

**WAYNE AND DONNA ESTAY**  
**Lockport, LA**

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Date: August 26, 2011  
Location: The Estay Residence—Lockport, LA  
Interviewer: Sara Roahen  
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs  
Length: 1 hour, 43 minutes  
Project: Down the Bayou – Louisiana

**[Begin Estay Interview]**

**00:00:00**

**Sara Roahen:** This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Friday, August 26, 2011. I am in Lockport, Louisiana with the Estays. If I could get you all to say your name—and I know that you're fairly retired now, but let me know what you did as a career before you retired.

**00:00:20**

**Wayne Estay:** My name is Wayne Estay. I'm fully retired. And before I retired I unloaded shrimp boats in Grand Isle, Louisiana on Bayou Rigaud, [for] well, right around 36 years.

**00:00:36**

**SR:** Could you tell me your birth date?

**00:00:39**

**WE:** July 17, 1949.

**00:00:43**

**SR:** Thank you. Donna?

**00:00:44**

**Donna Estay:** I'm Donna Estay, wife of Wayne Estay. We live in Lockport now, but we worked in Grand Isle for 36 years. I worked with my husband seven days a week unloading shrimp and paying the boats.

**00:01:01**

**SR:** Thank you. Could I get your birth date please?

**00:01:05**

**DE:** August 28, 1951.

**00:01:08**

**SR:** Thank you. Maybe you could tell me a little bit about how you got into the business. And I know that that's a really big question, but we can go from there.

**00:01:21**

**WE:** Well I'm kind of—I'm born and raised in Baton Rouge, and my daddy had a seafood market in Baton Rouge, and--and from Baton Rouge, we worked our way back. My daddy was originally from Larose, and we ended up in Golden Meadow in '65 and had an unloading dock in--in Golden Meadow, and I worked there through high school and through college. And in '72 he--he asked me if I wanted to go to Grand Isle and work with John Blanchard and--and help him operate the place. And I said, "Surely." And that's where I ended up in '72 until I quit. But I was always—all through grade school, high school, college, I was always affiliated in the seafood industry.

**00:02:09**

**SR:** What was your father's name?

**00:02:11**

**WE:** His name was Antoine Joseph Estay. They called him Tan.

**00:02:18**

**SR:** T-a-n?

**00:02:18**

**WE:** T-a-n.

**00:02:22**

**SR:** And so—let me write this down—why did he ask you if you wanted to go to John Blanchard's place? Was he in business with him?

**00:02:35**

**WE:** No, but he had just bought the ice plant that was next door to it and they were getting shrimp, but John Blanchard was getting all the shrimp—most of the shrimp—that came onto the island. Which at the time there was—count my daddy's place and John Blanchard and the other people they had there—there was eight people that was on Grand Isle and Chénrière that was unloading shrimp boats.

**00:02:55**

**SR:** When you said he bought the ice plant, who is “he?”

**00:03:00**

**WE:** My daddy.

**00:03:00**

**SR:** Okay.

**00:03:03**

**WE:** My daddy, the company that he had, New Orleans Shrimp Company.

**00:03:06**

**SR:** Oh okay. And so he was friendly with John Blanchard, I take it?

**00:03:11**

**WE:** Oh yeah, my daddy was friendly with everybody. He had friends everywhere.

**00:03:16**

**SR:** Now you said that you went to college. When did you all meet?

**00:03:24**

**WE:** High school.

**00:03:26**

**SR:** In Baton Rouge, or in—I'm sorry; I'm not putting together the dates.

**00:03:31**

**DE:** In 1965 Wayne moved from Baton Rouge; he was a sophomore in junior—a freshman in high school. He moved to Golden Meadow. In 1965—I was born and raised on the other side of Dallas in Fort Worth, in Texas, and we moved to Larose the same summer. And Wayne went to high school the last year of Golden Meadow before they started South Lafourche (High School). They consolidated the two schools, Larose Cutoff and Golden Meadow, in '66. We went in '65 to Larose; I went to Larose and he went to Golden Meadow. Then the next year we met in high school at--the first year of South Lafourche. And then we were married his senior year he was at LSU, but every summer his dad made him go work during the season in Golden Meadow or New Orleans at the plants, in the shrimp business, because it was seasonal. And Wayne had three courses left to graduate and he didn't graduate. We moved to Grand Isle the same summer we moved back to—what year was that?

**00:04:44**

**WE:** Seventy-two.

**00:04:46**

**DE:** In '72, we moved to Golden Meadow and worked that summer. And in June—and in July we moved to Grand Isle—of '72. And then after the kids—our two children were born—we moved back to Baton Rouge for him to get his degree. That year, in '75, his dad fell sick with cancer and he died within six months. And Wayne never went back and took his test, so the college got the—a friend of his went to the teachers and they mailed him his diploma because he didn't get to go back because we had to help his dad until he passed away.

**00:05:21**

And then we moved back to Grand Isle and worked, worked, worked, worked, worked.

*[Laughs]*

**00:05:28**

**SR:** Why did your family move to this area?

**00:05:30**

**DE:** My dad worked for Gulf Oil. And we were transferred and it was a culture shock. We were—we had never been to Louisiana. And South Louisiana in 1965 was different because of—there was no air-conditioning, and the humidity. They used—you know you had mildew in the houses and all because it was just the way things were years ago. And we were from a different—a dry area, climate, and it was completely different. And we all lived here. My--my mother and dad stayed here; my brother is here. Our immediately family is still here in South Louisiana. And this is home. But we still go back to Texas. We have a house over there also.

**00:06:18**

**SR:** You go dry off?

**00:06:20**

**DE:** Yes, yes.

**00:06:21**

**SR:** That's very interesting to me because you know there's an inter-marriage, so to speak, of oil and fishing in this area and the two kind of merged.

**00:06:35**

**DE:** Uh-hm, yes.

**00:06:36**

**SR:** Is your family still in the oil business?

**00:06:39**

**DE:** No. My dad passed away a year ago in February but he retired from Gulf Oil the year Chevron bought Gulf—was what year? I don't know.

**00:06:50**

**WE:** Eighty-five, eighty-eight. But her brother, when he came back from Vietnam, came to Grand Isle and worked with me and we became partners. He had a percentage of the—



**00:07:02**

**DE:** My brother and his wife worked with us all these years. And my mother and dad retired—

**00:07:09**

**WE:** Not three or four years after they came.

**00:07:10**

**DE:** My mother and dad retired from their jobs and they came and worked with us also. They would travel in the winter and in the summer they'd come and work with us during the season.

**00:07:21**

**SR:** Well, now, talk to me about—so you went to Grand Isle—. Well your father became ill and passed away pretty quickly; I guess let me start here. Did you always know, even while you were studying in college, that this was what you were going to end up doing, is taking over your father's business?

**00:07:42**

**WE:** I thought I was going to go work in the shrimp business. I didn't think I'd be working in the--in the plant manually you know because my—actually my father's business was New Orleans Shrimp Company, and I thought I would get it up in New Orleans and--and work in sales or--or something like that.

**00:08:05**

Now a year or two before my father died, New Orleans Shrimp Company got so big—his business got so big—they sold out to--to a bigger corporation, which was Hardee's Food Systems—which, you've seen Hardee's hamburgers, okay. And what we had going in Grand Isle was a completely different business separate and away from New Orleans Shrimp Company. And--and once my daddy died, they—yeah, we--we dealt with small inshore and coastline fishermen in Grand Isle, okay. Where my daddy's business was all big steel boats that worked--worked shrimp offshore. And I say it was kind of different fishing and all and these boats—big boats that would go out and they would stay 10, 12, 14, 15 days, where almost 80-percent of the shrimp we unloaded off the boats in Grand Isle was the boats go out that morning and they come back that evening and unload. And we had fresh good quality, good merchandise, and most of it—80-percent of it—was head-on shrimp also, which went to peeling plants which was—. Then, when I first went to Grand Isle, they didn't do very much peel meat shrimp. It was canning shrimp.

**00:09:33**

When I went to Grand Isle there was 11 canners in Louisiana and Mississippi. There's nobody that cans domestic shrimp anymore in the United States. It's all imported.

**00:09:48**

**SR:** There's so many questions. [*Laughs*] I hardly even know where to pause you, but when you say "canning," what would the end product of that be?

**00:09:59**

**WE:** They—

**00:10:02**

**DE:** Little cans of shrimps.

**00:10:03**

**WE:** Little cans of shrimp, small cans of shrimp, and which is--which is good. Salty but good. But they put—they always had a lot of sodium in it. They would cook the shrimp, they would peel the shrimp—. They'd cook the shrimp and they'd be all—everything was automated as far as canning the shrimp.

**00:10:20**

**SR:** So I don't think I've ever eaten that Is that eaten a lot, or was it eaten more back then?

**00:10:29**

**WE:** It's eaten. You go to--go to the supermarket, and not far from the tuna fish you're going to find the canned shrimp, you're going to find the canned oysters, you're going to find the pasteurized crabmeat.

**00:10:43**

**DE:** Bumblebee is who used to—

**00:10:45**

**WE:** Bumblebee imports all the—

**00:10:48**

**DE:** —out of California. They used to can it, but they don't do anymore in the United States.

**00:10:53**

**SR:** So now, you were talking about the separation between your father's business, buying more of the--from the offshore boats, and your business more inshore. Now when you say your father's business—where was the dock that you're talking about where the offshore boats would come into?

**00:11:12**

**WE:** They had a main plant that was in New Orleans on Jefferson Highway, and they had an unloading facility in Golden Meadow, Delcambre, Morgan City, Cameron, and that little dock that they had bought in Grand Isle. They had bought the ice plant with a little unloading dock because they did a little bit of peel meat—you know not—a small volume you're talking about; they had like two peeling machines.

**00:11:35**

**DE:** That was right next to John Blanchard's business.

**00:11:39**

**SR:** And that is the only--the only thing that y'all went into, then was—? Your father's business, other than the plant in the Grand Isle, was all sold before he passed away?

**00:11:50**

**WE:** No.

**00:11:53**

**DE:** No.

**00:11:54**

**WE:** What happened, I ended up buying once my daddy died—. I went to Grand Isle in '72, but my daddy died in '75. And once he--once he died, well the ice plant they had in Grand Isle, well I bought it from--from Hardees Food Systems. And Hardees let my uncle and another guy operate New Orleans Shrimp Company for a year or two, but it—eventually they liquidated the company after--after my daddy died.

**00:12:22**

But see, what my daddy did—my daddy, he bought the shrimp from the boats and he packed it in five-pound boxes, and it was headless; it was bigger shrimp. Where I was buying a large volume of small head-on shrimp that we'd buy today and we'd deliver to the peeling plant, the canning plant, the next morning.

**00:12:43**

**DE:** I have to say that Wayne's daddy was very instrumental—. When he worked in Golden Meadow, he also had around 17 steel slabs that fished—that trawled off-shore and not in-shore. But his daddy was also very instrumental in the Louisiana Shrimp Association. He was President

for a couple of terms and he worked--worked to bring the small boats and the large boats to work together. They worked kind of separate industries and smaller—the small boats were just kind of coming around. They had them for years. That's where John Blanchard dealt with the small boats; not the big boats. And Wayne's daddy unloaded the big boats, and they were mostly—in Golden Meadow they unloaded the big boats. They had a heading plant where the women stood there and broke the heads and they got paid by the bucket of heads they would break. And then across the street they had an ice plant and they had peeling machines and they would freeze and make 50-pound crates of five-pound boxes of shrimp from the peeling machine and then the headless. They had different types of shrimp they processed, and he sold to brokers—correct Wayne?

