

**Narrator: Vickie Duffourc**  
**Interviewer: Jennifer Abraham Cramer**  
**Transcriber: Joshua Coen**

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**JENNIFER ABRAHAM CRAMER:** So, today is November 14<sup>th</sup>, the year 2013, and this is Jennifer Abraham Cramer with the LSU Libraries Special Collections T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History and we are here today with our CWPPRA partners working on the project that was just explained to you. And I am here today with Vickie Duffourc and I'm just gonna start with a real, oh yeah, let me tell you where we are. We are in the Connoco Phillips office in Houma, Louisiana. And we're gonna start with a real easy question. When and where were you born?

**VICKIE DUFFOURC:** [00:32] I was born in Commerce, Georgia. Northeast Georgia.

**CRAMER:** And can you state your full name for us?

**DUFFOURC:** Vickie Smith Duffourc

**CRAMER:** And where did you grow up?

**DUFFOURC:** I grew up in northeast Georgia

**CRAMER:** When did you move to Louisiana?

**DUFFOURC:** [00:49] I came to Louisiana Mardi Gras 1977.

**CRAMER:** So, um, what? You just never left?

**DUFFOURC:** I just never left. I say I'm Mardi Gras trash.

**CRAMER:** So did, um, so you've been living here since 1977?

**DUFFOURC:** 1977

**CRAMER:** And where have you been living?

**DUFFOURC:** I lived in Westwego, Louisiana. My first home was on Bayou Segnette when I moved here. Well actually, I had a place in Plaquemines Parish. I stayed about one month until I got some funds together but I met some people on Bayou Segnette and so I moved on Bayou Segnette, um, when I first came here and I lived there in a camp without electricity for seven years.

**CRAMER:** Wow

**DUFFOURC:** [01:42] And I learned, um, I fell in love with the marsh. I worked on a shrimp boat, I shed soft shell crabs, I had bush lines, and I trapped. In my day, I could skin a muskrat and put it on the mold in under 3 minutes.

**CRAMER:** Where did you learn all that? Just out of curiosity.

**DUFFOURC:** Just, I learned from friends. You know, on the bayou. I was very, you know, just fascinated with the whole life. You know the late 70s were kind of the “earth mother” phase and so I was, you know, back to nature. And just, um, learned from different friends my age and also from older people. And the older people were really fascinated that I was fascinated with their culture. So they were anxious to teach me because a lot of the young people at that time thought that was, you know, old fuddy duddy stuff where I was fascinated with it because I had never seen this culture.

**CRAMER:** So is that where your connection with the wetlands kind of comes in?

**DUFFOURC:** [02:53] Yes, that's where I started. I did that, and then at that time my education was...I was a graphic artist. And so when I, um, living on the bayou with no electricity wasn't working for me anymore, I got a job with the Westbank Guide newspaper and I used to write a little column called "Bayou and Me" for the Westbank Guide. And then, um, I worked there for a while and when my first child was born, I realized "oh my God, I need money. I know what the people are talking about. I need an education." You know, I had a technical degree in graphic arts but I had not finished my bachelor's degree so I got a job at UNO in the print shop and started working towards my bachelor's degree, although I did not know what I wanted to study. And then one day, I saw some materials...we had the copy center and so all the professors had their supplemental materials copied there and the students came and purchased them from us...And so, uh, I saw some supplemental material about the environment and started flipping through it and was just fascinated with it and so I said well this might be what I want to study because I was working on a general studies degree. And so I asked the girl I said "Well, what professor brought this in?" and she said "Oh that's a visiting professor from EPA and he's coming in to get his business card. Would you like to meet him?" And I said "Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I want to take his order when he comes. So when he came in, and you know I worked in the camera room, the dark room, and when he came she let me know and I went "This stuff is fascinating. This class is very interesting." He said "Well why don't you take it?" I said "Well this is a six thousand level and I'm, you know, just a sophomore, maybe junior, and uh he said "Oh it's six thousand for engineers but its four thousand for urban studies and all you need is an instructors permission and I give it to you" He was Greek so he had this very theatrical... "And I give it to you" he said. So I enrolled in his class and, um, it was a very uh interesting...like we would just do readings and then sit around and discuss it. And it had a vast group of people from

