

CORKY HIRE
Retired Shrimper – Biloxi, MS

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Interviewer: Francis Lam
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Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Project: Ethnicity in the Seafood Industry on the Mississippi Gulf Coast

[Begin Corky Hire Interview]

00:00:02

Francis Lam: This is Francis Lam for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Monday, July 28, 2008. I'm with Corky Hire, at the Slavonian Lodge in Biloxi, Mississippi. We're going to be talking about his days growing up in Biloxi and shrimping in the Gulf. Corky would you please state your name, your age, and your occupation?

00:00:20

Corky Hire: Nick Hire, 126 Cedar Street, Biloxi, Mississippi born *[Laughs]* 1921—tenth day, second month—I mean tenth month, second day, 1921. I'm 86 years old.

00:00:38

FL: You don't look a day over 82 Corky. You're looking great. Corky where—you were born in Biloxi?

00:00:47

CH: I was born in the house I'm living in now—the house I'm living in now. Well it's a cottage; it was a house—I was born in the house 86 years ago.

00:00:57

FL: Did you have siblings?

00:01:00

CH: Two girls—Lisa and Rita Ann and I married a girl from Arkansas, Laurie Schmidt and married for 53 years.

00:01:14

FL: And where did your family come from?

00:01:20

CH: They call it Bobovisca in Yugoslavian and Croatian, my mama and daddy come from the same place. Oh hell, I don't even remember when. But I know she said that he was—he was about 27 years old when they got married and I'm the baby of—there was six in the family—two girls; they died before I was born and four brothers. They're all gone now; I'm the only one survived.

00:01:52

FL: But your mother and father came themselves? They—they didn't—it wasn't—?

00:01:56

CH: They came separate. My daddy—my daddy come on a ship. He stopped in Canada and they told him if he jumped ship—it was Gold Rush Days and then I don't remember what year now; I forgot. But they told him if he jumped ship they'd shoot him because the Gold Rushing you know and—. He come through—I think he went through Ellis Island and my—my mama came—her sister came first and was married to a Maronivitch and he sent for her and they met down here and got married—got married here in Biloxi.

00:02:35

FL: And have you ever been to where they came from?

00:02:38

CH: Huh?

00:02:38

FL: Have you ever visited where they came from?

00:02:40

CH: No; never have—never have been to Yugoslavia. In fact, I ain't never been to Europe. I've been all over the Pacific, in World War II. Fought in the Solomon Islands and—and my main—my main invasion was Bougainville, you know, in World War II.

00:03:05

FL: But growing up in the neighborhood where you did, how would you describe that neighborhood? Were there a lot of Croatian families living there at the time?

00:03:14

CH: Yeah, yeah it was a lot of Croatians. Well you know, when the foreigners come they all try to get together and a lot of French and a few Polish people—a lot of Frenchmen and a few Polish people with a lot of Slavish, a lot of Slavish. That's where the lodge started from.

00:03:32

FL: And at that time did you remember—or could you describe growing up in that sort of community? Would those families get together? Obviously the families got together a lot but what language would they speak? What languages do you speak? Were there traditions that they would try to uphold together?

00:03:48

CH: Well my family you know—well at home, we all spoke Slavish you know. I guess—the French people the same way; they came—most of them came from Louisiana—that bunch; the Polish from Pollock. Well they all came down to kind of to the seafood industry—fish and you know, shrimp and oysters and we got along pretty good. We fought like kids you know; kids fight—they all fight, all kids fight and got along pretty good—really did, among the neighborhood. Everybody knew everybody. I knew everybody at one time in Back Bay Biloxi; we worked for Back Bay or Southern Shell, Oysters and Shrimp and we worked for Sea Coast Packing Company on the east end of Biloxi, called Point Cadet, and nothing but shell roads then—nothing was paved. The trees was in the middle—all shade trees and the houses were built all three or four feet above ground.

00:04:57

FL: Well did you—I'm sorry if I misunderstood you; were you suggesting that the different communities like the—the French people worked in a particular factory and—and the Slavic people worked in another factory or—?

00:04:57

CH: No, no, no; no, no, no they got along fine—no, no. No, no; everybody worked together—even the Polish or French. It wasn't too many blacks, but mostly French and the Slavish people. They all worked together. They worked you know side-by-side. It wasn't no—I'd kid one another; there wasn't too much trouble really.

00:05:34

FL: How did—how did they all communicate with one another?

00:05:37

CH: Hell, everybody spoke—tried to speak English. You—you'll get along, you know. You meet a stranger you'll gradually communicate one way or the other. So we started—we all started talking and I guess they had to start speaking English, my mama and my daddy because they couldn't speak nothing but Slavish. And the French people was the same, and as the kids grew up you know we all talked—well probably most of us went to St. Michael's School and plenty of them went to Howard too. But we all got along great I think—I thought so anyway.

00:06:19

FL: Can you—but you said you grew up speaking Slavish?

00:06:23

CH: Slavish yeah.

00:06:24

FL: Do you still speak that language now?

00:06:27

CH: I can't twist my tongue no more. It's been a long time since my mama died so I don't use it, you know. Cuss words—we can cuss but that's about it. Once in a while you'll hear it around here once in a while you know—[inaudible] where you come from or Slava means bad and—and all that.

00:06:49

FL: But then how is that neighborhood and you—you still live in the house you grew up in you said.

00:06:52

CH: Well no, it's a cottage now. The house I grew up, Katrina took it. Yeah, it's gone. That's clean. You've seen—you've been down there, you took a ride; there's nothing.

00:07:02

FL: But even before the storm how—how had that neighborhood changed over the course of time? Certainly after the storm the—the change was very sudden but even before the storm from when you were growing up, how did that neighborhood change?

00:07:17

CH: Well it didn't change too much really. It looked like you know everybody went—everybody was fishing and went—went out on the boats, the husbands, and the women worked in the canneries. Well, my mother never did; she always had a bad leg, so she didn't work in the

cannery too much. But she fed four growing boys. And I guess we liked to eat, you know. She stayed home and cooked and my daddy—and I didn't want to go to school no more and my oldest brother said if you don't want to go to school you're not going to retire. You're not going to run the streets. Papa is going to retire. He worked long enough, so I took his place on the shrimp boat.

