Roland Guidry Interview

Interviewer: Carl A. Brasseaux and Don Davis
Date: July 24, 2019

Carl Brasseaux:

[inaudible 00:00:01] I'm an honest here.

Don Davis:

We need to do a little paperwork. This is Don Davis. I'm out at the South Lafourche Library at 16241 East Main Cutoff. It is 24 July, 2019. I am here with Mr. Roland Guidry. Before we get started, I just want to get your permission to record this conversation and put it in the archives, so people who want to study the culture and people of south Louisiana in the years to come can listen to it and get information, and use it in articles or books, or documentaries, or whatever project they're working on. Involved in the interview will also be Carl Brasseaux. Is this okay with you?

Roland Guidry:

It is.

Don Davis:

Fine. Roland, thank you so much for helping us put on this oral history project together. I'd like to begin by a simple question. What do you love about the Bayou country?

Roland Guidry:

The people.

Don Davis:

Oh, and...

Roland Guidry:

The people, the food, that we're a friendly, friendly culture. The Acadians, the Cajuns, they love people. Until... golly, until the '60s maybe, nobody locked their door down here. You go knock at any time of the day or night and somebody say, "Come in." You never went anywhere without somebody offering you coffee or food. Poor people, but they had enough for everybody anytime you went. Big families, little families, could be Sundays. People would walk to church, come back, talk to all the neighbors along the way. Yeah. Hardly any people had cars when I was a little kid, and Sunday afternoon, you'd go to your mom or your dad's house. That was a ritual.

Roland Guidry:

My dad had eight or nine brothers and sisters. When my grandmother got a cold, she would stay with one of the kids a week at a time. My daddy was the youngest survivor, so he would go everywhere that she went for a Sunday meal. We'd go Sunday, have a meal with her. We'd go to Bridge City. Marrero or Larose, we'd go and visit Mama. I was 15 when she died. I was in second grade when my teacher said

that we were poor, I didn't know what she meant, being poor. I asked Mama, "Mama, what does it mean, being poor?" She said, "Well, Roland, we don't have any money. That's what it means. We can't buy anything that we want. We buy our groceries, what we need, but we can't be extravagant. We can't buy anything."

Roland Guidry:

Because I couldn't understand, because when I got up in the morning, my grandmother had baked some bread, churned the butter that the bread was... had preserves that she made herself. We had our own garden, eggs, our own chickens. We raised hogs, we raised chickens. We had a cow. They had Guernsey cow, and we would raise chickens and ducks, and you name it. My uncles are all shrimpers and fishermen. We had all the seafood that we needed. The neighbors would get together. We'd butcher a hog one time. Two weeks later, the neighbor would butcher a hog.

Roland Guidry:

Two weeks later, the other neighbor would butcher a hog. Everybody would share. It was a real good society. Go to school barefoot with short pants, walk through gravel. I guess the old saying is that when you went to break in a pair of shoes, you put a little gravel in at first and you don't walk in it. But everybody pretty much got along. Shrimpers, when it was shrimping season, you could see everybody had a tree in his front yard, the back yard. There would be a net hang. They had tarred it themselves.

Don Davis:

Why would you tar a net?

Roland Guidry:

To preserve the cotton, because it was made out of cotton. There was no nylon like they do today, and all this flax stuff and everything. It was cotton trawls. They would tar them and hang them up, and you could smell it from a mile away, but everybody had his trawl hanging up to dry after you've tarred it.

Don Davis:

Where'd you get your nets?

Roland Guidry:

They had a few people that would make nets. A lot of these guys would make their own, but my first experience with a net maker was Mr. [Clareville 00:05:36] Keith. My daddy and Clareville were in church together, and we'd go... During the war we'd go and... during the blackouts, we'd go make ice cream at his house or they'd come to our house and we'd make crank ice cream in the dark. Mr. Clareville, like I said, was the first net maker in my area that I remember as a child. His son and I were the same age. Clareville Junior was the same age as me. We grew up across the bayou from each other. Of course, they lived on 308 when I was a kid, and then they moved across the bayou, bought a piece of ground and then he built a shrimp shed.

Don Davis:

Your daddy?

Roland Guidry:

No. Mr. Clareville. He built a shrimp shed and started having a few hardware for his shrimpers, and were financed until the... He'd buy the shrimp. When they brought the shrimp in, they'd pay that debt before he gave them a nickel. I'm sure... that's how it was in those days.

Don Davis:

How do you define a shrimp shed as opposed to a shrimp factory?

Roland Guidry:

Well, I guess it was the same thing. He would buy shrimp and pay ladies to break the heads. You had a trough running down the middle of a long alley. You had to stand up on a bench about six inches off the ground, because there was always water running, so the ladies would get their feet. Most of the time the water was running to keep the shed clean. They would come with a wheelbarrow or a bushel basket and dump shrimp on the table, and he had women on both sides of that table breaking heads. There was a gutter running right on top, maybe a foot off the top of that table, and they would throw the shrimp in there, and water would bring it down to the end, and it would fall in the area and they would make sure it was clean, and then they would pack it.

Don Davis:

How were they packaged?

Roland Guidry:

Well, at first it was just by the [inaudible 00:08:01]. They'd pack it by the bushel, about 70 pounds, 75 pounds a bushel. They would package it and the shrimper would get paid mostly by the barrel of shrimp when he'd sell it by the barrel. Of course, it was a heaping barrel, and they had a big old container that was a barrel. You could go up, fill that up from the hold of the boat and it washed... It was full of holes, that barrel, and made out of steel, and they would wash it real good.