different disciplines: engineers, urban planners, you had the industry people, the greenies, the governmental people, and we would just discuss these concepts. [05:37] And so...um, the first...and he was there for two semesters so I had both of his classes and it was kind of the same concept. For the first class I did, and that was when environmental justice was the buzz word, so I did a study of the Houma Indians and came down into Terrebonne Parish into Dulac and met, um the Houma Indians and interviewed them and did a paper on how they were liked forced to the end of the road and then I learned a lot from them about how the erosion was taking the land. You know, they had been forced to the end of the road because they were marginalized and now they were being attacked from the Gulf side. And, um, at that time they were building the levee system and the levee came right north of Dulac. So their whole community, they look and see the bulldozers building the levee and they're on the outside of it and they were intuitive enough to know that the water is going to stack up against the levee and destroy their community. So that was my first...that kind of got me interested in the coastal part of environmental. And it went well with my living in the marsh and trapping and fishing everything. So, and then...the next semester they started building the levee in Westwego. And at that time, the print shop closed. They privatized it. And we were laid off. So I took my state retirement money out and bought a camp with electricity out on Bayou Segnette. So I was moving on up! And I had done a study on softshell crab shedding as an independent study. And LSU was just developing the continuous flow shedding system with up-flow filtration, sand filtration. And Dr. Porier in the biology department was shedding these crabs in little swimming pools all over. And so I had done a study on that and when I bought the camp, I got...I set up one of those tanks with the swimming pool and three garbage cans with oyster shells in one and you'd shed it through. 'Cause when I had done it earlier, we did the bush lines. We cut the bushes and tied them and strung them

across the lake and then dipped them and shed them in floating carts in the water. [08:24] And that was a problem because when the water would change and the pollution in the water, you could lose your whole everything overnight, you know. And so, we couldn't shed them by the camp. And then we had moved out in the bay where we had a better flow of water but you would still get a tug boat come through, kick up sediment and kill 'em all. So this flow through system offered you control. So I did a modified, um, flow through...I came from the bayou, went through the rocks, and went back out. And I could shut my system off and then loop it around or I could flow through from the bayou. And so I had a little more control of the environment. And so I shed, um, I did a mortality study on those. And I had crabs coming from two different salt water environments, and so I did a study on that and I became fascinated with that and then I expanded the operation. I bought...my friend had a crab shed and he sold it to me and dismantled it and came and rebuilt it for me. And it was all those, um, the front of a Pepsi coke machine that's Plexiglas with Pepsi on it. So I had this whole building with Pepsi. So I had the Pepsi soft-shell crab shedding facility! And then I had the ability to hold up to a thousand crabs in shed. And I did that...well my children were small then. I had two children by then. And they were small so that allowed me to stay home with my children until they started school. And they started school. And they would go to school in a boat. And they would wear, you know, "get your life jackets and time to go to school" and we would bring them. We bought a little...a special boat we called it the school bus boat...that they went to school in. And the Easter bunny always brought a new life jacket because you had to have a nice life jacket to go to school with. And I did that until...I did that for a few years and then when they came in and built the levee, they tore out the...they were building the flood wall in the front of Westwego and they displaced all of the boats and they built this dock. Well they told all of the boats they had to leave and y'all

could come back when they finished the flood wall. And when they finished the flood wall, the West Jefferson Levee district posted these signs saying “No Mooring” and they started writing people tickets for tying up to it. And this is where people came to the market for years. You know? And so I came up one morning and Mike Roberts lived right over the levee in a little house right there by the shrimp factory over near Westwego. And he said “Well I wouldn’t tie there” and I said “Why?” He said “I got a ticket.” And I said “A ticket? A ticket for what?”