00:08:04

FL: I definitely want to get to your experience on the shrimp boat in a little but let me—let's talk—can you talk a little bit about your mother and about the food she cooked? Were there—were there dishes you remember; do you remember them being traditional Croatian dishes?

00:08:18

CH: Yeah, and she made all them Croatian pastries, the hrstule, pusharatas, and different things—fig rolls, whatever you call them. Oh she cooked—I guess [*Laughs*]*—*what's—you know, the regular standard food you know? I always had something—red beans, cabbage, fish—fish, court-bouillon, she cooked all of that too. That's standard, you know. That was good—pretty good cooks you know; they all was good cooks. Mama is always a good cook anyway. Nobody cooks like mama, so—.

00:09:02

FL: Everyone's mama is the best cook in the world usually. But I imagine growing up in what was then Yugoslavia, she didn't—she didn't learn to cook red beans and rice and court-bouillon growing up.

00:09:15

CH: Well plenty of them—plenty of them was American dishes and she—they brought so many of the dishes with them, you know that they cooked, but I know—I used to hear my mama say she was stronger than most of the men. She used to carry 200-pounds of grapes on her head going up a hill, bring them to the winery and the men would pick them up and it took two guys to put it on top of her head and she carried it on up the hill. My mama was big like us; my mama was a big lady, you know. She was strong. In fact, I think my daddy was the shortest one in the family. But we was all six-foot; all of us was six-footers, six-five, six-four, six-three, and I'm six-two.

00:10:06

FL: But you said your mother had a bad leg. Did she hurt her leg?

00:10:07

CH: Yeah; she—old-time stove, one of them pokers—the lid off and fell and it never—never would heal up. And then well they didn't have the medicine you got now to treat anything you know. She—she limped around on it all her—all her life.

00:10:27

FL: Well did that happen here or did that happen—?

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CH: Yeah; it happened here. We—we was all born. In the house I was living in, that's where it happened, in that shotgun house. I guess she was cooking and it was wintertime and they didn't

have heaters like you got now and air-conditioning so they all warmed around—around the stove they cooked in.

00:10:45

FL: And had she worked in the factories before she hurt her leg?

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CH: Not too much, not too much. She never—she never did work too much in the cannery. I hardly don't remember her working in a cannery—well I was the youngest one now; I'm the last one. I was five years coming after my next brother, my brother, Eddie. I'm—he was five years older than me, so she—she had me kind of late in life—well if you want to call it then; she was around 40 years old. Women didn't have babies—not like they do now, so—.

00:11:23

FL: And then again up until the time of the storm were there still a lot of Croatian families living right around where you—where you live?

00:11:31

CH: Yeah, yeah some of the old ones were still living. It was still—you know as families—as the families got big they had to move out, you know. As children grewed and went through school and—yeah wound up getting married and they had to find a place to stay. So they still had a good many Slavish people down there, yeah.

00:11:56

FL: And can you talk about some of the—or maybe were there—were there certain traditions that you would all try to observe together, certain festivals or certain ways you would celebrate holidays?

00:12:08

CH: No; well [*Laughs*] they celebrated Christmas, New Year's. Every year—every year the lodge had—this lodge had a special day and we have dancing just like a buffet or something—a get-together. They had—they had a good many dances in the old lodge and a bunch would come up. We had dances all the time, you know get-together just like the French people. They had the Fleur de Lis [*Society*]. They all got together and dancing and I—I guess—they celebrated. Well you celebrated naturally your birthdays and all as they come up.

00:12:54

FL: But was there a particular Croatian tradition to these—to these dances or—or to these celebrations?

00:13:01

CH: Yeah; yeah they'll dress up a little bit and in their own little way. They all wore them long dresses and stuff. And they made it sort of a family get-together, just something special. Just for the fun of it, you know—yeah okay; yeah let's all get together just like a bunch of—going to meet a bunch of friends and that—everybody know everybody, see. It was fine; it was great, in fact.

00:13:30

FL: Okay; let—you had mentioned that you had worked on the shrimp boats from a pretty early age.

00:13:36

CH: Yeah; fifteen—I was 15 years old. I didn't want to go to school like I told you. My oldest brother said if you don't want to go to school he said, "I'll give you spending money but if you ain't going to school you're not going to run the streets." So you're going to take papa's place. Papa is going to retire and you're going to work.

00:14:00

FL: And what are—what are the jobs that you had on the boat?

00:14:02

CH: [*Laughs*] Standing! Standing. You know, picking out the shrimp out of the trash fish and stuff and icing them down, cooking, whatever you did.

00:14:16

FL: So I'm a person that doesn't know anything about how the shrimp boats work. Could you explain to me what—what a day going on the boat is like from top to bottom?

00:14:30

CH: Oh okay. Well my—we'll get up in the morning and say we're going out in the morning, well after my daddy retired. I went to school 'til—at St. Michael's and—and he'll get up in the

morning and he'll make coffee and he'll toast bread. Sometimes he used olive oil on the bread and put it in the oven because hell we was—you know we was all young men, we're all hungry.

And well we'll walk down to the boat and we'll all get on the boat and head for Louisiana Marsh, out on the Mississippi Sound and trawl for shrimp. And after Christmas we all went oystering in Louisiana. Sailboats were just—when I got on a boat, the sail—the sail schooners were sort of running out, you know, and then they're starting to let Mississippi schooners have power, big schooner boats you know. I seen a few of them—ain't too many of them left now. And we went all in the Louisiana Marsh for shrimp and we unloaded them on what they called freight boats—had certain boats come out loaded with ice working for different canneries, like Kuluz, Southern Shell, Sea Coast. My daddy and them are—were stockholders a little bit in Mississippi Coast and he kind of drawed his money out because he needed to pay off the boat. We built us a boat in 1932 called *President Roosevelt* during the Depression right before Roosevelt got elected and beat Hoover and then named it—*President Roosevelt* and he built the boat and—well he knew—he knew we had to go to work. That's all they did here; there wasn't too many jobs you know—what little seafood you did. Most of them worked seafood and had a few stores up here. In this section of town where we're sitting now was department stores and dry goods stores and a few bars—normal, small little town. I think the population I can remember when it was around 12,000—14,000—dollars—14,000 people not dollars.

