

Sandra Boquet Interview

Interviewers: Carl Brasseaux, Don Davis, and Roy Kron

Sandra Boquet: Yeah, he used to go out with his daddy and work on the boats and uh, they used to go out on some of these platforms – I, I couldn't tell you the name of the places, you know – but they used to go and where you just go and bring your shrimp straight to the platform and they'd boil them right there, you know.

Carl Brasseaux: Yes. Yes. And if you remember those stories?

S: Well if I, I, If I tried to tell them to you, I may not be saying it right because I didn't go. I just remember him talking about it. I don't know the name of the places. He can tell you where they were. I don't know I just - I know he talked about it. But my, my daddy was a shrimper too but we, like I told you we'd do the dried shrimp at the house, he'd boil shrimp for your supper you got leftovers you put them on a sheet of tin out in the yard, you beat them in a sack and eat it, you know?

Don Davis: Well that what we need to hear from you yourself is what you experienced yourself when you were growing up because like you said all that knowledge, when you're gone, that knowledge is gone too. So hopefully when...

S: Yeah

D: When he's going to be doing a school project down the road and wants some of this information, he'll be able to get it from us.

S: There's not a whole lot of people interested – you know, wanting to get into it these days - because it's a lot of work, and the, the worst part is you have to know, like he – like my husband learned on his own – like if you don't dry your shrimp enough or you dry them too much - one way or the other - it's a mess because you know, you're either making money or losing money you know? Or if they're not dried enough you can lose a lot because if they get sent back because they're not dried enough, they'll spoil. They have to be dried up to a certain point, you know, to be good product.

C: Before we get started, I just wanted to get on tape that it's okay for us to interview you here. So just like I said it's just going to be made available to researchers for those who want to study just down the road, so this is okay with you?

S: Yeah that's fine.

C: Okay. Um, and your full name is?

S: Sandra Ann Matherne Boquet.

C: Okay. Thanks, Well, tell us a little bit – you said you grew up in a family, and your dad was a..

S: My dad was a shrimper, and as a kid I remember boiling shrimp, having crab boils and shrimp boils. We dried um, the leftovers out in the yard and beat them in a little sack to eat them as a snack, you know, and that was until after I was married. My husband was a shrimper and his dad was also a shrimper and oyster fisherman and all that. It was a few years after we were married that we, um, decided to just try it out - try a business with it. We made us a small platform, and beat them by hand just to get the feel of it. I'd say it was about twenty five years ago when we built the shrimp-drying shed across the road with the dryers, and we also did have a platform behind the building at one time –until the Health Department said, "That's a no-no. You can't do that anymore."

C: About when did that happen? When did you have to give up the platform because of the Board of Health?

S: Uh, I'm not really sure. I know we had the platform for a few years. After we, um, built the shed, where you know it eventually just deteriorated with the weather and stuff. But we had it mostly like a backup space, you know. We'd spread them out on the platform when the dryers were full, and when we'd get a batch beated we'd bring them in to the, to the dryers - to try to get them done faster. Now we just, it's just a matter of boiling what the dryers can handle and keeping the rest of them refrigerated in the trucks until the dryers were empty because they won't let you put them on the platform anymore - which it never killed anybody - but that's just...

C: How big was the platform that you owned? (inaudible)

S: Oh, it wasn't that big. It was just along the backside of the boiling shed. Uh, I'd kind of lie to you if I'd try to tell you. I don't know, maybe forty by twenty or something. I'm not sure.

C: You know a lot of the old ones - they weren't flat they had...

S: They made mounds in them.

C: Right.

S: Yeah, you know and they'd bunch them up at the peak part of nighttime and cover them with the tarps and then that way if whatever moisture that was in it - if the water hit it or whatever - it drained down to the middle. I'm assuming that's why they did it. Because, you know, when we started our little one over here you know we had to pick them up at night and cover them up, and it was just something us - mostly me and the kids - my husband would go shrimping and at nighttime he'd come in and run pick them up and crank that one, um, old borrowed, hand-crank beater. That's an exercise, anyway.

C: So the beaters that you were using you had to turn yourself?

S: Turn it by hand. It was just a barrel thing with a screen and a crank on the end and just, me and the kids would take our turns cranking on it.

