

Narrator: Yancy Welch
Interviewer: Susan Testroet- Bergeron
Transcriber: Taylor Suir

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BERGERON: My name is Susan Testroet-Bergeron. I'm interview Mr. Yancy Welch about his memories and experiences concerning Louisiana's wetlands. The interview is being conducted at 1:30 p.m. on August the second, twenty-twelve. The interview is being conducted at Yancy's home in Oak Grove, Louisiana. Do you understand that portions of this taped interview or pictures taken during the interview will be used in a variety of publications?

WELCH: [Mm Humm]

BERGERON: Good. Thank you for speaking with me today and we've gone over our consent forms and I'd like to get some basic information and then we'll go on with the interview.

WELCH: All right.

BERGERON: So, let's start with, Please state your full name.

WELCH: [0:40] My name is Yancy William Welch.

BERGERON: And can you please give us your date of birth and tell us where you were born?

WELCH: [0:50] I was born December 9, 1965 and I think I was born in Lake Charles. But, about 40 miles from here, but, been here all my life.

BERGERON: Been here all your life. So, tell us about, If you've been here all your life, tell us a little bit about growing up here.

WELCH: [Humm]. Where you want to start? Back whenever we was kids?

BERGERON: Yeah.

WELCH: You got to realize, whenever we was growing up, it ain't like kids today. We... in the summer time we grew big gardens, in the winter time my daddy trapped, and we had cattle, you name it. We actually worked just to just to get by 'cuz my daddy was a school teacher, most probably, no telling what he was making back then. But, when I got to be a teenager, whenever I got to be out there, around '72-'73, that's when alligator season started back. That's whenever I could go out in the marsh. I could learn...I knew how to trap and we hunted lots of ducks and waterfowl. And growing up in a place like this is very unique 'cuz you don't have no neighbors

on the south side of you and you can't get no neighbors to the north side. We live on a ridge and what people don't understand...Cheniere... and all it is, is a big sand bar that used to be in the Gulf is now land with marsh in between the ridges. [2:27] And growing up, we'd...it was family, family oriented. Everybody participated in the gardens, with the cattle, and it's long gone traditions now. You don't have that no more. It's you know... Winter time you look forward to it because we were rat trappers. We walked the marsh, we trapped the muskrats because we have kind of like...we don't have deep marsh. We have prairie marsh around here. So we were rat trappers, caught a few nutria, you know, and caught some 'coons and stuff. Had a lot of good duck hunting. We didn't fish. My daddy never took us fishing because we were working cows or building fence or hunting. Every now and then we'd go catch us a red fish or something like that. And we just, you know, it was football. You know, it was the number one sport. Everything else played second fiddle to that, you know, you did a little bit of track and coming up we wrestled and before...when you blink your eyes you're an adult and grown up and it's all gone.

BERGEORN: Yeah, tell us a little bit about what you do as an adult or what your jobs have been as an adult.

WELCH: Well, whenever I got out of high school, I worked in the oil field was still booming. And I worked at the offshore docks pumping the diesel, you know doing bay writing, chemical and stuff like that and it kind of just dried up. Tried college for a little while and about a year and that didn't work out. So what we did, we, my first job I made really good money at, the second year they had the alligator hunt at Marsh Island, I got pulled for that. And me and my

brother went over there and we hunted alligator and ever since then we opened up some skinning sheds. We were some of the first ones to skin alligators and started marketing the meat. From then on, then I got a crabbing lease and I started fishing crabs and you know in the wintertime and if things was slow we had a few nutrias, we had a few rats and we trapped them. We just kind of rolled with the punches. You know, you either did alligator meat or alligator season or you trapped or you know, had crabbing, and if you had a little slack time, maybe you go catch a few frogs to sell or some crawfish. You just...a few years there it was just wide variety of things. And you know, you had cows; stuff like that. You name it, we did it. [Laughs]

BERGERON: That's good. So, what's it like to be a crabber, I mean, now you're pretty much a full time crabber.

