

Dovie Naquin Interview

Interviewer: Earl Robicheaux

Dovie Naquin: You got to change that song – I can't use that on account of – that uh, you know to say it in English. So I had to – so I could make it in French or in English.

(Subject speaks French)

(singing) If you really want a Louisiana Cajun man, you gotta know how to handle that man. If you don't know how to handle that man, you better go and run just as fast as you can. He's a good hard working man. He can make his living on the sea, or he can make his living on land. But you can't hold his hand all the time. You've got to let him go, he's gonna make one or two rounds in town. He's gonna come back to you just as fast as he can. That's Louisiana Cajun man. If you really want a little bit more from him, get one or two drink of wine. He might last all night long, if you take him on your shoulder and give him another drink of that wine. He's gonna stay on that dancing floor just as long the band gonna play. That's a Louisiana Cajun man.

Earl Robicheaux: Alright. Ha ha. Alright. How about a little Francais?

N: (sings in French)

R: Alright. Haha. A oui.

N: (speaks French)

(sings in French)

R: mmhmm. Haha

N: (speaks French)

R: (speaks French) Je sui uh...

N: The women have stronger husbands that leave, you know, they don't understand that there. She wears the (French term) the pants. She took her husband by the hair and she throws him out the window – she says, you're drunk. That man didn't have a drink. First thing she knows, she passes the stew around his nose, and she makes him eat beans every day and all day long. Early in the morning he gets up, he cleans her house, shine her shoes, she would look on the side – not satisfied. That's when he turned around and he gave him her shoes, he says take them. Good thing he had a (inaudible) on his shoes because I don't know how you're gonna stop.

R: And of course this has not changed at all.

N: That's right.

R: That's right. How about anything with your accordion?

N: Oh, you mean a story of that?

R: Yeah, any songs?

N: (sings in French)

R: Play us some tunes?

N: Okay. (speaks French)

?: You got any songs about fishing, and um...

N: No, not too much. I got a little bit about alligators. (speaks French) I don't practice my old songs no more.

?: What about songs about living here, or living in this house, or going out trapping and fishing, and..

R: Play us what you know best.

?: Yeah.

R: Play us what you know best. Whatever you feel good playing.

N: This uh, this old song is um, part of the old one, but uh, I got some new words on the end, okay.

(plays accordion and sings in French)

R: Tres bon. Tres bon.

N: (Speaks French)

(plays accordion and sings in French)

Good thing that mosquito went in his eye and makes them dry because he was in trouble.

R: Haha.

N: Yeah, man.

R: So that's your alligator song.

N: Yeah. Alligator – ain't got none. I got some stories like that, but they had a group come here from uh, Grand Terre. (Speaks French) to go in that canal with the two boats, to have one man – and that man asked me to go with him in the – one with a camera on the side. Yeah. We went to St. Louis Canal there, they uh, go away, and then he made those two boats stop, and hold the boat cross-way to see when the the film, to take the picture, take the canal, and the trees on both sides where the alligator was, but we saw some that day, but not right there. I don't believe he came out in the film at all. But he asked me some questions. He said, he said, he said, I don't believe you can make a song. You can't read and write! I said no, you don't know me. He said, why? Why I don't know you? I said look, I've been trapping all my

life. In fact, I got fifty to a hundred traps. I talk to those traps every day. He said, what you telling them? I said, what I'm telling them? He said, catch me an otter, lay out my nets,(inaudible) take you, do the same tomorrow, I'm gonna come right back and keep on going to the other one. I go to the one – the other one, they got grass in it. It closed in with grass – with nothing in it. I found him. I said, if usually it don't bait it better, I'm gonna bring you and I'm gonna put you in the back in the house and I'm gonna keep on going. I said, if I can do that, I can make a song, huh? He said, you're right. Ha.

R: I like that. Talk to the traps.

N: (speaks French)

R: Talk to the traps.

N: I go by myself in the morning, I go trap the trap; if I got a hundred traps, I know – I take a one for every hundred, but a lot of them, I talk to them. And I brought another one – I don't know where he was from. I dropped him off in the marshland – he's gonna make me go in the boat away and come back there, and sing and talk like I talk to the traps, you know, and I come back and pick him up. If you do that, you gotta have two little boats where the camera man can follow all the time, you see.

R: Oh yeah, yeah.

?: Can you sit here?

R: MmHm. Well we're here today with Mr. Dovie Naquin in Point aux Chene, today is what? March the

?: Nineth.

N: Nineth.

R: 2005. And Mr. Dovie – you're now, what, 91?

N: 91. I was born in 1914.