**00:14:04**

**WE:** The brokers sold the shrimp for him to the--to the wholesalers.

**00:14:10**

**DE:** Okay, but he--he was very instrumental in bringing, in those years, the two sides of industry to work together more, and I don't know if there's something else you'd want to say about that but that was a milestone, I felt, in his life of what he--he achieved. He also ran for Port Commission in Fourchon, the first original Port Commission, and won. And they have a road named after him at Port Fourchon: AJ Estay Road, yes.

**00:14:46**

**SR:** Oh really? I'll have to look out for that. It's interesting, what you say about his being instrumental in bringing the two sides of the industry together. Are they--are they intermingled now more? I mean are there--are there unloading docks?

**00:15:01**

**WE:** There's not very many off-shore fishermen left.

**00:15:04**

**DE:** Mostly Vietnamese.

**00:15:06**

**WE:** Well yeah, but there's still not—there's not nearly as much as they had in--in the past because between the price of shrimp and the price of the fuel has eliminated quite a few of them now.

**00:15:21**

**SR:** I'm thinking about a shrimper I know who in the off-season—I mean has a small boat, but in the off-season goes offshore. Does that happen? I mean maybe I don't know the difference between a small and a large boat. Does that ever happen?

**00:15:36**

**WE:** How big a boat?

**00:15:37**

**SR:** I've never seen his boat.

**00:15:38**

**WE:** Oh, I'm sure the boats that can go off-shore in the wintertime have got to be at least 60 to 80-foot long.

**00:15:44**

**DE:** They trawl, the small--the smaller boats also trawl—they drag closer in, but what the laws—they allow them the size of nets and all. But they drag in the same areas now, not so much as off-shore, because it's hard for them to make it off-shore—big whites, headless. Where the—see, the big boats used to go and stay two or three weeks; break the heads. It was all big shrimp, and ice it up and then come in and have them grade it and you know, unloaded the headless. Where the smaller boat has a tendency to drag and sell the product all head-on, and then it's brought to processors. It's kind of different aspects of—.

**00:16:37**

Then he has a brother who is in Dulac. Now tell him about Allen.

**00:16:42**

**WE:** Yeah, he unloads fresh shrimp off of the boats, and he takes the big, big head-on one and he nitrogen-freezes them, fresh off skiffs. They're one-day shrimp, which is good quality, and which nitrogen freezing—it's--it's glazed and it's packed in—I think he puts it in 10-pound bags, and they're very easy to thaw out and very easy to peel, where—



**00:17:13**

**DE:** Good product.

**00:17:16**

**WE:** —it's a good product and he sells quite a bit of it in Houma.

**00:17:20**

**SR:** Where does he nitrogen-freeze it?

**00:17:21**

**WE:** In Dulac.

**00:17:23**

**SR:** Oh okay. So the--so the boats come in and then he freezes it?

**00:17:26**

**WE:** Yeah, he--he unloads the boats, the skiffs, one-day boats, and then he—they'll sit there and they'll dump the shrimp in the tank and the tank brings them up and they'll spread them out on the belt and he freezes them individually.

**00:17:44**

**DE:** Very good quality shrimp.

**00:17:45**

**SR:** And you can do that with the heads on?

**00:17:47**

**WE:** Uh-hm, and the quality—. You see, they have these freezer boats that--that freeze them in a brine, but the ones that are nitrogen-frozen are really good quality. Now the brine shrimp are good shrimp, but sometimes if you don't watch when you're cooking them with the--with the shell on, the shells could stick.

**00:18:07**

**DE:** If you overcook them, they don't—they're harder to handle.

**00:18:12**

**WE:** Uh-hm.

**00:18:13**

**SR:** Can you freeze shrimp with the head on?

**00:18:17**

**WE:** Yes. Yeah, he does. That's what he does; he freezes them with the head on.

**00:18:21**

**SR:** But just with—not nitrogen freezing?

**00:18:24**

**WE:** We do. We'll freeze some. We'll get like—I get a gallon jug that ice-cream came in or something, and we used to freeze bait and fresh head-on shrimp and put it with—fill a bucket up, and we'd fill it with water and put the top on it.

**00:18:41**

**DE:** The quality is not there as—unless you're very careful freezing; defrosting them at a slower rate; and you lose some quality when you freeze them yourself heads-on. They have to be solid ice, and then it's cumbersome because it's a larger volume and--and they're put in your freezer. It's not logical a home. You'd rather have them ready to cook. **[Laughs]**

**00:19:08**

**SR:** Donna, you were—when I asked Wayne about whether he always knew he was going to go into his father's type of business, you were shaking your head. **[Laughs]** I take it you didn't know you were going into that business.

**00:19:21**

**DE:** Well actually, Wayne was a senior at LSU and majored in accounting. And I had worked with him through high school at the different plants and different—in Golden Meadow. And we were married in August and we went back to Baton Rouge, and I said, “I'll live anywhere in the world but not Grand Isle.” You never say “never” because it happens.

**00:19:42**

And we moved to Golden Meadow that next summer, and then the deal came up where John Blanchard wanted to retire and Wayne's daddy wanted us to go down there and work. So, well, I did and I followed. You know it wasn't my ideal. I didn't—I just didn't dream I'd be there. My idea—it wasn't my idea to do that but you do it. He was happy. His accounting helped him a lot in the business. He's a good business person. And we had our ups and our downs, but we learned and we persevered and God blessed us and we stayed there for 36 years. And we were both happy.

**00:20:26**

**SR:** When you said you'd live anywhere but Grand Isle, were you just thinking of—you didn't want to do manual labor or you didn't—?

**00:20:31**

**DE:** Grand Isle was a party place. When we were in high school, people went to Grand Isle to party.

**00:20:36**

**WE:** Big tourist attraction.

**00:20:38**

**DE:** You didn't live in Grand Isle. *[Laughs]*

**00:20:41**

**SR:** How many people do live in Grand Isle—or did when you were there?

**00:20:45**

**DE:** About 1,600 or—

**00:20:46**

**WE:** Sixteen hundred. That's children and every--everything. There's not as many—I don't think there's 1,200 that live there now. Property has gotten—went up so high people--people just can't afford it. You just ain't got no migrant workers that come down here anymore. And a lot of people like us—like when we finished we--we moved up the bayou, you know. It's a--it's pretty easy living up here compared—. In Grand Isle you got to—Grand Isle is an hour drive from here. Anywhere you want to go. If you want to go to Houma it's an hour and 40 minutes. If you want to go to New Orleans it's two hours.

**00:21:26**

**DE:** To go to Wal-Mart it was 45 minutes driving one way and 45 minutes back, to go to Wal-Mart. To go to any shopping center it was four hours in one day of driving, and I just got really burnt on driving. And I knew eventually—

**00:21:39**

**WE:** Well we started building this house before Katrina, before we ever talked about quitting, and we finished it after--after Katrina. Well I told Donna a few years before, I told her I had had

enough. You know I was getting tired, like in 2004-2005. And then I just woke up one morning and said, “I quit. I’m going up the bayou. I’m finished.” In fact we—before I ever—I had done sold the house in Grand Isle because it was too much to take care of between these two houses, this house and that house there, and we was living in the camper and we’d come up here for a couple days.

**00:22:16**

**SR:** So that was even before Katrina?

**00:22:19**

**WE:** No, this is after Katrina.

**00:22:20**

**SR:** Well maybe we should—you know I have other questions about just the industry in general, but since we’re on this topic let’s talk about your path out of the business and what Katrina did to--to sort of—I don’t know what. I’m assuming it sped it up, but maybe not. You can tell me.

**00:22:39**

**WE:** Well Katrina—. When we went back after Katrina—Katrina was the Monday morning and we went back on Wednesday morning by boat to Grand Isle. And I told myself then, I said, “That’s it. I’m not--I’m not rebuilding.” And what we did, we started—we’d go back and went back--back and forth almost every day, and we’d go to the bridge and you’d have to take a four-

wheeler onto the island because the--the big bridge had some sections that they had to straighten up and all and you couldn't cross the bridge with a vehicle.

**00:23:13**

And we started cleaning it up and doing the work, and all along I says, "I'm not rebuilding." And when we went home for Christmas—when we went to—we was in Woodville for Christmas. Not Christmas Day but the Christmas holidays. After Christmas we went to Woodville hunting where we have a hunting place. And me and Mike was talking and we decided to rebuild. Katrina was September 1<sup>st</sup> or the last day of August or whatever it is, but we were in September, October, November and December, with the intention in that four months that we were just not going to rebuild.

**00:23:53**

And then I kind of talked—my brother-in-law talked to me, you know, and--and he said he still needed to work and all too, you know. So I said, "We're going to rebuild," and we kind of put some figures together and said, "Well, we could redo everything and get things rolling for \$400,000 to \$500,000; we could get things started." Well we spent \$850,000 before we unloaded the first shrimp, but we had--we had good equipment. We had bought a lot of new equipment we had lost, and the ice plant had to be rewired and everything. And we got it going and we unloaded our first shrimp towards the end of—let's see. We started in January fixing things and at the end of April we started unloading some shrimp.

**00:24:42**

**SR:** January of what year?

**00:24:45**

**WE:** Two thousand seven.

**00:24:48**

**DE:** No, no, 2007 you quit. We started unloading January of—

**00:24:55**

**WE:** Katrina was 2005?

**00:24:56**

**DE:** Two thousand five.

**00:24:56**

**WE:** Okay, all right, 2006 we started unloading the first shrimp.

**00:25:02**

**DE:** We stayed there two summers at the new dock, but it was not like the old dock.

**00:25:09**

**SR:** Well the—when you first brought--took the boat, you said that you went by boat on that Wednesday after Katrina to go check things out. First of all, where did you stay during Katrina?

**00:25:23**



**WE:** All the years we lived on Grand Isle we always evacuated to Larose. Well this—on the Sunday morning before Katrina—. Now Katrina was the Monday morning; on the Sunday morning every--everybody was done gone and me and Donna was the last to leave. And we got—she came downstairs and she says, “Well, where is the little pickup?” I said, “I put it in the garage. Everything will be okay.” And I got in the Suburban and we—we had a blue Suburban and we—I said, “I’m going to go with you.” So I’ll go--we drove to Larose where her mama lived on West 13<sup>th</sup> Street, and Jenny walked out the door—and my daughter walked up to the door—and she said, “We’re going to Texas.”

**00:26:06**

**DE:** We never have—we would go to Larose and stay at my mother’s for hurricanes. Very rarely did we leave.

**00:26:15**

**WE:** We drove to Texas all—it took us—it wasn’t too bad of driving. We got there by 10 o'clock that night, Sunday night, and Katrina was the next morning. The next day we heard no news whatsoever. We’re 100 miles west, northwest of Dallas, and oh you’d hear some on CNN.

