't. I just grew up in it, so that's what I did. In the '80s, when I got out of school – I got out of school in '81. There wasn't a whole lot going on. The first winter, I dredged oysters for that winter. That was another good time of my life. I enjoyed that winter a whole lot. It was just nice and – but anyway, then after that, me and my dad – I went to work for my dad and went to work in a machine shop and just took advantage of opportunities that came there.

SSD: So, you grew up in the business?

NS: Yes.

SSD: It was just natural for you to follow in your father's footsteps?

NS: Yes. And after the shrimp industry and all that stuff started going away – I guess it was in about 2000 – I'd made enough money to where I started buying land. Then I needed machines to clean up and clear and do my land, and so that's how I pretty much come to be in the heavy construction business like I am now.

SSD: Tell me about dredging oysters. How do you do that?

NS: It's a steel frame that's got teeth on it. You normally put it on the end of a chain, and a winch pulls it also, and you just drag it back a little bit, and you got the oyster beds, and you just pull it over it real slow, and it pulls them up. The teeth pull them up, and it's got a little bag in the back, and they fall into that bag. Then you'll pull the dredge back up. You got a dredge table and all; it pulls it up on there. You grab hold of the bag, flip them out of the dredge, and throw it back over. You handpick through them for the sizing and all that and throw them into a sack. You just keep doing that all day long until you get your limit.

SSD: What was the limit?

NS: Forty sacks a day was at that time.

SSD: Forty? How big are the sacks?

NS: I think they were bigger sacks then. I think one-hundred-twenty-pound sacks or one-hundred-forty-pound sacks.

SSD: How long did it take you to get your minimum?

NS: By two o'clock, we was normally ready to go home.

SSD: From what time in the morning?

NS: We'd start off about 6:00.

SSD: Wow. And when you throw the little ones back in, do they just settle back down into the bed and continue growing?

NS: Yes.

SSD: [laughter] That's amazing. So, you said you really enjoyed it. Did you ever do it again, besides –?

NS: No, I never did it again. That was it because, after that, I went to work for my dad. That was my brother-in-law that I dredged oysters with – come to be my brother-in-law. That was really fun.

SSD: Is he still doing it?

NS: He's a shrimper man down in Louisiana now. He's still shrimping. He went to shrimping because they did run the boat to Ship Island. The boat that we actually dredged the oysters on was the *Sundown II*, which was a dayboat to go out on, a charter boat, and they would go out for the day, and fish, and come back. But in the wintertime, when the tourists wasn't here, we'll use it for dredging.

SSD: Can you dredge oysters year-round?

NS: It's seasonal.

SSD: Is it seasonal because it's convenient for people or because that's when the oysters –

NS: That's when the oysters are safe to eat and all that stuff.

SSD: They're not safe to eat in the summer?

NS: I don't think so because the water's too hot. I mean, I'm not for sure, but I know they say that when you can eat oysters is any month that ends in R.

SSD: Yes, I've heard that before.

NS: I don't know how that works. That's just an old saying.

SSD: But those are the winter months.

NS: Yes.

SSD: Interesting.

NS: I don't know. I ain't never ate – that'd be something for a biologist to tell me. [laughter]

SSD: I know. I don't like oysters.

NS: Yes. I don't eat them anymore. I don't eat them since Katrina.

SSD: Yes. Is it because you're afraid of –

NS: It's just a mental thing –

SSD: – what's out in the water?

NS: Yes.

SSD: What might be in the oysters?

NS: And things are getting more polluted, and oysters are just a filter. I don't care for them.

SSD: Yes. The oceans are getting polluted in so many ways. Gosh, you were growing up, and you had family going out to Ship Island on boats. Did you do that as a kid? Did you go out with your granddad?

NS: My dad had a boat when we were younger, and we'd go to Ship Island and spend the night, sleep on the boat sometimes. We'd go [inaudible] Deer Island and sleep on the boat and stuff like that. He had a little boat.

SSD: Did it ever get stormy and scary?

NS: Sometimes we'd get bad weather, but it was all right. It wasn't bad.

SSD: I think I'd be afraid to go to sleep on a boat. How do you know the anchor's going to hold, and you're not just going to drift off?

NS: Well, they had it figured out. [laughter]

SSD: You didn't get waked up by bad weather in the middle of the night, thinking, "Oh, no, we're not going to make it?"

NS: No. Normally, we'd pick a good night to go stay, where it was nice and had a little breeze, where you didn't have mosquitos, and you'd just pick you a good night that you knew was going to be nice and enjoyable. You didn't just pick any weekend that come along. You'd pick a good time.