WELCH: [5:23] Yeah, I'm pretty much...It's tough. But it's fun. It's different. It's like having a hundred, I got about 150 cages that I run a day. And it's like having 150 different employees. Every time you put, you don't know what you got in it. You don't know how this employee is producing today. And it gets to where, it sounds funny, but you go and you pull the cages up, you know where they at. I usually start in March and I fish 'till November, hopefully 'till December if it don't get too cold. And you get to know these cages. Everyone looks the same but after a while, you know, they got a certain dent in this one or you run over this one or something happens and you get to know them. It's a job to where from 6:00 in the morning 'till 11:00 during the day you got to get it, bust it up, and get the crabs in. And the deal is, the crabs that I catch, and I'm not bragging, but I catch a lot of big crabs 'cuz I fish in the marsh. And a

majority of my crabs are crabs that are eaten in Baltimore, Maryland as “Big Jimmy Crabs”, male crabs, you know, the crab capital of the world. That’s where they end up at. [Laughs]
That’s true.

BERGERON: I love that. So, how did you get hooked up with people on the East Coast?

WELCH: [6:53] Well, the guy that I sell to, they got buyers that come there and every day when I unload my crabs they put them in cold water and they go through them and they box them up. You know, these big male crabs and they put them in cardboard boxes and they’ll finish around 1:00 and they head to Abbeville and there’s a truck that passes every day. These refrigerated trucks will pass and they’ll put them boxes of crabs on that truck and by the next day, they in Maryland.

BERGERON: Are they still alive when they load them?

WELCH: Aw, Yeah. They chill them down in that cold water and they send them to Maryland. And sometimes if it gets to where the truck ain’t passing and like early in the year when the truck ain’t passing, they ship them on planes. They’ll put them on a plane like in Lafayette or New Orleans or they got to all the way to Houston, but they usually go this way. And they’ll put them on a plane, next stop, Baltimore, Maryland. And sometimes they’re there for supper.

BERGERON: [Laughs]

WELCH: That's true.

BERGERON: That's awesome. I didn't realize that. I hadn't heard that the east coast were consumers...

WELCH: Thank goodness for the east coast...

BERGERON: [Laughs]

WELCH: and big male crabs.

BERGERON: That's good to know. Tell us a little bit about alligator hunting and what you do there.

WELCH: [8:17] Well, I guess I started hunting by myself, you know going and having a line here and finding a gator here since I was about 16 or 17 years old. And I'm not going to say I'm a great hunter but gators are kind of scarce around here, you had to really find them. You had to hunt for them and then you had to catch them. And for years we had a handful of family tags and we'd go out and hunt them and stuff like that. We'd hunt. I hunted on Marsh Island when I got out of high school but I guess around '93 I got on some lease property and that's when you learned how to handle a bunch of alligators. And you really learn a lot of things. You got a bunch of tags, you know, I got 3-500, like 150, 175 tags like that. It takes us about 10 days and it's kind of a family thing. My younger brother comes with me and now I got my little boy. He's 13. He thinks he's an alligator hunter now. You know, he knows how it's all done. He stands back there and tell me how it's done 'cuz he sees it on T.V. how it's done and that's how it's supposed to be done. And I ain't doing it right. You know, I've been doing that since '93 and I've known...you name any other big alligator hunters; I've associated with them all. But, every year is a different year, some years its chicken and some years it might be feathers. So you just got... you never can really rely on year to year what you're going to make. But what you got at the end of the hunt minus your expenses, that's what you make.

BERGERON: It sounds like an interesting adventure, being an alligator hunter.