Roland Guidry:

Make sure there was no more ice in it. They didn't want pay for ice, and they always got a cone on top. Anything I did that was oyster or shrimp, there was always a cone on top and you got paid by the barrel. They had to come out a head. Anyway, the women would get paid, when I was a child, 35 cents a bucket, about a two-gallon bucket of heads. Again, you had to have a cone on top, and they would pay you 35 cents. Every time you'd go to the lady, they would take charge of it, pay you whatever. She'd put your name down for one, two, three, and at the end of the day, if you had 10, it was $2.50 cents.

Don Davis:

Were you paid in dollars or were you-

Roland Guidry:

Cash.

Don Davis:

... paid in shrimp nickels?

Roland Guidry:

No. You were paid... there was no tokens at Mr. Keith that I remember. It was cash.

Carl Brasseaux:

If I can just ask a quick question here. Some places had a siren that they used to announce when the boats were in-

Roland Guidry:

[inaudible 00:09:40]-

Carl Brasseaux:

... and then the women would come.

Roland Guidry:

He had a siren.

Carl Brasseaux:

He had a siren, too?

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. My Mama... we had a flag boat and she'd take her, sometime one or two of the ladies would get in it and go, and I was I think about 14, I guess. I did... I went a few times during the summer, the spring and break heads.

Don Davis:

What's a flag boat?

Roland Guidry:

A flag boat is, you had a bunch of relatives and friends that had each a small shrimp boat, and they would go out into the bay and shrimp together. They had a flag boat, a bigger boat that would come and pick up their catch. They all had the same flags, and their flag boat would always have a bigger flag of the same color, so that they get a little shrimp and they go in all direction, and in the afternoon, they would come back to the shrimp boat and unload their catch.

Don Davis:

Okay. Now, the flag boat worked for a cannery or a shed?

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. He would bring... they would come mostly... They would shrimp from before daylight till about 11:00 in the morning. Then they'd come to the boat, to the flag boat and bring their catch. He would, again, measure up their catch, big measure. He'd always come out ahead because the guy was working for shares, too, the guy at the flag boat, too. They bought in an extra two barrels that was there, two barrels, but they would bring you fuel, drums of gasoline. Everybody had a gasoline boat. Few diesel boats. They was mostly gasoline, and they would bring you groceries, fresh, whatever fresh thing you wanted. You would tell them what you want that day, and the next day they'd come back, or two days

later sometime they'd come back and they'd bring... Some of these guys would work for the locals. Some of these guys would work for the... in Westwego for Southern fisheries, Southern Shell Fish Company.

Carl Brasseaux:

These were mostly inland boats?

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. They was all in that. They were wooden boats.

Don Davis:

Have you ever heard of those boats called ice boats?

Roland Guidry:

It was same thing.

Don Davis:

How about freight boat?

Roland Guidry:

Same thing.

Don Davis:

Now, when you were one of the small boats, did you have ice in your hold?

Roland Guidry:

Yes. Yeah. You'd take off with a load of ice and you'd work off your ice. Then the other boat would supplement your ice, the freight boat, flag boat, would supplement.

Carl Brasseaux:

Now, you would charge for the ice...

Roland Guidry:

Oh, yeah.

Carl Brasseaux:

... as part of hauling things?

Roland Guidry:

Some wouldn't charge, but you'd get charged because you'd sell your shrimp cheaper. It worked out. Everybody got charged for everything.

Don Davis:

Now, let's go back to the cannery. When the shrimp are de-headed, what's the next stage? They're in a little trough moving.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. They go... they're iced in a truck and brought to a cannery where they would sell them fresh to the market, or in a fresh market, or restaurants and whatever, but one outlet would buy the shrimp.

Don Davis:

The cannery was not necessarily the same place that the women were pulling the heads off.

Roland Guidry:

No. They might have had one or two places like that. Before my time around 1917, 1920, '22. They had the Baton Rouge Shrimp Company. The guy would par boil shrimp and package five and a half ounce cans, and ship it. His son wrote a letter to a friend of mine who bought an empty can saying that his father, Ari Petri told him that he was sending his to the Mexican army during Pancho Villas time. It was a place in north Louisiana where this guy bought a lot of those, and that's where all the cans come from, from this one place. He had a hole in the wall and we'd go under the house in the sub-basement, and this guy doing a remodeling job, found all the cans and selling them online. The can that I showed you this morning cost $60. There's money in old stuff.

Don Davis:

Yeah. Well, you were a shrimper, an oyster man. You had a boat that would effectively be a tow boat. Where do you get the boat?

Roland Guidry:

Okay. After I got married, I was working at a paper mill. Right out of high school I worked four years at a paper mill. Okay? I operated machinery to cut paper, and I had a bunch of people working for me. I was supposed to get... I was only 22 years old. I got promoted to be the superintendent of my department, and politics went into it and they wanted me to train a 35-year-old guy who was the mayor's brother-in-law and my... to be my boss, so I quit. I went oyster fishing with my father-in-law, Mr. Herman Crosby. I bought the boat JCH and the other boat was the Violet. We had two boats. Well, I bought the boat after the season. I went shrimping and I went in [inaudible 00:15:24] oysters. Shrimp during the summer time, oysters in the winter time.

Don Davis:

Off the same boat?

Roland Guidry:

The same boat.

Carl Brasseaux:

Now, did you have to make adjustments to the hardware and so forth?