**00:26:32**

**DE:** We got there that night and Uncle Billy—not Uncle Billy; Uncle Walter—called us at 4 o'clock that morning.

**00:26:37**

**WE:** We got there on Sunday evening around 10 o'clock—

**00:26:39**

**DE:** And we cleaned the yard, you're right, I'm sorry.

**00:26:41**

**WE:** —and we cleaned the yard, all day on Monday, and we heard a little bit on CNN about-- about Katrina. And I don't know what we was going to do the next day but the guy that owns the supermarket [in Grand Isle], well he was in Kentucky, and he called me and he says--he says-- it's 4 o'clock on Tuesday morning and he said, "Slick?" He said—this might have been 2 o'clock on Tuesday morning—he said, "Slick"—that was my nickname—he says, "You heard from anything down there?" I says, "No." I said, "You?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "It's pretty bad." He said, "When are you going back?" I said, "I don't know." He said, "I think you need to go ahead and—." My buddy is telling me, he said, "You need to go and go back and get things checked out." So I got everybody up and we left about 4 o'clock that morning and we drove.

**00:27:30**

**DE:** But we heard on the satellite radio what was going on. People down here didn't know what was going on but we heard a lot about New Orleans and we knew that there was water in Grand Isle.

**00:27:44**

**SR:** What do you mean "satellite radio?"

**00:27:46**

**DE:** On the--in the car, satellite radio. They had the CNN and the—we heard more from that than people down here could hear you know. But we knew it was bad. We—Walter's son-in-law went into the grocery store and he had two-foot of water in the grocery store and he said we--we didn't have—we had a lot of damage, so we knew it was bad. But you know for 30 years we had—we'd evacuate, come and go and take just pictures and just a few sets of clothes and never--never boarded our house up; had two glass sliding doors and the beveled glass in the front of the house and just—

**00:28:25**

**WE:** Never put a board on the door.

**00:28:27**

**DE:** Never boarded anything up, and I would bring my computer and we left—that's what he was trying to tell you. I had my—my daddy was ill and we had bought his little pickup and we left that. We had a bunch of Mexicans that worked for us and they took our big pickup and went to Beaumont. And the next morning when I got—well before they left they brought our computers upstairs and we left them at my house and I never—

**00:28:51**

**WE:** No, they were gone. Everybody was gone. I brought all of the stuff out of the pickup. I had to haul the computers from the office in the little pickup and I brought them in--in the dining room upstairs in the house.

**00:29:01**

**DE:** And I just never, ever left my computers down there. And Wayne always said, “One day there is going to be one that’s going to get us.” And when we got home, when we got down there, my house had a bay window and it was the only thing that was broken out upstairs. But I had—my Jenn Air was solid—everything was just saltwater. And I had plants on that window—mud. And just all over my--my kitchen and my--my den. My breakfast room and my den, you could see the rust was getting up on some of the furniture and all and—

**00:29:36**

**WE:** We had about four foot of water underneath the house. We were eight feet off the ground, and what happened—even though you have four foot of water, with the wind you have—with the wave energy—you had eight foot of water. And it washed all vinyl from underneath it, and it hit on the--the water would hit on the side of the house from the wave energy and with the wind and it was blowing the--the sandy water. The water came from the bay that we had on Grand Isle for the storm, because the eye passed between Grand Isle and Venice, the mouth of the river, and it took like a--a northerly course towards—well it passed on the east side of New Orleans and went up--went up Lake Pontchartrain right up to Biloxi and—

**00:30:28**

**DE:** But we got the northerly coming in from the bay. And it brought all the—

**00:30:30**

**WE:** Yeah, we had a lot of dead marsh grass on the island and—

**00:30:34**

**DE:** And we had the computers in the formal dining room and not in that room, so they were okay. That was what—I just can't believe I left those. I mean that just goes against the grain all those years I'd evacuated and never left my computer. You know the one computer—I had three or four, and just I brought one with me to have—the main computer—to have all the data and be able to work. And it was devastating because we cleaned—we had no place for the Mexicans. They wanted to come back and work. They wanted to come back and work, but they had—there was no place to house anybody. We had 18 camps, and the shrimp shed was on Smith Lane, and there was nothing left on that street.

**00:31:16**

The only thing left was a generator we had put up the year before on brand new pilings—and the building—that was the only thing on that street was left. Then our ice plant was pretty bad off, and then we had a warehouse on Smith Lane where our house was—if you see the two. And I have to go back and say, “Why did we leave? Why did we retire?” I have to tell you: We lost our son. He died in 2003. He worked with us and he died at home there with us. And that was part of the reason, I think, Wayne had—Wayne was tired. He gave all he had to give to the industry after 36 years. He was just, he knew he was—you work with the public seven days a week and never take any time for yourself. It gets—it gets old.

**00:32:06**

Then he had—then our son died, and then we had Katrina. And I think Katrina was really preparing me. I know because I would have never left Grand Isle because that was where my son loved it, and I wanted to be there. You know it was just something—he had drilled into me for 30 years work, work, work, work. Well it was kind of hard to stop, stop, stop. But then [Wayne] had a little stroke that he lost his sight in his left eye, and then he had another deal where he has ischemic optic neuropathy, where he lost in the good eye on two occasions—where the optic nerve, the optic, the microvascular that fed the optic nerve, kind of contracted and he lost—he could just see somewhat. So there were various reasons. The business wasn't the same anymore.

**00:33:14**

**DE:** But it's factors; it's factors. And losing our son; Katrina; tired; the industry wasn't the same anymore—just weren't profitable, and we're not going to kill ourselves if we're not profitable. So it's not one thing; it's various things, and he made the decision. I kind of coerced him to go back in and rebuild, and it's never going to be the same because it's not the same shrimp shed as the one that we had for 50 years on the other side. You know it was just like a--like a glove; it wasn't there anymore. We built—rebuilt, and it was nice. We unloaded; we worked. But it was over, and you know when it's time to be over, and it took him a year to convince me and finally I said, "Okay, we're going to leave." Well he said, "I'm leaving."

**00:34:03**

**WE:** I walked in the office and said, “Write me a letter. Tell them we’re closing October 31<sup>st</sup>.”

And she said, “Are we going to stay closed until the May season? You’re going to stay closed that long, until next May?” I said, “Also put I’m not coming back.”

**00:34:20**

**SR:** Write a letter to whom?

**00:34:21**

**DE:** The shrimpers.

**00:34:21**

**WE:** All the shrimpers. I sent them all—I got everybody’s addresses on the computer and everything and I sent them—. You know because some of the boats in the fall—the fall season was in the process. A lot of the boats had done moved to the west where they had a little bit more white shrimp. A lot of them had went home and quit already because there wasn’t a whole lot of shrimp in our area in that--that fall of 2007.

**00:34:49**

**SR:** When--when Wayne told you to write that letter, were you ready to hear that then? Were you ready to pack it in?

**00:34:56**

**DE:** I knew it was—yeah, I knew.

**00:35:00**

**SR:** It's very—it makes a lot of sense to me. I've never heard anybody put it that way about their homes or their business, that you can rebuild perfectly but even the space—even the space isn't the same. It's just not the same.

**00:35:16**

**DE:** Uh-um, it wasn't. It—we functioned.

**00:35:21**

**WE:** We had a facility that worked a lot easier than the other one and it just—

**00:35:23**

**DE:** Yeah, put more modern equipment and a nicer facility but it just wasn't the same.

**00:35:32**

**SR:** You mentioned earlier that Mike really wanted you to go back in the business, too. Was that your brother-in-law?

**00:35:35**

**DE:** My brother.

**00:35:38**



**SR:** Your brother. And so when you got out, did he get out of the business as well?

**00:35:46**

**DE:** Uh-hm.

**00:35:46**

**SR:** What is his last name?

**00:35:47**

**DE:** Oliver, Michael.

**00:35:52**

**SR:** Now I'm going back just a little bit. When you came back after Katrina, was there anything left, or did you just raze the entire business and start over? I mean you said that your house—your house was still standing, I guess.

**00:36:08**

**WE:** The house was still there and the ice plant was still there. The building and all. It was a lot of repair work on the ice plant, but as far as the unloading dock, we had to—that whole building, all the facility, all the equipment, everything was gone except the two unloading tanks and—

**00:36:29**

**DE:** We had a warehouse next to the ice plant on Smith Lane, and it had a concrete slab. And what we did was we called the people we originally--we bought the siding from to build the warehouse, and they sent us all the specs or whatever and we extended out the warehouse to the water in concrete and we rebuilt the building and put a--a cooler that we could put ice in and--and load--put the pallets of shrimp. As you unload shrimp, you could put it in there like a cooling facility and it--it was a nice facility what we had. We put two new suction machines in that we didn't have at the other one. You could unload the boats a lot faster.

**00:37:19**

**SR:** You unload with a suction machine?

**00:37:20**

**DE:** The new one; the new place, we had two of them. But that's—Wayne had had his stroke, and he couldn't see out of his left eye, and the way the facility was set, it was just a drop-off from the concrete to the boats and he kept hitting his head.

**00:37:34**

**WE:** Had no depth perception.

**00:37:35**

**DE:** He couldn't see, and he kept—he had to go to the doctor for his eyes—his doctor in New Orleans one afternoon during the shrimp season. He had hit his head that morning and I left and drove him over there and Dr. Brad looked at his head and he said, “You need stitches in there.”

He said, “You’re going to have to be more careful.” And it was—and Wayne was hands on with the shrimp, with the--the fishermen. He had to be out there to unload their shrimp. You know he had to be there to make the deal of what he’s going to pay [for] the shrimp and unload them, and it was dangerous for him.

**00:38:14**

**SR:** When did you have your stroke, Wayne?

**00:38:16**

**WE:** The spring of 2006.

**00:38:20**

**SR:** After Katrina?

**00:38:21**

**WE:** Yes, ma'am.

**00:38:24**

**SR:** Do you feel like the stress of all that contributed to that?

**00:38:27**

**WE:** No. It’s a long story; it’s a long story.

**00:38:33**

**SR:** That's okay.

**00:38:33**

**WE:** I kind of brought it onto myself.

**00:38:38**

**DE:** They could never find--tell him exactly why, but he feels it was trauma from him coughing that caused a flake to come from his carotid—because he had no blockages. He's in good health, but he still had the stroke. Do you follow me?

**00:38:52**

**SR:** Uh-hm, yeah.

**00:38:53**

**DE:** Okay.

**00:38:55**

**SR:** Wow, you've been through a lot. I want to ask for the record: What was your son's name?

**00:39:01**

**WE:** John Michael.

**00:39:05**

**SR:** So, who did you sell your business to?

**00:39:11**

**WE:** We did not sell the business. We closed the business. We still have the corporation. We still have some--a little bit money in the bank, and we just finished disposing of--of the assets this past November. We sold the property; we sold the property and everything to the Grand Isle Port Commission and the State of Louisiana, which the Port Commission is a State agency. And we did the sale in--in November of 2010. Now mind you, this was Rita/Katrina money from 2005 that took that long to—took a year and a half to do the sale. But there was so much--so many stipulations in it. But the Port—now the Port Commission has it, and now they have a public facility on Grand Isle for commercial and recreational fishermen.

**00:40:11**

**SR:** So when you say “Rita/Katrina money,” you mean that’s what--how they bought it from you?

**00:40:17**

**WE:** Yeah, they had the money and they only could buy--they only could buy marina or waterfront property with this money. This was HUD money that went through—HUD money that went to FEMA, or might not have went to them, but it went to LRA, which is Louisiana Recovery Association. And they had—they had quite a bit of money in this fund. I don’t know, \$30, \$40, \$50 million, and I don’t think they spent \$10 million of it so far.