R: 1914 – what's your birthday?

N: February the 24th – I just had it.

R: Alright. Alright.

N: And I was born about a mile and a half below here. And in those days, it was very, very sad. Hardly had no money at all – we had enough to eat. Because my daddy was a good fisherman and a hunter. He would hunt and – as a matter of fact, he got caught by the game warden a couple times. And uh, the second time, the game warden told him, he said look. His name was Francois. He said Francois, the money get you out, and the friends get you out. He said I caught you again, you in jail, you go. He said, Mr. Folkes, let me tell you something. His name was John Folkes. He said Mr. Folkes, let me tell you something. I got a family to raise. You got a job. You do your job. You caught me – I can't let my kids cry for food when they got something to eat right by us. You can try to catch me again, but it's fooling me,

and he never did catch him a third time. Two times, there. And he couldn't make much money in those days. It's sixty dollars I think at one time, and sixty dollars was pretty big. Now, it's not nothing at all. It's just a token. It's not even a penny. But um, my youngest days, that's the reason I didn't have a school to go to school. We didn't have no bayou here. No road here to get to the doctor anywhere. You had to go by boat and follow the water – go to Seabreeze and then come back Terrebonne Bayou to Houma, from here, go fight to get to Larose - Larose from here was okay. Long – it was not in the summer – summer you had the water lilies that was floating the canal – you could get in there. No motor. Very few motors if you had any. It was rowboats and sailboats. So that's why I got a big respect for the Indians. Because I was raised – that the medicine kept me up to talk to you today. The Indians. They gave me some – somebody said it was good. I said yeah? It's not bad, huh?

R: Do you know what kind of medicine that it was?

N: It was the roots of the tree – you have bark of the tree. The limb of the – the root, everything for different things. I know a few things again – but not – not as much as I should.

R: So do you remember some of the names of the *traiteurs*?

N: Oh, *le traiteur* – he was the – about three of them around. The closest one - and not for money, no. You go there, wake him up, and he comes to the house by pirogue, and he do what he had to do, and then one of them his name was Paul Maurin Vuillot. Maurin – that's a French name. And Paul, well that's a French too. But Vuillot – Vuillot got to be the Indians here, but they got some Vuillot French people in French people. So um, Paul – he was a good doctor, but he was one leg cut off just below his knee. That'd make it – leg um, his leg, foot with an old cypress knee. You know why they call it a cypress knee, huh? French –bous couillot.

R: Bous couillot.

N: Bous couillot. You know why? When you (inaudible) – it don't come any higher – no branch, no leaf or nothing. It just comes out, and you don't see it. Hitting it you can fall, you (brouse couillot?) so they call them brouse couillot. So as Paul had his leg there, the only thing he was at – my daddy, in those days you had to have chickens and hogs and to raise – and raise some corn to raise those things because you had to have eggs, and the chickens to eat. So the hogs for the fat, and um, the little bit salt meat that was put in a jar with salt and they'd be fresh - but all Paul wanted just the head. If you kill, he said, Francois, I only want one head – if you kill two, I want two heads. For the year or whatever. So Paul gets the word and Paul goes get his head. And when he came, I don't know maybe he wants to trade that for chicken or ducks, no. And then my daddy would make him corn and potatoes – a lot of potatoes. Those people would come to get the potatoes. You know something? That's one thing – how they would save – how they would save the uh, the potatoes with out rotting, and without the stuff growing. You never – maybe you never heard that. My daddy was picked up in the yard – the highest spot they had. Bayou side, close to the house, you put some hay in there and you pick up a potato that high, and just as – many you could put, and when it was finished, you put some hay on top. And you got your – cut some uh, pine needles, they have a long leaf, cut it up, then he takes his shovel about a foot from the top of the hill, he cut a little ditch all the dirt – he put that on top. And then – but six times – six years or six