Roland Guidry:

I used the same. I put cable instead of chain on the winch for the trawl, and I had a mast. The boat a real mast on, and you'd have to winch the trawl in, the net in to the side of the boat, and had two sticks on the side of the boat, and put the tail of the net. The bag, I'd hook it up... It had rings on it. I'd hook it up with some wooden dowel that would stick up. Then I'd dip with a net, dip the shrimp, and everything on the deck, and then sort it out, clean the net, tie the tail back to it, back on the board. While we were dragging, we'd be culling. One time I was coming back from Delcambre. We shrimped Delcambre, we made a nice trip, so coming back home, and my Uncle Percy Petri had the boat The Ajax, a little bigger boat than me.

Roland Guidry:

He had a diesel in it, had a little 271 diesel. Now, this big generators with those 271, the 55 horsepower, they'd... eight and a half, nine miles an hour. Satisfying. I coming back from Delcambre and went at... we had come to and through Lake Pelto and I got two... I'll take it a pass. Wine Island passed, Caillou Island. He was ahead of me about three quarters of mile. He threw his test trawl overboard. Test trawl is a 16-foot trawl, the shrimpers throw to make sure that shrimp to make sure before they put the big net overboard. I saw him pick up and I took my binoculars, and I looked and I saw he had a bag. I'm talking about a big bag, like a two-bushels worth. I said, Lord, have mercy, here's the shrimp. I didn't wait a second.

Roland Guidry:

I threw the net overboard, and get closer to the other boat. He was doing something. I told him, I said he was doing some signal and I couldn't find out what it was. What he was trying to tell me, it's crabs. It was crab. As soon as I got close enough to see them, I picked up my trawl too late. I was born down with crabs one end of the trawl to the other. Well, I pulled up the bag as close as I could and tried to flush the other end of trawl, get the crabs out. I had to cut the net to let the crabs go. Too many crabs in there. I shoveled what I could in the boat just, since I had to bring some home, I brought back 28 bushels of crabs. I probably threw 150 bushels in the water. 28 bushels. I gave them away when I came back. Then I had to fix my trawl. It's not all ice cream.

Don Davis:

No.

Roland Guidry:

Anyway, I shrimped and oystered a couple of years. I went to Texas. I oystered in Texas, really made good. The shrimp, the oyster season starts in November. I lived in Port Boliver. I had one child, just a baby, Sadie. She's 60 years old this month. She was this month, June 26th, actually. Anyway, I came back and I said, I got enough money to put a down payment on a big boat. I sold my little boat. I built a 56-foot oyster boat, skiff, 56 by 18 and a half, and nine-foot bow. Had a World War II surplus engine.

Don Davis:

What kind?

Roland Guidry:

671 GM.

Don Davis:

Marine engine.

Roland Guidry:

Marine engine. Yep. My daddy, my Uncle Ken Cheramie and I built the boat. We were getting golden medals. He sent me to the hardware store one day for stuff that I didn't need. When I came back, they had cut four foot over the keel before they started the boat because they had one knot in the end of the keel. Otherwise, the boat would've been over 60 foot long. That's how it works. We bought a 3,000 foot of one-and-a-half-inch cypress and gave no lumber [inaudible 00:19:55] New Orleans. We built the boat. When the cabin was completed, the cabinets, the whole nine yards, I had one eight-foot board left.

Roland Guidry:

I had out of that 3,000 feet of lumber. He cut it short. A little joke along the way. While we were riding lumber at Gueydan, we had a little roadside restaurant with a cabaret that couldn't speak hardly any English. We had nice plate lunch and the had a dessert, and it was some pudding. The girl come back after we ate. He pointed to the bowl, at the bowl of pudding, he said, "What that?" She said, "Pudding." He gave her the bowl, he said, "Put in some more." Put in some more. He was a funny old guy. Had a little stray dog that came by and we gave him scraps.

Roland Guidry:

He stayed by. He called him Bubble Lin, the old man. He gave him a name, Bubble Lin. He talked to him all the time. He smoked a pipe, and he smoked 10 pipeful's of tobacco a day. Every time he'd come by when were building the boat, he hid on the ribs of the boat. He [inaudible 00:21:17]... with that handle of his knife, he'd clean the thing and put some more tobacco and light it up again. Every rib had a little brown dark spot where he cleaned his pipe. Every rib of the boat. But the boat was a well-built sturdy, sturdy boat.

Don Davis:

Did you have to caulk between the seams?

Roland Guidry:

Oh, yeah.

Don Davis:

What'd you use?

Roland Guidry:

We used the cotton.

Don Davis:

Cotton?

Roland Guidry:

Mr. Aber was a caulker and he caulked the boat, and I helped him because I wanted to learn how to do it. The deck was two by fours, long-leaf pine, we caulked the deck, too so it wouldn't leak inside the hull. As I put the dredges on the Cyndy Lou , the dry dock, put all the tent, all that equipment, the trawl, the

shrimp, the oyster equipment on the deck. The boat was finished in November of 1959. I went to Texas with it and I oystered it in Texas. The Hornbecks, they had a little place at Port Boliver and they had a dock. We docked it. They had a little something to dock there at the dock, and fished in Galveston Bay.

Roland Guidry:

There was an oyster growers association started by Larry Hornbeck. He was the President and I was the Vice President, Texas Oyster Growers Association. We fished oysters there. Then I got a lease on east, or west Galveston Bay, West Carancahua Bay Reef where the Carancahua Indians used to go and stay in the summertime. They'd stayed on the island. They'd wade across from the mainland to the island. Then I had a lease there and we would take some polluted oysters in the summertime, and the biologist would let us take them and we'd go on our lease and put the oysters down. 90 days later, they would check them and they could be sold.