**00:40:55**

**SR:** So it is not any kind of unloading dock, or it's not—no seafood goes through it, but it's a dock?

**00:41:08**

**DE:** Public dock.

**00:41:08**

**WE:** It's a public dock for—

**00:41:11**

**DE:** Commercial and sport.

**00:41:13**

**WE:** They let them tie the boats up.

**00:41:14**

**DE:** Uh-huh, so much is for commercial and so much is sport. Now the Port Commission leased or rented our warehouse part to Bobby Collins, Robert Collins, and he is drying shrimp there now. He revamped it all, and I don't know what the lease—anything about that—but he is doing dried shrimp there.

**00:41:40**

**SR:** That's interesting.

**00:41:40**

**DE:** That might be something—

**00:41:44**

**WE:** I could have kind of sold the property a couple times maybe, but I really had—I had the fishermen in mind. A place—you know they needed a place to tie up too, and there's a lot of people that live on Grand Isle and that comes from Lafourche and Lafitte and Westwego and shrimps out of Grand Isle that has no--no place to tie their boat.

**00:42:08**

**SR:** Why did you not sell the business?

**00:42:13**

**DE:** *[Laughs]*

**00:42:15**

**SR:** Is that too loaded a question?

**00:42:16**

**WE:** No. I wouldn't have got the money I wanted to get. I just as soon just sell the property.

**00:42:23**

**DE:** He was the valuable one. That's my opinion.

**00:42:25**

**SR:** Right.

**00:42:29**

**DE:** He made it work.

**00:42:32**

**SR:** Um—

**00:42:34**

**DE:** He had a talent. He had a talent to work. His dad was a very—he told you earlier his dad knew everybody and gave—. His dad was a giving person and he was a very giving person and he helped people and he helped people. And he had the talent to go and work with them, and that's why he had to be there, because they wanted him there. They didn't want somebody else there. They wanted him there.

**00:42:57**

**SR:** When you say “they”—?



**00:42:59**

**WE:** I've had fishermen tell me, I've had them tell me, he says, "We come once and you're not here, we'll come twice—you're [not] here; we come a third time and you're not here, we're not coming back you know."

**00:43:08**

**SR:** Right, so when you say "they," you mean the fishermen?

**00:43:11**

**WE:** Yeah. Now look. We unloaded these boats and we sold—we sold majority of this—we sold almost all these small shrimp to processors, but we unloaded a lot of good shrimp also. And we not only entertained—our business was not only unloading the boats and selling the shrimp to processors. Our business was also unloading the boat and selling the shrimp to the end-consumers also. And we sold a tremendous amount of shrimp to tourists that came to Grand Isle, and because we sold good--good quality merchandise. And it was--it was a big, big part of our business, was--was the tourists you know. And it was the--the fishermen, the tourists, and the people of Grand Isle—they were--they were really good to me and Donna and the kids.

**00:44:06**

**SR:** Did you have a shop there, or do they just—would tourists just come to the dock?

**00:44:10**

**DE:** The dock.

**00:44:12**

**WE:** They'd come to the dock and we'd have a place set up with some hanging scales, and--and look, they would want to come and walk back there and come find—. If I wasn't in the front they'd come walking in the back and want to come walk between the shrimp boxes or the vats of shrimp, and they'd want to see the boats and—which insurance wouldn't--insurance wouldn't have liked it you know. But you know we never had no--no mishaps.

**00:44:36**

**SR:** Would the fishermen get more money from you for shrimp that you were just going to sell off from the dock than the--the stuff that you were sending to get processed?

**00:44:47**

**WE:** During the summertime, yes. Yeah, I took care of them.

**00:44:50**

**DE:** Bring quality, you get better price.

**00:44:54**

**SR:** Well I wanted to ask, like, what makes a good dock owner? What did the fishermen feel like they were getting from you?

**00:45:03**

**DE:** Personal service.

**00:45:08**

**WE:** Yeah, I gave them personal service.

**00:45:11**

**SR:** And I suppose a fair price.

**00:45:12**

**DE:** He was fair; he was fair to all. He--he didn't do one better than the other. What he did for one he did for all. Whenever he would go back and say, "Well I should give you that price," I had to go back on the computer and I paid everybody the same thing. Everybody got paid the same.

**00:45:32**

**SR:** Well that--that brings me to—I was going to ask about the division of duties. You were at the computers, it sounds like?

**00:45:43**

**WE:** Oh yeah, sometimes—

**00:45:44**

**DE:** I was everywhere.

**00:45:45**

**WE:** —on Saturdays and Sundays when we had a lot of--a lot of people and a lot of shrimp, she'd be on the dock.

**00:45:51**

**DE:** I worked on the dock also. I worked wherever I was needed.

**00:45:55**

**WE:** When you unloaded a boat and you're putting the shrimp in the tank and they're coming off of the conveyor, well you got to--got to weigh a pound and you got to count them. And it determines what you're going to pay the boat. And look, I might have her there counting the shrimp, or might have her up there—all of a sudden you get 10 or 15 people up here wanting to buy shrimp and--and so we needed some help. So she'd come--come help wait on the customers. She liked to wait on the customers because she'd--she'd shoot the bull with them, you know, because we knew--knew most of them because 80-percent were returning customers.

**00:46:33**

**DE:** Oh they were like family. They'd cook for him. They'd bring food to him. Always somebody bringing something for us to eat. Always.

**00:46:42**

**WE:** Yeah, the ones that grew gardens, they would bring me vegetables. And one guy, he didn't get any the last four or five years because he passed away, but he would can--he would jar these--pickle these okra for me and then bring me as much as 20 jars of them.

**00:46:57**

**DE:** One lady would bring him Italian—what was it? —eggplant. Oh I mean they would come down; they would always bring him something because he was a giving man and then people gave to him also. It was--it was—. I have to tell you something else. We also had a fish business.

**[Laughs]**

**00:47:18**

**SR:** In the same spot?

**00:47:20**

**DE:** Well actually—

**00:47:20**

**WE:** Well it was separate but we put--put everything together in 2000.

**00:47:25**

**DE:** In the '70s—the late '70s—somebody came to us—quickly—somebody came to us from Florida and said, “Can we use your dock?” Because we didn't work as much in the winter in the '70s. And he--he wanted to unload king mackerel off the boats over our dock. We said, “Sure, no

problem. You can unload the king mackerel. Then Wayne got to realizing there's a lot of these boats coming over catching these fish. So the next year we purchased—we started buying fish. We would buy—I want him to give you the actual figures; there was days that we bought tens of thousands of king mackerel in one day, and then we would sell them.

**00:48:02**

Then we got into the fish business strong. We started buying snapper and king mackerel, and then we put that at the warehouse—before we built that warehouse? No, we had a dock on the other side of the warehouse, yeah. We had the warehouse there. We had a dock with the ice plant with the New Orleans Shrimp Company. We bought the ice plant and then we had the warehouse. Well, on the next side right next to the shipyard there was an unloading dock that New Orleans Shrimp Company used to unload the shrimp there further in from John Blanchard's. And we unloaded the fish there. And I worked with my brother there for years and threw a lot of fish around. **[Laughs]** And we bought fish, but it wasn't that prosperous. We had trucks that would take the fish to New York to Fulton Fish Market, and we'd sell fish to different places in Florida and in New Orleans a little bit.

**00:48:59**

And I guess we really started losing money because they'd catch so much fish, and it's a fresh market and you--you couldn't—we were losing more than we were making. But anyway, we combined it altogether and kind of phased out of the fish. We still bought fish—I don't remember. That's why I wish he was here to tell you. [Interviewer's note: Wayne had stepped out of the room for a few minutes.]

**00:49:29**

**SR:** If you are selling to those high-end markets, I mean, how would you make more money?

**00:49:35**

**DE:** There's no guarantee on the fresh market because you wouldn't find out—you would have to guarantee the boats—excuse me. We would guarantee the boats a price, but we didn't know what we were going to get for them in New York. And I know years, back in the late '70s or early '80s—I need you Wayne—the fish, we kind of phased out the fish because we didn't—we kept catching—they were catching more fish than we could handle.

**00:50:01**

**WE:** Oh, there was too many restrictions with the--with the Federal government on--on quotas and catch limits and who is going to catch them and ITQs.

**00:50:13**

**DE:** But you didn't make money going to New York.

**00:50:15**

**WE:** Oh, it was hard to make money going to New York. But—

**00:50:21**

**DE:** What did we do? We combined them?

**00:50:23**

**WE:** We--we put the two together, okay, and then we changed--kind of revamped it and changed things around where we can make some money on the fish and handle less fish. Too much fish you can't make no money with it. You got to eat it fresh, especially the red snapper that comes from the Gulf of Mexico.

**00:50:45**

**DE:** Well in the meantime, the government did come in and set ITQs and individual—

**00:50:54**

**WE:** It's individual quotas and all. But they had seasons on the snapper before--before. They were working towards it and they really didn't get--get rolling with it until after Katrina, the ITQs. In fact they just—they worked on it for 15 years and just started with it two years ago, with the individual quotas and all. But after Katrina because of limited space and things like that we just didn't—we just did away with the fish. We didn't handle it anymore.

**00:51:23**

**SR:** Are there fish docks on Grand Isle now?

**00:51:26**

**WE:** Dean [Blanchard] unloads fish. Yeah, he unloads snapper boats and king mackerel.

**00:51:31**

**DE:** The closest--the closest one from him would be—



**00:51:35**

**WE:** Griffin's in Leeville.

**00:51:37**

**DE:** —Griffin's in Leeville.

**00:51:38**

**SR:** So you've been talking about the ice plant. Did you manufacture ice there?

**00:51:43**

**WE:** Manufactured 84 tons a day.

**00:51:47**

**SR:** What was the process of—did you manufacture block ice or—?

**00:51:52**

**WE:** No. We--we'd chip ice, but we sold it like a block of ice. Like, we weighed it and then we--we sold them 315 pounds of ice, because when you—. We built that new facility in '75 totally automated, but before that we had a—

**00:52:10**

**DE:** Block ice plant.

**00:52:09**

**WE:** —we had a block ice plant, which was you had to freeze them in the cans and raise them up, which was a lot of intensive work.

**00:52:17**

**DE:** And that's how we purchased the New Orleans Shrimp Company, the old ice plant, which John Blanchard never owned any of that. That was New Orleans Shrimp Company. Wayne and I actually had someone to help us because we had no money and his dad had died and—

**00:52:34**

**WE:** The shrimp business was in a depression state.

**00:52:38**

**DE:** And someone helped us to finance and to purchase the old ice plant. And then a few years later we had an SBA loan, and we built a new--that new ice plant, and it was ammonia and the ammonia would go through the cylinders and the water would go on the outside of the cylinders and it would crack and it would fall. And it was really a very, very nice ice plant, and it was—we had it there for all these years. It still worked.

**00:53:05**

**WE:** But there was no money in the ice plant, but we increased our production of ice, which enabled us to increase our production of shrimp.

