

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Midge and Milton Zirlott Oral History
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Michael Stieber: If you would just state your name, where you're from, where you live now, and how long you've been here.

Milton Zirlott: My name is Milton Zirlott. I was born in Bayou La Batre, Alabama. I've lived in the Fowl River area all my life. You take it.

Rosalie Zirlott: Okay. My name is Midge Zirlott. I was born in Strathmore, California and was married in the year of [19]46, moved to Alabama, lived in the same place, sixty-two years.

MS: How has your family been involved in the seafood industry in Bayou La Batre over the years?

MZ: Yes. Most of my family has been in seafood. My grandfather and my father before me was in seafood also, in boat building. Then I followed my father with it. Then my son – both sons have been into it. Both daughters married people who were in the seafood business but not in it now, have other types of work. Can you have anything to say about it?

RZ: Well, one son is a tugboat captain now. The other son works for the environmental business. A grandson is still in the – what type of business is Chad in?

MS: He's in – well, it's just (our?) business, still with –

RZ: Still with boats.

MZ: Still boat work.

MS: What type of role did your grandfather and father play in the seafood business? What was their trade?

MZ: My grandfather was mostly an oysterman. My father, he took up oystering and shrimping mostly. Back in my younger days, and I reckon my father's too, the seafood was mostly seasonal. He had crab season, oyster season, shrimp season, and some people follow fish. It was kind of seasonal. But nowadays, deepwater shrimping is year-round. Bay shrimping is still seasonal. Some of them do try to follow it all year, but it's really not worth it. They do have closed times. So, they have to not do it, find something else at that time. I think they've been fortunate enough to get to plant oyster shells, plant oysters to refurbish the oyster reefs. That's helped them quite a bit. Now, do you have something to say?

RZ: Just that your grandfather, instead of – the type of power he had was sail. His grandfather on the other side of his family was a net man, one of the first net men.

MS: In Bayou La Batre?

RZ: In Bayou La Batre.

MS: Okay. Can you talk about his other grandfather again?

RZ: I thought it was interesting that his grandfather, the power he used was sail, and he'd take his catch to Mobile.

MS: What type of refrigeration? How has that changed over the years? What type were you using?

MZ: We come to freezing ours, IQF – it's frozen cold water. To start off with, it was ice. That was my time. Now, my father – at the time of my grandfather was – never done no [inaudible]. But it came out after his time. But I imagine it was hard for him to get ice. They did have an ice plant in Bayou La Batre. I don't know what year it was put there. But then there are bigger boats with ice. They'd have insulated holes, so they could keep the ice for, probably 15 days is the most you do. Then we'll come out with IQF freezing. That made quite a bit of difference in fishing. You could keep amiss, well, for quite a while. You could come in on a trip and still go back on another trip if you wanted to. But I'd say a month is about as long as they would keep them. But some of the boats now are going out for at least two months. Fuel cost is so high; they just try to make longer trips to have just – not have extra running time.

MS: You mentioned someone in your family was a boat builder. What type of boats did they build?

MZ: My father was a boat builder. He started out in his younger days that he had knowledge of carpentry work. A lot of people would build their own boats. But they would get them started, and there was a lot of things about them they couldn't do. My father was always called in on it – the job. Maybe there's just one certain plank they couldn't get in. They'd try to build a boat that they'd get to the one plank, and they had to get him. One was garboard strake, they called it. That was the plank that fit next to the keel. Then as time went by, when he started (to row?), well, he started a business of building boats. He built snapper boats, built some party boats, built quite a few shrimp boats, and helped on a lot of oyster boats. But most oystermen start off building their own boats, like my grandfather was – he had a little knowledge of boat building too. He built his last oyster boat, I think, he was – might have been up in his eighties when he – late seventies or maybe early eighties when he built his last boat. Then my father did teach boat building. He helped the Landrys get started with a boatyard. My dad died in [19]74. They had two boats under construction.

RZ: Was it [19]74?

MZ: [19]64. Correct that. Their boats were left for me to finish up. He did have carpenters. A few carpenters stayed with me, and we finished up. One was a snapper boat, went to Texas. One was a local boat, went to Bayou La Batre. I think the one boat is still operating out of Bayou La Batre. But the Texas boat, I don't know anything about it.

MS: What was the name of the company?

MZ: Zirlott Boat Works, and then somebody else took the same name later on and built boats. They learned under my Dad.