Roland Guidry:

We did that during the summertime so in the wintertime, or the next summer, we could have oysters. Well, Hurricane Carla comes along and oyster from this cycle there was a decision that you could see through the oysters; they were so skinny. Needless to say, I was paying notes on the boat and everything. I decided to come home. I spent a lot of time with Carla. What I did was clean up stuff. We lost everything, our furniture and all. I went on along the Intracoastal as a day hand, as public service, and picked up lawn furniture and tables and chairs, all that kind of stuff from the camps on the island that had been washed over on the bank of the Intracoastal.

Roland Guidry:

I came in to T and T Marine which was Rudy Teithton. Rudy had a machine shop. His was bigger and got bigger later on. The all cleaned up industry [inaudible 00:24:33]. He was the mayor pro tem of Galveston. Rudy got his radio friend to come, and TV guy, and me, and they announced that I had all this furniture on the book. Anybody owned it, come get it. I had a deck load. I'm talking about over 400 pieces of furniture. Every piece of furniture left, except one little table, which is in my garage. I couldn't give it away. It was a little bitty table with two wheels on one end. It said... still the same original little table.

Don Davis:

You bring up an interesting point. You were born and raised on Bayou Lafourche, fished in Galveston. Carl and I have found references to Louisiana shrimpers that went to Port Isabelle.

Roland Guidry:

Yep.

Don Davis:

Is that true?

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. A lot of...

Carl Brasseaux:

It seems like they had something to do with the discovery of all those shrimp in the Bay of Campeche? Is that true?

Roland Guidry:

Yes, we'd go to Brownsville, and from there, they'd go fishing in Bay of Campeche and come back.

Carl Brasseaux:

Okay. Well, that's what I was asking, if there was any connection at all with them.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah, a lot of the guys. We had some big Vermilion Bay outside, inside, fish [inaudible 00:25:58] go to those, but the bigger boats would... I had a small 43-foot boat and then when I came back from oystering, I did doodle bugging work outside the [inaudible 00:26:14]. I fished. I had a... worked for Tideland Exploration, worked with a... had a quarter boat and they would put the instrument building on my boat. Then that small boat would drop a jug line in the foam out there.

Roland Guidry:

I would go and they'd put the dynamite powder, black powder in a container, 10 pounds worth maybe, in a blasting cap, and they would float that on a light jacket behind my boat, about 300, 400 feet behind the boat. It would hit the two cables on a battery and it went blue. For the concussion, it would recoil on the shaft. At the end of 10 days of that, I would have to go to the dry dock and get the boat recaulked, because it'd knock the cotton off the boat and keep pumping 24/7 to the concussion. But I was making $60 a day, man, me and my boat. But they paid for the caulking, so that went okay. I lost it...

Don Davis:

When you mentioned your size of the boat, and then you said the people that went to Port Isabelle had a bigger boat, 40 foot is big to me. What is a bigger boat?

Roland Guidry:

Over 50 foot long, because they could go on the Gulf, stay out the Gulf, and work and get caught in the Bay of Campeche, and then bag the squall or something like that. They could defend themselves. It was mostly the Floridien type of boats that did that, the one with the cabin in the front. They're the ones mostly that went way out there.

Don Davis:

Those are the Floridiens?

Roland Guidry:

Yeah, the Floridiens.

Don Davis:

Floridiens?

Roland Guidry:

Floridiens. Yeah. The Biloxi boats were the one with the cabin in the back.

Don Davis:

Oh, sorry.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah, but they had some big Biloxi boats, too. That's a big one, 55, 60-foot boots.

Carl Brasseaux:

Which was the most common along the Louisiana coast?

Roland Guidry:

Mostly the Biloxi boots. I call it the boats with the yoyo cabin. The boats had a cabin would just house the engine and we cooked... The kitchen inside. You'd cook and it had some drop box that would drop over the motor, and you'd sleep right on that hot motor. On top, there was a deck on top of the cabin with another top on top of that, and they would sleep there with the mosquito bars. They had a little wheel on the back side and on the front side, on the long shaft, over the same wheel. When they were trawling, they could steer the boat from the cabin on the back of the cabin. The JCH had a cabin on it and it was also suspended over the engines. It was hot like a furnace in there all night long.

Carl Brasseaux:

[inaudible 00:29:15].

Roland Guidry:

But in the winter time it was pretty good.

Don Davis:

When do you remember hearing the term "jumbo shrimp"?

Roland Guidry:

Oh, when I was a kid. I was a kid. Jumbo shrimp was the 15 and 20s. 15 and 20s to the pound.

Don Davis:

Those were offshore?

Roland Guidry:

No, you could catch them right on the beach from the bay. In Timbalier Bay, at a certain time of the year, the female shrimp would come to lay their eggs on those sand bars in everywhere in there, those channels, and the shrimpers, we'd go out there and catch the hell out of those big jumbos, all big females, 21, 25, 15, 20s.

Don Davis:

15, 20s.

Roland Guidry:

But off the beach, I've caught some jumbos off the beach. Mostly the jumbo shrimp is offshore, over 100 foot of water.

Don Davis:

In Federal waters?

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. The shrimp migrates. Shrimp migrates. The shrimp would catch up in the... My brother-in-law, Ray, that y'all are going to interview later on, Ray fished 18 years in Grand Island. 90% of the time he's fished right there passed... there's a hole that's almost 200 foot deep, he would shrimp around that hole, right in a hole. The shrimp would always keep tumbling in there with the current, and swimming out and going offshore, all the passes. That's why the shrimper would trawl all the passes. The shrimp would concentrate there.