00:16:52

FL: Okay; but what—let's go—if you can go into a little more detail about how you caught the shrimp. So you'd get on the boat early in the morning and you'd go out there—?

00:17:00

CH: You'd get on the boat. Well say when—so they was catching a few shrimp right outside the beach here, Biloxi Bay and you'd just put the net you know—there's nets. Put the net out and then there's what they call trawl boats—we call them [*inaudible*], some of them call them trawl boats and—and you let out 40—50 fathoms of line and you drug it around for maybe a couple of hours—two hours—two hours and a half and pick it up. And picked them up; at first they didn't have all these hoisting rigs. You had to scoop everything; it was done by hand, okay, even when I started. We had to pick up the trawl lines by hand and leave about four or five of them out and a man on each side would pull the net—rope by hand so he could get the trawl boats and then get it straight up and down, one—tie one end up, come help you pick the boat up, and then get the other five and put it on and bring it around and scoop the shrimp out. Scoop the shrimp out and put them on deck and you clean the shrimp from the—clean the shrimp from the bad—well not bad fish; just trash fish—you couldn't—couldn't sell them. Or if you had some good fish in there like flounders, crown mullets and white trout, you know, you'd kind of save them aside because you can—you can eat them but the—like croakers and stuff—oh Lord. Sometimes you'd have 10 barrel of croakers and just shovel it overboard; it's not good for nothing and it's bony. It wasn't bad; you just have so much trouble eating them like a freshwater bream or something. It's just full of bones.

00:18:52

FL: And how would you store the shrimp then—the shrimp and some of the other by-catch too, some of the other fish; how would you store that on the boat?

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CH: Well they had special made—they had special made boxes in the hull of the boat called the hull you know. You had the pilot house and then you got the engine room in an old Biloxi lugger—cabins were in the back, okay. And—and in front they had a hull—what they called a hull and they made special compartments called boxes, just you know maybe ice—15, 20 barrel in this and you put a little—little bit of ice, layer of shrimp, layer of ice, layer of shrimp, okay? Well, then you fill that up and start another. And they have—all some of the boats—how big it was—some of them had two or three compartments. Some of them was more, and you'd come on into the cannery—the cannery will pay you so much. When I started it was \$4.50 a barrel. That's 210 pounds I'm sorry—\$4.50. And you take out your fuel. Well the fuel wasn't much at the time—diesel; we had—we had a diesel in the boat and the reason we got a diesel we run parties with it. Later it become a—it was only about a—I don't know a nickel a gallon or something—diesel. That's when it first come out; gas wasn't much more. I forget. And we paid a fuel bill, grocery bill and what little expense and then split the money down the—down the middle. Say—say five ways; if you had \$100 everybody got \$20.

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FL: How long—how long would you go out for at a time?

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CH: Well when it first started you went out oh eight—ten days, twelve days.

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FL: You had enough ice to last that long?

00:21:01

CH: No; like I said, when we first started they had a lot of freight boats—boats that come out with loaded ice. Each boat—each cannery had a flag, representing you know, like different color flag, just any kind of flag would say this one worked for Talvuz, this one worked for Southern Shell, this one worked for Sea Coast, this one worked for Kuluz Brothers and [Inaudible], [Inaudible]; they all had you know—and you see the flag flying, you know that that’s who the cannery they’re working for. So you go there and you unload the shrimp and they give you a—a little receipt, so you had three barrels shrimp, they give you a little receipt for three barrels of shrimp, you know? And we didn’t carry too much money. Some boats have cash but most of them have—. And you stay about 10—12 days but this time of year you couldn’t keep the shrimp on that too much you know because they’ll spoil. You had a lot of times the boats would come alongside and pick up the shrimp while you’re dragging, you know. They’ll come alongside and unload them; you know they got—they had scales on the boat. They’ll weigh them and they’ll give you—say you had three barrels at 600 pounds—630 really; it’s 210 pounds to the barrel. They said 10 pounds was the trash. And they’ll give you—they’ll give you a receipt, and then when you—when you came in you went to each cannery. You might—if you—if your boat wasn’t there, a guy come will come ask—say you want to unload your shrimp? You want to get rid of your shrimp? You say yeah; come—they’ll pick it up and they’ll give you—they all had little—it was all—they all sort of worked together but you always tried to save them for your—the cannery you worked for. They bought you the license; see they bought you the shrimp license, see like, we worked for Southern Shell a lot. They bought the license for us you know—wasn’t much but they paid for the license so you tried to save the shrimp for the cannery you worked for. And hey you went around. My brother Eddie, he went around and collected—collected from each cannery. They give him a check and he’d come up to the bank, give you cash

for it, and he would go around and pay the bills and what's left—what's left he brought it home. And what's left he put it on the table—understand? He come home and he put it on the table. My daddy was sitting there; my daddy picked up that money. Okay; he—like you said, “Hey I worked for that.” He—my daddy picked up that money—not only my daddy now; this—the whole generation of them old people. He picked up the money and—and after the bills was paid for he'd maybe give my oldest brother, Paul, \$10-bucks or \$5-bucks. Well \$10 in them days goes a long way [*Laughs*] and—and he'd—and he'd—me I was the baby; I didn't get nothing, so that's—.

Then later on in life he figured, well my brother is old enough so he started giving them half of what they made—they made. If we made, \$50 he'd give my other two brothers—if you're 21 he'd give half—he'd give them \$25 and \$25—\$25 and he kept the \$25 for eating and sleeping and washing clothes home for expense you know.

00:24:47

FL: And was that typical? Did other families do that too or was that just your family?