SSD: So, who went out?

NS: That's why things was so much better then because you could do that back then, it seemed like. You wasn't so pressured by everything now.

SSD: Yes. So, what did you do during the day on Ship Island if you spent the night on the boat?

NS: Whenever I was little, when we would go, I took a bow and arrow out there. They had stuff I'd shoot at. I'd shoot fish. We brought toys that we'd want to play with, things we'd want to do while we were there. We'd bring a cast net and fishing poles.

SSD: Did you catch any fish with your bow and arrow?

NS: Yes. They had a pond of flounders that I was able to get one time that was – how the tide would go out, and it would leave pools of water on Ship Island, and there'd be flounders caught in them sometimes, and you could go get them and stuff like that.

SSD: Shot your arrow into flounder? Wow.

NS: Gig them or whatever.

SSD: Yes. For people who don't know, for the record, can you explain where flounders live and how they're caught?

NS: Flounder's a bottom fish and he kind of goes along the bottom. Then he moves with the tide, and he'll go up to the beach to catch the minnows and stuff when it's on a falling tide, and that's how he feeds at nighttime. Whenever the tide would go out, they would be in puddles of water, and they didn't know that they were getting trapped in there, and they'd just be sitting there feeding. They would feed all day. And tide would come back up – a lot of them – and be back out again and – because the minnows would get caught in them little ponds too.

SSD: What's a gig?

NS: A gig is a point on the end of like a broomstick to poke him and pin him to the ground until you can pick him up and put him on a stringer.

SSD: That's how you catch them? Did you ever catch them with a line?

NS: Oh, yes. You catch them on a fishing pole, too. Yes.

SSD: Or did you ever catch them in a net?

NS: Yes, you'll catch them in the cast nets too.

SSD: So, at night, what do you use to see the flounder?

NS: At night is when you see the people on the beach floundering with the lights and stuff. That's what they're doing. You can catch them at nighttime because that's when they'll come up to feed on the beaches or whatever. In the daytime, you just catch them on a pole or hook and some shrimp.

SSD: Live bait?

NS: Yes. Well, whatever. They'll eat dead bait.

SSD: Will they?

NS: When we was kids, that's all we fished with was dead bait. We didn't know nothing about live bait.

SSD: What was your bait, your dead bait?

NS: Shrimp. Just shrimp. And I would go to (Shimpa's) – (Shimpa's) had a factory there, a market. We'd just buy shrimp from them. They had bait shops too that you could go to, but wherever was closest to us, where we could walk or ride our bikes to, that's where we'd go.

SSD: Yes. Did you ever do any crabbing?

NS: No. But the crabs was out there. But you'd have to have crab pots and all that stuff. We didn't do the crab pot thing.

SSD: You just weren't interested –?

NS: But back then, you didn't have to have a fishing license. You didn't have to have a crabbing license. You could be a little kid, and you could go play and not have to have all these things. I think it ought to be that way again myself because a lot of times, that deters kids from being able to go play and do these things.

SSD: Yes, it seems like kids ought to be exempt.

NS: Exempt from that.

SSD: Just to be able to have fun and enjoy it. So, what are you currently? How would you describe your title and your current work?

NS: Right now, I own a construction company that's Saunders Construction. What I do is development. I develop land and stuff. I do subdivisions. The license I've got with the state is a municipal public works license, which means that I can do just about anything except for build bridges. I've got a dirt pit. I'm building me a dredge, actually – the same type – way that they dredge the beach or whatever, so I can pump some sand and gravel. I've got my own dirt pit.

SSD: Where would you pump gravel from?

NS: On the property here, I've got a license to dig and to dredge. They got a little vein of gravel that's on the property.

SSD: How do you discover a vein of gravel?

NS: Well, I didn't know. I was just digging. I got the permits for digging the dirt pit. Then as we dug down, it come across some gravel and stuff. I've never bored it or anything. But I've got some good core sand that I'll be able to make concrete with. So right now, for the last year, I've been building me a dredge kind of on the side. I'm fixing to build me a classifier, which will classify all the different sand and separate the different sand out when I pump it, so I'll be able to sell it as different items or whatever.

SSD: Now, what kinds of different sand are there?

NS: They got mason sand, which is a fine sand. There'll be concrete sand, which is coarser, got some little pea gravel mixed in with it. There'll be pea gravel. There'll be gravel. You got screens, and you use the water to help classify it, to separate.

SSD: Can you sift them out? Separate them with the screens?