MS: How many boats did you operate or own at one time during your shrimping days?

MZ: I owned four at one time. I just started (filling?) my fleet a little bit at a time. Then things got a little bit tighter, and I started decreasing the fleet. I got down to one boat. Then I turned around and built another boat afterwards. Then fuel prices got up so heavy, and Midge was keeping me from getting on the boat just as much as I need to. So, I just wound up selling.

MS: Can we go back to where you were talking about, you had four boats, and the fuel prices got high?

MZ: Okay. I did have four boats at one time. Then I started decreasing. Then I got down to one boat. Things kind of got a little bit better, and I was thinking about retiring. I built another boat. I thought I could sail my boats and be alright with retirement. But things did turn around pretty bad. I had to take quite a loss on the boats. The fuel prices got up so high, and the fuel – or the shrimp prices had dropped due to imported shrimp. But I was able to get rid of my boats. I did finance one of them, and that's not working out too good for me. I thought at the time I had done it, it would be fine. But fuel prices are hurting [inaudible] boat.

MS: So, where did you get your equipment, such as nets and fuel and ice?

MZ: We bought most of our nets in Bayou La Batre when we were operating out of there. We do operate out of different places. My boat stayed on the East Coast quite a bit, and we'd buy some supplies over there, buy a few. We still bought our nets from Bayou La Batre though. I kind of favor nets – Sprinkles. I kind of liked his nets. But it's actually a design that my son had – son made his own nets for a short while. Then Stevie Sprinkles picked it up, started building to suit us. But we did some business with other people. Now, my supplies was mostly with Tide Marine. I'd done a little bit with Marshall Marine, [inaudible]. I just tried to scatter my business around.

MS: Did you do your own repairs?

MZ: Repairs was done – I started using Jemison Marine. He had a lift to lift the boats and put them where you – in a place to work on them. Did do a lot of business with Landry Shipyard, but his yard was – wasn't capable of handling larger boats. As long as I had wooden boats, I always went back to Landry. When I got steel boats, I brought them back a few times. The smaller steel boats he could handle. Then we got the bigger boats, his shipyard wouldn't handle it. So, that's what I went to Jemison.

MS: When you went out shrimping – a lot of people are going out at nighttime now – were you going out at night, or was this daytime?

MZ: Well, when we went out there, we were going to be out there anywhere from fifteen to thirty days. So, we were going to be out there night and day. Whenever the shrimps are running into the bay, sometimes it was day and night. So, we'd fish around the clock. Sometimes it wouldn't be – either it's nighttime wouldn't be good enough, or the daytime wouldn't be good

enough. Two different types of shrimp. One was mostly daytime shrimp. One was mostly nighttime. But once in a great while, they would catch day and night if the weather had been real bad, and it's got the water stirred up. For white shrimp, if the water got muddy, well, it – now, the brown shrimp, I'd take it back. Brown shrimp, we could catch in daytime if the water got muddy. Then the white shrimp, it – I don't know what made the difference with them. Sometimes it's daytime. Sometimes it's night. Sometimes it'd be both.

MS: Who did you sell your shrimp to?

MZ: Some of them – there was a young fellow in Bayou La Batre that had started up later years, was Darrell Graham. I sold most of my shrimp to him. But to start with, there's – when I first got my own boat, I reckon I started off with a guy by the name of (Ramus?). He had come from Patterson, Louisiana and built a place in Bayou La Batre. But it's no longer there. Then I went to a Graham, which was this young fellow's father, and sold to him. Well, sold to Clark Seafood and –

RZ: Sold to Dickinson.

MZ: Yes. There's Dickson Seafood, yes, sold them – sold to them for quite a few years.

MS: Are those decisions mostly for personal reasons or for more economic reasons?

MZ: No, just a lot of times, one might have a little bit better price than the other one, and you'd go for the better price. But if it was the same, we'd pretty much stick to one person. But no, I wouldn't say personal reason but just –

MS: I've heard in Mississippi, there's actually been formation of some seafood unions that set prices. Has that ever taken place here?

MZ: I didn't quite understand the question.

MS: In Mississippi, I've heard of seafood unions that set the prices. They've been created to set the prices of the seafood brought in. Has that ever happened here, of any formation of a union to set prices?

MZ: Well, they do have different set prices. But I think that would probably be Biloxi, Mississippi. The biggest part of the Biloxi fishermen are Vietnamese nowadays. All the old-timers have left. There might be a few boats but not many other American fishermen in Biloxi.