**00:53:14**

**SR:** Because?

**00:53:14**

**WE:** Without ice you cannot buy no shrimp.

**00:53:16**

**DE:** And there's a shortage of ice during the season.

**00:53:22**

**SR:** There's no ice plant there now, though. Is that right, or is it now?

**00:53:25**

**WE:** Dean has some ice makers. He put in some—

**00:53:27**

**SR:** Right, but your ice plant is—

**00:53:31**

**WE:** It's not operating.

**00:53:31**

**DE:** It's standing there but it's not operating now.

**00:53:34**

**SR:** Can you talk to me a little bit—because the season keeps coming up—can you talk to me a little bit about the seasonality of shrimp?

**00:53:40**

**DE:** First of all, it's evolved. I want him to tell you, but it's evolved. It's never the same. It's changed through the years. Go ahead.

**00:53:49**

**WE:** You can't put--you can't put—all the years, you can't put two years where they're the same, where “Well, we're going to catch some shrimp now and we're going to catch them this year—we're going to catch them now.” Well you're not going to catch them on the same date next year. You might catch them a month early, you might catch them a month later. I've seen years where they don't have nothing at all to catch. I can tell you, [I've] seen years where there's no shrimp whatsoever.

**00:54:15**

**DE:** But it's all weather factors.

**00:54:19**

**WE:** It's a noble resource.

**00:54:20**

**DE:** God puts it there, those factors of why and where, and no man can tell you where it's going to be the next year.

**00:54:25**

**WE:** But usually in the spring—usually the spring season is the--is the heavy production, which usually starts in May, but you start getting some shrimp in April if you got an early winter and you get warm weather quick and you don't have too much rainfall, and you'll start with small brown shrimp and big white shrimp. And then the white—after a week, two weeks, three weeks, well the white shrimp plays out and then the brown shrimp gets a little bit bigger as it goes on and it gets a little bit bigger, and then until towards the end—well I've seen years where the brown shrimp lasts until--until September, but I've seen years where they're finished at--in the beginning of July and there's no more brown shrimp. And then in the fall season, which usually--usually opens the third Monday in--in August, which just opened this past--this past Monday, well it's white shrimp—usually the bigger white shrimp—and as the season goes on the white shrimp get smaller, especially when you start getting the cold fronts. It flushes the smaller shrimp out of--out of the marsh. So, and once the shrimp hit the coast they come out of the marsh and then eventually they move offshore or they migrate west.

**00:55:51**

**SR:** So there's—so we talked about the summer season and then the fall season. How long does the fall season last, approximately?

**00:55:59**

**WE:** Well usually they close the season by--by the middle of December, but if you get too many cold fronts it'll close itself because it'll finish flushing the shrimp out by Thanksgiving. I've seen years where it's finished by Thanksgiving. I've seen years where they've closed the season and we still got shrimp, and we--we get these small shrimp on the beach in--in January. Every year is different; it's all--it's all with the weather.

**00:56:23**

**SR:** If they close the season and then you have the shrimp in January, will they open it back up?

**00:56:28**

**WE:** No. No, once they get it closed they're going--they're not going to open it back up again. In fact, they usually try to close the beach, some areas that are beach, where the shrimp are really small, over 100 to the pound, so—

**00:56:45**

**SR:** And so no one is allowed to fish those?

**00:56:47**

**WE:** No.

**00:56:48**

**SR:** And so, then, will you go from the close of the fall season until the spring, or is there a middle?

**00:56:56**

**WE:** No, it'll go—it won't be nothing. You get a few shrimp along the coast. Most of the boats, 80-percent of the boats, will tie up. Okay, these smaller boats and just a few local boats will go try once in a while on the beach and until they—usually by the end of January, the smaller boats that they have local—nobody is going out other than the bigger boats along the coast.

**00:57:20**

**SR:** And so—

**00:57:20**

**WE:** And that's when you get a little break in the action, too, you know. It's--because once you start in the spring, that's seven days a week until at least Thanksgiving, you know.

**00:57:32**

**SR:** What--what would you—but you would have, what, four months of not unloading any boats, it sounds like.

**00:57:40**

**WE:** Right.

**00:57:41**

**SR:** What would y'all do during the off-season?

**00:57:43**

**WE:** Oh we'd do some repair work, cleaning up and take a little vacation. Except once we got in—I think it was in—we really got in the fish business back in the middle of the—mid-'80s, '84, '85 where you handled most of the fish you'd catch would be in January, February, and March and April—you know, the snapper boats.

**00:58:13**

**SR:** Have you ever shrimped? Have you ever gone out on a boat?

**00:58:21**

**WE:** Shrimping? When I was in high school—when I was in high school and college, when-- when things would get slow in Golden Meadow and wouldn't be working and the boats would be going a little further west towards Texas—all for Texas—and my daddy had a few boats and I'd—I've hopped in two or three times and went and would make a trip. Most of the time, usually once we'd get to the—we went to port. The first time we'd go into port I'd get off and take a bus home. I'm a fair-weathered fisherman. I like good weather.

**00:58:55**

**SR:** I don't blame you. Talk to me a little bit, please if you can, about the price of shrimp when you started and how that evolved over the years.



**00:59:06**

**WE:** When I--when I first started and went to Grand Isle, shrimp was like—they bought it by the barrel, which was 210 pounds, and like it was \$35, \$40 a barrel for shrimp you know. Look, 210 pounds of shrimp at \$40 a barrel, that's 19.28-cents a pound. And then once it—a few years later, when we got—let's see, when I started in '72, when you got into the mid-'70s, well the shrimp kind of went up a little bit. No, the shrimp went off like from '72 to '75, but then in '75, that's the first time we had the oil embargo from the Arab countries. Well the oil went up, the fuel went up, and the shrimp went down. The shrimp was in the—shrimping industry was in a depressed state at that time in '75 and '76, but it came back again. But these small head-on shrimp that we handled, the large volume was always a--a pretty much cheap commodity during--during the season and they always liked to buy them for...hmm, they quit buying them by the--by the barrel and they would be like 30-cents to the boat and they'd give us 40-cents and unload them and deliver them, and--and it's had its ups and downs through the years and all. But now you get—things were looking up; the shrimp was going up a little bit in--in the early '80s. The boats were making some money, but then all of the sudden, I guess in the mid-'80s they started doing it with these—first these pond-raised shrimp that came out of South America. And then before you knew it they had all these shrimp that was coming out of these--out of these Asian countries, and you know right now at this—in 2011 we can--we are going to consume 85-percent imported shrimp in the United States.

**01:01:15**

And look, and I'm going to tell you what. I really up until about three weeks ago, I really never did know if I was eating imported or--or not-imported. But we went to a restaurant when

Donna was gone, and me and my daughter and my grandson and one of his buddies, and we went to one of these Japanese restaurants and I ordered—I always thought Japanese restaurants—where they cooked it out there. They didn't cook it enough, so I ordered a steak and--and everything I had was good. But then somebody else at the table had ordered shrimp, and they dumped these shrimp out on the grill and they were a beautiful product, beautiful. And--and the guy cooked them and they served them and they had some left and he gave everybody two or three and I ate one of them, and I thought it was terrible. I thought it was—I said they just didn't cook the damn thing enough.

**01:02:08**

So when I went to Dulac last week and talked--talked to my brother—. We went to see him, or we went by his house, when we visited him because his wife has been sick too, you know, and--and he was telling me. He freezes these shrimp and he sells them. And he was telling me who he sells these shrimp to, and he says this certain restaurant where we ate at used to buy 1,200 to 1,500 pounds of shrimp from him a week, of IQF frozen headless shrimp. And he says in fact there's three--three of these Japanese restaurants in Houma and they all bought the shrimp from them but now only two buy; this one we ate at uses--went to imported peeled shrimp. And that's—and I says, “That's why they put three shrimp on my plate and I ate one of them and I didn't eat the other two.”

**01:03:01**

**SR:** And what did it taste like?

**01:03:03**

**WE:** Tasted chewy; it was terrible. And look, I know what a good shrimp is. I can cook you good shrimp too.

**01:03:13**

**SR:** Why is the shrimp around here so good?

**01:03:16**

**WE:** Because it's a fresh--it's a fresh product. It's of good quality. And it's from the wild. These shrimp that they grow in these Asian countries, or--or farm raised shrimp, and what they do, they—I don't know if they do it with crawfish but they got--they got a pond like a crawfish pond or whatever and they grow them in a large volume and they give them this medicine where they don't get sick.

**01:03:45**

**DE:** Because they get—bacteria grows in there also, and they have to put antibiotics and things on the shrimp, and if they don't clean those—in China if they don't clean those ponds out there's—

**01:03:58**

**WE:** There's a disease it gets too.

**01:03:59**

**DE:** Yeah, it's not healthy. So it's something in the natural Gulf and flowing water, open water, has got to be better. Plus we have—you see that there's been Florida shrimp and--and it's the silt, the natural feeding ground. You have the Gulf Stream and they have a better feeding—

**01:04:22**

**WE:** We have the best ocean grounds and--and feeding ground for shrimp in the world right here in Louisiana on this coast.

**01:04:31**

**SR:** Why?

**01:04:33**

**WE:** Because it—I guess it's just the estuaries.

**01:04:41**

**SR:** I'm not looking for anything specific. I just—I'm actually curious because since I moved down here I've realized that I don't want to eat shrimp anywhere else. I went to California a couple years ago and my father-in-law really wanted me to make gumbo, and I spent a bazillion dollars buying shrimp for the gumbo. I mean I can't even remember what it was a pound but it was the most expensive gumbo I've—you can imagine—and they weren't that good compared—. I mean they weren't bad. And so I'm— really don't know why they taste so much better.

**01:05:13**

**DE:** I have a good story to tell you. When we first moved to Grand Isle, Lena—Miss Lena was John Blanchard’s wife. And I worked at the shrimp shed with them and she brought over the shrimp salad sandwiches, a little platter, and she was a good cook. And that winter—now, I’m 20 years old [*Laughs*] and I wanted to learn how to cook the shrimp--make the shrimp salad. So that winter I was home and I got some shrimp and I cooked it just like she told me. They’re just not like hers; you know, I couldn’t understand. Finally she explained to me the next year, she says, “You have to use the Brazil shrimp, the brown shrimp.” In the May season that’s the type of shrimp they catch.

**01:05:57**

**WE:** A lot of times they call them Brazil.

**01:05:59**

**DE:** The brown—little small brownies. In the winter we had white shrimp; white shrimp do not have the flavor the brown shrimp have. But now you have, today a lot of your brown shrimp is from offshore, the big ones, and they’re full of iodine and they smell rotten. You don’t want that.

**01:06:20**

**WE:** They’re good; I love them.

**01:06:20**

**DE:** He loves them. You have to have an acquired taste for them. And that’s not the same little brown shrimp—they’re big ones; they’re offshore, but they have more iodine. It’s the little ones

inshore that they catch in the May season that have the best flavor. To me, the perfect shrimp is a 36--40 count brown shrimp. To make and cook a bowl, a little pot of them, and sit and peel them, there's nothing better—and I don't get that anymore. He likes to eat big shrimp. He likes big white shrimp.

**01:06:52**

**WE:** I like--I like big brown shrimp too.

**01:06:53**

**DE:** And to me—

**01:06:55**

**WE:** I don't mind the iodine.

**01:06:56**

**DE:** So there's different varieties of shrimp that have different tastes.

**01:07:00**

**WE:** But it's all the same shrimp. What happens, you got these—the shrimp with the southerly wind comes in in the post larvae state from the Gulf, in--in the spring, early spring. They start—every time you get some south wind they'll move inshore, okay. And the Wildlife and Fisheries samples all this. And they get into the marsh, and if you don't have a lot of rain and you're going to have a good shrimp season, well with the high salinity and everything else these shrimp grow

and they--they go out there with a quarter-inch net and they test everything and tell you how much of the shrimp they catch and what kind of volume they look for for the season.