NS: Yes. Yes, and the water. The way the classifier works that I'm understanding is, when I'm pumping the water up there, it'll slow down. As it slows down, the certain size sands fall out, and then you'll have little compartments in that to separate it.

SSD: The flow of the water makes a difference in what gets carried along with it.

NS: That's correct.

SSD: Wow. That's ingenious.

NS: And you use all that to separate it. You already pumped it up there anyway. You might as well classify it rather than letting it all go.

SSD: The earth's just full of resources, isn't it?

NS: Yes. Yes, it really is.

SSD: Most of my life, I don't stop and ask myself, "Where did that gravel come from? Where did that concrete come from?" It had to come from a natural resource.

NS: Yes. Right now, the whole world's getting so populated, to where we need to figure out what we're doing.

SSD: Yes. If we don't, we're going to become self-stultifying, I think. I think it's already started.

NS: Yes.

SSD: What's a typical day at work like for you? Just walk us through.

NS: I'll get up. I got three or four guys that work with me. The job we just got through, the job we're finishing up right now, a guy laid some sewer pipe wrong in a new development. It was a job that I gave them a price on, and I was the low bidder, but they decided to do it themselves. Then they ended up doing it, laying it all wrong. They put the pavement and the curb and everything down, so we had to go back through and take all that back out and lay it right and put it all back. Right now, we're taking and trying to set the road back up and fixing to pour some curb tomorrow and get it straightened up, so they can sell some houses.

SSD: Yes. Oh, yes. That's pretty necessary.

NS: IT was a screwup right at the end that they caught.

SSD: Good grief. I'll bet they're sorry they didn't let you do it in the first place.

NS: Yes. Maybe I'll get the next [inaudible]. [laughter]

SSD: [laughter] Yes. If they have any capacity to learn at all, then you should get the next one. Well, you mentioned on the phone that you traveled out of the United States in your work with TEDs. Can you tell us about that?

NS: What I would do is go with the National Marine Fisheries Service to – they would go to different countries and show them how to build TEDs and what to expect and put them on their trawls and just educate them [on] them. Being I was such a part of everything with them, they would get me to go along with them – being I was a builder – to help show how to build these things in these different countries and stuff like that. So, they can build – and production and all that. I went to just about all of them down there.

SSD: Which countries?

NS: I went to Suriname, Aruba, to Venezuela. I went to Ecuador. I went to Ecuador. I went by myself to Ecuador. I went to El Salvador with the Fisheries Service. I've been to Peru just to get back into Ecuador, down there. I can't remember. There's a bunch of them. I got my passport book stamped up.

SSD: Does anything stand out about those countries that you remember?

NS: The people was really nice, and they're clean. They were just a real good type person. They didn't really have much or have anything, but they had good morals, and they were good people. That's normally what you find in the shrimp industry; a lot of it is – or even with just people, period. The poorer people don't mean they're bad people. Normally, they're very clean and good people. You see that a lot more than you do in other places.

SSD: Maybe value friendship and human relations more than the more materialistic United States?

NS: That's correct. Yes.

SSD: Did you get that feeling?

NS: Yes. They're proud of what they do have, probably like the United States used to be, back in the real early days of it.

SSD: How long did you travel?

NS: I would go sometimes for normally about a week at a time, and I would plan a week trip, and they'd have it all arranged and everything for that. Right there at the end, what I was getting – they was asking me to do, or whatever was to go to – one of my trips – my last trip would have been to Pakistan, India, and Nigeria. That was going to be – I think it was like a three-month deal. What my responsibilities would have been is back to like we were talking about, the – if you didn't use turtle excluder devices to catch your shrimp, you couldn't ship them to the United States. Well, these countries were supposed to be in compliance and all that stuff and be geared up. What my responsibility was – they was going to bring me to these different harbors, and I would have to look at the different boats to make sure they were geared up properly and, if not, tell them what the problems were, what they were doing wrong. There was a guy from Washington that was going to go along with me, and he was going to write all this stuff up for

them. That's who I would report to. But right at the end, it got canceled. The reason it got canceled was because they didn't want to be responsible for getting me back home.

SSD: Were they afraid you were in some danger?

NS: I don't know what, but that wasn't long before the 9/11 thing happened. So, I don't know what – it wasn't as safe. They didn't feel it was safe, evidently.

SSD: Pakistan, India – yes. So it wasn't that you didn't want to be gone from home that long. It fell through because of maybe security.

NS: Yes. I'd already went and got my shots and everything to go and was done briefed on everything to be expecting and all that stuff.

SSD: In the briefings, was there any mention of terrorism?