WELCH: Oh, it is. Well, matter of fact, my wife, she works in Cameron. She works for the D.A.'s office. She got drawed for the Sabine Reserve. And, the first year we hunted that's when the year Ike hit. It was '08. We had to go back out and we had too...It was so funny...we hunted

for 2 days and they shut us down. [10:48] We had 150 tags to fill. We killed about 50, we had 100 to go, it pushed up all these gators up in one area and they were just solid. We went in there and it was our turn to go, it was me, my wife had to be with us, Tara, her name is Tara, and other guys, my step-son, a few of our helpers. We went in there and in two days we killed 100. But on the last day, everything was gone again. When you come down from Lake Charles, you had to come through Suhphur, through Hackberry, through Johnston Bayou, to Deep Bayou to get out there. There was nothing. The last day we went, I got a scar on the side of my leg. Our boats were full with these big alligators and stuff, and what'd we do, we'd take our guns and unload them when we're coming out because, you know, you want to be safe, don't want nobody to get shot. And they were on their backs; you'd take your gators and you'd turn them over. I grabbed one of them by the tail, and it's a true story, it comes around and everybody had went to go get the trucks, but, Tara was standing at the end of the boat on the bank and was talking and it turned back and grabbed me. And I had my knee boots on. I wear green boots; I don't wear white boots like the rest of them. I wear green boots. And I had long pants on and it grabbed me. Well, the deal is, it hurt, but, it's tagged. You lose your tag, that's worse than getting a DWI, sometimes in Wildlife and Fisheries. You don't want to lose your tag. I'd let the alligator go but I had the tag in my hand and I was trying to get him off my leg. And I was hollering at her and she was running in place trying to get, and she's just hollering, "What am I going to do?" and I'm saying, "Get the gun. Get the gun. Get the bullet. Get the knife. Get something." And you know, and after a while it finally let me go but you can see where the cuts are, where the scars on there on the side and just two teeth got me. And it's just the bacteria 'cuz you don't want to get bit by these things; they got nasty mouths and all that. But that was one of the, I've been hunting. I've been bit twice. And you do, you get bit. It's one of the most exciting things 'cuz we was finished.

We was finished. I finished my tags, I finished her tags, and we was finished for the year and I get bit on the last alligator before we picked it up. It didn't get infected or nothing. I've got marks you know. [Laughs]

BERGERON: [Laughs]

WELCH: It's better than a tattoo sometimes.

BERGERON: [Laughs] It is a tattoo.

WELCH: [Laughs] It's better than a tattoo.

BERGERON: [Laughs] It's a real tattoo. Wow, that's good. Tell the people who are watching how far we are from the coast right here.

WELCH: [13:28] Well, we're approximately about two miles from the beach now and like I was saying when I was growing up, here in front of my house is called the Old River, it's the Mermentau River, where it comes out at. And at Rutherford Beach over there, used to when they put their cows on Hackberry Beach, its two different beaches, you had to swim your

cattle because that's where the river comes up. Well, I don't know if I should say this or not, but they changed the water route. And now you drive your cars across and it's a big, beautiful beach out there now. But, for some reason, we're having erosion. And like whenever tropical depressions and stuff like that come through now, bad waves or something like that, you can stand on my porch now and before you could see the Gulf, the waves out in the Gulf breaking. Where before, you never seen that. The Gulf, you know, my daddy will tell you, when they used to work cows out there when he was growing up, back in the '50s and '60s, the beach was actually a mile further out than what it is now. [14:49] You know and how they say we losing x amount of marsh land, we'll go ride our 4-wheelers out there and my neighbor up the road that owns the property out there was passing me and Tara riding the 4-wheeler out there one day and with the kids and I passed by and I stopped and I said, "Tara, you got to look at this. You got to see this." She said, "What is that?" And I backed up. It was a duck blind on the beach. She said, "Why you think they put that on the beach?" I said, "This used to be out in the marsh." And they used to have what they called tanks out there and it wasn't a tank like it sounds like. They went dug holes for cattle to drink out of. It was freshwater tanks. And that duck blind, 'cuz I was talking to my neighbor up there, and I said, I mentioned it to him. And he said, "Yeah, they used to be out in the marsh, like 3 or 400 yards out in the marsh. It's on the beach now. It's right there. It might be out in the Gulf now. You can see where the old locations were, it's right there. And within the next few years, couple years, or another bad storm, it will be right here. We got a big protection levee out here but it's going to be beach front property 'cuz it's all going to be gone. All your barrier gonna be gone. Your salt water marshes gonna be gone.