Don Davis:

Well, one of the things that we need to clarify, you have said inside, outside and deep water. How do you define the three?

Roland Guidry:

Okay. Inside in the bay. Okay. Outside up to the three-mile limit, and then three mile and out is federal waters.

Don Davis:

Three mile an out is under federal water.

Roland Guidry:

Federal, yeah.

Don Davis:

Now, up to three mile is in Louisiana water, and inside waters is Louisiana water.

Roland Guidry:

Louisiana waters, yeah.

Don Davis:

Thank you.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah.

Don Davis:

You and I have talked a number of times about motors. Carl and I have been able to put together a list of some of the motors we think were in south Louisiana. One is a Cummings diesel.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. That came in later on.

Don Davis:

Well, we have reference that people bought them through Sears Roebucks catalog. They bought 2800 of them and every one of them was returned. Cummings got out of the Marine business, came back in. Gray Marine? Yes.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah.

Don Davis:

Motor Go. No. Fine.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. They are the only ones that I'm familiar. They had had the Booders, which were used in World War, II in some of the landing craft,

Don Davis:

The Booders.

Roland Guidry:

Booders or Butes

Don Davis:

Burres? No.

Roland Guidry:

Butes.

Don Davis:

Cyrus.

Roland Guidry:

It could be. I'm the only guy call them Butes.

Don Davis:

Okay.

Roland Guidry:

They also had the Fairbanks. In fact, my uncle's boy had a 20 or 30 horsepower Fairbanks Morse actually changed to put a Gray Marine Chrysler in it. My daddy worked with him one summer in the Lanny R and they used that. Mac truck engines. My uncle Harry had 100 horsepower Mac in the Gulf Wave when he

built it brand new, and a secondhand motor. Everybody was secondhand motor. My motor for my boat was a secondhand motor and World War II surplus.

Roland Guidry:

I boat in Morgan City area from American Marine. I burned... the vibration in Napa burned a... when you're burned a rubber plate. In oystering you can't hear the noise. It kept hitting the water tank. It broke the water tank and I had to burn the head. I had bought a brand-new head, almost $200. That's a lot of money in those days. I was buying diesel for 9 cents a gallon, man. That was expensive. Anyway, the old head, I wanted to have it repaired. The guy laughed at me. He said, "You see this head?" I looked, it was 22 places where they had drilled the head and patched it-

Don Davis:

Wow.

Roland Guidry:

... during the war. They wouldn't throw anything away. They would crack the head. They would drill holes in and plug it with lead so it wouldn't leak. Anyway, that's the story about a secondhand engine for you. But coming back to the engines, my old father-in-law, he was 13 years old in his first boat. 13 years old. He had a little engine, he called it a Palama. It was a Palmer, one and a half horsepower Palmer. Pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat, pat.

Don Davis:

Well, we've found Lockwood Ash, Globe.

Roland Guidry:

See, I'm not familiar with any of those engines. [inaudible 00:34:43].

Don Davis:

Well, Ted just mentioned one that I'd never heard of, Onan.

Roland Guidry:

Okay. Onan, that's modern.

Don Davis:

Okay.

Roland Guidry:

Onan generators have a little engine they put on small books.

Carl Brasseaux:

What about Model T and Model A motors?

Roland Guidry:

Aren't they used all of those .. used Fords.

Don Davis:

Yeah. Have you ever heard of a Pivert, P-I-V-E-R-T?

Roland Guidry:

No.

Don Davis:

Okay.

Roland Guidry:

That don't mean they didn't have them. Mostly, Don and Carl, you had a shrimp factory or a dealer, or something like that, who made money. He made money from all these guys and they went to repo and all that. They were good for his guy. This guy would really deal for the motor somewhere and then buy that motor for them and put it up. They'd pay for it while they were shrimping. Nobody had money. Very few people had cash to buy anything really. Getting back to my situation, you can [inaudible 00:35:49] with a question. Now, my boat, after I did the work with the dynamite company, if I could digest just a couple of minutes.

Roland Guidry:

While I was in Freshwater Bayou, I went up on the Mermentau River with my boat and I took... and I went to Joseph Harbor, which is a little bit east. Not too Far East of that is [inaudible 00:36:19]. Okay? I had a little 16-foot trawler. The guy asked me to go out and see if I could catch us some shrimp for dinner. I go out there and I hook on something. I lost the trawl. I come back, I said, "I lost the trawl." Said, "We'll buy you a trawl," but they never did. But years later, there's a guy that I was fishing oysters with, Curtis Bloom, in Galveston, who had 56, a 60-foot shrimp boat built, big old shrimper. He was trawling in the same place I was trawling.

Roland Guidry:

He hooked and he stopped his boat, double rig. He didn't want to lose his trawl. He had his diving outfit on, went down there, unhooked his trawl and come up with some brass ingots, copper ingots on a little piece of wood, but from something else. He decided it was a treasure ship. He thought it was a treasure ship, so he started doing a little dive and all that. Then the state came along. He was 4,000 feet from the shore. He said, "Hey, you're in state water. That's our treasure." They got together and they got it together. It was the ship The Constance. It was a Spanish ship.

Carl Brasseaux:

Constanza? Yeah.

Roland Guidry:

They split the treasure, whatever it was. It sank, had a take full of water close to shore during a storm. It came from Mexico. The state's part of the treasure is in Baton Rouge in the basement of the Galvez building.

Carl Brasseaux:

Yeah. By Constanza's name for that.

Roland Guidry:
Yeah. That's his name for that.

Carl Brasseaux:
Yeah.