C: And how long would it take (inaudible - you all?)

S: Oh, I don't remember. It was, you just have to watch 'til all the shells are knocked off. It probably took us a while because we weren't going very fast.

D: Did you - do have a picture of that hand beater?

S: No I wish I would.

C: We do too.

S: I know!

(laughter)

S: That's something I don't ever remember taking pictures of is - is that part of it. Uh, I didn't really have a good camera in that day anyway so...

D: When did you first get involved in the shrimp drying business? About, 25 years ago?

S: Since about 25 years ago because she's twenty two years old and I was pregnant with her when we were building the, the building across. So we kind of like, maybe started with the little thing I want to say, twenty three, twenty four years - something like that, you know, but it's about - it's over 20 years that we got the shed across the road that we do it in - and bring them in to Mr. Blum and we sold some to Mr. Roy Picoult because he owned the property right here and we'd sell him some, and some to (?? - 0:06:10) Bergeron.

We've been here for a while.

C: Would they come here to pick it up or did you have to transport it?

S: Mr. Roy – no, Mr. Roy comes and, uh, well – came. Mr. Blum comes and picks it up, and right now we're also selling them to a guy in New Orleans. We take them to him. He has a, um, seafood place in New Orleans where they work them, pack them, distribute them. But he's - he himself is actually in California. He just has different businesses and...

D: Did he take over for Mr. Roy?

S: Mr. Roy, yes.

D: Yeah.

S: Roy Picoult? He bought Mr. Roy Picoult's business out, yeah. His uh, - his account, his boat, his warehouse up the road – just took the equipment and brought it to his place in New Orle – in Harrahan, that's where it's at.

C: Now what's his name? Is it a Chinese fellow?

S: Yes, Howard Lin. (Gulf? – 0:07:02) Food products.

C: Yes, Yes- that's the name we found...(inaudible – 00:07:06)

S: Yeah, he's a nice – nice man.

S: They'd use a good bit of our - well right now it's just him and Blum - that's the only people we sell our dried shrimp to. When one has enough the other takes over. When that one has enough, we go back to the other one. Sometimes they kind of, like, argue when the shrimp is scarce, they both want – we kind of got to share them out. But they use a good bit of shrimp. And he's a very nice man.

D: Do you own your own boat, or do people bring you the shrimp?

S: No we buy our shrimp from other boats. We don't - the only boat we own now is the... (inaudible – 00:07:41) an oyster boat. We don't go out and catch the shrimp ourselves anymore. He used to but when he decided he was going to buy shrimp he tried letting somebody run his boat for a while but just ended up selling it because when you got somebody running a boat for you, you can't always get an honest person and it was just too much hassle. So, we just buy the shrimp from the other fishermen.

C: And you also have an oyster shucking business?

S: Yeah, just a small oyster shop. We don't shuck a whole lot – just basically for the people – (inaudible- 08:18:09) people from around the area. People come from all over now that they know we have them because we've just been doing it for a while, and they like our oysters. It's just that just this year it's not working out. Oysters are not getting fat like they usually do so we're just kind of holding off for a little bit, but I know for Christmas they're going to want them, and...

R: Oyster dressing

S: I know. They're just not - they're still skinny right now. We don't like to mess with them while they're still skinny. We like to wait till they're fat because I don't like selling something to somebody that – you're going to put that in your mouth and it's just a little bag of water, you know. We like to wait for them to get a little fatter. That's why when they came up with this deal about the oysters for the summer time having to be processed and everything – that would have really helped us because it would've kept the oysters where they belonged in the summer time – in the water – to be good for the winter time. Fishing them year-round,

to us, doesn't make any sense because they're not good in the Summertime – they're just too skinny. But, that's what the half shell people want.

D: Ah. Okay.

S: They need them for their oyster boils. They don't – to me, it's not like a matter of quality to them – It's just a matter of demand, I guess, and the oysters are just oysters to them, you know.

D: Yeah, I've seen that. Yeah.

S: You see, years and years ago, people used to fish oysters in the winter time, shrimp in the summer time. The oysters would do what they had to do during the summer and when it was winter time at the end, you had good oysters to fish. They wouldn't fish them year round. But now, the problem we have, we own oyster leases but we're working shrimp. The ones who are fishing – you can't be out there watching your leases, so you know what's going on. You go out there in the winter time – there's no oysters. But, what you going to do.