00:24:50

CH: I think most of them did it. I know one thing, they was mad at my daddy for doing that because when he realized my brothers was getting old enough, they needed money of their own. And a lot of them old men was mad at my daddy for giving them boys half. Now I don't know how the Frenchmen did it, but I know plenty of Yugoslavs when they came from the Old Country. Daddies kept all the money, you know. It ain't like it is now. They said, “Hey, that's

mine,” you know, but your mama and daddy said, “Well who is going to pay for the food you’re eating?”

“Well I don’t know; I worked for that and that’s mine.” I got a grandson that way right now. **[Laughs]** He—he—if he wants to go somewhere or he wants to go eat he wants—he asks my daughter, “Give me a couple bucks. I want to go get a sandwich.”

She said, “You just got paid.”

“That’s my money,” he says. You know that’s the difference in generations now you know. I’m talking—I’m talking what—70 some years ago to now and he’s what—he’s a senior at St. Patrick now but he was working this summer so all that money is his. If he wants something to eat, he wants money from his mama. Just changes—everything changes; you know that. Life goes on whatever it is. That’s true.

00:26:17

FL: Let’s get back on the boat.

00:26:18

CH: Huh?

00:26:18

FL: Let’s get back on the boat. So you’re on the boat.

00:26:21

CH: Yes.

00:26:23

FL: You're hand-pulling the net back in. You're sorting through the trash fish and the shrimp?

00:26:28

CH: No; you got to pull it—you got to pull the net up, okay, and bring it to the—what they call a tail and you bring it—then you bring it around and then you put it on the side of the boat where they scooped. They had a special made rack to come out and—and—and part of the tail they call it the titty. I don't know why, but it's about that far from the tail of the boat. So you have shrimp here and the shrimp boat here and you can work it so you can scoop them on the boat. And you tie it back up and throw it back up and drag it along again, for a couple of hours—two hours; it all depends.

00:27:06

FL: So then you scoop it all in the boat and now you're sorting through it?

00:27:12

CH: Yeah, you save the shrimp and that's when you start, you know—you've got to keep—once you sort it out, you clean, you wash them down a little bit. And you get the sand and stuff out of them and you put them on ice. And you come in and—well, the canneries unload. They had crews when you brought it in, they paid men you know at the cannery to unload these shrimp.

00:27:32

FL: Were there different types of shrimp or different kinds of shrimp?

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CH: No, it was all white shrimp at that time. I don't know what—they call these brownies now you know, but at one time I can't remember—nothing but white shrimp, all nice white shrimp. You know and then—and at one time, at one time, well, before the machine—the picking machines come out, you cannot catch a shrimp over 40 count [*40 shrimp per pound*]. Up to 40 because women—women wouldn't pick them, you know, because it's too small, they would be hard. So the women—just so they had a special—at 40 to the pound, okay that's 40 to the pound. Over 40, sometimes he'd let you go with 41 if—if a couple boats before you unloaded some shrimp with—say in the 30s and they was mixed anyway. You know so you can get by with it but most of the time 40 is the count; if you didn't you'd throw them off—you'd throw them back off so—.

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FL: Forty is pretty small. Did you get a different price for the different sized shrimp?

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CH: Yeah; yeah, oh yeah. You had different prices for different sizes.

00:28:42

FL: So would—you would sort it by size also then?

00:28:45

CH: Uh-hm; yeah you know say—say certain shrimp, big shrimp naturally, say you might get 50-cents a pound okay and as they get smaller you get—. No, for big shrimp you get more; I'm sorry, more and the smaller the shrimp the smaller the price.

00:29:13

FL: Back then you said you had all white shrimp. You didn't—you didn't see any brown shrimp?

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CH: Not too—no; you see one in a white shrimp you'd take and throw him over. You thought he was sick, you know. It was odd—an odd looking shrimp so you didn't know if he was bad or what. And then all at one time—I don't know when the brown shrimp come into the Gulf of Mexico but right through the passes out into the Gulf and hell it was plenty—plenty—plenty.

00:29:42

FL: Do you like eating shrimp?

00:29:42

CH: Huh?

00:29:44

FL: Do you like eating shrimp?

00:29:45

CH: Oh why yeah; I've been raised on shrimp, fish, and oysters. How do you think my pa—my daddy used to work by himself trying to raise—well two girls had died—four boys and he'd make \$5—\$6 a trip.

00:30:06

FL: So to you what's the difference between a good-eating shrimp and a bad-eating shrimp?

00:30:09

CH: [*Laughs*] I don't know how in the hell you play—how you say that one? Shrimp—bad—when shrimp bad they'll stink you know; you can smell bad shrimp. You won't cook it—you wouldn't—it will start turning black—it will start turning red up by the backbone, I think they say that's the backbone. It will start turning red; if they start stinking you don't even cook them; you throw them away—bury them really, so they won't stink up the neighborhood. But most time we eat fresh—most the time we eat fresh shrimp.

00:30:48

FL: Just because I—I find that sometimes the shrimp—sometimes when you cook them they have a really nice snap, right? Sometimes when you cook them they're kind of soft and kind of mealy. Do you know what causes that?

00:31:02

CH: Sometimes they're overcooked. Sometimes they're overcooked, you know, that's what causes it and sometimes they're old. They might have been on ice a long time you know and they might have been on ice three or four days sitting in that water and stuff and they get soft and they

get mushy. That's what you're talking about I believe; yeah. But the fresh shrimp they stay kind of firm and easy to pick.

00:31:31

FL: You also mentioned that—actually, so on the boat well did everyone have different jobs or when the time came to do something everyone—?

00:31:39

CH: No, everybody—everybody did everybody's job and there wasn't no—it ain't like you see now. No, everybody—at that time—even now it's the same. The Captain gets down and picks trash with you too—everybody. Most of the time it's two men—shrimping, maybe three okay. Now oystering, when you're catching oysters there will be five—four and five, the Captain and three of the crew or four—four crew and the Captain. It all depends on how big the boat was. But there ain't oysters like there used to be either. The boats coming here loaded with oysters, 300—400 barrels of oysters you know a three or four-day trip, you wouldn't make much—300 barrels, 320—330 barrels of oysters would make \$17—\$18 a trip. That would be five men.