Roland Guidry:
That is there, and I have a book explaining all of this also. [inaudible 00:38:15].

Don Davis:
You had a really interesting career. When you built your oyster boat, did you have a cabin?

Roland Guidry:
Oh, yeah. You see the pictures of the modern oyster boats?

Don Davis:
Yes.

Roland Guidry:
Like the Captain Haman and all that?

Don Davis:
Yeah.

Roland Guidry:
I had a cabin just like that.

Don Davis:
All right.

Roland Guidry:
Bedroom, kitchen, and the kitchen had two bunks. I had a bunk... two bunks in my cabin, but the kitchen had a sink and everything else, table.

Don Davis:
Would a Biloxi be the same way?

Roland Guidry:
Kind of, but this is a skiff, oyster skiff, flat bottom. Biloxi most have the round bottom-

Don Davis:
Yes. All right

Roland Guidry:

... because they would work offshore. They would take the sea bed round bottom and the skiff would prowl.

Don Davis:

The Lafitte skiff being smaller would just have a tarp or something? It wouldn't be...

Roland Guidry:

Boat...yeah. Only the modern Lafitte skiffs have cabins. The old one, the open one, the open hull with a box for the motor, and a tent. You had a pole in the front and a pole in the back, which you could put in a pole, put on the back pole when you want your tent up. Then you had some eye bolts in the hull on the deck on the boat's side, the front and the back. You would unroll your tent and you'd snap it on through those eye bolts there, so it would fit.

Don Davis:

That is very informative.

Roland Guidry:

Oh, yeah.

Don Davis:

Now, did your father serve in World War II, or your grandfather?

Roland Guidry:

No. My father was too old. He served between the World War I and World War II. He served at Fort Bennings, Georgia. He got out three years in July the 4th, 1931. He got out. Now he was saving for shrimp, Mr. Arthur Guidry, and that's how he met my mom while he was saving for shrimp. He was a carpenter, but at off season he would build. His brothers were carpenters and they worked in the plants on the river after the Depression. My daddy built his own house boat. I was born on it, December 1935, 7:15, 1935. We parked at front of my grandma and grandpa's house. My grandfather was a shrimper. My mother's father was a shrimper. My dad's father was a farmer.

Roland Guidry:

I was 21, 22 months old and I remember him. There was never a picture of him, but I remember him sitting on a rocking chair and he always told his friends, "viens voir, viens voir", come see. Come see." I was scared... He had a beard. I was scared of him. My dad had tried a pole. I'd hang onto a poke so I would never let go. Anyway, I remember him, and he lived with his oldest daughter and son-in-law, Albert Trosclair, Albert, Albert. He was a farmer. He worked for the Ducos. He formed their land, first corn, and then sugarcane. But getting back to the city [inaudible 00:41:42], my boat was there and names after our oldest daughter and Luanna.

Roland Guidry:

After that done, we were going to dynamite companies, I went to the shipyard and I put some steel on the sides, put some tires. I got a job working standby in rigs, working supply boat for rigs. I worked East Bay, rough as a cob. I cried sometimes in there. It was so rough, but I worked at East Bay. Then I went

and worked for Richard Barr, Dixon Well Service at East Bay across the river, St. Bernard Parish. I did all kinds, worked there for him. After a storm I went and pick up debris, Camille. After Betsy, I went and worked for Texaco 00:42:32. Then I went from Texico after Camille that I went and worked for Richard Barr, Dixon Well Service. I worked all over the industry.

Don Davis:

How long did you have your boat?

Roland Guidry:

I sold it in '71. '59 to '71. I was an insurance salesman for a year. Then I went working with my brother on the El Rico ATO, the big 88-foot train. That was fun.

Don Davis:

Is it fair to say that a boat is to a fisherman as a horse is to a cowboy?

Roland Guidry:

Definitely. It's the way to make living. The horse, if you made a living off your horse, then you'd make a living off your boat.

Don Davis:

You took care of them?

Roland Guidry:

Well, yeah, you had to.

Don Davis:

Well, one of the things we've discovered is if a boat comes on the market on Bayou Lafourche, used, people almost get in line to buy it because...

Roland Guidry:

Depends who owns it.

Don Davis:

People know that. Whereas there are other bayous, that's not the case, that there seems to be a high appreciation for maintaining, if you like the analogy of your horse.

Roland Guidry:

You bet. Let me tell you something, Don. I know some shrimpers who had boats for 25 years. Let's say it cost $25,000 to build a boat. Okay? They sold it for $67,000. It's not like a used car. Boats appreciate if you take care of them.

Don Davis:

If you were going in the business today, what would your investment be like? You got to buy a boat, motor, steel hull. You're going into deep water, fuel.

Roland Guidry:

It's a rough...

Don Davis:

We understand that.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. Look, I was in the tugboat business, too, later on in life. I built a big 900 horsepower turbo down... right at the wrong time, and it took me down. I mean, I had a motel, I had a lounge. I was in politics. I was a member of the Port Commission. I stayed a member for 15 and a half years till I got a job at the governor's office, and as you well know, I was the Oil Spill Coordinator, worked for different governors. The last governor didn't want us sitting in his office, so he transferred us and we wound up at state police and spent three years there, which was a great place to be. That's where I was in the BP spill. Only time I ever made any money. Besides my salary, I got overtime first time ever.

Don Davis:

If you were... But I have seen ads for used big boats. $800,000, $700,000, $600,000, which tells me if you want to be a fisherman today, not in waters, but going out for jumbos, the investment is pretty dear.