MS: What do you see are some of the greatest technological advances for the seafood industry over the years?

MZ: I don't exactly know how to answer that question [laughter].

RZ: Like plants?

MZ: What went fast?

RZ: Yes.

MZ: Oh, yes. There's quite a few things. We have – started out we didn't even have radio aboard our boat, two-way radios. We never had automatic pilots. My father didn't have a depth recorder. It would give you soundings on the bottom, give you the depth water, keep you a little safer. Radars came out. TVs come on the boat, and later, satellite TVs come on them. It's sure been a lot of improvements over the years. We started out pulling one net. Now they're pulling four nets. There's just quite a bit of difference. I think the first shrimp, I might have pulled the nets in by hand. Have rope tied to the doors and then pulled that in, picked the doors up and put them on deck and pulled the nets up and then take the tail back of the net, which had everything in it, bring it up to the side of the boat, and put it in a rack and take a dip net and dip the shrimp out on deck. That was where they started off.

RZ: Your father would hold the string to feel the shrimp when they hit the net.

MZ: Yes. That was only done in shallow water.

RZ: Yes.

MZ: Anything more than 15-foot of water, it didn't work too good. But you test net. You'd put a string on it. When the shrimp hit that net, you could feel the vibration in that string. That way, they didn't have to pull the net up all the time and check it to see what was going on, whether you had [inaudible], or you didn't. Then I started the fishing depot work. But I quit that. I don't know if anybody's doing it anymore.

MS: How has the working waterfront changed over time in Bayou La Batre?

MZ: The waterfront, you said?

MS: Yes.

MZ: Yes. They have their group. So, we go to their meetings with the waterfront. I think it's a – they're a pretty good organization. Bayou La Batre does need something besides condos in it. If we sell all the land to go to condos, and then they wouldn't have no land for business. They do need the waterfront, the working waterfront.

RZ: Well, Milton, don't they help the oystermen, like with the meetings that they have? They've got grants?

MZ: Well, that's not through the working waterfront, though.

RZ: Oh, that's not. Okay.

MS: Where the boats are docked now, is that pretty much the same? Or has that changed?

MZ: It's changed over the years, the dock has. I think Bayou La Batre has got less docked than it had at one time. Normal way was either – was a fuel dock would have extra dock. You could buy your fuel, and they give – you'd have a place to tie your boat and a place you unloaded to, you sold your catch. That was one of your reasons you'd fuel her up. One person – whoever had the best dock to tie it in and the same price, you'd go to him. But they'd have docking space. That's kind of phasing out a little bit in the bayou now. If they don't preserve some of this, there won't be any docking. The place I used to unload to has leased half of his property to a shipyard, (large?) shipyard. That's good in a way because it's working people. There isn't a lot of work going on now. But it's still – certain boats don't have no place to dock. They're going to have to go somewhere else.

MS: Is there any place else for them to go find that?

MZ: I don't know where they'd go [laughter]. Dog River wouldn't have no docking space for that. Fowler River don't have none for the big boats. Pascagoula could possibly have some. I imagine Biloxi would have a lot of docking right now, but I don't know if anybody would want to make that drive, 60 miles to go to his boat.

MS: Maybe talk about what was like in Bayou La Batre in its heyday.

MZ: Bayou La Batre was, I reckon, one of the top places at one time. It had plenty of docking space. The people were reasonably friendly when strange boats would come in. Just about anything you want for a boat would be there. I know I have one in other places and not find that. Florida was one of our worst, I reckon. You go to the east coast of Florida, and you had a pretty good job to find supplies you wanted. A lot of times you'd have to get them sent from home or drive home and pick them up. But when you come into Bayou La Batre, you had nice supply houses, had nice docking place, and had restaurants that people could go to. They didn't have much in line of hotels until later. But they do have a fairly nice hotel right now that helps a lot. But most times, when a person comes here in the Bayou, they stay on the boat anyway.

RZ: In the summertime, when the boys, young boys, were out of school, the boats would take a fish boy, and what the fish boy got was the fish money. It taught them the business a little bit because they'd do just about everything.

MZ: It wasn't a lot of money they would get, but it would keep them out of a lot of trouble. One of them would get on a boat and spend a whole summer. He would usually have enough money to buy some type of automobile to drive around. A lot of them would buy pretty nice cars with their fish money. I know that the boys I took over the time was pretty happy with what they got. They had no complaints. They would work pretty good. They'd learn a lot. Some of them would follow up the trade, and some would go somewhere else. I had one boy that worked with me. He always kept a fairly nice car. But he got out of school. I put him on a full share. But he took a job in the Fire Department. I think he stayed there until he retired. But I never thought he would leave fishing. He acted like he liked it.