BERGERON: When we set this interview up, I told you I worked with CWPPRA and we're trying to do some restoration around here. Why do you think restoration, coastal restoration is important?

WELCH: [16:28] Because...it's... the way we're losing marshland and stuff, you know, nobody sees it. Not many people see the whole wetland but I've been seeing it since I was able to go out there. We used to walk and shoot ducks, you know, and walk through the beach and watching, that's all gone now. It's going, once it gets to a certain point, where's it going to stop? You got to stop it somewhere. I guess the Intracoastal Canal is about 10 miles or so from here, from my house, once it gets there, where you going to stop it at? But this whole area, the shrimp have to come in and raise in the marsh. The crabs have to come in and raise in the marsh. All kinds, you catch these little fish, little trout, little red fish, they come in and raise in the marsh. They leave, they come, they go. And I've been watching them do this. I've been working in the marsh all my life. If you don't stop it somewhere, it's going to be gone. Down here we have a lot of big levees and stuff but like down in the southeast Louisiana they don't have it like that and it's just disappearing and when you have big lakes you ain't got nothing, You got to have marsh. I tell y'all something, whenever Rita come through, this is a true story, we were coming over the Intracoastal Bridge there in Gibbstown, you got me, my brother Ben, my brother Rusty, and a guy from the Federal Government, who was a postal guy come to Creole. We was the first ones to Creole. I was the first one to step foot in Creole and only reason I did that is because I jumped out the boat to keep the boat from hitting the asphalt. But, whenever we come across, on the road there was...I looked like they just come and took a big brownie, let's say a sheet of brownies the size of this trailer house, that were this high and cut them up into squares

and I said, "Where'd all that come from?" And what it was the big byrons back here, it took and it pushed all this stuff across, 'cuz it was pushing it towards the Northwest and it was just big chunks of Earth. [19:00] It looked like someone just cut them out. You know, you might say, "Oh, he's full of it." And set them on the road, off the side of the road. And you hit them with your airboats because the water is so high. "[Buhooy], What is that?" You know, but it was big chunks of Earth and it's not dirt. It's, you know, what would you call it? Vegetation. You know, it's just that kind of stuff. Well once you lose that, that's the islands that are out there. You know, and we have islands when you dry these marshes you don't have that no more. It's the organic matter, that's the word I was looking for. You know and they got in in the byrons and I seen that and I said I didn't realize them islands were like that until you see it right there. Well you pass a lot of these places right there right now with what the hurricanes did, it's all big open water now. You got where the ducks used to come and get behind them islands and stuff now its below the blows and the waves and stuff are that high. It's changed so much 'cuz the marsh I crab in back here behind my house and I've been there the year they put the gates in. And I've been crabbing there for 25 years and I've seen the marsh come and go and go different scenarios every year. But, sometimes, you know, you help it along this way, you help it along this way, it always has a tendency to fix itself with a little help of, with a little guidance and a little stearence of people trying to help it, you know, but if you let it go too far, it's gone. Once something's gone, because we have pastures around here that were pumped out and the organic matter settled in these marshes. Well you can say we ain't going to do that no more. Its big lakes because, one of the few things I have to learn 'cuz one of my guys I used to work with, he was really smart and ended up going to be a professor at McNeese and I think he's in Baton Rouge now, and it's called oxidation. And I always thought oxidation was rust, he said it's the same thing and

whenever that organic matter oxidizes, it don't come back. So if you, when you have these droughts and stuff like that, it hurts, that hurts everything. It's such a delicate place, you know. It's nothing like it anywhere else because you just walk across the road right here, you get your feet wet. You know, and you walk right out here and you get your feet wet. And if you don't take care of it, it's all going to be gone.