00:32:34

FL: So there's much more money in shrimp than oysters?

00:32:35

CH: Oh yeah; hell yeah. I seen a—when I first started—well let me get back to shrimp. Like I said, I didn't want—I didn't want to go to school and so my brother, Eddie went with Mike Sekul on the Wallace S and—and I had to go. So he went with Mike, his cousin—Sekul down

there. You know the Sekul sailboat? That's who that sailboat is named after, and I went—me and my—my daddy and my oldest brother, my oldest brother was the Captain all the time. My daddy and I were—my daddy was the cook and cleaned up. And we was going out one morning and we was heading for Louisiana Marsh shrimping; it was fall of the year. Always opened the second week in—in August is the season, for some reason. Always the second week in August the shrimp season opened up in Louisiana. We was going out. And my daddy was always in the back, always doing something, patching holes, the net would have some holes or something, so he'd patch. And so I walk up the front. We just went through Ship Island and he says—my oldest says, "Where's papa?"

And I said, "Laying down."

He said, "Huh?" I said—I said—he said, "Where's papa?"

I said, "He's laying down." He never said a word; he turned the boat back and headed back towards Biloxi. He said, "Papa never lays down. He's sick." So my daddy—I don't do it either. When I'm running a boat I don't—I don't lay down; I sit. I sit and watch—just look, you know, looking at the sea because looking in general but he never said a word. That's the last trip my daddy made on a boat; he was sick. After that he never did go back on the boat and I took his place. I went because I didn't want to go to school like a nut. I could have went to high school. The coach come and got me and wanted me to go play football. I was pretty—I was pretty big for a kid; I was always about six-foot and stuff and I played around and I used to catch a football pretty good when I was a kid. I didn't want to go; I wanted to go to work. I thought I was too dumb to go to high school like a nut, like a nut—you hear what I said—a nut. You know I regret it now. But I didn't want to go.

00:35:26

FL: You do regret it now?

00:35:28

CH: Yeah—oh yeah; oh yeah. I'm happy—my two daughters; I didn't do it but they did. I got one that's a doctor. She teaches at William Carey [*College*] and I got another one that taught high school and now she's going to teach junior college. I only had two girls; they're great, you know. I tried to get them educated anyway. See that's why most of this Slavs people got educated because the old man is all for trying to make a living, so as the guys grew up—they'll pitch three or four in there, professional men you know. And I got a daughter—my daughter, Lisa the one that lives—one teaching at William Carey now, she worked—well [*Laughs*] I could kill her. She went up to Illinois. She was dating this—well she's married to Jim now; she was dating this boy. She met him out at Keesler; she went up there and she got a degree. She got her Masters from Southern [*University of Southern Mississippi*] and she got a Doctorate from St. Louis University up in Illinois, up in St. Louis. She worked in the state prison up there for 11 years. That's why I was mad. She had to have her stupid career. She said, "No daddy; when Jim gets discharged I'm coming home. I smell that water and I'm tired of smelling corn." You know she—she come home—did good. I'm proud of her—real proud of my daughters.

00:37:15

FL: So I want to get back to this idea of regretting later and also education later but getting back to your work on—did you enjoy the work on the boat?

00:37:25

CH: Oh yeah; oh yeah—shrimping is great. I love to shrimp. I love shrimping.

00:37:30

FL: What did you enjoy about it?

00:37:32

CH: Everything: wide open spaces, you just—you just enjoyed it, nice—especially the weather. Most of the time the weather is nice and the Louisiana Marsh is very seldom rough anyway in bad weather or rain and stuff. It will blow—if you're figuring you're going to anchor behind that Island, the Louisiana Marsh beat up pretty good since the last two—Katrina and Camille. But you can go back there and anchor behind the Island be just almost smooth like this and get—just wide open and when you come home you was off. You might go out like oystering about four days and shrimping like eight—ten days. You'd stay home three or four days and then you'd go back out, you know. But that's what was good about it—wide open, I guess. And you—and it was more or less independent. You didn't have—well I had a brother if you want to call him a boss, but anybody—it was good—real good. I enjoyed it.

00:38:36

FL: What was—what was your least favorite part of the work?

00:38:38

CH: Shrimping—shrimping? I loved to shrimp.

00:38:42

FL: What was your least favorite part? What was the part you didn't like so much?

00:38:46

CH: Hell everything I guess; there wasn't nothing really hard. Everything was hard and then everything—when everything is working smooth, everything is easy and then everything—sometimes everything goes haywire too, you know? And you work your butt off to get it straightened back out. Oh drudging oysters was the hardest—oystering, oyster catching. You had to stoop—stoop, bent over. You'd get up before daylight, get up before daylight and you—you know where the reef is after years and years. Everybody knows where the reefs at. You go drudging oysters and you—well if you want to say it—you're picking and the sun is up and you pick all day long. And at one time, you—you wouldn't even go eat. One man would go eat at a time—what they'd call breakfast about 9:00—10 o'clock and then we would take a coffee break about 12:00 and then we ate supper after dark. By that time we had to store all the oysters and get them ready for the next morning—getting room, because when you work you just throw them down there with a shovel at night—took them and stacked it like. But shrimping was—shrimping was great. Oystering was all right because you only stayed out four days see, but shrimping was easy. Them two hours you're dragging you just sit and read a book, sit around; you might pick up a try-net and see if you got any shrimp. You know it was easy.

00:40:32

FL: What's the difference between drudging for oysters and tonging for oysters?

00:40:36

CH: Oh Lord, I never did tong. Too much work; too much work. Drudging—drudging was hard but tonging was pretty hard too, you know—tear your body up tonging. But drudging you just—you stooped over and throw the oysters between your legs you know—you shovel with them I mean, that way you can throw the shells back over and then you had to shovel them in the hull but both of them was pretty hard work now. But I never did tong—never did.