MS: Who worked on your boats? Was it mostly family?

MZ: A lot of times, family and then just most anybody. I'd have – most of my crews would be young men. Some of them I had to just teach the fish and tail. Some become good captains afterwards and own their own boats. Some would not do too well, just the way they spent their money, I reckon. Some of them would just spend it all before they went back out. But I reckon you find that with any kind of job.

MS: What were some of the greatest obstacles that you ran into, or people are running into now in the shrimping industry in Bayou La Batre?

MZ: Just like what happened to you on –

RZ: What problems you had.

MZ: Yes. One boat in Bayou La Batre – I know you probably heard about it – lost a man. It's in a certain business. That hadn't happened too many times in my lifetime. But I know it's terrible for the people it's happened to, to lose this boy, not knowing when he got overboard and why or anything about it. But we've had storms come through, and it's – would make it pretty hard on everybody for a while. They just change it, fish it up, would slow down our supply houses. They would have quite a bit of loss. It would be a little while getting back to work. I think Katrina was our worst in my lifetime. It didn't do the most damage. It gave us the most water on the coastline. That's what does you damage.

RZ: Then you've got fuel now, fuel and –

MZ: Yes, fuel is –

RZ: – and the price of shrimp is down, along with the fuel being higher.

MS: You spoke earlier that you had built several boats. Where did you learn the trade of building boats?

MZ: Well, I learned what I know about it from my father, and I believe I picked up some of this knowledge from Pascagoula, Mississippi. A great uncle had a boat built over there. I believe he went to help the shipyard. That's when he picked up drafting boats, learning how to draw the boat out. At that time, they built them by just starting a boat, whatever way it looked. What they got through is the way it turned out. Then I learned quite a bit from my father as a kid helping him. He built quite a few boats, mostly summertime. He'd (sharpen the rock?), wintertime, when season was open. At that time, he had a 42-foot boat of his own. It didn't go a real long distance with it. But sometimes would go to Louisiana. That's about as far as we went.

MS: How did having the boat-building knowledge help your captaining and shrimping?

MZ: See, how it helped me?

MS: Did it give you a better familiarization with the boat in general?

MZ: I reckon helping build boats has given me a knowledge of boats, even when I had my steel hulls built, and someone else built them. The last two steel hulls I had, I had Mickey Johnson built one, and then Jemison Shipyard built the other one. But I was with them throughout the boat [inaudible]. I'd be all over the boat when they were building them.

RZ: With the boat with Jemison, you wanted a slight change.

MZ: Yes. Jemison, at the time, couldn't get nobody to make this change. He had a model of a 24-foot boat or a 26-foot width. I wanted a 25. He didn't have no time – no draftsman had the time. They were all tied up at the time. So, I tell them that was no problem. We'd just go ahead and lay that boat out ourselves. I had no knowledge of the computer, but he did. He got on the computer, and we started working with it. So, I wound up laying that boat out to 25 feet instead of 20. But I've seen my dad do that work and had an idea of how to do it.

MS: Are your children continuing in the seafood industry?

MZ: I don't have any immediate family in the seafood business now. I do have one grandson that just kind of plays around at it a little bit. He's the one that moves trailers. When he's got time, he's got a small boat that he shrimps a little bit with. Then he does some microfishing. He's got a permit that he can microfish with. It's probably just a little bit in his blood. The one son, he's a sports fisherman. So, he gets to do his boat work.

RZ: The other children – we do have some other grandsons who are with boats but not shrimping.

MZ: We've got one supposed to leave out Sundays on a dive boat, where they take divers out to dive for pipelines and check the footing on their wells.

MS: Just in Bayou La Batre in general, would you say the tradition of learning a trade and passing it down through the family is continuing, or it's not continuing?

MZ: Not just a terrible lot, I don't believe. Some, but most of them are falling old businesses. It's still boat work, but they – it's more steady, I reckon. Personally, I don't really see how the shrimp fish and the large boats are going to continue if the fuel price is \$3 a gallon. They can survive, but it's not – it's going to be hard. But it gets to \$4 – and it has been to \$4 – that I just don't see no way they'll just keep operating large boats. But I do have hopes of something changing in that line. I feel, right now, it's taking a little bit of a drop. I hope it's not something temporary. I hope it'll just keep going down.