BERGERON: One of the things we're trying to talk to people about is kind of what piece of advice to you give to the next generation who's going to inherit all of this. I mean, sort of what have you and the generations before us have learned and what kind of message do you want to give the next generation?

WELCH: [22:13] Not good. Because, I'll give you an example: I don't know if you know the road between Cameron and Holly Beach?

BERGERON: [Mmm Humm]

WELCH: I'll say his name, Captain Fletcher used to have a camp over there. He was a rat trapper. And he's dead and gone now. But, where Captain Fletcher's camp was, on the south side of the road, the beach used to be out there, hundreds of yards, hundreds of yards. Now, when they get a good strong southeast wind the water comes over the road. The beach is right there. It's 20-feet, 30-feet from, it's one of the few places you can actually ride on a major

highway and ride along the beach. You know, there's no other place like that, you're actually on the beach. And within another hurricane or something, that road's gonna be gone like the road between Port Arthur and Galveston or Highland, whatever you want to call it, that's gone now. And it's a proven fact. That's gone. This is going to be gone. As far as next generation, if something ain't done, they're ain't none. It's gone. It's going to be the Gulf. Coming and Going.

BERGERON: Tell us a little bit, when we talked earlier, about your son and what's going on with his school, the local school. Tell us what's happening to the schools around here.

WELCH: [23:41] Oh, Whenever I graduated in '84 we had 69, I think it was 69, kids to 68 kids in our class and it's always been like that but when the oil field kind of slacked out, you know, we went back. We was Double A, went down to Single A, but since we still play football, like last year, the football team, I think they had 15 kids on the team. Whenever I played they used every number. There was 80 kids, 90 kids that went out for football. There's 15 kids for the football team now. Once we were kind of a powerhouse, we kind of stood our ground and had a good team, now they go out there and they do the best they can. There's no kids. Everybody moved. Since the storms, you know, and the new laws and regulations and stuff, it just costs so much to build, the way you got to put your houses up in the air and, which is good 'cuz you don't get washed away, but it's just, some people just, it's easier just to move 40-55 miles north and build back on the ground.

BERGERON: You think that's had an effect on your community?

WELCH: [25:00] Oh, yeah. Everybody's gone. You know, ain't nobody here no more.

BERGERON: How do you feel about that?

WELCH: Oh, it's horrible. Oh you can go, and this is true, you can go lay on a Sunday, you can go lay out on the road out there and nobody's going to run over you. 'Cuz there's nobody. On a Friday evening, a Friday morning when I'm going crabbing, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, it doesn't matter, you know, days when people are in and out and you go back here to the store. We got 1 gas pump; 1 gas pump and 1 diesel pump. And you don't have to wait. There's nobody at the store. There's nobody, you know, they got a few locals still here and they, but as far as you know, people in and out and [*shakes head*]. The storm took a toll on a lot the people and they said they can't put up with it no more. They went through Audrey when they were little and they lost it and then 2 years later, 3 years later when Ike comes through and they lost it again, we'll come visit.

BERGERON: Yeah. It's a different world.

WELCH: Oh, yeah.

BERGERON: Do you have anything you want to kind of tell the viewers from the rest of the nation why this is not just a Louisiana issue? We've spent a lot of time talking to people and trying to explain to them, this is not just a Louisiana issue, this is a United States issue. Why is what's going on here important to the nation?

WELCH: [26:40] Because it's... South Louisiana is a very unique place. You gotta understand, you're never going to meet any kind of people like you meet. People come down from...we got people who live here, they up the road here, they from Wisconsin. Buddy of mine, good friend of mine now, he's from Pennsylvania. Everything's gone now and they still think this is the greatest place in the world 'cuz there's no place like this; Now the people that live here all their life, there like it's time for a change. The people you meet, in the fall, the duck hunting, the fishing. People come here for our red fish. We got, right here in Calcasieu Lake, some of the best and biggest speckled trout better than the eastern part of the state. The big trout over here, are some of the best red fish in the best estuaries, we got marshes, we got...Here in Cameron Parish, we have the Sabine Reserve, we have the Cameron Prairie Reserve, we got Rockefeller, we got Lacassine, too. You go up to Lacassine's, it's got some of the biggest bass but it's the parishes and it's not like any other place in the world because, well in the United States, because we're still... So many flags have flew over us and we have changed so much. I got friends that are Boudreaux's and Thibodeaux's, I actually got Boudreaux's and Thibodeaux's. We got Miller's that are Germans. We got Nunez's that are Spanish. You know, it's so many different cultures. They got some names back here that we can't pronounce 'em. You know, I can't spell them. I went to school with these people and I can't pronounce or spell their names. It's kind of like New York, but everybody knows everybody, everybody grew up with everybody and