**01:07:40**

Well the season will open. But the point I'm trying to make, I'm going to tell you how the shrimp migrate. When the moon is right them shrimp come out to pass, starting usually the last--the last moon in April and the first moon in May, and them shrimp go onto the beach and they catch shrimp on the beach for approximately six days. They'll catch shrimp on the beach, and then all of a sudden they will go out there and when the current and the moon is through they'll go out there the next day and they won't catch a shrimp. Them shrimp disappear. Them shrimp move and they go—they move offshore and they—and the water, when you get into the blue water, the water is clear. Well them shrimp turn to night shrimp and they bury up in the daytime. They bury up in the daytime and they—and when they go out there they have to bury up because the water is so clear because of the predators and because of the fish.

**01:08:34**

And when the boats go shrimping offshore they only can—only at nighttime they catch the shrimp. Other than that they bury. But when they get into that deepwater they acquire this iodine. And it just—

**01:08:53**

**DE:** You know the shrimp work with the moon.

**01:08:57**

**WE:** And the current.

**01:08:57**

**DE:** They do.

**01:08:59**

**WE:** The current works with them.

**01:09:00**

**DE:** John Blanchard told us that and I didn't believe it, and I believe it now.

**01:09:03**

**WE:** Oh yeah.

**01:09:03**

**DE:** The shrimp are—

**01:09:03**

**WE:** You ever see on the news when they talk about the tide charts? They tell you how much the tide is, because you know when the tide is there you're going to catch some fish and you're going to catch some shrimp, but when the tide is not there you're not going to catch neither one and they're going to be right there and you're not going to catch them.

**01:09:23**



**DE:** But these old trawlers could tell you when and where, but it's not like that anymore.  
They're not—

**01:09:30**

**WE:** Oh yes, it's different. It's different. All the old-timers that—. Look, these young—

**01:09:33**

**DE:** They just knew.

**01:09:33**

**WE:** —these young shrimpers, they can't—back in the old days nobody brought a net to the net shop. When they came in they got on the back deck, these old-timers, and they sewed their net and they patched them. These young fishermen--these young fishermen, they can't sew. They got to bring it to the--to the net shop.

**01:09:51**

**SR:** Now why do you think that the relationship with the moon and--and the net-sewing wasn't passed down?

**01:09:58**

**WE:** Well the industry has changed too ,you know. It's--it's—

**01:10:05**

**DE:** Because I'm going to tell you, the industry in the '70s— '60s and '70s—was a small fleet. And through the years' economy people thought, "Well, there's a way I can make a living." And they go buy a boat and they go try to make a living. But they didn't have that history. And it expanded. A lot of people could make—everybody could make money with the shrimping. But now it's gone back to where it's harder to make the living and there's less boats in it.

**01:10:30**

**WE:** Less--less people entering the business. You know it's because of the fuel.

**01:10:35**

**DE:** There's so many government regulations.

**01:10:37**

**WE:** And look, when we started—when we moved to Grand Isle we sold fuel for 15-cents a gallon. And my daddy thought that was high. And now they paid \$3.39 this summer. And listen; shrimp was 25--30-cents a pound for 80 to 100. Shrimp was 45--50-cents this summer, in May, when they first started.

**01:11:05**

**SR:** A pound?

**01:11:05**

**WE:** A pound, and--and fuel was not 15-cents this summer. Fuel was \$3.39 a gallon, so—.

**01:11:14**

**SR:** Well I understand why the imports have, you know, driven the price of the shrimp down—the--the imports coming and being less expensive. Is there any other reason that shrimp are so cheap, the fresh shrimp, or is it purely imports?

**01:11:36**

**WE:** Imports and--and anybody that's in the frozen market now. Fresh shrimp—usually local people, they--they pay a little bit more, but they get good fresh quality merchandise, you know. But then you got to watch where you shop also, too. You got to know. I don't know how to tell you this with--with the end-consumer. There's a few places like in Baton Rouge where—in New Orleans, you get good, good merchandise and--and you're like—they don't pull your eyes out like they did to you when you was in California like you mentioned.

**01:12:16**

**DE:** Right, oh no. But it's a process of--of—

**01:12:22**

**WE:** It's the same thing when you pay expensive for them shrimp, that's the same way I felt sometimes if I'm not going to New Orleans and I feel like eating lobster, well, I'm going to go pay—well, I'm going to go to Sam's and they have good quality lobster there, rock lobsters that they sell there. And which was \$29.99 a pound, and the--and the king crab was like \$22 a pound.

Well, when I was in New Orleans Benny charged me \$20 for a lobster and he charged me \$13 for the king crab.

**01:12:52**

**DE:** Yeah, we have a history with him. [*Laughs*]

**01:12:52**

**SR:** Well for the record, where were you buying that in New Orleans?

**01:12:57**

**WE:** Louisiana Seafood Exchange on Jefferson Highway.

**01:13:00**

**SR:** Yeah. We talked about it earlier. Well, I know that place. I go eat po-boys there a lot.

**01:13:07**

**WE:** Yeah, and he's got it—he used to operate the--the front part now but he doesn't operate it anymore, and he's got--he's got it leased out but the guy has got good sandwiches. They load them up with shrimp.

**01:13:16**

**DE:** We sold a lot of product to him, fish and shrimp.

**01:13:20**

**SR:** What is his name?

**01:13:21**

**WE:** Benny Miller.

**01:13:24**

**SR:** Um—

**01:13:24**

**WE:** He would be a good guy for you to interview too, you know that?

**01:13:27**

**DE:** Uh-hm, he would.

**01:13:29**

**WE:** He's been around a while.

**01:13:30**

**DE:** Knows a lot about—

**01:13:30**

**WE:** He's--I guess Benny must be 53 or 54 years old, but—

**01:13:35**

**SR:** And he buys seafood from down here I guess?

**01:13:37**

**WE:** Yeah.

**01:13:39**

**SR:** What about the count? You know when you talk about the count of shrimp, the 36--40—  
what does that mean?

**01:13:46**

**WE:** It determines how big the shrimp is; it determines what you're going to pay the boat.  
When the shrimp--when the shrimp run like in the spring, the brownies when it first opens,  
they're 80 to 100. In other words, they're small shrimp. There's between 80 and 100 shrimp in  
the pound. When the fall season opens, the white shrimp, the majority of time—not all the time  
but I'd say 80-percent of the time—they're 15--20 count. That's a nice white shrimp; that's good  
white shrimp.

**01:14:16**

**DE:** It's how many shrimp to a pound.

**01:14:18**

**WE:** Yeah, between 15 and 20 shrimp in the pound.

**01:14:21**

**SR:** What is the difference in flavor between the white and the brown?

**01:14:24**

**WE:** The brown shrimp is more firmer shrimp. White shrimp is more tender, but—

**01:14:33**

**DE:** Brown shrimp have more flavor to them than white shrimp.

**01:14:39**

**WE:** Inshore--inshore brown shrimp.

**01:14:42**

**SR:** I'm really—you solved the little mystery for me. I bought some offshore brown shrimp a couple weeks ago.

**01:14:50**

**WE:** Were they red?

**01:14:51**

**SR:** They were, and they were fine once I cooked them, but they smelled really strong and the stock that they made smelled so strong I didn't use it. And I knew that they weren't rotten because it's the same person I buy shrimp from all the time at the farmers market, but she did tell me when I asked where they were from, she said, "Well these are offshore; it's not the season yet." And they were huge. [*Emphasis Added*]

**01:15:17**

**DE:** We would--we would sell sometimes, when we wouldn't have big whites—customers would come and we'd have big brownies and Wayne would tell them. And we've had, through the years, a couple of times customers call and said they didn't want them and Wayne said, "Well bring them back, no problem," because they're strong. And you have to acquire a taste for it. And you think they're bad and they're not bad.

**01:15:38**

**WE:** It's just the iodine in them.

**01:15:40**

**DE:** Just high iodine.

**01:15:41**

**SR:** And the iodine is—why do they have more iodine? Just more iodine in the water?

**01:15:49**



**WE:** I think it's because the water is so clear, and when it gets offshore all the shrimp have some type of iodine. That's why we eat shrimp, so we don't get rickets. If you don't have enough iodine you get rickets.

**01:16:06**

**SR:** Well I'm going to keep eating them then.

**01:16:08**

**DE:** You're showing your age, Wayne. [*Laughs*]

**01:16:09**

**SR:** What did your shrimpers—what was their reaction when they got the letter that you were done?

**01:16:16**

**WE:** Oh heart failure. Really heart—you wouldn't believe it. I still see—and listen, they either call me Slick or they call me Parrain, one or the other.

**01:16:28**

**DE:** Do you know what Parrain is? [Interviewer's note: In Cajun French, "parrain" means "godfather."]

**01:16:32**

**WE:** And a bunch of these people, I seen them grow up into the shrimping industry, and I don't meet anybody that doesn't tell me that they miss me, that they don't miss me. I've been over there at Dean Blanchard's and I got one of them, Nunnie, is unloading shrimp and Dean is right there. Dean is right there, and--and I'm getting some shrimp for us to cook because we go to Grand Isle on weekends and we fish.

**01:17:01**

**DE:** Dean loves when we come.

**01:17:04**

**WE:** And--and Nunnie, he says, "Parrain, man, we--we sure do miss you. We sure wish you was back here." And he's unloaded at this other guy's facility you know. **[Laughs]** And which the guy has a good facility, but he didn't stay there and take care of it. He's got it all and I'm happy for him.

**01:17:23**

**SR:** Do you—when hear that kind of thing, do you have regrets about leaving the business?

**01:17:30**

**WE:** No. I have regrets about—oh, I don't see the people no more.

**01:17:40**

**SR:** Yeah, that was the best part of the business it sounds like.

**01:17:48**

**WE:** Yeah, a person can only do so much work, yeah. Oh I could still work. But I stay really busy too you know.

**01:18:00**

**SR:** I know. Every time I talk to you you're in the car or you're going to Gretna or—

**01:18:05**

**DE:** Going to Grand Isle or going—

**01:18:04**

**WE:** Going to play golf.

**01:18:06**

**SR:** When you go to Grand Isle on the weekend, do you have a place there?

**01:18:11**

**WE:** We have a camper, yeah.

**01:18:12**

**DE:** Yes. We are also in the oil business. We have crew boats.

**01:18:18**

**WE:** We have a part—we have another little business, and this guy came to see me. He shrimped for me since he's 12 or 13 years old.

**01:18:27**

**DE:** Since a kid.

**01:18:27**

**WE:** And he came and find me in 1998. He says, “You buy me a crew boat,” and he says, “I’ll make you plenty of money.” Well November 30<sup>th</sup> of ’99 we found a boat and we—and I bought it—we bought it—. He couldn’t go to the bank and get the money and he couldn’t—but I could and--and I bought it. And let me tell you something, this man really held up to his end of the deal.