months or so after, he opens that, and it was just fresh as he was pull it out the ground, and then he gave the word. I'm gonna open up my – people want some potatoes, today or tomorrow or the next day I'm gonna open. But if people from the island, from low Point aux Chene they called that. (French term) they would come here too. And then some of them would bring a push-pull or paddle or to get some potatoes – no money, often no money was holding. You know, so the only – when I got married, the only thing was make money in '36. We went to the fur. They stayed here. Muskrat. No neutras in those days. And very few raccoons. No otter at all. Mink – very few. Only rat and I was – I was moved from here to go to the camp – they had a father from New Orleans who had a camp for um, for hunting, fishing, and all that. and they asked me when I got married – ain't no job, if I wanted to take a job to take care of the camp, and take a day – and wait for us on Friday and bring him in, and I said, okay, I don't have nothing to do, I got thirty dollars a month. A dollar a day, in those days, it was very good. That – after a while, I had to quit that job because my family was growing up. And the fur business went down –that's when I started to – went to seismograph, and uh, I come very green. They put me in the marsh buggy, and I didn't know nothing. I was riding in the boat behind one of the, the say. Mr. Morris came here and he said, tell me you ain't got no job. Well what you gonna do? I said, well I'm gonna find something to do for sure. He said, if you want, tomorrow I'm gonna give you a job. He said, come to the house. In about a mile here, they had a headquarters for the buggies – this company was quick. They'd they finish the job – they go on back to Texas - the machine was still there. He said, come here Monday, and we're gonna talk about I said, I don't know. But I went. And I talked to my wife first. She said, I don't got a nothing to lose. And I said oh, he said um, you want a job? I said, I don't know. I said, I don't know nothing. He said you come one day, you gonna get help from those guys. So a guy gets on the job. He tells me his name and everything, when I told him the name of my wife, he said I don't want that. I want her name. I said, I gave you her name! Because she was a Naquin too. I said, Necie's a Naquin. She said, Necie? You can't use that name - that's your name. I said, that was her name too. So he said, you had a joke? But anyway, after I got through with that the same reason you're there, you. But those days, you had to take the wheels off the big buggy to put on the truck. Not the whole wheel, but the part of the – because it got to go through the marshland, and then uh, then, so I went there, and I went in – the first on – in the (inaudible)the line for the other guy – told me I had to drill a hole, and then shoot the (inaudible) and so forth. I was the last one in the back. Everybody was ready to bring it out and start working. I had a, a skiff full of hides, you know how to patch up those old buggies – we had trouble. And they put down the back and they say, the boss said, when you got through with the buggy, put it in the water and bring that skiff with you. I got to go to town tomorrow – coming back, pick you up. He said, throw it around the corner – you got a stake and you get - fuel up everything, you can have oil and gas, what you need. I stopped, but before that, when I come to put that pontoon behind, I didn't know how to do it too much. I go with my buggy in the water, I put the wench in instead of bringing the boat in the water, the buggy was going in the water. And they had a group of people that was coming with a bus I don't know what it was – workers or – they saw that in (inaudible) and something was new to see then. So they stopped. They asked me – they said, well you want us to help you? I said, you got something to help me, I said, I appreciate it. So they did that – they put that by hand and take off. Green as they can. Than now, if you ain't got no (Spanish?) nobody gonna hire you. In those days, only job was freight trains. When I got on the quarter boat that night, and he gets on top, he says you see them rigs way out there? He said tomorrow morning you take that and go there. When I get on the bank, the water is

okay. It's a hydraulic. The wheels was going like that. the buggy was going like that. I said I don't want to do that – follow the line. You got to be straight on the line to make some. You got it on record, so far apart, certain things, so, so we got – I got on that thing. First man from Morgan City - it was a Borne. Mr. Borne – he talked French good. I said Mister, I don't know – before I do anything I'm (green?) where this thing is. He said don't worry about that. Bring that thing here and leave one. So I hooked up on him, we weren't – three days later, one of those machines broke down. So we had to go on new jobs (inaudible) takes his place. And I didn't know nothing about it.

R: Now how many years did you drive a marsh buggy?

N: Thirty years.

R: Thirty years.

N: And I retired – and the boss he didn't want me to resign because he said you got so many people who know you, and you know they know you doing it right. They say you're a good help - you should stay with us. I said, Mr. Morris, let me tell you something. That's what I like to tell you is to take my vacation now. Because I'm feeling good to do something else. And whenever I fix it up (inaudible) at me. He said, you're – if you wait a little bit longer, you're gonna have more. And you can make so much money – like that and then you got to pay some in time. I said, I don't care about paying. I don't want to be free. So and then one time they had a party with them big shots from Texas – and they all come down in the office. And every time when they had a big going on before Christmas, they called on me to go meet them to talk to them. The lady though, the big boss to, Mr. Morris, she said Dovie, I want you telling me the truth. How it is when you retire? I said Mrs. Morris, you want the truth or the lie? I said, I want the truth. I work about three times the whole (inaudible) with y'all. But one thing - when I lay down underneath my big oak tree there, nobody can say get up and let's go. I can take my nap as long as I want. I said, Mr. – she said, that's what I thought. True, huh?

R: Absolutely.