everybody's kin to everybody. You know, you go from one end of the parish to the other, you know, if you're a Trahan, a Theroit... Welch's they a little bit different, a lot of us moved out but, we're kin to them, you know. And it's, I don't know, it's getting to where it's so, you have to fight for everything so hard. It's like we get put on the back burner sometimes, the way I feel. You don't see it happen and there's nothing you can do about it. It's coming. It's like I watch on T.V., you know the History Channel, the Discovery Channel, a volcano blows up. Here comes the lava. But, it's real slow, and you stand there and you looking at it like it's coming, the house is right there, and there's nothing you can do about it. It's going to get it. And that's the way the Gulf is. You can go out there this summer, during the spring I have a little boy. He's autistic and he likes to ride the 4-wheeler. So, we go. Every spring, and we'll play in the water and this and that and every year it's different. You're further back. The mud banks are higher. You can see where it's breaking over the marsh now. The bluffs are gone. It just comes and it goes. And pretty soon, one year we're going to go and we won't be able to pass. And then it won't take long after that, it will be right here in the front yard. I will have beach front property, in my little bird house. That's why we're, me and Tara, we're making it like a beach house 'cuz in [indistinct]. You can laugh about it, you can smile, and it's like. It's coming and I don't know where it's going to stop. You know it's people come and the people you meet in the winter time down here. You know when I'm working Holly Beach over there crabbing and shrimping and trapping and they had them restaurants, people from all over the world and they come and they just want to look. **[30:46]** And the birds, certain times of the year, the birds that pass through here, the ducks that pass through here, and the people that pass through here, you know, you never know. You can see the Europeans pass by. You can pick them out. They drive BMW motorcycles and I've learned that from crossing the ferry. They got a ferry up here, if it'd be in

the Navy, they'd have done decommissioned it, cut it up. But we've still have a ferry that is 50 years old. And we still trot back and forth on it, you know, and it's the people you meet, the people you see. And everybody wants to come, you know, 'cuz you can't go no further South than right here. I have no neighbors to the south of us. My closest neighbor, I think, might be Cuba. I'm referring to the South, you know, if you think about it, you know, Mexico is that way, you know, you got to go this way. You know Cuba's this way.

BERGERON: Yep.

WELCH: [31:39] It's just, I don't know.

BERGERON: We usually save the very end, so, if there's something you want to tell people about your life and what's going on here and wetlands so you would have a chance to...

WELCH: Oh, the wetlands, the sights, the sights, sunrises, the sunsets, the rainbows, the things you see, you can't see nowhere else. The fog, the humidity, the heat, the cold, you know, it's all just running into one another now, it's just a wonderful place, but it's leaving. There's nothing you can do about it. Unless the start doing something about it. I seen 'em between Holly Beach and Cameron, no Holly Beach and Johnston Bayou they did one of them projects where they, they told me this you know, you don't believe people until they...unless...There's ancient rivers out in the Gulf. And they went out there with these dredges and pumped sand up. But, it's