**01:18:56**

**DE:** It’s been a wonderful—a blessing. They’re Christians; they’ve had a hard life. They just could not get ahead in the shrimp industry, and they sold shrimp to us, and every winter he would go work on a crew boat in Golden Meadow for Nat Collins. And he had his captain’s license and he wanted that so bad and—

**01:19:17**

**WE:** In fact he’s 53 years old today.

**01:19:20**

**DE:** And we finally—he found the boat and there was times in the first year or two that Wayne said “Well, it’s not going to work.” But I said, “No, we have—we can afford—if we lose this, it’s a gamble.” And we have been blessed. It’s just been awesome.

**01:19:38**

**WE:** Look, in 11 years, or 12 years—

**01:19:40**

**DE:** We don’t—he takes care of every—he takes care of the boats.

**01:19:44**

**WE:** I go to Grand Isle and I get the mail and I pay the bills and I tell him how we stand financially and how much accounts receivable and then I come back home. And I’m going to tell you what—\$200,000 or \$300,000 a year.

**01:19:58**

**SR:** Well that’s great. Pardon my ignorance, but I don’t even really know what a crew boat is.

**01:20:04**

**DE:** It’s an offshore marine supply boat.

**01:20:07**

**WE:** It transports—this is the boat that they use mostly for transporting people that work offshore on the oil rigs and all. And plus it carries supplies also.

**01:20:18**

**DE:** It's 100-foot; we've had three. The original one we bought, he sold it and bought another boat, so we have two right now. He wants to buy—and you know it's just a wonderful relationship. Everybody said it won't work. But it worked.

**01:20:39**

**WE:** It's a lot of work with these boats and all. He does all the crews, the groceries, the marketing, the dry dock. Look, he stayed—one time he stayed 11 to 12 days on the dry dock right there and they worked their butt off. And I'd go see him and he would say, "No, we got it." He said, "You go play golf."

**01:20:57**

**SR:** Well that's great.

**01:20:57**

**DE:** And his wife, I taught her to do the payroll and now I don't—I just go on and do the online and—that's why I had this in Grand Isle a lot. I logged into my old email down there and I have a bunch of them and I'm going to send them to you. But he bought—this was our house.

**01:21:16**

**SR:** We're looking at an aerial photograph right now of Grand Isle.

**01:21:19**

**DE:** And this was my brother's house and this is the ice-plant and that was the warehouse, okay. And my brother sold Ernie this house and we sold this and kept this little shed right here, is our office right there for Ever-Ready Marine. And it's on his property. We put all of this property; we kept it and we have—this is before Katrina. So after Katrina, my brother had sold his house and he put a deal right here to put his camper. And we had—we put two campers for the Mexicans to live in to work when we rebuilt after Katrina because there was no housing. See, we had all these camps. We lost all this. Everything over here was gone. There was nothing left over here. I had a rent house here and I had a rent house here. I had John Blanchard's house that he had sold to us before he died that was inside of our property and those two houses I rented—we lost everything.

**01:22:21**

And this was still here and this was still here and the ice plant was still there and part of this warehouse, but we made a shrimp shed. This was the old shrimp shed right here. But anyway, have our camper here and all this property is in our--our crew boat business, so that's—we don't have anything personally but it's in our business down there that we have that. We can go stay. I don't want anything more than that.

**01:22:45**

**SR:** But it's great that you're still connected—so connected. Well what is the name of the business?

**01:22:50**

**DE:** Ever Ready Marine.

**01:22:53**

**SR:** Ever Ready Marine?

**01:22:54**

**DE:** Uh-hm.

**01:22:54**

**SR:** And you mentioned Ernie. What is—?

**01:22:56**

**DE:** Ballard.

**01:22:56**

**SR:** Ballard--B-a-l-l--? Okay. So you're back in the oil business? [*Laughs*]

**01:23:07**

**DE:** Never were—we were in it before.

**01:23:09**



**SR:** Well they're very—. You know it's obvious when you live here, but not if you don't how meshed the two industries are—fishing and oil.

**01:23:21**

**WE:** Well so many people that shrimp in the summer and the fall work somewhere in the oil field industry in the winter. I've never in my life worked in the oil field industry. You know I couldn't tell you anything. When BP had the spill, Ernie would tell me about it and he'd tell me what was going on you know but—.

**01:23:43**

**SR:** If you were still in business now, how much do you think the BP spill would be affecting you?

**01:23:50**

**WE:** Oh Dean is blaming it all on BP right now. There's no shrimp in the Grand Isle area. But listen, shrimp and fish—oil is not going to kill the shrimp and the fish. If the water is bad the shrimp and the fish are not going to go there. They're going to move, okay. I've seen years where there's no shrimp at all. I've seen—or hardly any fish at all; you couldn't go make a living. I've seen years where there's so much shrimp you've got to shovel them overboard. I've seen years—you see shrimp second, third day of April, the fourth day of April you're seeing shrimp already. I've seen--but I've seen years where you don't see the first shrimp until May 24<sup>th</sup>. I've seen them that late; you know you're talking about a seven-week span. It's a renewable resource from God and every year is different.

**01:24:51**

I've seen it change where we had brownies and never have any white shrimp in the Grand Isle area, and I've seen, years before we closed, where the brownies are--are finished before the middle of June and there's white shrimp, white shrimp like you've never seen. But it all changed with this Davis Pond, this freshwater diversion, they got in Luling. And they're trying to make it--make it fresh water, and you know stop the saltwater erosion, intrusion, whatever you want to call it.

**01:25:24**

**SR:** That changed the salinity.

**01:25:24**

**WE:** Every year--every year is different and it all depends on weather, tide, currents, rain. Rainfall is such an important factor with shrimp. Before they opened this freshwater diversion, it--it's all different.

**01:25:45**

**SR:** So you're not worried about the seafood that you eat, having oil in it?

**01:25:51**

**WE:** I eat just as much. I ate more shrimp probably last summer out of Grand Isle than I ever ate—plenty. We eat quite a bit—we eat quite a bit of shrimp.

**01:26:00**

**SR:** So if there aren't shrimp in the Grand Isle area it's—

**01:26:04**

**WE:** They'll come back; there will be some shrimp sooner or later.

**01:26:08**

**SR:** I don't want to keep you much longer because I've gotten into lunch hour.

**01:26:15**

**WE:** You want a cracker?

**01:26:18**

**SR:** No, thank you, but I won't keep you much longer. **[Laughs]** I do want to ask a couple more questions if you don't mind, and one of them is: I can see in his photo how big your business was. I mean just in geography there's like a wide area, but—

**01:26:32**

**DE:** This is Dean Blanchard's place right here, and we went to right—our property ended right here.

**01:26:45**

**WE:** We owned half of that water.

**01:26:47**

**SR:** I don't--I don't know if measuring something like that in acres makes sense when there's water involved.

**01:26:52**

**DE:** Seven and half—seven and a half acres.

**01:26:55**

**SR:** Oh okay, and how many people did you employ like at the height, do you know?

**01:26:59**

**WE:** Well in the spring, 22--26.

**01:27:03**

**DE:** Twenty-five, yeah.

**01:27:04**

**SR:** And you mentioned that your son—I think you said that your son worked with you. Did, or does, your daughter as well?

**01:27:10**

**DE:** She did in high school. She's a CPA right now. **[Laughs]**

**01:27:15**

**SR:** Oh, the other--the other inherited that part.

**01:27:19**

**WE:** Uh-hm.

**01:27:19**

**SR:** And what is your daughter's name?

**01:27:21**

**WE:** Jennifer.

**01:27:24**

**SR:** Is her--is her last name Estay?

**01:27:26**

**WE:** Uh-hm.

**01:27:29**

**SR:** Okay, I guess I'll try to wrap this up. There's just so much. Do you think that Grand Isle will exist in 50 years?

**01:27:40**

**WE:** Uh-hm.

**01:27:43**

**DE:** Because it's a big tourist—a lot of fishing. Grand Isle is probably—

**01:27:49**

**WE:** You been?

**01:27:49**

**SR:** Uh-hm.

**01:27:50**

**DE:** —sustained by the sport fishing. That's probably the most important thing about Grand Isle, why it will always be there.

**01:27:57**

**WE:** It's a tourist attraction. Probably the only natural beach they have in Louisiana, okay; people love the beach. People love the sand, you know. And the fishing—the fishing wasn't good this summer, but there wasn't that much shrimp. But if you get shrimp, bought it for fishing, they get some speckled trout.

**01:28:19**

**DE:** As far as the shrimp and fish industry, the commercial part of it, nobody can read the future, what's going to happen. I mean you know when Wayne's daddy was alive he said, "You'll never see shrimp at \$5 a pound." But he didn't visualize what would happen one day. You just can't tell what's going to happen. I mean we don't know what our company is going to do next—tomorrow. We don't know what—you know, as far as the shrimp industry, there will be some sort of shrimp industry, but I see it changing but it's hard to say how it's changing, to what—. I think there's going to have to be less volume, better quality, and then maybe the prices will go up. And I think there's going to be an avenue probably of boats are doing more freezers and they're selling their own shrimp and there's going to be, you know—it's just going to be a different; it's going to look different. How, I don't know.

**01:29:23**

**SR:** I see a lot of people selling shrimp and crabs and other things from the side of the road and not going through a dock. Is that more prevalent now, or was it always like that?

**01:29:34**

**WE:** You can buy a license—

**01:29:36**

**DE:** And sell it now, yes.

**01:29:37**

**WE:** You don't have to buy the \$200 license. You can buy a \$25 license. If you have—if you've got your regular shrimping license you can buy another license for \$25 and you can go and sell it on the side of the road.

**01:29:49**

**SR:** Was it always like that?

**01:29:50**

**WE:** No, when times—nobody would do it because they didn't have this \$25 license. You had to buy the \$200 license. Well back then it wasn't \$200; it was \$106 back then.

**01:30:05**

**DE:** They can't make it at the dockside price.

**01:30:09**

**WE:** At \$3.39 a gallon for diesel.

**01:30:10**

**DE:** And the fuel and the dockside price, and if they go catch 500 pounds of shrimp and they get \$1.50 per pound. at \$750, and then the fuel is six—

**01:30:28**

**WE:** And if they burn 150 gallons of diesel, they don't have much—



**01:30:31**

**DE:** You don't make it; you know it's just not feasible. So things are changing.

**01:30:35**

**SR:** But on the other hand, if they sell it themselves directly to the consumer—

**01:30:39**

**DE:** For \$3, then they're going—you know, they can make ends meet.

**01:30:45**

**SR:** But can they sell enough? Can they sell as much as they catch?

**01:30:47**

**DE:** I don't know.

**01:30:49**

**WE:** Sometimes they can; sometimes they got to sell to the—

**01:30:54**

**DE:** What they can't sell, they can go dump it at the dock.

**01:30:57**

**WE:** A lot of people goes and sells shrimp in—where my brother is at they go sell some shrimp in--in Houma, okay. But eventually they catch too much shrimp and they got to sell him some of them. Not a bunch, but he's got a few of them. Where when we was in Grand Isle, well, I wouldn't let nobody sell no shrimp off the dock, but if they wanted to bring some shrimp home and sell them at home, no problem. But I wouldn't let them sell them off the dock because I'm there selling shrimp off of my dock too.