C: So the shrimp drying business started about 25 years, 22 years ago.

S: Yeah.

C: Alright. How about before that? Do you know of any of the earlier platforms and how they operated, or did you hear stories about how they got operated?

S: I've heard stories I know they had some out in the waters before they even had refrigeration and ice. People would catch their shrimp, bring them straight to the platforms out in different areas and I'm not - I can't tell you the name of the areas because I might lie to you when I say the wrong place but like my husband knows where they are, but um...

C: Well when you were little, there must've still been platforms operating out here...

S: I'm - I'm guessing. Yes, I know there was, but I was not, how can I say it, um, when I was a child I was just drying shrimp at home to eat. It wasn't a matter of the business in it to me. It was not something I was interested in, you know? So I mean, I've read stories, I've seen pictures at Blum's, you know, which interest me but I wasn't involved in that time. So I couldn't really tell you a whole lot um, just from a few things I've heard but um, I've never experienced it.

D: That's fine we just thought you might've heard people talk about it or remembered some of the things...

S: Yeah well, see I said, I remember my husband talking about them going out and bringing them to a platform and he, I think he even helped them work on some of them, and then like at Mr. Blum's place I, I love this picture he has on the wall with the dried shrimp dance where they'd pile them up and dance to knock the shells off, you know? You just – when you stop and think about that time and how different it is from now - it's just hard to believe.

R: It is.

S: It is.

C: And it was difficult at best

S: Oh yes. It was not an easy job.

C: No, no.

S: It's still not the easiest but it's a little bit simpler. And whenever we get our new place we're going to be

rebuilding the drying shed, and hopefully it's going to be where it's a little bit simpler. We're going to have - he's got ideas to where to make it where we won't need as much of the labor because that's hard to find. Once you've seen a couple of the guys in that shed across to try and dry some shrimp, you know - if it's a new guy that never done it - he's not around very long. So that's, you know, that's one thing is the labor. So the, with the new mechanical things these days and they all try to make it a little simpler. We got our son-in-law right now he boils for us so you know we got - we're teaching him one step at a time. He does the boiling and we have the crew that does, you know, washes and dries and turn them every, I think you've got to turn them every two hours. But um my husband's the one that decides when they go in the beater but he's kinda sorta letting our son-in-law judge it, you know. "You tell me if you think they're ready," and he'll check and see if he's right. Trying to get him to learn that part, so he's pretty much got that, but as far as when you put them in the beater and beat them until they're just - the shells are off and you're not you breaking up the shrimp. That's something my husband still needs to be here to watch. He doesn't want to teach him everything at one time because then you're going to forget, but he's hoping he's going to want to keep it going.

C: I understand that the drying part is the most critical part of the thing. It's got to be just...

S: Yes.

C: ...just right before you put them in the beater.

S: Yeah and the, like they have that department that requires you to take a certain amount of water out of the shrimp. We have to, like they want for them to have to be dehydrated up to a certain amount - you figure it out with your weights and stuff, you know before and after what you come out. But if you don't boil them enough, you, I mean and if you don't dry them enough, they're going to be too soft and when you go to beat them the shells won't knock off. And if you keep them that way and you try to sell them out to your customers and everything and they're damp, they're going to end up mildewing, so they have to be dry enough so that they stay good, you know. If dried shrimp is dried right - I mean it'll last a long time. You don't even have to worry about refrigeration or anything. It'll just stay good because it's dried - it's cured. But if um, we've never really had problems with our shrimp not being dried enough because he's always done it. I've heard of other processors that they, they - they would do it because more weight would come out. They'd charge by the pound - so they were more interested in the money than the product, because years ago Mr. Roy, when he was buying the shrimp, he would buy from another one - I'm not going to mention any names - but he would buy from another person that was also in the shrimp drying business, and when they would go to clean them and they weren't dried enough, he would come to us to ask us to finish drying them because he couldn't send it to his customers like that, until my husband just told them one day - he said, "Look, why don't you bring it back to him and let him finish drying them?" So he knows he's doing it wrong. He wouldn't do that. And I don't know why he kept bringing them back to us. I guess he didn't want to bring his complaints to the other guy. I don't know what it was. But you have to have them dry enough, and if you make them too dry and you put them in the beater, they'll fall apart. But me personally, I like them dry because they're crunchy. But that's not the way to make money.