a different type of sand than beach sand. And it packed real hard and it did a good job then the storms hit it and made it. And they built breaks and it's one of the projects you can actually go and see 'cuz I can remember, my first one over there before they did that... Well my daddy taught in Johnston Bayou I guess '65, '66, '67, something like that, and on the side of the road they put some rocks; buried rocks. Well, it got to where you could see the rocks again. Well, now they coming pump the sand in there and the put breaks and they did a project and it actually worked. And you can actually see it work. It stopped it. You know, to what degree it stopped it, I don't know. But, it has to be continued because here in front from Cameron on toward Vermillion Bay, it's like that too. Some places have built up, like the mouth of the old Mermentau River, but you know, it goes down and it comes in, the marsh is eaten out. I don't know, can't point a finger, I don't know, scientifically, what's going on, or whatever, but for some reason, it built up and it used to be way out there and now it's...and we don't have no protection from the hurricanes. Used to if it's a hurricane, well now when it's a tropical wave it's like we better go spend the night in Lake Charles tonight because the water might be 4 and 5 feet. You know my daddy rode, in one of these big Oak trees out here, I'll show you when we go outside, he rode in that tree with him and his two sisters and his mom and dad for Hurricane Audrey. But we're standing underneath this other big Oak tree and he says, "You know Bub, that storm comes through, that water's going to be that high." I'm going to show y'all where that's at. And I said, "Dad, look, don't tell me this." He said, "I'm telling you." Well, about 2 weeks later when we finally all got down here together and standing and my house is completely gone and, "Come, I want to show you something." And he's really a smart aleck sometimes, you know, with me and you can see where the debris right where he pointed at was packed into that branch like that. He said, "You know the water was that high." "Yeah, daddy, I know, the water was

that high.” To be so peaceful and tranquil right now, it can be a dirty place. It can be a mean place, and in a flash, as fast as it get here, it’s gone again, you know.

BERGERON: Well, I appreciate your time today and for telling us a little bit what it’s like to be here in Louisiana and use the resources properly and taking care of it. I really appreciate your talking to us today.

WELCH: [35:53] Aww, and there’s so much...It’s like our seafood industry. You know, I do my best reading in the bathroom, and I was reading in this magazine, and you know, and it makes me feel bad, and I’m a crabber and whenever you go, and this is true, you go to some of these stores and they got Bertrand’s and Boudreaux’s Crab meat, but you turn it over and you look, imported. I ain’t gonna say where it’s from, imported. Then, I was reading this magazine, and they was talking about how to build shrimp this way and this way and all these poor shrimp guys, they doing the best they can, that’s what they did and it’s generations of them doing it and, [hummm], 10% of the shrimp that’s consumed in the United States comes from the Gulf coast, right there. 90% of it’s imported. Boy, I tell you what, you know, these guys, back whenever I was in school are getting a dollar or two less for a pound of shrimp and back then diesel was about \$0.30 a gallon. Well, now they paying \$3.50 a gallon, \$3.00 a gallon for that red diesel, you know, everything’s going this way but a lot of things still going, instead of just stopping they going the other way. ‘Cuz you know, price of everything goes up and some, it’s just you know with the oysters, you know, these guys, I tried that, I was going to fish oysters [indistinct] and all that. They gave me the job of culling the oysters. One day [fshht] that was it. I got muddy, I got

it [uh, uhh]. And I'll pay top dollar for a sack of oysters. I'll pay top dollar for a shucked gallon of oysters. They got the best ones right there in Cameron. But, I'mma tell you what, I ain't doing it. I suck that knife in the palm of my hand 2 or 3 times, I ain't doing it nomore. It's an art. It's like me pulling a crab cage or them guys shucking oysters, you know. That's their job and they're actually professionals at it. [37:58] You just can't...some things I do, it's like some guys with a shovel, it's like, man, ain't nothing to it, ain't nothing to it, been doing this for 50 years. Oh, it's just so much, you know, you can't get it all in, in one little interview, it's over time, so much time, you know, you got to see it all, and the things I've seen come and go, with the ducks, with the rats. When I was a kid, when I was in the 7th grade, some weeks I made more money than the school teachers trapping rats in the morning and in the evening. We'd sell our fur. The fur buyers would come by and daddy was a 7th grade teacher, we'd sell our fur. And all the class would go out there and me and a few of the kids we'd bring our muskrats, and our nutrias, and our coons and stuff like that and they'd pay us right there. You know, a kid in the 7th grade, sometimes a hundred, hundred and twenty five, hundred and fifty dollars [ohh hoo hoo] Look what I got. And you know, that was a lot of money back then. I've seen it to where 5 dollar rats, you know, gas was \$0.80/ \$0.90 a gallon. Now, muskrat, you can't get a dollar for it, dollar and a half. Nutria cut your tails off, throw the rest of it away, you know. I don't understand, you know, there's 6 point something screaming billion people and you can't sell a... I don't know. I don't know how things... The old ways but you got to learn if you want to do this kind of stuff you gotta adapt and roll with the punches.