**01:31:32**

**DE:** Yeah.

**01:31:35**

**SR:** The fishermen that you dealt with, I mean, how many fishermen—how many boats were you unloading?

**01:31:41**

**WE:** Oh look, we've had days with the skiffs, with the small boats, we've unloaded as many as 70. We've unloaded--we've unloaded as much—two years before Katrina and before the—the day before the shrimp season opened we unloaded either 1,500 or 1,675 boxes of shrimp. We unloaded around 160,000 pounds of shrimp in one day. And--and that's the day before the season opened. Couldn't wait for it to open and have a break. But you'd go to work—basically you'd go to work and they'd hit the shrimp; it was a good year with volume. And they'd hit them shrimp and we'd—look, they'd call me. I said, “Y'all call me. Don't go put them shrimp on—

don't go ice up them shrimp and go to sleep. Let's get them shrimp unloaded if you want to go back the next night because you're going to fall behind if we don't get started."

**01:32:44**

**DE:** Wayne—they would call Wayne and wake him up and we'd go unload the shrimp at 2 o'clock in the morning.

**01:32:48**

**WE:** At 2 o'clock in the morning and work 'til 10:00--11 o'clock that night. You'd unload them - them butterfly boats or skimmers now; you'd unload them butterfly boats as they'd come in early in the morning and then the guys that would leave to go shrimping with—that would drag the net on the bottom. Well, they'd leave at 1:00, 2:00, 3 o'clock in the morning and you'd unload them in the afternoon when they'd come in.

**01:33:14**

**SR:** So there's—yeah. So there's the difference, for the record—?

**01:33:18**

**WE:** Usually--usually the month of May was never less than 2 million pounds.

**01:33:22**

**DE:** Mr. Efficient here. *[Laughs]*

**01:33:23**

**WE:** What?

**01:33:26**

**DE:** Mr. Efficient here; he handled it and he could manage it and they liked it because he was on top of it and he did what it—he would always manage to do what it took to make it easier on everybody.

**01:33:37**

**SR:** Could you describe the difference between those two kinds of nets?

**01:33:42**

**WE:** Yeah, see this—what is that? That’s the trawl shrimp. That’s what we done. These boats we’d unload in the afternoon.

**01:33:53**

**DE:** Early in the morning—

**01:33:53**

**SR:** Those nets go to the bottom?

**01:33:54**

**WE:** Those would fish on the bottom and the ones that fished on top of the water were the butterflies, and now—

**01:34:00**

**DE:** They're frames like you've seen—

**01:34:02**

**WE:** Like a big pass—they have a big pass they use, butterflies, but they all use skimmers now because the skimmers will go fish on the bottom now in the--in the small bays and all, shallow bays. Efficient means of shrimping. See, one time, whatever net—back when we first moved to Grand Isle, we didn't have no white shrimp hardly in the fall. And I think the guy--the guys that shrimped, they fished with a flat net, and they fished these brownies, okay. And--and they'd use them in the fall and they wouldn't catch no white shrimp. But then this guy came from Florida with this, what they call—not balloon. What did they call that?

**01:34:46**

**DE:** Pete?

**01:34:47**

**WE:** No, yeah, Pete--Pete and Queenie. There was a certain type of net with a lot of webbing to it. It was bigger than a—

**01:34:57**

**DE:** Mongoose.

**01:34:59**

**WE:** Mongoose. It was bigger than a balloon net. And they'd catch--they'd catch white shrimp. You know if they're using more efficient means to catch the shrimp to start with. And then they-- they have fish exclusion devices; they have turtle exclusion devices, you know. So they're not-- they're not endangering the—

**01:35:24**

**SR:** Are there restrictions on that?

**01:35:27**

**WE:** Plenty, plenty. That first meeting they had with the concerned shrimpers when they wanted to put them in, they had 5,000 commercial fishermen that was in Thibodaux. And the government knew they had it beat—they were beat. The government knew they could not win. So what the government did, the government says, “We’re going to win.” It’s the first time you had all the segments of the shrimping industry together from inshore, bay fishermen, coastal fishermen, offshore fishermen, and what they did, they had all these fishermen from the four segments of the industry. And the government knew they were beat so the government says, “Well, we’re not beat. We’re going to do this easy. You can’t organize these fishermen.” Very, very competitive.

**01:36:22**

So the government says, “We’re not going to make them all pull tags. We’re just going to make the ones offshore pull tags.” So once they targeted one segment of the industry, the other three segments, they left. And then after they had the--had the ones pulling offshore—

**01:36:41**

**DE:** It’s the old divide-and-conquer.

**01:36:42**

**WE:** —they went to the next segment. But now they’ve got all four segments pulling tags. But if the government targets all—everybody together—it can’t win.

**01:36:56**

**SR:** Smart.

**01:36:59**

**WE:** Uh-hm.

**01:36:59**

**SR:** One of my last questions is: When we heard your clock making music earlier, you mentioned that you were Admiral of the Fleet at one point. Could you tell me what that means?

**01:37:10**

**WE:** I was, in other words, there's a blessing of the fleet where the--the priest comes out and he blesses everybody. He decorates and it's an affair. It's a fundraiser too for the church also, but they come out and they bless the boats. They do that at the--towards the end of July and the beginning of August in the Grand Isle area, where like in Lafitte they'll do it in April. I think they'll do it usually right before the season opens in Golden Meadow.

**01:37:36**

**DE:** It's a fundraiser for communities, for different—

**01:37:39**

**WE:** Yeah, mostly for the--for the church. And I think Grand Isle has used the money for functions for the kids though now.

**01:37:51**

**DE:** For the church, but I think it's done through another organization now.

**01:37:56**

**WE:** Yeah, and—

**01:37:57**

**DE:** When you—they'd ask—

**01:38:00**



**WE:** Yeah, for years they'd ask me.

**01:38:02**

**DE:** It was always some trawler and then he knew he was going to quit and so he said, "I'll do it."

**01:38:05**

**WE:** Yeah.

**01:38:07**

**SR:** And then, what--what are your duties when you're Admiral of the Fleet?

**01:38:09**

**WE:** Well you walk around with white pants and a white shirt and admiral cap and be pretty.

**01:38:15**

**DE:** [*Laughs*] You preside over the functions.

**01:38:21**

**WE:** And then I wasn't—I wasn't here two years and living in Larose since I retired and they made me—what was I?

**01:38:29**

**DE:** The French Food Festival.

**01:38:32**

**WE:** I was the Admiral of the—

**01:38:33**

**DE:** No.

**01:38:33**

**WE:** No, not Admiral; I was Grand Marshal.

**01:38:37**

**DE:** Here in Larose, but he always—Wayne always supported the Larose Civic Center. The old ladies would take and peel the shrimp and we'd give them some smaller shrimp when they got a little bigger, 60--70s, and we'd give them a 100, 150 pounds or 200 pounds, or however many women they had here to peel them by hand. And for years Wayne always donated shrimp and they'd come get a little at a time. And they'd put that out for the French Food Festival here. You know what I'm talking about?

**01:39:07**

**SR:** Uh-hm.

**01:39:09**

**DE:** Uh-hm, and then since we're out of the business—. I think before we got out of the business Wayne said, "Let me get some peeled meat for you that's already—you know fresh meat—and y'all don't have to peel them." So now they—we still get it for them. They purchase it but Wayne goes and gets it, the product, and—

**01:39:29**

**WE:** This is when the day is half over during the middle of the summer, that's what we look like, wore out already.

**01:39:35**

**SR:** That's so great. I love that photo.

**01:39:37**

**DE:** This was Wayne and our son with the flounder when he was young. Now he died at 30.

**01:39:44**

**SR:** Aw. Oh I'm looking—we're looking at some really old pictures; they're beautiful.

**01:39:49**

**DE:** This is when I was pregnant with my daughter, and that was his brother and that was my son—our son. We only had the two children and Wayne's brother, Allen.

**01:39:57**

**WE:** This is Kyle, my grandson. And that's John Michael.

**01:40:03**

**SR:** Those are great pictures. Wait, so this—who is that, your brother?

**01:40:06**

**WE:** Oh that's my little brother, yeah, brother and sister.

**01:40:08**

**DE:** And his sister.

**01:40:09**

**WE:** I was a lot heavier at one time.

**01:40:12**

**SR:** Yeah.

**01:40:12**

**WE:** Oh when I quit drinking in '90 I weighed 258 pounds.

**01:40:15**

**DE:** Then he walked it off. [*Laughs*]

**01:40:17**

**WE:** I thought I had a picture of me and Donna out on the fleet in here, but I don't.

**01:40:21**

**DE:** It's up there on the wall somewhere. I don't—he really enjoyed that so he's always been—. He goes and he does and helps at the Civic Center, and he goes and gives his time and does things because they always have people volunteering over there.

**01:40:34**

**SR:** The Civic Center in Larose?

**01:40:35**

**DE:** Yes.

**01:40:37**

**SR:** Well just for the record, some of our oral history subjects on the Gumbo Trail make the gumbo for the French Food Festival. It's a big deal in these parts.

**01:40:45**

**DE:** Yeah, well that—right.

**01:40:48**

**SR:** Donna, Wayne made it clear that it sounds like—I don't want to put words in your mouth, but the most rewarding part of your career was working with the people, it sounds like.

**01:41:00**

**WE:** Uh-huh.

**01:41:00**

**SR:** What about you, Donna? What was your favorite part of—?

**01:41:04**

**DE:** I loved it. I loved it. I love—. Look, I could sit in the office and talk to the trawlers all the time.

**01:41:08**

**WE:** Oh yeah, she could carry on quite a bit.

**01:41:10**

**DE:** [*Laughs*] And I did a lot of paying their bills. Some of them, I had to carry them through things and I did the paperwork for them for tax exemption forms and license and just—. One guy, we took his checkbook. He couldn't read and write and I did everything for him. He was-- he was illiterate, you know. I don't know, how do you say that—illiterate. And he got mad at Wayne because he wanted to buy another truck on his checkbook and Wayne says, "You can't afford another truck on your checkbook." And I paid—I had gotten him a tax exemption form

because he hadn't paid all of his back Louisiana State taxes, so we got that—. I did research on that and I took and we paid that and I managed his money for him.

**01:42:02**

But then when you don't understand and he got angry and he wanted his checkbook and he quit and he left. And you know you do and you do and you do and you enjoy it because you do a lot for them, but they gave you a lot too. It was—we were part of the family, all of it, a lot of them. And you couldn't please everybody.

**01:42:24**

**SR:** But that's sort of what it sounds like. It's like a family thing. You know there are—it's give and take and give and take, and sometimes there are big blow-ups.

**01:42:31**

**DE:** And my son had a college degree in--in business, but he loved working there and he wanted—that's what he wanted to do. And I guess if he'd still be alive we'd probably still be there working.

**01:42:42**

**WE:** Not as much though.

**01:42:43**

**DE:** It would be his. *[Laughs]* And Jenny worked with us, our daughter worked with us when she was in high school. She—well, you live there, you worked. *[Laughs]*

**01:42:56**

**SR:** Well I want to—I mean I could go on all day, but you know maybe I'll have some follow-up questions one other day, but I want to thank you both so much for giving me your time and your story.

**01:43:05**

**WE:** You want to know something else, you want to ask something, you're welcome to call any time.

**01:43:11**

**SR:** Thank you. Thank you so much.

**01:43:12**

**DE:** Thank you.

**01:43:15**

**[End Estay Interview]**