C: Now, how many of you are left? Do you know of?

S: Drying shrimp?

C: Yes.

S: We dry the shrimp and Mr. Norris dries, High Seas dries, I think...(inaudible - 15:56) dries, Houston Foret I think is out of it - he hasn't done it in a few years. (Alan Marie?) used to do it - I don't know if he does anymore or not. I think he's out of it too, but I'm not positive. I haven't heard anything about him in a while. Yeah, used to be a guy in Grand Isle but I think he got washed away for the storm.

C: So, roughly four operations

S: And there's another guy down here, Ervin Naquin but he's like on a smaller scale. He dries them to put

them in the little cards in the store. I don't think he does anything like, really bulk stuff. He just, I think it's only with shrimp he catches. I think he processes it himself and just puts them in the cards. I've seen his shrimp in the store but I don't know that he does a whole amount and sell it to anybody like we do. We don't put them in the cards. We just put them in sacks and they go to - they do what they want with them.

D: Yeah, I was in, um, Chinatown in New York this year and I was also at a Chinese grocery in California, and both sell Louisiana shrimp. So the market is...

S: Yes well the guy, like I said, the guy we send them to in New Orleans - he's from California. And he does um have some customers in California, in fact but he was telling us how with the economy and things how things are going down, he had a customer that would buy a few cases from him and he'd tell him when he ships it he has a shipping charge no matter how much he ships. And uh, this customer usually orders like thirty cases but he said he only wanted fifteen and maybe take the other fifteen after new years or something so he was going to find him a storage over there and ship it all because they said it would cost him twice the shipping. He's just going to find storage to put it in until the customers were ready. It's in California. It's one of the stores over there - I think it's some of the um, Chinese people there that they sell them in their stores. They repackage them and sell them. But it's, he said it dropped a lot, the sales.

D: Yeah. 22 dollars a pound in California, and just short of 29 dollars a pound in New York City. And it clearly says Louisiana dried shrimp. Now there's some from Thailand. No, Taiwan. So and, But the price is pretty competitive. Even those over there. I was curious...

S: Well you see, I'll say that again that Mr. Albert - we call him a Chinese, Chinaman but he is from Taiwan. That's where he's from. Because every once in a while he goes - he tells us he's going back to Taiwan because of this family I think his uncle was just in the hospital not long ago or something. But um, that's where he's from.

D: And his business is in Harrahan?

S: Yeah. Uh, Commerce Point?

D: Okay.

S: But he's he doesn't stay there. He comes every so often, but he's got this other guy, David, that works for him that manages the, um, the place where he cleans his shrimp. You know, works his shrimp for him, packages and ships them out.

D: We hope to talk to Robert (?) He was on St. Louis Street a long time. He sold his business out, according to Louis, and um they found this small connection of Chinese which is not widely documented - we're trying to find out as much as we can about, you know the Chinese embassy had their own platforms - big ones. Um...

S: Yes, well Mr. Albert, I remember him telling us he had an um, a drying facility I believe in Taiwan or somewhere, or in China. I remember him telling us about it. It was like set up different, and they wanted us to um, get us to try the way it was, but my husband didn't go for it. It was a big operation he had - some kind of experiment I think. Something that I think he could boil and dry like in one you know. I don't know. He was explaining it to us just one time, and it's just not the way we do it, so. But I think he must've been drying some out where he's from. I don't know.

D: So Louis Blum comes by and picks up your shrimp and the shrimp dust..(inaudible)

S: Yes.

D: Okay. So there's a market for both?

S: He has a market, yes. I mean, and it helps us because we don't have to find a way to dispose of it.

D: Oh yeah.

S: We don't, I mean, he pays us like twice a year. It's not a whole lot of – he'll take, twenty two dollars a ton he pays us for it but at least you know he's getting it out of here.

R: Yes.

S: ...because sometimes, you know, they fill up quite a few sacks with the shrimp dust.

D: Do you know what it's used for?

S: I don't know. I've heard like pet foods or fertilizer. I'm not sure.