Roland Guidry:

Don, it's out-of-sight, but everything is relative. Like I said, diesel in 1959, 1960, diesel was nine cents a gallon. I scrounged. I bought kerosene for 11 cents a gallon because it was so clean burning, saved my engine. I did that while I was in Galveston. I'd go...

Don Davis:

Well, one of the things that we're trying to get some understanding is during World War II, the shrimp industry never slowed down.

Roland Guidry:

No.

Don Davis:

Well, we wondered if the captains got a deferment-

Roland Guidry:

Definitely. Yeah.

Don Davis:

... to continue to shrimp there?

Roland Guidry:

They were sea farmers. Just like oyster farmers, shrimpers were farmers, too. Farmers definitely had deferment because they had to make the crops to feed the shrimp. Same thing, the oyster people, the

same way. They canned it, they sent it to the service. Service people got the first of everything, first crop.

Don Davis:

You remember rationing?

Roland Guidry:

Oh, yeah. My dad was an industrious. He built a small grocery store while working for Higgs. It was in front of my grandmother's house. It was connected. It was separate, but connected to the porch, front porch, and it was 14 by 20. Not very big. Bedrooms today of new houses are that size. Anyway, because everything was rationed, and if you had a grocery store, you could get an allotment. You went once a week, once every two weeks at the person out there and it would fill in your allotment, and like that, your neighbors would have sugar that was on ration.

Roland Guidry:

Everybody had his little share of sugar. We were a little more lucky than most. My mother worked for Valentine Sugars and he would give us bags of raw sugar, the brown sugar. That's another story which I love. My old aunt was the oldest, the second oldest child. She had 15 kids. The three youngest kids had grandkids older than her kids. She had a two- gallon pot of coffee. She would pick two gallons of coffee on a Sunday when my grandmother stayed or whatever, we'd go. Homemade bread, but she had oven in the backyard, homemade butter, and homemade butter she churned.

Don Davis:

Of course.

Roland Guidry:

She would serve the adults that wanted pure coffee and then she would take a gallon of milk, boiled milk and pour into and take a lot of that sucrose and sweeten the pot. Then she had another pot, she'd skim the fat of the milk. Everybody got the same amount of cream on top of that. Man, that was a good sugar in her house, but we were poor, but we ate like rich people.

Don Davis:

Well, we've been doing this for almost an hour. Not quite. Carl, do you have any questions?

Carl Brasseaux:

I have a long laundry list, but I don't know if we have time.

Don Davis:

I think that we can certainly extend beyond our time.

Carl Brasseaux:

Well, if that's okay with.

Roland Guidry:

I'm fine. I like to talk.

Carl Brasseaux:

You talked about all the shrimp shells and the heads and all of that. How was all that disposed of?

Roland Guidry:

Come again now?

Carl Brasseaux:

The shrimp shells. You talked about people, the women coming in and...

Roland Guidry:

And breaking the heads?

Carl Brasseaux:

Yes, and the shells, what did they do with all of that?

Roland Guidry:

In the bayou. The shells would go in the bayou. Now, they had a, like I said, conveyor that we'd take... They'd just dump the shells in and they'd throw it because sometimes you have pieces of shrimp and all that. The guys that would work there would pick some of that stuff. I would stand at the end of that thing once in a while, and what they missed, I'd pick up sometimes maybe a pound of shrimp pieces, hot shrimps and all that. Me and my cousins, we had a canal. We had dug us a hole in the canal wall, and we had a piece of tether like this, an oven, stove. My first attempt was a shrimp and onion stew. I put so much salt, they didn't know whether they could eat it. But they would go in to bayou and we'd catch all the cat fish right there.

Carl Brasseaux:

Now radios, you mentioned people using them, but can you give us a rough timeline? When you were little, were people already using two-way radios, short wave radios, anything like that on the boats?

Roland Guidry:

It started during the war.

Carl Brasseaux:

Okay.

Roland Guidry:

Yes, it started by buying surplus] radios and everybody... There's a steward of one guy who got lost offshore and he saw a plane, so he said, "Plane in the air, it's a boat in the water. Come in, plane." It didn't answer. Somebody heard him and told him which way to go.

Carl Brasseaux:

Now, you talked earlier about the flag boats. There must have been some kind of predetermined rendezvous points, huh?

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. The boats would always anchor pretty much at the same time. The guys would shrimp in, say, a five-mile area, and the boat would move it. They'd say, "Okay, well, we got to go here tomorrow because there's more shrimp there." Yeah, so he'd go there and meet him. Most of the little boats had air horns. He'd blow the air horn to make sure that the late comers would come.

Carl Brasseaux:

Go ahead.

Roland Guidry:

I have a little sidebar story. My grandfather had a boat, The Paris Minor, a 38-foot boat. His second oldest son, because his first son had a boat already, inherited the boat when he died. He died June of 1942. He'd had a stroke and he died on Island Pass. The Paris Minor, I would say August of that year... I'm sure you know the history of the U-boats in the Gulf.

Don Davis:

Right.

Roland Guidry:

56 vessels sunk between Campeche and Florida Straits. All of them went under the water except one, The Benjamin Brewster, which sunk offshore Grand Island, in Fourchon/Grand Island. It was sticking about eight foot out the water. My uncle took The Paris Minor. We went out of the East Pass Fourchon], with a bamboo pool to find a pass because we couldn't get out the other way. It was too shallow, but it's now Bell Pass. We went offshore. He put me and my cousin on top of the deck. He went inside the hull. He said, "Y'all stay in the back."