00:41:13

FL: So drudging there was—there was—the equipment that would just that would—?

00:41:16

CH: Yeah drudge—drudge equipment, they call them drudges on the side of the boat. And you went around in a circle on a reef and you separated the shells from the—the oysters from the shells, throw the oysters between your legs, throw the shell back overboard ‘til you load up and get 250—300 barrels of oysters and you come—. When I first started we made \$15, \$16, \$18 a trip; that’s it for 300 barrels of oysters. We was only getting 50-cents, 45—50-cents a barrel. And just like shrimp, \$4.50 and \$5 a barrel for 210 pounds. That’s big shrimp.

When I first come back from the service, after I got discharged in ’45—let’s see—yeah I think ’45—this boy come asked and said you want to go shrimping? I said, “Oh Lord,” I said, “I just got home Peruga.” You know Peruga? He’s dead now.

He said, “Come on and we’ll make a trip.” Okay; I went on the [Inaudible] for Kuluz Brothers Packing Company. Stayed out—longest trip I ever made—17 days. Okay; it was out to the mouth of the Mississippi River catching big old white shrimp, big—nice big white shrimp. They’re always big out there, big ones. And about two days before we got ready to come in I think Nicky—Nicky Savin came on the [inaudible] and he said, “Hey the price just went up.” He

was giving us \$12 a barrel. It went up a little bit—that was for big white shrimp now. He said, “They’re going to give you two for one.” He said, “OPA took the price tag off.” He said, “Son of a bitches,” and we was about to run out of fuel. We stayed two days. Every time you unloaded one they’d give you two you know which 210 pounds—210 pounds they said they’ll give you two—two barrels for one. You hear what I’m getting at; they said if you’ve got four barrels they’ll give you eight. But—but they never did raise the price, so that made it \$25—\$24 a barrel.

00:43:53

FL: Why would they do that?

00:43:54

CH: Why? I don’t know. Just like anything else; how come the boss don’t give you a raise? You understand; they said the OPA helped them now, at that time. Now this is right after the War in ’45—’45—oh shit it was ’45 when I got discharged when I come from the service.

00:44:25

FL: I’m sorry; what is the OPA?

00:44:25

CH: I don’t know what the hell it stood for now. That was a government project or ah—that’s what I’m saying. I can’t think no more man. Shit; it was—what—I forget what it stands for now but they said it was an OPA price. The government said they kept the lid on it, so that’s what they said. So what—.

00:44:53

FL: How long did that go for?

00:44:54

CH: I don't know; I made that one trip. I made that one trip and then my oldest brother got sick. He had a little—where St. Michael's Church is now down around—he had a little bar. He bought that; he got sick and he run that bar for a while. He hurt his back in the service. And he was in the Navy, and so he bought a little bar and he got sick. And I—I was his—I was his bartender. I run—I run that thing for a while; you know he didn't have much anyway so—some hamburgers and beer. He didn't have no liquor and he had a floor. We used to go there and dance before the War because they used to call both of us. But what the hell—beer wasn't what 10-cents a bottle, 15-cents a bottle; JAX Beer and stuff. But the—he had a bad back and he got hurt in the Navy over in New Orleans. He was in the Navy; I had a brother Paul in the Navy and my brother, Pete was in the Army and I was in the Coast Guard. I'm the onliest one that seen action out of the three and my other brother, they didn't draft him I guess. He was the only one left with my mama and dad so they left him stay home—Eddie.

00:46:26

FL: But after you—after you came back from the service and worked in—you went back out—you went back out shrimping and then you worked in the bar with your brother for a little while.

00:46:37

CH: Well that's right after—that's right after; Eddie—Eddie was working for the oil company, in Chandelier, with the oil company when I first come home from the service. And then I don't

know; something come up. They got laid off or they quit and he went back shrimping and Eddie bought a boat and I was Captain of the President. I wound up being the Captain. My other brother bought a little boat you know. My daddy always said brothers can't work together, so we had different boats—brothers always argue. Not too many Captains you know; you can't have too many Captains. You can't have too many bosses. Too much conflict, so—. My daddy was smart enough; that's what I say on that half and half deal—remember I told you. That's why a lot of them old men was mad at him. They was mad at him because he—if they made \$20 he gave them \$10 for them to spend and that was their spending money. But the other \$10 was for cleaning their clothes, laundry, food, place to stay.

00:47:48

FL: When did you eventually retire from the—from shrimping?

00:47:52

CH: Fifty-five—1955; my brother, Eddie got the service station and we got—bought a service station up on Rodenberg Avenue and stayed there 10 years. And we gradually sold the boat. And then oh shit, see I forgot what hurricane came through and it wasn't that bad; just I never did do good up there because it was dead and it wasn't nothing up there, you know in the '50s you know—single lane and all that. I moved down there and worked with him for my boss where the Grand—Grand Casino is at. It used to be the service station across the street. Mavar's had a cannery there; I stayed there for—to work with him. I don't know 10 years—11 years—something like that and he got sick and then that's when they started going to self-service, remember? The service stations all had little pumps and stuff and then they came out with these big self-service you know Texaco and [inaudible]. No; he said I'm getting too old—quit—he

quit. So I went across the street and went to work at the cat food plant. I worked—I worked there for a while about 12 years between there and Heinz—Heinz Ketchup bought them out, and they moved to Pascagoula—about 12 years I worked there and that’s when I called it quits. Well they kept laying us off but hell I was 70-some years old then, you know? No, I like to do something. I’d go nuts sitting around the house. I tell my wife now; I said don’t you get tired of sitting? Let’s go somewhere; let’s go. Just take a ride you know. I know it’s kind of expensive now but I said let’s go somewhere, let’s go somewhere. Like yesterday I said let’s go see Rita Ann—she’s home because my other daughter is up in Tennessee on vacation. “Nah, I don’t feel good.” That’s—and I’ve had a good life—real good life. My kids are fine; my kids—my kids are—they’re okay. I’m okay; I’m healthy; I like to fish.

00:50:26

FL: You still like to fish?