D: We've heard of both of those.

S: Every so often we'd get some of these old farmers that come and ask us for the sacks so they could put in their garden, so I guess it's good fertilizer. But um, my husband tried to spreading some one time on some property we have and, you know, you have to get over the smell if you put too much of it.

(laughing)

D: Yeah

S: ...and I guess they know how to mix it, because I don't think too much would grow in there.

(laughing)

C: That's good. Well, what's happened to the industry since the storms in the last few years?

S: Well, they didn't - not that's it's affected us any more - in a way of the size of the shrimp. After the storms passed the boats had trouble going back out, clearing out the waters and get the junk out so they can catch the shrimp. And we wash our shed and sterilize it and order new heaters and we're back in business. We're always, you know, we're ready to go sometimes before the power gets back on. We just don't let it sit. If the, like if the people sit back and wait for FEMA or for somebody to come help them. We don't do that. We get over here we get our food, clean up, you know. Take pictures, and then worry about the insurance after. Get ready to work, and that's what we did.

D: What about the number of shrimpers operating out here - like, selling to you. Has that ever gone down since the hurricanes?

S: Over the years the numbers have I guess you can say have gone down the um how could I say it um it's kind of switched around from... Used to have the old shrimpers the old trawlers and people used to chase sea bobs in the winter time - that generations either retired or died. Most of the shrimpers like the ones who just wouldn't really into it I guess and couldn't make ends meet have gone on jobs. The majority of our shrimpers here right now are Vietnamese. It's like it just did a complete turnaround. I think, I would say like three quarters of our shrimpers are Vietnamese right now. And if it wouldn't be for them, we could probably shut the place down because it wouldn't be enough to keep going. There are very few maybe right now I can think of, maybe three or four of the Vietnamese that I could actually say I'd rather not have around here because they're lazy. They're just more of a pain than anything else. The others are hustlers. They work. And we have a few left of the good shrimpers - the American shrimpers and ones that have been with us for years. But, like, from what the way that we started it's just completely changed. We used to work - this time of the year, there'd be someone on the dock 24 hours a day sometimes when they'd go after the sea bobs. Now, it's been years since we've even gotten a boat going after sea bobs. In fact we're thinking about going look for some land around Cameron. To try to get some sea bobs where we can send our truck you know get them there and truck them back. Because like Blum and them sea bobbing one at a time – we're not

getting them. So, it's just a whole different time.

D: Hmm. Now do the Vietnamese live on the bayou?

Some do. Some live in town they leave their boats tied up here. Most of them all have either here or our other place. Their boats are all tied up around here. There's not many of them that'll have a place to put their boat. But um, some of them even live in New Orleans that come around. Like um, they work depending on where I guess a good spot is they work and they stay and uh, sometimes they'll work towards the east depending. And in this area they sell to us. When they go to the other end they go to Leeville or um, Venice.

D: Mmhmm. Venice!

S: They travel. Wherever the shrimp are – that's where they go.

D: When we were driving down we saw a shrimp boat, and on the back there was a sign that said "Live Bait." What is that?

S: That's people that have a bait license like if the in-shore waters are closed they can still go out and catch shrimp to sell for bait, but they have regulations they have to follow. They can only keep the live shrimp and they have to only I think leave their nets in the water a certain amount of time. It's for these little bait houses that sell to the people going fishing.

R: And like Marie's? Up the bayou?

S: Martin's?

R: Martin's! Yes.

S: Yes, Martin's Bait they sell it and they um, they house. And then down the bayou, well the man just died, he used to do it too. His son sells us his shrimp. He had a big license too that – um, that Bayou Bait and Tackle - but the guy just recently died of cancer, so he's not around anymore. But the son's trying to get the place. But um, that's what those are for. They um, they catch the live bait for people who go fishing with.

D: Now to sportsmans – do sportsmans buy that bait for their charter?

S: I really don't know. I don't know what they do. I don't know

D: We just, we saw the sign and I'm going...

S: Yeah well that's - they have a bait license and it's different than – they have to follow regulations but they uh, they're allowed to catch for shrimp when the season's closed to sell for bait.

D: Okay.

S: They have to have the live boxes on their boat - to keep them alive.