N: One you're free. You know you got to do it. You ain't got no boss to get him something. You got to hustle. But I make like a good – not a lot of money. I just survive. And then my wife will go trawling, we come here, tie up the boat - the little boat I got on the right there. And then we was back about ten, to eleven o'clock every day. And I had people all over on the telephone to - I want so many bushels of shrimp, every, every time I goes out. And then we would make a pretty good, and in those days, pretty good money. So she passed away in '85. I had a good woman. Once you talk about good women, that's the one save you to start. 40 cents an hour, and she raised me seven children, and no one on the side was coming. She had the - she had no job. We had to fund – fight with that. so my daddy and – part of my life but not much. But my daddy's life, before they had to have um, a place to trap to survive. And then, if you got a hurricane down here, fast, you wipe out all the muskrat. You leave on the credit - the store man knows you, everything you would take, you mark it down. When you was taught to make money with the fur, that's the first money that you had to pay – that's grocery. Not for Christmas – we didn't have nothing because we didn't have no cash. We would pay the grocery with boots and traps and so forth. We was to use them, and that's why the – a poor trapper, he had a very hard life, you

know. And then that's my um, part of my life, but I like you to know my grandpa's life. My daddy would paddle a boat, about two miles, a pirogue – you know what a pirogue is. To start trapping, he'd get on the bank and start walking, and coming back at eight o'clock at night, and though we uh, too small to help him out yet. And then after while, I come back to help him out, and after while I got married, and my biggest catch was a hundred and fourteen muskrat. Come that dark, and the only light – we had a kerosene light. And we had to sit down on the floor and skin that, pull them straight, and then the smell you say, you had to hook that in your living room. You even smell that on the string if you're walking door, it was bounce - so smell is so strong. That's a true story. That's what I passed through.

R: So your grandpa and your dad and you all trapped?

N: I was all...

R: Ya'll fished on this land? Now were they from Point aux Chene? Where were they from?

N: Well, my, my grandpa was in Point aux Chene, but before that I don't know. My grandpa was Emile. Daddy's side. Emile Naquin, and he uh, he had – two brothers. He was Edward, and uh, the other one was Francois. The other one was named Francois. And uh, that's what I had to say. I got uh, seven children, and I got four boys and three girls. And out of those boys they got one of my sons, not Mark, the one after Mark – Dwight, and he's gonna come up tonight – no tomorrow night. And he uh, I said Dwight, I like the way you live because that's the old routine my daddy had and I had, and one of you kids, you show your kids how to catch alligator, you let them drive boats and show them how to place to play with these little boats and all, right by, he said, he's about eight years old. And him, he works offshore, as soon as they get there, they're gonna set a few traps tomorrow, I mean Friday, and then he's gonna start – go cut grass. Now he's gonna cut grass – or kill grass with the weed eater or whatever, then he's coming back around his trap, and he skins it – he skins it right here, on that table, you see those stretchers? He puts a stretcher on. And he likes to do that. And he's ready to retire anytime. He's gonna wait for the - for sixty two, sixty five, you make good money, and he uh, he knows how to do it. He says I'm strong, and I know what I'm doing, and I got a few dollars to back me up, he says I want to retire.

R: So now he's passing on this tradition to his children. Do you know of anybody else in Point aux Chene that's doing this?

N: Uh, not too many. The – word in French, on the other side, you got more. I got a lady coming help me out when I got the big tourists who was coming in? And uh, her name is Jean Vardin. And she brought along one of her little grandchild – he was, I don't know, about six maybe? And that little son of a gun, he can talk three languages. I said, how in the hell he learned that? She said you learn French, you learn English, you learn um, Espanol. And I said, look, I can talk four languages too. I know no school, she said, yeah, tell me what you can say. I said, I can talk a little bit English, a little bit French, and a whole lot of ducks and alligators. I said alligator you got to do, (Aw! Aw!) and duck, (Quack Quack!) I said, that's what it is. I've got to talk to them. It's true.

R: Yeah. Before we end this tape, what's your duck call? You want to do a couple of duck calls?

N: Alright, I make that, you got thirty, forty years ago. And I like it very much because I learned to watch the – ducks to call any bird. The first call I give you – we call that the feed call. The female ducks – they got a little sun. When they go in the water, she goes with her nose looking for food, mud in water, when she raises her head, she can't holler loud. That's why they call it the feed call. She got feed and mud and water. It's true. So that's why they come first.

(duck call)

N: (coughs) – that's not he duck call – that's my call. Ha. I'm gonna give you another round of that Feed call – I can't do like I used to, but I ain't got the pressure in my stomach no more.

(duck call)

N: I got to breathe - I had to breathe.

R: Okay we're out of tape. Hold on a second.

(subject speaks French)