00:50:27

CH: Oh yeah; that’s what I got—I got to go pick up my motor now about 10:00—10:30; 10:30 some black guy on Cowan and Lorraine Road, a mechanic, he called me up this morning and he said I got your motor. Well I had to put a starter on it for \$25 [*Laughs*]; can't do it no more. You know you can do so much; that’s just like Ronnie, the boy—I could kill him. You know he said you’re getting old ain't you? Oh he never—never quits; you can see him back there behind the bar. Him and I are good friends. But oh well. I’m still here that’s all that counts. Like I said I thank the good Lord I step down in the morning and when I get out of bed I can still walk on my two feet.

00:51:30

FL: All right; you mentioned earlier that you cooked on the boat a lot.

00:51:34

CH: Yeah.

00:51:36

FL: And now you cook a lot for the lodge.

00:51:38

CH: Well the whole family is cooks. My whole family can cook—all of us, my daddy; my daddy would make [Inaudible]; [Inaudible] was—they said king shrimp at one time—this is 100 years ago. Well daddy been dead since—my daddy died in February and I found out in July, you know when I was overseas. And he could cook; all his brothers could cook; we all could cook. All fishermen can cook, you understand? You had to or you wouldn't eat. Sometimes you'd work a boat by yourself and you ain't got any canned goods—you got to cook something, so we always worked—we all cooked a little bit. I can't say we're gourmet cooks but we cook enough that you—that you can get your stomach full. As long as you got your stomach full you're happy; okay. If you ain't hungry you're happy. You get what I'm talking about? You might not have everything in the world but at least you ain't hungry.

00:52:39

FL: Where did you learn to cook? Was it—did you learn on the boat?

00:52:42

CH: On the boat, yeah. Yeah, one taught the other. My oldest brother taught Eddie; Eddie taught me. And I cook a lot at home; I cook a lot. I cook a lot at home; I cooked yesterday. I cooked macaroni yesterday at home you know with gravy and macaroni and a big piece of beef.

00:53:04

FL: What kind of food would you eat on the boat? What—what kind of supplies would you bring?

00:53:09

CH: Everything; you—what you cook home you'll cook on the boat. Now everything—hell everything is like home on a boat, but them days you—you—. The onliest thing, on a boat at one time, when you went out you had—you had slab—slab of bacon, a slab of bacon and you had a slab of salt meat, okay and salami. Then it didn't spoil like it does now; they used to hang it—hang it under the awning where it's shady and stayed there. You'd just cut that black part off and you'd eat it. Salami was good but you'd cut some bacon off; you'd fry the bacon down. Sauté some onions and stuff and make a little gravy, rice, spaghetti on the side, or you can throw shrimp in there and make Shrimp Creole or whatever, you know? You learn how to—you learn how to get by. Everything you know as long as it's cooked; the main thing in cooking—taste, okay. I can tell you that; you can print that if you want. You can go buy a steak that costs you \$1—okay the steak costs you \$1. You eat it; hey that's pretty good. You go—you go to another restaurant and you order a steak a few days later and it costs you \$20-bucks. They put it in front of you and it ain't worth a crap. It ain't worth \$1; the steak you paid \$1 for is worth \$20. That's my theory about it: if you can enjoy it's worth the price. If it ain't no good—it's no good; right. If

it's no good it's no good. You—you went places and ate food you didn't like, okay; and it didn't make no difference the price. If it's—if the food is good it's worth the price; if the food is no good then it ain't worth crap. A dog won't eat it. You—you—hell you—if you've been around you ought to know I know what I'm talking about. I've been around in a lot of—lot of restaurants. Long as the food is tasty it's good; you know you can enjoy it. That's just like me, we never—see; now my daddy made wine. My daddy was—never did make home brew but my daddy always made—my neighbor made wine. I used to go help her fill the bottles so I could get half charged up on all—get a swallow. You know how the made home brew? I mean they'd fill the bottles with home brew, you know and you sucked the hose and filled the bottles. You stopped it with your hand so you got to suck it again to get another mouthful [*Laughs*]. By that time you get half charged up. But my daddy always made wine; we had a—a pitcher of wine and a pitcher of water. Now Eddie didn't drink; I drank maybe half a glass—drink a glass of wine and cut it with water. But my daddy and my brother—my oldest brother, Paul, and my mama drank a glass and the preacher would drink about a glass. And I said hell; we used to drink a gallon of wine a meal. Huh? You get—my daddy would drink a couple of glasses, a couple—three glasses; my oldest brother would drink a couple—three glasses; mama would drink maybe a glass; him would drink a glass and I'd drink a half a glass or so and you'd drink a couple three glasses and the gallon is gone. You had the gallon of wine right there; he had wine brewing all the time—all the time he had wine but no home brew.

00:57:10

FL: Where—where did he get the grapes for the wine?

00:57:11

CH: He'd buy them and we had—we had grapes in the backyard by the house I'm living in—it had oh hell—wasn't quite as big—but half of this building, them little white grapes. He had them; I seen—seen my daddy and my oldest brother stomping grapes you know like in the movies sometimes you see them stomping grapes in Italy. And you put it to brew.

00:57:38

FL: Is that something he learned to do where he grew up?

00:57:39

CH: No; I never did make the wine, no. After my daddy died—.

00:57:47

FL: No; I'm sorry. Is that something your—your father learned to do where he grew up?

00:57:49

CH: Yeah; oh yeah. I told you my mama carried them grapes on her head, but they didn't—I don't know they knew one another in Yugoslavia or Croatia wherever, you know. I don't think they knew one another. They met here. I think now I'm not sure.

00:58:05

FL: And did you know of other families that made their own wine?

00:58:07

CH: Huh?

00:58:07

FL: Did you know of other families that made their own wine?