NS: No. No, they didn't want to be responsible. I was going to be on my own. In the past, which I don't want to get into all that, but in the past, it was a normal deal. We all went as a group, and we all come back.

SSD: Together?

NS: Yes. When we would go to these countries in South America, there was always some embassy people waiting for us that we would make contact with. Even when I went on my own, I got the number to the embassy down there, told them what I was doing, when I was coming, what my purpose was. So if I needed – they knew I was there and what was going on and everything, if I had any trouble when I went by myself.

SSD: So, it felt more like you had a support group?

NS: Yes. You had somebody that could get you out of there. Because when we went to Suriname, there was a little prison or whatever there, and they had some metal bars, and they had a thing there. We was walking past, and it said you couldn't take any pictures, and they had some guy hollering, "Help me, help me. Help me get home." We just walked on by because that wasn't our responsibility. He evidently went down there and did something wrong.

SSD: Or had bad luck?

NS: Yes, something happened to him.

SSD: Yes, being in prison abroad is not a good situation. Much worse than here. It's pretty bad here, is what I hear. [laughter]

NS: Yes. I'm sure the crime down there is bad, and that's why we made our arrangements like we did and did what we were supposed to do. There was always good people. They would tell

you things about the different towns and things that happened. It was really interesting. I'm glad I got to do what I got to do going to these places. It was educational for me.

SSD: Was it hard to be traveling that much? Were there some disadvantages?

NS: No. No, I liked it. The only thing that was a disadvantage was that I'd bring all my own food because I didn't want to be down there and be sick with food poisoning or anything like that. I'd normally pack all of just snack-type food and drinks and things like that, so being down there, when I went by myself, I didn't want to be sick, because what my job was, was to go out with them for a week on a shrimp boat, so I needed to have – I didn't need to be sick on the shrimp boat.

SSD: What were you eating?

NS: I'd just bring M&Ms and canned fruit cocktail and just stuff like that. What was bad was that, whenever they'd see you over there eating or whatever, they'd – because they was eating something different, so you'd have to share with them. [inaudible]

SSD: They wanted some of yours?

NS: Yes. They wanted to try something different.

SSD: Did they want you to eat theirs, too?

NS: Yes. When I went, they had some really big shrimp, huge shrimp. The captain boiled me some shrimp, just plain boiled shrimp. I ate them, and they were really good.

SSD: Protein.

NS: They were like three to the pound.

SSD: Probably saved your life because you were eating sugar. [laughter] Got some protein.

NS: Anyway, it was just a good experience. I enjoyed it a lot.

SSD: It seems like I should have some questions about your international travel. I'm sure I'll think of some later. Were you able to bring back any souvenirs?

NS: No, what I try to do is bring my mom – if we got somewhere where they had a jewelry store or whatever, I'd bring my mom a cross back. I'd always buy her a cross on the way back, something like that.

SSD: Did you ever feel in danger?

NS: No. When we went to Venezuela, one time, they had some kind of uprising. How they burn the tires on the street and all that stuff – well, we was going to another part of Venezuela,

and they had a barricade like that. The guy that was traveling with us told us to sit back and don't say anything, don't speak any English. He pulled up to it, and he gave them some money and told them, "Here's some more gas for bottle bombs," and they let us through, and we went on through.

SSD: I wonder if they had known you were American if they would have held you for ransom.

NS: I don't know. But it all works out. He told us not to speak or don't say anything. I normally listen to everything.

SSD: Were you scared?

NS: No, I wasn't really scared. But I was going to listen. I wasn't going to mess things up.

SSD: Yes, that sounds pretty tense.

NS: It may have been more to it than what I realized. I don't really know. But it's like you see on TV. I don't know. Maybe TV dramatizes it more, but it wasn't something that you couldn't have got away from if you had to.

SSD: Well, why did you quit?

NS: Why did I quit building TEDs?

SSD: Well, why did you quit traveling, I guess, is the question?

NS: Well, because the TED stuff was growing in different ways. By the time I was ready to quit building TEDs, different companies were starting to build them. They were getting more – the profits was leaving. You was having to get more competitive with the pricing. I had the opportunity to go to China and open up some factories and companies and stuff like that. When I didn't get to do that, I got kind of disgusted and went a different way.

SSD: How did that fall through? What happened?

NS: Well, I got three brothers, and they should have helped pick up and been part of the family business and decided not to be. I couldn't do it by myself. You couldn't really hire the people, and it was unlimited what could have happened. So, you get disgusted, and you just figure out something else. That's why I started buying land – because I didn't need a whole big group of people to help me. So, what I've learned to do is to take care and not have to have so many people to make money, to make good money. You can do it different ways. That's what I've learned to do.