[11:20] He said “I don’t know. I can’t read” And this was... a lot of people could not read. And there were people my age that I met who could not read. And I had never met people... I mean I knew older people from the mountains that couldn’t read, but I had never met anybody my age who could not read. And I said, “Oh, well I’m gonna check into it.” So I checked into it, you know, and we ended up opposing the permit and a lot of things transpired and so we formed the Bayou Segnette boaters association. We used to call ourselves the canal rats. We were actually the Bayou Segnette community of boaters association on paper but we called ourselves the canal rats incorporated. And we opposed the permits and we made some headway. And that’s... in doing that conflict is how I met Marnie Winter, the director of the environmental department because I was the thorn in her side. And we did a lot of things to bring attention to our cause. A man was killed from a sunken boat. On the side it had an old boom sticking out and he was decapitated actually at night. And then there was a big uproar and nobody would move this. You know, the council said “well it’s not in the channel, it’s not our responsibility... and blah blah blah” So we all got together and I went before the council and I said “Unless somebody tells me otherwise, you know, next Thursday at 10 o’clock, we’re going to move that boat” And we did. The guys came with the shrimps boats and just jumped in the water, and um... The council backed us and they waived the tipping fees at the landfill to dispose of the stuff. The coast guard

came out and stood by in case there was a spill or something coming out of it. [13:24] The Jefferson Parish Sheriff's office came out and slowed traffic on each side so we could lift it. Tauzin's office came by and she was like "where is everybody?" you know? Cause it was like ten minutes till ten and nobody was there. And then here comes the big boat and all the guys would, you know it's kind of cold in October, and they just jumped in the water and "phw-phw-phw-phw-phw-phw" and thirty minutes later the boat was gone! We hooked up the wench and "chuuhhh." And we moved it...that was really nice. And then all the guys...you know, everybody who participated got a certificate from Billy Tauzin's office; a congressional certificate.

**BERGERON:** [14:03] Vickie, you and Marnie have been working together on coastal restoration a mighty long time. It's interesting to hear how you met one another. So tell me a little bit about your coastal restoration work with Marnie.

**DUFFOURC:** Well uh, after that incident ended, Marnie approached me after a council meeting (and we had been to several things together) and she was like "we gotta get you with us. You're too good to be on the other side." And so, I was...by then I was back at UNO, finishing up my degree. I was going to school full time. I didn't have to work. I was at work and I was going to school full time. And that was when 3D Seismic was coming out, and so they were having a lot of new activity looking for oil. And Marnie wanted to do an ordinance for the Parish to require a permit for the 3D Seismic and just try to control that a little bit more. And UNO had this program called LUTAC. Louisiana urban technical...something. And it was through the urban planning department and they would hire people out. So I got a contract from the parish

through LUTAC to work for Marnie's office to write the ordinance for Seismic. And so I did that and that was my first job with the parish. And then when I graduated, I didn't have a mechanism to work for the parish anymore, so Marnie had a contract with coastal engineering and environmental consultants and they were assisting them with their CZM program and so she talked to the owner of that company about hiring me cause I had graduated so I was hired to work on Jefferson Parish projects so I have been working on Jefferson Parish projects for fifteen years now.

**CRAMER:** So, in your opinion, what do we stand to lose without coastal restoration projects?

**DUFFOURC:** [16:04] Oh, we stand to lose the culture and the uniqueness, you know...if we don't save the marsh and we just fortify ourselves with levees and live behind levees, we become, you know, a Houston or something. You know, very generic...not as unique as we are now. You know? And I mean, um, I'm not an engineer. My degree is more or less in policy; coastal zone policy. But, you know, we learned in elementary school and I studied it in Georgia. A delta is built from sediment overflowing from the river. So we cannot save this place without sediment, without the river. The river is the answer. The river is what built the land and the river is what will save us.

**CRAMER:** So, in line with that: based on what you know now, what piece of advice would you offer the next generation coming behind us in regards to coastal restoration

**DUFFOURC:** [17:17] Don't give up the fight. And work with natural processes.

**CRAMER:** very good advice. And do you have any other questions, Susan?

**BERGERON:** No, I don't think so.

**CRAMER:** Okay, excellent. Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate it.

**[Tape Ends 17:36]**