C: Huh. Well, I want to get back to something we talked about when we first started. I'm from up around Opelousas. We used to eat dried shrimp during Lent all the time. It was always in stews and I didn't even know you could eat them, ...(inaudible) you know, till we started this project. Did ya'll eat them, I mean in stews or gumbo or something here?

S: I've heard of dried shrimp gumbos. I've tried one time but there's too much fresh shrimp around to make a dried shrimp gumbo. In my opinion I'll eat them out the bag. And that's my problem bc over the years you know it's kinda like, you get these health problems you know and it's like I'm on high blood pressure medication and this dried shrimp has the salt and I take a (fluid?) pill so when I have to sit there and clean some shrimp because I clean every once in a while – because some people in the area want some, you

know, in bags. But I cannot sit and clean the shrimp and not eat any. And that puts me in trouble.

(laughing)

S: But as far as cooking, lots of people come – some people tell me they cook them like smothered potatoes with – you know. I don't cook with them because I rather them fresh when they're cooked.

C: Sure. Well I understand that's it's just where I grew up you know there it wasn't easy or – to get them and most people couldn't afford them anyway, so...

My husband's doctor he sees at Ochner's in New Orleans - I think, I'm thinking he might be from, is it Germany? I don't know where he's - I think he's from a foreign country. But whenever my husband goes for a checkup he'll bring him some because he says he likes to take them and soak them, you know to get the shells off and he makes him an omelet for breakfast in the morning. I make shrimp omelets but with leftover boiled shrimp – not dried shrimp.

C: (laughing) There's too many fresh shrimp. I understand that.

S: Right! Yeah, it's just, I mean, but a lot of people who come here, you know especially we got people coming with the first cold front looking for oysters for a gumbo or you got dried shrimp and you could make a gumbo. You know, so yeah I know it's just everybody's different preferences, you know. How they were raised. But we started here with fish. We used to buy fish and, you know, fish is what built this place. The bull drums, the red fish and the garfish - like he's talking about Opelousas - we used to go to Monroe every week twice a week to bring fish to the markets up there. We had gill nets and then we had boats. We had like three or four of our boats out there at a time, and miles and miles of gill net, until they banned the red fish being a sport fish and banned the gill nets, you know. That was it for the fishing, but it was fish that built this place.

D: Did you ever dry – dry fish?

S: (chuckles) The only thing we did one time was when they had the gill nets out, and they, there was one of the Vietnamese somewhere who wanted the fin. We'd save the shark fins and then you put them out and dry them – put them in the sack and bring them to him. That's as much as I did. But you know, we'd get these Vietnamese that come in and sometimes when they come in to unload their shrimp you see them climbing on top of that cabin and they pick up their fish. But they make their soup so they, um, but not me.

C: Been good! Real good. Appreciate your – very, very good.

D: Very good. Well, before we turn this off, explain to me again your heaters. You said it's like a home?

S: It's a central heating unit. It's a - we buy them from Grainger. It's just a central heating unit just like people put in their houses, but it's modified. It's got a blower to um blow the air into the box – the dryers where the shrimp are at.

D: So you have a gas line going to each blower...

S: Each heater

D: Each heater, and then..

S: Then there's a blower on it

D: I got it. Now I understand.

S: And the blower pushes the hot air into the dryer. We have fifteen heaters in there. So you could imagine in the middle of the Summer time when it's 90 degrees or so outside, and there's fifteen heaters in that

building...

C: Now how to move it - do you have to turn it?

S: Well the - once they get them boiled that's the hot part, they're going to boil and take them in wheel barrels and take them and bring them to the shed and dump them in the dryers, and then after the dryers you know, either they're finished or after the dryers are full, you know, whichever's first, every two hours they go and flip the shrimp over and it takes about 6 to 8 hours to dry a batch of shrimp. He'll um, on a regular day, not on an overloaded day but on a regular day he'll put, they'll boil 400 pounds of shrimp to a batch, and in the boilers they'll put 600 pounds per dryer on a regular day. But I don't know exactly how many dryers he puts in the beater at a time. I never did ask that. But we'll go up to as high as 800 pounds per dryer when there's a big load of shrimp. That he don't either have too many - If we have to save some already that might be two batches - two rounds. Or if it's not enough to make another round he'll just add extra to the dryers. It just takes a little bit longer to dry. He doesn't like to do it, but sometimes you have to do what you have to do.