SSD: Yes, be more independent.

NS: Yes.

SSD: Yes. It's safer in this world. Why did you decide to stop building TEDs?

NS: Well, just because the market was going away, and I worked my way out of it with buying land and just moved to a different – it wasn't going to be as profitable for me as what it had been.

SSD: Yes. I understand that. Well, we're on question ten, and I want to get back to it. But I'd like to ask you about your experience during Hurricane Camille down here. I know you were a kid, but what do you remember about it?

NS: I remember a lot, really. The night, we stayed up on Pass Road, just the wind blew, and all, about like it did for Katrina or whatever. But the next morning, when we came – we went back down towards the Point or whatever; they had shrimp boats washed up in the roads and houses in the roads, kind of the same thing, just like Katrina, but not such a scale that the beach did.

SSD: It was more limited?

NS: Yes.

SSD: So, you were in Biloxi on Pass Road/

NS: Yes.

SSD: Were you aware of trees falling there?

NS: No.

SSD: No?

NS: No. My daddy's cousin or something worked at a dog veterinarian, and he had a house right there he stayed in, and we stayed with them for that. Then after that, our house was all gone. When we went back down there, our house was gone. The machine shop was there. The metal and all – the tin and all was all blowed off the building. So they built the shop back, and then my grandpa built him a house, and my dad built him a house. Because it was like Katrina; there wasn't nobody down here to build stuff, so you built your own stuff back and all that stuff. Then my dad built his shop. He started buying some lots here around the neighborhood. He bought a piece of property across the street from my grandpa's shop and built him a shop there. They moved into that. That's where our shop was after that.

SSD: That was on Point Cadet?

NS: Yeah. It was on Pine Street, 307 Pine Street.

SSD: What about boats? Did they lose the ferry to Ship Island?

NS: Oh, I don't know about that because I was like six or seven then. I just remember everything being – I remember the stink. The smell was just like it was after Katrina, and just it

took a while – and all the debris. It didn't clean up like Katrina did. There wasn't – it took longer, it seemed like. I don't know. I was a little kid, but seemed like it took longer – and just the mud all over and –

SSD: Where did you live while your house was being built?

NS: It was kind of like Katrina. After the storm, at first, for like the first week or so, we had just like a tent that we stretched up, and we lived in a tent. After that, my mom and dad rented a house that was right up there by Keesler, somewhere up by Keesler. We stayed in that house until we got us a trailer. Then they put a trailer on the property down there, and we stayed in the trailer until we got our house built. Then we moved in the trailer.

SSD: What about going back to school? Do you remember? Was your school damaged?

NS: I think I was probably about six. I don't think I started the first grade until a year or so after the storm, so whenever school started, just went back.

SSD: They'd probably caught up on things by then?

NS: Yes.

SSD: Well, what about Katrina? What was Katrina like for you? When did you first hear of it, and how did you prepare for it?

NS: [inaudible] at my mom and dad – just watching the news, we heard about it. The night before, they're building a water tower that's right there across the street from my mom's now, where there's some woods where we used to play. Even before Katrina, I climbed up to the top of it and took some pictures. I just took pictures out of it because I figured it was going to be bad or whatever. And then it seemed like it speeded up, so I called my mom and dad and told them they needed to come up there by me and stay with me, but to come that night rather than the next day. By the next day, I got up about – I don't know. I got up about five o'clock, right about daylight or whatever, and took my four-wheeler and rode down to the Point and looked around. By then, the water had come up a pretty good little ways. I rode around and ended up going back to the house, riding down, watching the water, just seeing how high the water was everywhere is what I was really doing, and just went and watched it all wash away.

SSD: That sounds frightening.

NS: Yes. [laughter] I was just back and forth. I had my machines by then. I had my machines out by my house. My house actually didn't get flooded. Where I was living, it came about three inches from having water in it.

SSD: Wow. What about wind, though?

NS: Yes. The wind blew, and the trees fell down. I watched poles fall down. I took my mama for a ride on the four-wheeler during the storm. We would go, and in between the gusts – when

the wind would gust, you'd just get behind something. Then you'd take and shoot to another spot. We were sitting, waiting for a gust to go by, and my mom told me – she says, "Look at all the bats coming out of the roof of that house." I was looking, and I said, "Mama, that ain't bats. That's shingles flying off of there." She thought it was bats flying.