MS: What would some of those changes be that could improve the fishing?

MZ: To make the fuel prices –

MS: Would moving back to smaller boats be more economic?

MZ: Some of the larger boats are cutting back. Like they pulled 460-foot nets, and the doors that spread the nets would be somewhat up to 12-foot and better. They're cutting back to 10-foot doors and cutting their nets back to 50- and 55-foot. Their production might be a little bit down, but their fuel comes way down. They can take a little less rap and quite a bit less fuel and make the difference. Running from place to place, they learn to slow down the engines. That's helping a little bit. It'll have a lot to do with seasons too. A lot less boats out there now. Maybe the seasons will be better. But no matter how many boats is out there, we have good seasons and bad seasons. I reckon it's the same way as farming, to have good crops and bad crops. Shrimping is the same way. I know in my time I've seen a lot of bad years. I've seen some real good years.

MS: Could you speak a little bit about romance with the sea and being connected so closely to the sea and what that feeling is like, the freedom it brings?

MZ: Yes, it does bring freedom. There's just something about it. Once you do it, you – seems like that's what you want to do. I was 18 years old when I went into service. I went through training like anybody else. I went overseas and wound up in Okinawa. I was in the branch of Seabees. There was one time, they picked me to put on a small tugboat, a tugboat operator. I reckoned, some way or another, I showed them that I had love for the sea. I was happy with my job as a – working on the water, and the chief in charge was happy with me, seemed like. Then a typhoon came out. We lost everything. We were doing was building a wharf for the ships to come into. We were kind of building it at sea. Then a group on the beach was making a fill to reach the wharf. When the typhon came out and then the war got over, and they didn't – must have not needed a wharf. So, they discontinued it. So, I was sent off into another outfit which didn't have any boats. The nearest thing I'd come to it is rigging steel, handling cables, and that was the nearest I'd come back to the type of work I'd done. When I came home from the war, I stayed home just a short while, discharged, 11th of June. 23rd of June, I was in California, getting married. I think we would have put that off, but so much space between the two of us, we had to do it. We just kind of speeded it up, got married a little younger than we wanted to. She was 19, and I was 20. But I was anxious just to get back to the sea, just had a love for it.

RZ: As a wife of a fisherman, it was all right too. Because he would go to different parts, like maybe Key West or Lake Charles, and I'd go down where he was at, take some children with me together. So, that was all right.

MS: Did you ever accompany him?

RZ: Only one time I went out of Key West with him for a couple of weeks. But it was Easter. Our daughter was married and had some children. So, we called her to come down. We all went out while the crews went home for Easter. So, we all went out fishing. I stayed a little bit longer. But it was nice. It was a good life.

MS: In the past, how did the families in Bayou La Batre who were in the seafood industry relate to each other?

MZ: It was pretty good. The fishermen were always friendly with one another. A lot of times,

we'd work nighttime and anchor up in the day. If the weather was smooth enough, you'd almost see two boats tied together, fishing with one another. They'd have coffee or something cross from one boat to the other. They're always pretty much willing to help the other boat. One fellow I'd seen not too long ago reminded me of something that happened. He said he was out on a real small boat, and it broke down. He said the weather was real bad. He was quite worried about it. It was the first boat he owned. He said he saw that boat coming towards him and said that boat looked like a ship coming towards you. It was only 57-foot long. I reckon I thought it was a ship too. Because I took him in tow and brought him to Bayou La Batre, and then he says I turned back and went on back to sea. So, I must have thought it was a ship myself. But while I was working in Okinawa, I told a crew on a boat with me, I said, "I see a boat broke down." He said, "How do you know that boat broke down?" I said, "I just know." I said, "I can tell by the way it's drifting, it's broken down." So, I headed towards you. There's a bunch of officers on a smaller boat that was going to go ashore, I reckon. I asked them if they had a problem. They said, "Yes, we broke down. So, would you take us to our ship?" So, I did. I towed them to the ship and got them tied up. Then I went on my way. But the crew with me just couldn't understand that I knew the boat was broke down. But I could tell by the way it was drifting in the sea. It was no heavy sea, but the little boat was rocking pretty much. I know they wouldn't let it just stay that way, rocking all the time. But there's just something about the sea that keeps you there. But for the boys that's got to struggle so hard nowadays, it can't be as much fun as it was. I think my life was real good. We've had good relations. Yes, oystering had been in early years when I worked seasonal, you know, but worked mostly white shrimps, seasonal. When we first got married, there was no sale for brown shrimp. Nobody would buy them. They thought there was something wrong with them. It's a different color. Then they hit the pink shrimp off Key West, Florida and worked up a sale. Then people started catching brown shrimp here. That's when we started going deeper into the gulf. Because white shrimp would only go out so far. Right off the mouth of the Mississippi River, they might get out pretty deep. But that's normally about 60 feet of water, about average for white shrimp. But there are places, they get just a little bit deeper.