Roland Guidry:

He went in, we could hear him banging away. He brought back one metal ball from the compass. It was all that was left. The compass was gone. The other ball was gone. My aunt put cloth around. He was at his door stop, but while he was doing that, Riley and I, Riley was four and a half, I was six and a half, we fished knives, forks and spoons out of an old drum that had been cut in two, and about a dozen of each. My uncle took those and they used them for a long time. They both passed... excuse me, both passed away. We don't know what happened to it. He said it was vicious. One of the boats torpedoed during World War II right? What other questions do you have for me?

Carl Brasseaux:

The jumbo shrimp. You talked about them already, fishing, picking up what we'd now call jumbo shrimp in Timbalier Bay area. I suspect that when they talk about the jumbo shrimp, jump starting the industry, it's a big deal because of the quantities that were available after they were discovered offshore.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah, the restaurants would go wild with the big shrimp. They'd used the small shrimp for stewing and the medium shrimp, a lot of the restaurants thought that the jumbo was too expensive. They'd buy the medium shrimp, and they cut a piece of tail off to use it in a stews, and they use the bigger part to fry, to have shrimp. Now, my mother was one of those few... I'd say a few people. They had a handful of people that would go special. They would do really big shrimp, which they would peel the shrimp, the little piece of meat in the tail, all one piece. Now, mostly when they would peel the shrimp, they would not peel that tiny a little piece. They would break it off. Now, you would break heads. Sometime they wanted peeled shrimp, so the women would also peel shrimp. It was a lot. We peeled shrimp.

Don Davis:

It was all based on a container?

Roland Guidry:

What the customer would want. It was, again, they'd pay you by the pound.

Don Davis:

Do you ever remember shrimp being canned and put in boxes as opposed to cardboard? A wooden box?

Roland Guidry:

No, not in my... that I remember.

Don Davis:

Okay.

Roland Guidry:

Now, like I said, there was a lot of different kind of packing before I was old enough to know better.

Carl Brasseaux:

Roland, could you give us a rough timeline, please, for the movement of the industry from in shore to far offshore?

Roland Guidry:

The small boats, first, they say... now, they didn't do it offshore. They did it in the bay is it is shallow. They occasionally number more than five foot three, most of them, so they couldn't barely see the water. Then they started putting motors in those boats and trawl were invented, and they started pulling trawl in. The few braver ones started to go along the coast and shrimp. The boats got a little bigger. The motors got a little stronger. They went a little further, and then after oil was discovered, some of those shrimp boats, the bigger ones were used as freight boats for those rigs. Our success story, Captain Chouest, Edison Chouest Senior, he was shrimping. His brother-in-law's had World War II surplus boats, Navy boats.

Roland Guidry:

They were feeling the offshore rigs close to shore, but offshore. He worked offshore with his boat and he got a job with Exxon, which was Humble, I guess, at the time, to have supply boats. They started building small 65-foot supply boats. From the 65, they built the big boats and the bigger boats. Of

course, they're a billionaire company today, but he started, like I say, with a little wooden. All the Cheramies, all were shrimpers. They were in the industry, all well in the backyard, all that good stuff. They got lucky and they got smart, but the shrimpers gave off... the real too hard diehard shrimper gave off from the wooden boats to the steel boats. I gave you a list of over 100 wooden boats, old boats. I didn't give you any steel boats at all, because I said new breed, they only work offshore.

Carl Brasseaux:

Right, but we're talking about approximately, when does the transition occur from wood to steel?

Roland Guidry:

Oh, say in the late 50s, early 60s. Then they get more and more, and more. When a guy spent $100,000 on a steel boat, it was a lot of money.

Don Davis:

Still is.

Roland Guidry:

Yeah. $100,000, that's nothing on a steel boat. Some of them are over a million dollars right now, shrimp boats.

Don Davis:

Where would they be made?

Roland Guidry:

Well, some guys were made them local. My dad had built one of the row in 1965, '66, maybe.

Don Davis:

Well, Darcy Kief told me his boat came from Bayou La Batre.

Roland Guidry:

Bayou La Batre built a lot of boats. They came and built a steel shrimp boat and supply boats.

Don Davis:

One of the things we'd like to know is that as the trawls have evolved, the swing arms that allows you to drop them overboard?

Roland Guidry:

The buoy?

Don Davis:

Yeah, have gotten taller.

Roland Guidry:

Oh, yeah.

Don Davis:

Now, why is that?

Roland Guidry:

Because instead of hauling two trawls, some of those big boats haul four trawls.

Don Davis:

How does that work?

Roland Guidry:

You have to be very smart, but they would tag it pretty easy. You have to be very careful and know which ones to put out first. Then you have to be very careful.

Don Davis:

There is a science in how you use the four trawls.

Roland Guidry:

Oh, yeah, definitely. Now, The Captain Jimmy, BJ Martin, Beauregard Martin, his son, Jimmy has a boat company. BJ had a wooden trawl boat, was over 65 foot long. Captain Jim, he pulled four trawls, and he got a job with an oil company, supply boat. He had to cut 10 feet off the boat to bring it under 65-foot, so he wouldn't have to go through coast guard inspection. He cut... it had two engines in it [inaudible 01:00:33]. He'd work offshore with The Captain Jim, and he had an oyster business.

Roland Guidry:

Jim, his son started building trawl boats, him and his daddy, steel boats, but he didn't trawl for shrimp. They trawled for oil companies around the platforms that were decommissioning. They trawled for debris. He had three or four boats. He still had them. They go with [inaudible 01:01:06] on the west side of bayou, before the locks. People are industrious, Don.

Carl Brasseaux:

[inaudible 01:01:19] I have a question, an unofficial question after we...