SSD: Wow. You know, only a native would take a four-wheeler out in a storm like Katrina. [laughter]

NS: Yes. But it's not bad. It wasn't. [laughter] It wasn't.

SSD: [laughter] That's the first time I've ever heard anybody say that about Hurricane Katrina.

NS: It was just something to watch. It was really something.

SSD: But your parents had built back on the Point, so did they lose everything?

NS: Yeah. No, my daddy's house stayed because, after Camille, he built it up on pylons, and he built it – put a lot of steel in it and everything. And it stayed. That stayed. And a building that I had built for our TED company – that stayed. The machine shop building got washed away, got tore down because one of the containers had got up on the top of the roof, and it beat on the roof until it beat the building down.

SSD: Wow.

NS: The other building stayed because it was two-story. You could see where the container floated and hit into it and rolled around and got on the roof of the other one and beat it down. So, I kept my mom and dad's house and rebuilt that for them. And I got that one building down there and the other building I took apart. Some of the machines and all have moved up here, and I got them here, so I can do work.

SSD: So, where you were living, after Katrina, did you lose electricity?

NS: Yes. But I had a generator, and I was prepared for things. I always tried to – because I grew up in all this, so I knew what to happen and what to expect. And that's why I say it wasn't as bad because I knew how to handle myself in it. That's all, you know?

SSD: Now, what about this building during Katrina?

NS: I built this after Katrina.

SSD: Would you expect it to be able to weather a storm like that?

NS: Like Katrina?

SSD: Yes.

NS: Yes. You always build it where it's able to take care of that.

SSD: Did you think about trees when you were putting it up. Do you think you –

NS: Yes, the reason I put it in these trees, though – but if we ever have another Katrina or whatever – it's according which way the wind's going to blow – trees I would be worried about I'd go ahead and cut down prior to it, so they didn't fall on it.

SSD: That's a beautiful oak tree. I'd hate to see it cut down.

NS: No, that one wouldn't have to go. They got a bigger one behind it. But I put it in here amongst these trees for the shade so that it wouldn't be a hot building. A lot of it would be shaded throughout the day.

SSD: So, what is that?

NS: Live oak.

SSD: Live oaks were the ones that weathered the storm better than anything else, didn't they?

NS: Yes.

SSD: Same was true in Hattiesburg.

NS: Really?

SSD: Yes, absolutely. Yes.

NS: Some of the live oaks died up in Hattiesburg?

SSD: Well, only a few went over. I had four huge live oaks that I lost that were, I'm sure, a hundred years old. But I had four in my front yard that an asphalt street went in front, and then my asphalt drive went beside, and I think that helped keep the –

NS: The roots.

SSD: – root balls. The ones that went down were beside a drainage ditch, so their roots were in wet –

NS: That's right. That's exactly right.

SSD: But everything else – I mean pecan trees, pine trees – down. But those big old live oaks were –

NS: Well, they got such a big, broad root base on them; it helps them stand.

SSD: Yes. I know, though, that we lost some along the beach, I guess, to the saltwater [inaudible]

NS: Yes. There's still trees dying from the storm.

SSD: Yes. I hate it. It's so sad. I guess there's nothing to do for them at this point.

NS: Yes. I really don't know why – if it stressed them or – it had to have been stress put on them and stuff that made them die.

SSD: Maybe the salt does some damage, and then it just slowly dies without –

NS: Soaks in it or something.

SSD: – I don't know. But remember, it didn't rain for six weeks, so it wasn't washed off of – no, it was six months, wasn't it?

NS: No, it was probably six weeks.

SSD: So, the salt wasn't washed off.

NS: I don't know. It may have been. I don't remember because I remember there was so much going on that – that was cleanup.

SSD: So, you guys had electricity. You probably had food and water that you'd stockpiled yourself.

NS: Yes.

SSD: Did you have anybody living with you?

NS: Just my daughters, my two daughters, and my wife. My mom and them stayed for a while. That was about it.

SSD: What was it like getting a business running after Katrina?

NS: Being I had already pretty much went into this construction business, it wasn't nothing – it was easy because I had track hoes and moving trees and taking them off of houses. I did good after the storm with being I was in what I was doing.

SSD: How did you manage to keep your equipment safe?

NS: I put it up on the railroad tracks when the water got up higher. I took it and tracked it down the road and put it up – the railroad tracks was high enough to keep it out.

SSD: Was that in Biloxi?

NS: In Biloxi, yes. During the storm, while it was going on, that's whenever I moved some of my equipment because water just kept coming up and up, and so I moved some of it over there up the hill some.