MS: Growing up and going out to sea, were there certain stories that were told that had been passed on?

MZ: Well, I reckon some stories. Everybody had some kind of tale, most of them was big catches.

RZ: But they did catch a lot of shrimp, didn't they?

MZ: Yes, they did back then. One uncle was telling me that they would fish a channel. Sometimes a shrimp would get right on the bank of the channel where they were (tapered?). He said he was out with another uncle, and the owner of the boat didn't go out that way. He got his brother to take it out that day. He said he was dragging that channel and said he had pulled a test net and had a real good catch at it. Made another pull and real good catch. The one uncle told the other one, says, "I believe we better pick up." Says, "We're going to have more than we can get." He said, "No, we just get one more half a (beacon?) drag." So, he was watching his cables and said, all at once, his cables crossed one another. The nethead feels so full during the bank of that channel, it rolled down into the deep part of the channel. They lost the biggest part of their

catch. But they did come out with a good day's work out of this, just what the tail bag would hold.

MS: How do you see cultural and labor relations in the past different from today? Is it the same, or is it a little bit different?

MZ: Relations between the fishermen?

MS: Between the fishermen, families.

MZ: I would say pretty much like it was. I know it's got to be a little bit hard on them. But I believe the relation is – the families, I believe, do very well. The men, they're still pretty much like they were. I go to Hardee's once in a while and get with some of the men. They'd meet early morning. Most of them are not fishermen now, but they were at one time. They talk about different things that happened.

MS: I'm curious about the women. Because the women of the fishermen, they were home and provided for the home and the children. The men may be gone for long periods of time. What kind of a relationship with the community and other fishermen, with wives, did you find?

MZ: You can tell that [laughter].

RZ: Well, it was hard to get used to, to start with.

MZ: Thought you weren't used to it.

RZ: Yes. You would think, you know, at the end of a day, your husband's supposed to be coming home. So, you have to get used to this. Then as time passes, you have children. To begin with, Milton would be gone maybe two weeks, which isn't too bad when you have four children to take care of. Then it was always nice to have him come home. You get used to doing things like taking care of changing the oil in the car and things like that, that you would expect him to do if he was home all the time. It really wasn't that bad. It was – after you sort of get used to it, it was all right. It was fine. We had children, and that made a difference too. We stayed busy with – Milton's parents lived close. His brother lived close, with children. He was fishing too. So, it was a good life. It's nice when your husband's happy with what he does, too.

MZ: Yes, we never had that problem. But some other man and wife, the fellow would get off on the boat and be home all the time. Him and his wife would divorce after a short while. They just couldn't take being together. But we never had that problem at all.

MS: After these long trips, if you were out to sea for a while, when you came home, how long would you be home before you went out again?

MZ: It varied. It was no certain time. With me, I would take off more time when the season was slack, when it was harder to make a trip. I'd come in, and I'd take off a little bit more time. If I had work to do on my boats, I'd do that. Then when the fishing was good, if I made real

good trips, just as soon as we could get supplied up and get back out, then that's – we'd go. That was kind of hard to get crews out. They want to spend their money if they made a good trip. If they didn't make any money the trip before, [inaudible], they wanted to go right back out.

RZ: When I would cook when he came home, he always liked anything I cooked. Because he was used to these young boys cooking for him. A lot of them didn't know how – what to cook, you know, or how to cook.

MS: Yes. What type of food were you eating out there?

MZ: I've had some good cooks. I had several on a boat that were excellent cooks. Then I've had some that didn't know nothing about cooking, I mean, absolutely nothing.

RZ: You'd have to tell them what to cook and how to cook it.