C: The drying must be tough in there in the Summer.

S: Those dryers come out with their shirts on their shoulders, wiping their face with it, and I don't see how they do it. I hardly ever go across the road because my job's on this side. I work the office, I'll work the dock, you know, run the conveyers and stuff, but as far as going in there I've, I want to say of the 20 years we've been doing that, I might've gone 10 times in the building when they're doing the shrimp. And when you pull that tarp back from that door to walk in where the dryers are at, is like, (gasp) "where's the air?" and I don't see how they can do it, but...

R: Now it's all local people that are helping you?

S: Well, my son-in-law works for us, and the other guys are Mexicans. From overseas they come here. In fact, they going to be leaving to go back home probably around the 18th or 19th, so after that we're just gonna have to see what happens because we try getting local people to work for us. You hire them, and all they want to do is say they have a job and wait for a check. They don't want to work. You know, and you just you get aggravated with them. These Mexicans, they're workers. You tell them what to do - we've had very few we had to send back, you know tell them "we don't need you" because they just couldn't put up them, the lazy ones. But the majority of them, we have this one that comes every year they've been coming for quite a few years now. And he'll boil shrimp for us too because he knows how to do it.

D: Now does he - does he live here?

S: We have this little camp here where they stay when they're here, but they live here.

D: So you have a place they can live.

S: Yes we used to have - we used to buy little campers and put one right here behind the office where they would stay in, but it got to where we had to keep buying campers because they don't last, we built this little camp up here on pilings - that's the Mexicans' house. We have I think 5 or 6 bunks in there. And that's where they stay. They have the kitchen stove, bathroom, their washer and dryer - everything's in there. So whichever one's working for us at the time they sleep in there. And um, until they're ready to go back home.

R: And they go back home just before Christmas.

Yeah, most of them do. Some of them, we've had some who actually stayed through, but um, most of them will go back home for Christmas, because these, and they have the ones who will go work for High Seas, and they're all the same people and they have a house there that some stay in and a few of them at the docks, and whenever it's time that they decide they're going to go, they all go together. They probably have a caravan when they're leaving. They leave, cause they have a lot of Mexicans that work over there too there's...and that's also going to affect the closing of the shrimp season, because even though the season's

closing on the 22nd, it usually closes itself like I think it's about to do because these boats are going out and coming back with nothing. So it's probably just about finished with the inside but the Mexicans are going to be leaving around the 18th or 19th so the factories will probably quit buying on the 15th. Because they have to have all that shrimp worked and packed in the freezer before their workers are leaving. Then after that it'll probably be it they'll be shutting it down.

C: Have you learned some spanish?

S: No, except for um...

D: No. (laughing) Si!

S: Amigo and...I would want to but I would have to, I don't know. I would rather, I would like to have one of them sit there and teach me a few words because I understand the French I don't talk it because it doesn't come out like I want it to, but you know I was raised my grandma just talked French, my husband talks French, he, and um, then I had to learn sign language because I have two daughters who are deaf, so with the sign language the English and the French, you know, I would want to learn the Spanish. I wouldn't want one of them to sit and teach me the words they way they know it because I don't know if Spanish is like French, where you have the Cajun French and they have the France French you know, that don't go..I want to know the way they talk. I don't want to learn from some book if that's not the way they talk. But, every once in a while they'll say some thing you know like I know yellow means...(?)....that's one word I know, but besides that it's just, si, senior. We just joke around like that. Agua means water – because whenever they come in the office and they say “agua,” and I say, “okay”...But, they know English. So as long as they know a little bit of the English I'm not too worried about the Spanish.

D: Did any of your family trap?

S: Yes, well my husband trapped, in the winter time, before we were married and after we were married he did some trapping. My dad, I don't know that he trapped. He used to have I remember a little building in the back where he used to get the neutras from the trappers. I guess he would buy them because we'd skin them and dry their fur. And we did that after I was married and my husband trapped - his dad trapped in the Winter time and for a few years. You don't see much of that anymore.

D: No. No.