BERGERON: You said something important just now and you said, "This is an art." The people that are still harvesting the resources here, it's an art. We appreciate your willingness to

continue that art. I hope the next generation sees how important it is. We need the food, I mean, I love crabs. It's my favorite...

WELCH: [39:56] Ohh, yeah and it's but if you don't preserve the places that they're at, you know, one day it's going to be gone because the Gulf is coming. Where's it going to stop? Here, it's pretty much our coastline here but in other places it's just eating it up. If we don't have levees and protection and I don't know why it's doing it. It wasn't doing it 50 years ago. It was building up 100 years ago. And now it leaves four times as fast as it builds up. Like you said earlier, a hundred years, two hundred years from now we'll all be dead and gone and somebody will say, "There used to be land down there?" [Laughs] Yeah, yeah there was, used to be a road out there 'bout 20 miles that way, there used to be a major road, a highway out there to ride to Abbeville, Pecan Island.

BERGERON: I hope they're smart enough to save it.

WELCH: Oh, I hope so too. But where they gonna start? What they gonna, you know? Who's going to do it? When we going to do it? Anything else?

BERGERON: No, that was a good question.

WELCH: [Laughs]

BERGERON: Thank you very much, I appreciate your time.

WELCH: [41:19] It's, you know, just growing up, you know, when I was little, there was a... When Hurricane Audrey passed my Grandpa was a dairy farmer, lost all their cows and stuff. Well, Daddy was telling me about this and he said life changes. Well we're standing, me and Rusty, my brother, went to open up the gates on the lake back where I crab at. We just put it on the road and went straight across, made sure the gates were off, had to take the motors off, bunch of stuff, had some cows stuck in 'em you know and we're standing there and I reached in my pocket and said, "Rusty, Imma show you something." I took my keys, back then I had a Toyota truck, took the Toyota and put it in my pocket. I had my key chain with a big alligator tooth on it. Took all my keys off. I said, "Look at this." He said, "What you doing? What you do that for?" I said, "It's all gone." Everything that, every lock, every key that it belonged to is gone, I threw it in the river, threw it out in the lake. I said, "It's all I got left." "Dang, he ain't joking." I said, "Yeah, my house is gone, my shed is gone, the gates we had locked are gone, it's all gone bub. Can you imagine only having 1 key in your life? But then after a while, you know you start getting some more keys. You know, I'll be god-dangit if in 3 years I had to do it again. I did it twice in my life, threw all my keys away.

BERGERON: Yep.

WELCH: [42:54] [Laughs]

BERGERON: That's a, That's a...

WELCH: You know, but when you have a disaster that can be prevented, and our disasters down here, they can't be prevented. The only thing you can do is move. And then you got a tranquil place... and look at the monsters outside, that's giants, nothing killed them. Man killed them. That's the only thing that will kill that oak tree. A man can kill it. Salt water don't kill them unless it stays on it. But the pecan trees we have, the native pecans, they all dead. The hackberry trees, you used to have them, Rita killed them, Ike washed them away. But all the Old Men are still standing out back. You'll see, we'll walk outside and take a look at all that, we'll drink us a Coke or something.

BERGERON: Sounds good. Thank you very much.

Tape Ends [43:44]