00:58:11

CH: Yeah; might near all of them, the whole bunch, the Sekuls, the—well there's about four or five Sekul families that live down there and Jimmy is offspring from a Sekul, Fo-Fo. And mama was a Sekul, yeah all them—all them Slav people. A lot of Polish made the wine too. You know they made—now they didn't make it to sell; they made it for personal use—their own. That's what I said. We didn't drink Coca Colas and root beers and like they do now; we had wine and water. If you didn't want no wine you drank water for your meal. That's the way it went. It was—I think they all made it if you want to be honest. I think they all made it—every one of them, the Obronovich, [Inaudible], Sekul, [Inaudible]—all nine yards. This guy Jake—that's his grandpa.

00:59:13

FL: But even in Biloxi, the home of Barq's Root Beer you didn't drink root beer?

00:59:16

CH: Oh yeah; I love it. I drink it now; oh yeah but I mean we didn't have it on the table when I was a kid. Shit they started Barq's down here on Keller, a little—matter of fact it's still there. I think they got a sign on the front door. Katrina—no, Katrina didn't knock it down. Used to pass down and watch them brew the Barq's and then he moved up over here when he first started. We was kids you know; we'd walk to town. City Hall was right across the street. Oh yeah, we got

along fine. A show was only a nickel for God's sake; show was a nickel. I think the Saenger [*Theater*] was 15-cents or 12-cents or something—right over to the next block. Saenger was over there, Saenger Theater is still standing when it first come up. It was mobbed when it first opened up; man that was the big thing in this town when they opened Saenger. They had another theater over now what was it—before they built the Saenger; I forget. This was all buildings.

01:00:35

FL: So through the course of the time that you were in the seafood and shrimp industry and then afterwards you—even—even after you retired from it I'm sure you still knew people that were in it and—and knew about it. How has that industry changed over time?

01:00:48

CH: Oh Lord; this town is gone for its seafood. Looks like there's no more canneries, no more nothing. Hell they had what—there must—let's see; there must have been like five or six big canneries on what we called Back Bay Biloxi, Point Cadet, let's see there's Anticich's, Mavar, Dee-Dee's [*Dukate Dunbar*], DeJean, Victory, Kuluz Brothers, Sea Coast—that's what I'm saying; there must have been 12—14 big canneries here at one time—handled oysters and shrimp, you know. And the little—little by little they kept phasing out and phasing out, and then there ain't too many shrimp boats left. The Vietnamese almost got them now you know—that's all them big boats all the way in here; ain't too many white people got shrimp boats anymore. They got small ones and they'll go out and work maybe when the season opens up but most of them has got an extra job somewhere. It's just got—at one time we depended on—summertime from I'd say April, the last of April when it started getting hot and you couldn't catch no more oysters, you used to close down. The boats used to stay tied up, so and about in July—in July

they'll start going back down and start piddling on their boat and getting it ready for shrimp. The boats that went oystering they took all their nets home, okay; they took all their nets home, the trawls, nets and everything home and then brought—they brought the oyster stuff back—the drudges, you know drudges and put false decking on the deck so they wouldn't mess up the boat, because it always had false decking for oysters. You see them with oyster pens around; you don't see them around here no more like you used to. Some of them—some of these canneries had five—six oyster boats loaded to the gunnels to the water. You had five; some of them—big schooners had \$500—\$600 oysters on them. It was something to see really; it really was. And then every year—every year like I say in the summertime they didn't have nothing to do. They had schooner races; each cannery would put one or two boats in there and they'd fix it all up and paint it and make it look pretty good and have races for the Yacht Club around—especially around the Fourth of July and stuff you know. They had bragging rights—bragging rights is all. The guys had a little money so they all rigged up and one would rig up, one would rig up, and they would have about five or six. You've seen pictures of them schooner races haven't you? Didn't you see pictures? We had them all over the lodge—the old lodge, but—.

01:04:01

FL: So earlier you mentioned your daughters—obviously very proud of them; they were educated and they have different jobs and obviously they don't work in the—in this industry. And you had actually also mentioned that you regret a little bit not going to school.

01:04:15

CH: Yeah; me.

01:04:17

FL: Personally—why is that; why—why do you have that sense of regret? It seems like you—you were really happy with the work but why is it that you regretted that?

01:04:27

CH: [*Laughs*] Well, like everything else I guess you regret not doing something you wish you'd have did. That's all I can say. But far as having a good life, I had a good life. My kids were good. I didn't have to worry about all the crap they go through now, you know. They went through—they went through an all-Catholic school, Sacred Heart—whatever. They finished 12 grades at Sacred Heart and my two daughters—and my granddaughter and they went through St. John's and my two grandsons are going to St. Patrick—two boys. I guess we was raised a Catholic family really. My mama was strictly a Catholic. Boy she can—she can almost tell you more than a Priest—them old ladies. I remember one time, you know, now you can eat—the Catholic can eat meat on Friday; it don't make no difference—just during Lent and—and—and Good Friday before Easter—there's no such thing as putting milk on the table with your coffee because it came from a cow. That's how strict they were; they were strict. And my mama used to cook red beans with no meat; I don't know how in the hell she did it. It was better than with the meat but when you're young everything tastes good, okay. [*Laughs*] I hope I helped you some; I really do.

01:06:02

FL: Absolutely; thank you very much. I have one more thing actually; is there—I want to give you a chance if there's anything that you'd like to add.

01:06:09

CH: Not really no; everything is fine. I'm happy. I live pretty good and had a pretty good life. My kids ain't never gave me—never gave me kid crap, you know, coming in late or something or getting half drunk—no trouble; no trouble. That's the number one—no trouble; no trouble with the law and no trouble with—. My daughter, my oldest one, she left—she left the house. I was devastated when I got a note she's—she's going for good, okay, and she moved out of the house and she—I guess she was 18 I guess; I don't really know. Well anyway, she went and worked for the Police Department dispatching; she got married here and moved to Gulfport dispatching and she married her boss, Gil. He was in charge of dispatching and they got two kids and grandkids—and great-grandkids—one, he's something. They're fine. They're good; I had a good life.

01:07:26

FL: All right; well thank you very much, Corky.

01:07:30

CH: Hope it can do you some good. I hope I do.

01:07:31

[End Corky Hire Interview]