S: It was at one time when we moved to this house that there was enough space under it where he had a shed underneath the house where he'd skin his neutras and rats in until that just, I guess the hurricane's done took over that. It's gone, but yeah. He did that for a while.

D: You don't find many people at all anymore that trap. One time there was 20 or 30 thousand. Now it's hard to find.

S: I remember like if you don't have the right, like a big old shed to do your skins, and you had it's almost like the dried shrimp. You had to pick them up at night when you had the platform, and it would - we had to have the skins picked up, and if you didn't have a place to put them to keep them out of the weather, you had to bring them in your house. You, right now if somebody talks about putting neutra skins on the molds in the house, they'd have probably looked at me and knocked me over the head or something. “You're not bringing that in the house!” We used to do it.

R: Oh, yeah.

S: Mmhm.And I spent quite a few days with my daddy when I was a little girl pulling staples off of the molds to get the skins off – we used staples to get the skins on. we'd have to go lay them out in the yard – they had all these little holes with the wood across where you had to..dry them out in the sun..pick them up at night. Oh yes.

C: A lot of work.

S: You know with my - there was the steps you know. Like we had people that would skin them, and they had this big old pole where you used to stretch the skin over it, and then a scraper – two handled thing, what you call it – used it to scrape the fat off the skin, then they would go to another person to put on the mold, but then the same time he was doing something with the meat – I really don't know what he would do with the meat, but somebody would be there to take the guts out you know, and throw the meat in another pile. And the year my daddy quit fooling with neutras was gonna be the year I was gonna be advanced to be the one to gut them. And I was - And he quit. And he quit in the right time because I didn't want to gut no neutras.

D: So the whole family was involved?

S: Oh yes. Everybody was.

D: Did you come from a big family?

S: No, well uh I have three sisters and a brother.

D: well that's..that's pretty..

S: I think my husband there are seven, seven kids. His family was a bit bigger than mine. And us it was four girls and one boy. And there it was, I think it was two girls and five boys. But anyway he, you know we both grew up in the trapping family and the shrimping and the, there's just different ways, because you know with him being a boy he was always with his daddy going and doing. Me, I was just at home helping my daddy do the part at home but he was going out there in the boats experiencing first hand, you know?

D: Sure.

S: I was just like a helper with Daddy when I was a little girl. We both...

D: Your mom's generation - she must've been going out with her daddy...Because a lot of families went together out to the...

S: More than likely, I'm more - my mom's dad died when I was a little baby. She didn't tell me a whole lot about what he did. The only thing I remember is her talking about was they lived at the every end of the Point au Chene road but across the bayou they had a little store there. Her daddy owned a shore. And she would talk about that sometimes things about the store and how they used to have to hide the slot machines behind the counter and stuff like that. That's all I remember her talking about her daddy as far as...

D: At the end of the Point au Chene road?

S: All the way at the very end of the road and across the bayou.

D: so right here where you go...(inaudible)

S: Well, when you go to the island where you cross the bridge to go to the island..but you don't turn you go straight all the way at the very end

D: Yep. There's a grocery store there

S: This was years and years and years ago.

D: Oh yeah. I've heard stories.

S: The last time I've been down there and that was a long time ago you could still see the pilings because I think it was – I don't know if the store burned or storms took it or what but there was still some pilings but I'm

sure that's gone now – it's been a long time.

D: Do you remember a company called Bay Tuna Oyster Company?

S: I've heard of it, yeah. I remember hearing - I don't - I've recognized the name but I don't know anything about it.

D: Okay. Just curious.

C: Now you've been excellent. Absolutely excellent.

S: Well I'm sure my husband could tell you more stories like on the, experienced it himself you know with the platforms and stuff it's just I'm not, I've heard of them I know they exist I've probably seen old pictures and magazines you know with Blum and them. But I've never been to one - I know he has. He could probably tell you exactly how they worked and everything but all I know is what I heard and...

C: Sure. Well we're going to have to come back when he's not as busy.

Yeah, that's sometimes hard to do. He's not the type to just sit around too long it might be a couple days where if it's slow he'll sit and watch tv, but after a couple days of that he's gotta find something to do. And usually when he starts something it takes a few days to do it.

C: Okay. Thank you so much.

S: Well thank you.

D: Well I have a question I just...