SSD: You're a brave man. [laughter]

NS: [laughter] Yeah. My little brother lived back behind me, and he lives down in a hole. And I got up, went and knocked on the door, and I told him – I said, "(Glen?), you got to get up." I said, "The first time I come through here, the water wasn't that high. You need to start getting your stuff up and getting it back." Then when I went to the Point, and I come back, when I come back, he already had water into his house and all that stuff. My sister lives a street behind that. He had went back there to her house and was kind of visiting with her and didn't even realize what was going on at his own house.

SSD: He did not take your advice?

NS: No, he didn't. He got up and went to my sister's house. So, I went over there and told him. I said, "Water's in your house. Let's go get out whatever it is you're going to be wanting."

SSD: What did you save?

NS: His motorcycle. We rolled the motorcycle up by the railroad tracks, but it ended up going under anyway. I think he moved some of his cars. He was able to move some of his cars. He pretty much lost everything, too, because he was hardheaded.

SSD: Was the house inundated? Was it so low that it was –?

NS: It went over the roof. Yes. They just took it and gutted it, just like everybody else did, and put it back.

SSD: He rebuilt in that low place?

NS: Yeah. Yeah, because it didn't wash it down or it didn't – you know, the wind didn't hurt [inaudible] – just flooded it. The water came up and went down.

SSD: How can you guys afford the insurance now? Is it just killing you?

NS: Yes. Yes. The only thing that I got to put insurance on is my mama's house, which, luckily, all my stuff's paid for, so I don't –

SSD: So, you're not going to insure it?

NS: I'm not. I ain't paying them ridiculous prices.

SSD: Right. You could just about replace it?

NS: Yes. I'll do the same thing I did after the storm because a lot of stuff after the storm – and before the storm, like the machine shop and all that stuff – we didn't have insurance on that, so you just pick up and go again. But that's why you put up, and you don't spend everything you make.

SSD: You're paying your own insurance to yourself?

NS: Yeah, you're able to take care of yourself. That's the way you got to be.

SSD: So, does she have to have flood insurance now?

NS: My mom?

SSD: Yes.

NS: Yes, she would be required to. But it's the same thing – we ain't doing it because, before the storm, she didn't have insurance either, because whoever thought it would be so bad. So we took it and just put her stuff back together and remodeled her house, is what we did, which was well due because it'd been there since Camille. But at least it stayed. At least it was something to build back to.

SSD: Sure. Did you take part in any of the meetings after Katrina? It sounds like you have a lot of experience that other people might be able to use in building back.

NS: No. I let everybody do what they want to do, and I take care of myself. Yeah.

SSD: (laughter) You were pretty busy, weren't you?

NS: Yes.

SSD: Well, is there anything that stands out about Katrina that you'd like to get down on the record?

NS: I think, after the storm, there was too much stuff tore down, too much of Biloxi's history tore down. That's what's making it where Biloxi can't come back now. I think it's hurt it because a lot of the stuff could have been rebuilt and redone that got tore down. It was older stuff, but that's what made Biloxi what it is. That stuff's gone and won't be put back, so Biloxi won't – never be the same.

SSD: So, there was too much; just wipe it all clear instead of –

NS: Wipe it clear and expecting to build it back, and nobody's here to build it back. They wiped too much of it off to build again.

SSD: Yes. I used to ride down from Hattiesburg. I'd see the coast changing. The casinos brought a lot of change. But it wasn't changing so much. I thought, "When I'm really an old woman, it's probably going to be changed a lot, but I'll still have a few things from my childhood." But Katrina just – it's gone.

NS: Ain't nothing left. Biloxi's gone. What Katrina didn't take, they wiped off. Then with the new rules that they've got to build back and everything, ain't nobody can build back, except for the casinos and the condominiums and –

SSD: Because they can't afford to put the house up and –?

NS: Up – and then a lot of the Point was old people. That was the old people that lived there forever. And a lot of them's died since the storm. Depression got and killed a lot of them.

SSD: Stress after the storm too.

NS: Yes. They was depressed. They didn't have the money that they had.

SSD: Or the energy.

NS: Yes. They couldn't physically do it, and it depressed them, and they died. I've seen that a lot. That's pretty much what happened to my daddy because he was older and sick, and he couldn't get up and do like what he'd like to have, and they'd just sit around and spiral down.

SSD: When did you lose him?

NS: It was three years ago, January the 30th, he died.

SSD: Yes? How old was he?

NS: He was sixty-four or sixty-five.

SSD: Oh, that's really young. Yes. That's so sad. I'm sorry.

NS: No, that's all right.