MZ: I never cooked myself, but I reckon I've taught many a boy how to cook. I sure didn't know much about cooking, and I didn't like cooking. Well, I had other things to do on a boat. I didn't want a cook's job. So, they would have to learn. My son, when he worked on our boats, they'd take turns cooking. Someone asked him one day, "Where did you learn how to cook so good?" He said, "Well, my father taught me." But his father don't know how to cook.

MS: What do you hope for your grandkids? What do you hope for them as far as the fishing industry or a career in this area?

MZ: I'll tell you, in shrimp fishing, I don't have a lot of hope for them. I would advise them right now to do something else.

RZ: You asked a question a little while ago about me going on the boats. Well, after Milton retired, he still wanted to get back on the water. So, he got himself a small boat. How long – how big was that boat?

MZ: It was thirty-seven-foot.

RZ: Thirty-seven -foot.

MZ: It was probably the boat you'd seen up the river.

RZ: But anyway, he'd take his grandsons with him. Well, they got a little older, and they went in different directions. So, I started shrimping with him. We'd shrimp just out here. He'd come in, and I'd take the shrimp down and sell them. He'd work on his boat a little bit. But anyway, when I reached the age of 70, I decided I'd had enough shrimping. I quit on him. The poor guy had to sell his boat.

MZ: Yes. I still kind of miss it. I watch it go by once in a while and think, well, I wouldn't mind going on that boat.

RZ: Another time, he went out – Milton went out for Russell Steiner. Russell had a group of – what was it, environmentalists, that – when you went out with him?

MZ: Oh, we had National Fishery group.

RZ: Oh, okay.

MZ: Then we had some Japanese that was buying a boat from a certain hand. The boat was equipped to work 2400 feet of water. We actually went out and dropped nets down in 2500 feet. There wasn't too much interest in that depth of water. We had quite a few red crabs, but that's the only thing of any value. But what they caught in that certain area was scarlet shrimp. It was a real bright red shrimp and had a big demand for them in Europe. They would send them over there.

RZ: But this happened when Milton was a little older. So, he asked a young boy to go to help him. Russell asked him how much he wanted when he got in. Milton told him, "I enjoyed it so much; I don't want you to pay me anything." He said, "Pay that boy something."

MZ: It was just a real interesting trip to go out and put that sail in that deep a water. I had a boat. It was fishing as deep as 1500 feet. He was catching royal red shrimp. But fishing was an interesting life.

MS: It sounds to me like you had a great time.

MZ: Yes. I wouldn't want to take nobody away from it, but I don't – I really wouldn't encourage it.

MS: What's that now? Can you say that completely?

MZ: Yes. I said I wouldn't want to take nobody away from the fishing, but I wouldn't want to encourage it. I'm glad most of my family is doing something else.

MS: I wouldn't know about royal reds. Why aren't they being shipped all over the world?

MZ: I don't know.

RZ: How great would –

MZ: They just never marketed. Do you know, I think it was the very first time they rigged up for it and went out and caught the royal reds and brought them back, and they sold them cheaper. I told them, "That's a mistake." I said, "You're making a mistake." I said, "It's going to cost more money to catch them. They're harder to get. You need to raise the price and let the people know they're getting something special." I believe they're still selling down (Row Ridge?) right now.

RZ: But aren't they hard to catch? Doesn't the tide run so hard?

MZ: The tide's bad to work. Sometimes you've got to pull your motor wide open to catch them. You can't work – you've got to work with the tide. Because you can't get up enough speed against the tide to keep your nets where they won't twist up or bulk up. It's just got its handicaps. But sometimes the shrimps are plentiful. Now, one boat I just sold, financed it, so it had done a little bit of that last trip – well, done quite a bit of it. It would have been a real good trip. He got a buyer. When he got in, he got the shrimp on a truck to ship them. It was 40 cents a pound cheaper than what he had left for. So, he had to wind up looking for a buyer for himself.

MS: But the trick is that they're really deep too, right?

MZ: They're deep. 1200 feet of water is about normal. You might get a little shallower. They must move a good bit because they don't stay in one place too long. It might just be with the weather, if a person could learn just exactly when to go.

RZ: Milton, didn't one man lose his boat in that area?

MZ: Oh, he did, Roy [inaudible]. Let's see, he got his nets tangled up. No, he got a net in the wheel. What it was, he really wasn't equipped to do it. Instead of pulling four nets, he'd done two nets. They have a separator called a dummy door in the middle. So, he had done that dummy door and put it on deck and put one of his nets on deck. The sea was a little bit bad.

[end of transcript]