SSD: Well, in your opinion, does bottom trawling harm the ecosystem in the Gulf of Mexico?

NS: I don't think it harms it because it drags it and stirs it up. It needs to be stirred up to keep it from getting stagnant. I don't think they hurt it. I think they need to be more efficient with taking the bycatch out of things. But I don't see where it hurts anything, personally.

SSD: Can you think of any alternatives in addition to TEDs that might help turtles?

NS: No, because that's really the only part that I've been involved in or whatever. They claim that they eat the eggs down in Mexico and all that stuff. That, of course, hurts things more so than the trawlers do.

SSD: Yeah. That's what I would think – even more.

NS: Yes.

SSD: Well, this is interesting – I've only just thought of this – when you watch those films of the hatchlings going into the sea, so many of them don't make it. So if you have someone hatching those little turtles and helping them make it to the sea, then those eggs aren't going to be eaten, so that would be really helpful [inaudible] –

NS: Yeah. That's what they're doing in Texas with a lot of these sea turtles – Texas A&M or whatever – they raise these turtles and tried to see how they eat and all that. I don't really know what all they've done. But a sea turtle – whenever they're in the wild, whenever they're hatched from a beach, they come back to that beach to lay their eggs again and all that stuff. The male turtles – whenever they leave, they don't ever come back to the land.

SSD: They just stay out to sea?

NS: They stay at sea. They don't have a reason to come back. And the only reason the females come back is to lay their eggs. I don't know if – a lot of people don't realize that, I believe. They don't just come to sit on the beach. They only come back to lay their eggs, which is kind of different because they're an air-breathing animal, and to spend their whole lives at sea is kind of backward. [laughter]

SSD: Yes, to be able to come out on land. They're not like dolphins, who can't crawl out on the land.

NS: They got to float around.

SSD: Yes. Do you think it's feasible that shrimp could be caught with other methods besides bottom trawling that wouldn't harm turtles?

NS: No, probably not. That's going to be probably your most efficient way. The only thing more efficient than that is pond raised, which – that's what everybody's doing. That's the way it's going to be. Something else I think is sad that – I still talk to the guys at the Fisheries Service and all from time to time and ask them how the industry's doing and all that stuff. What they're saying that's happening is that people are starting to like these foreign shrimp better than they do naturally caught shrimp. It's because of the taste. They say that the wild shrimp have too much wild taste to them now, which the foreign – the pond-raised shrimp or whatever – they'll put these preservatives on them and all that, so they can ship them around. People don't even realize what real shrimp tastes like anymore; they want this altered shrimp taste. That's kind of sad.

SSD: You know, it's probably not even good for you.

NS: No, it's not. [laughter] It's not.

SSD: They've got antibiotics and preservatives?

NS: Yeah, and what they're feeding the pond-raised shrimp and all that stuff.

SSD: What are they feeding them?

NS: I don't know. Whether it be dog food or it's some kind of something they figure –

SSD: Dead cows –

NS: Yes, something.

SSD: – with mad cow disease, mad shrimp disease.

NS: You would think it would be like a – and I've never eaten them, but I've heard about them – is pond-raised catfish – somebody that feeds dog food to their catfish that their fish tastes like dog food and. Natural's always, to me, has been better.

SSD: Do you know anything about the dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico?

NS: I didn't. I wanted to find out more about that.

SSD: My understanding of it, from the one scientist that I interviewed – Tom McIlwain. I don't know if you know Tom. He's over at the Gulf Coast Research Lab – because of runoff from fertilizer, the algae overgrows and takes up all the oxygen. So wherever that fertilizer gets concentrated runoff from the Mississippi River or other little tributaries [inaudible]

NS: It's just the drifting tide out there that's got that concentrate in it that –

SSD: So then you get too much algae and no oxygen.

NS: Yes, I understand.

SSD: Can you think of any lessons that have been learned from using the TEDs?

NS: That they don't have to kill all that bycatch to get the shrimp – to get what they want. We're smarter than that. And we can do better than that. That's what I think that they should have learned or everybody should learn.

SSD: Well, then the last question that I'll ask you – is there anything you'd like to put on the record that we haven't talked about?

NS: No.

SSD: Can't think of anything? All right. Well, I want to say thank you so much for taking time out from your busy schedule and letting me come to your home – a complete stranger. [laughter]

NS: Yes, that's all right. I appreciate you all wanting to know.

SSD: So yeah, thanks a bunch.

NS: You're welcome. Thank you.

SSD: I'm going to go ahead and turn this off.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Molly Graham 9/30/2021