

**Lerline “Beauty” Rottman Gueldner
Ponchatoula, LA**

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Date: May 19, 2014

Location: Celeste Layrisson’s Residence - Ponchatoula, LA

Interviewer: Sara Roahen

Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs

Length: 1 hour, 58 minutes

Project: Middendorf’s and Manchac

00:00:01

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Monday, May 19, 2014, and I'm in Ponchatoula, Louisiana, on 7th Street. And I'm sitting here with Miss Beauty Gueldner. If I could just ask you, Miss Beauty, to introduce yourself by stating your full name, and tell me a little bit about where we are right now, that would be great.

00:00:25

Beauty Gueldner: Okay, I'm Lerline Rottman Gueldner, and I was raised in Manchac. What else do you want to know?

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SR: That's great. How did you get the name Beauty?

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BG: The town drunk named me. [*Laughs*] I was six months old when my daddy built this raft and we come across the lake, and that's—they landed on the canal over there and that's where I was raised. I was six months old and my mother was on the raft and when we landed Daddy had a barrel, an iron barrel, and that was my mother's stove. And Daddy had built a little palmetto—we called it palmetto shack, but that's where I stayed until I was about a year old. And then he got a railroad car—the caboose—off the train, and they give it to him and put us in a side track, and I was raised there until I was about four years old, I believe.

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And then Daddy had a house built, and it was a small house also and it was up on pylons, because at that time there were no yards in Manchac. Everybody was built up on pylons. And then later on they started filling in. And from there Daddy built another better house and a fish market, and that’s where I was raised.

00:02:13

SR: Let me back—there’s so much in there. Let me just back up a little bit. Where were your parents coming from when they crossed the lake, and which lake was it?

00:02:22

BG: It was—we lived with my grandmother on Highway 51 right there in Ponchatoula, and it was just about a mile north of the cemetery. The house is still there that I was born in. And we come across—Daddy built this raft at Wadesboro, and then—because it come out into Lake Maurepas. And that’s what we did.

00:02:54

SR: Did he know that his destination was Manchac?

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BG: Yeah. When he left my grandmother’s house he started fishing and he caught good fish, nice-sized fish, and so that’s when he decided he’d start buying and selling, and that’s how it come about.

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SR: Could you tell me, for the record, your grandmother's name?

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BG: It was Annie Rottman, and she come directly from Ireland. And she married my grandfather, and he was German, and that's how it all come about.

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SR: What was your grandfather's name?

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BG: Joseph Rottman. And my grandfather lived in that house; he built that house. And at the time it was during the Depression, in 1932, so I had—and mother's two brothers married my daddy's two sisters. And those couples and my grandmother and grandfather and mother and daddy all lived in the same house.

00:04:14

SR: So it was all siblings together, huh?

00:04:16

BG: Yeah. And they just—my mother's oldest brother, which was Thomas Hebert, he had me spoiled, and every afternoon he would sit—. Let's see, Jerry was born in April, May, June—I

think it was August. And my [uncle]—I called him Daddy Tom—sat on the porch in the afternoon and wrapped one of us on his leg and just rocked us and he'd sing to us. And that was—that was it. I was just spoiled for him.

00:04:58

And Mother said I hardly would go to other people. My grandmother Rottman, I'd go to her and Daddy Tom and Mother and Daddy, and I didn't want nobody else fooling with me.

00:05:09

SR: What were your parents' names?

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BG: Dennis and Jessie Belle Hebert Rottman.

00:05:16

SR: You know I forgot, Miss Beauty, to ask you for your birth date—if you wouldn't mind sharing that.

00:05:24

BG: September 11—09/11—1932.

00:05:30

SR: Okay, thank you. That's pretty exotic that you were living in a train car. Were you too young then to know that that was kind of cool, or did you like that?

00:05:40

BG: Well I was—like I said, we lived in it until I think I was four. But I loved it. It was just—and a couple other people, and I don't remember who they were—Schiells [sp?] was one couple—they got railroad cars and lived, and that was our neighbors. One railroad car after the other.

00:06:02

SR: When your father built your house, where was that—or is that?

00:06:06

BG: It was between the highway and the railroad, and they'd sell us fifty feet, and my daddy got fifty feet deep and put the pylon down because everything was, you know, swampy. So they built the houses on the pylon.

SR: So was that near—and we'll talk about the fish market—but was that near where the fish market went?

00:06:37

BG: Yes. It was all-together, and it was next door to Middendorf's. We were more to the lake.

00:06:45

SR: So Middendorf's was opened during your childhood then?

00:06:48

BG: Yeah, uh-hm.

00:06:51

SR: Now your father, I guess—so you're saying that he became a commercial fisherman at a pretty young age.

00:06:58

BG: Yeah. When he first started out, and then he'd—like I say, he caught enough fish—he decided to try selling them. And he did. And my grandfather Rottman used to sell scrap iron, so he'd make the area and take it to New Orleans and sell the scrap iron. And when he'd come back he'd have a truckload of vegetables and stuff and he would peddle them. So he peddled the catfish too.

00:07:30

SR: Where did your father sell his fish?

00:07:34

BG: To different fishermen, and when he caught them they were always fresh. And my grandfather delivered them to different little grocery stores.

00:07:44

SR: So your grandfather would take the scrap iron on a boat to New Orleans or—?

00:07:48

BG: No.

00:07:48

SR: Or on the road?

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BG: An old truck, and he'd take it to New Orleans and sell it and then make money coming back with the vegetables.

00:07:59

SR: Where would he get the vegetables, like at the French Market?

00:08:02

BG: He sold some to Middendorf's, whatever they used—onions and stuff like that. And then in Ponchatoula they had a couple of stores and he just peddled them.

00:08:12

SR: Where would he get the vegetables in New Orleans?

00:08:15

BG: Down at the French Market. And back then—I think it’s where the clothes are and the Mexican stuff [now], but all that was vegetables [then]. And you’d just get the truckload and the people from the area would bring green onions and onions and garlic, whatever. Almost any vegetable that was raised down here.

00:08:42

SR: That’s interesting because there must have been a lot of farmland here, but he still—I guess that’s where all the vegetables ended up, was the French Market.

00:08:51

BG: I would say ninety percent of the land that was here, they raised farms. We had a lot of strawberry farms, but almost everyone had green onions, sugarcane—you know, it would just be a couple rows but it was enough to provide them with a little extra income.

00:09:11

SR: And so what—do you remember what year your father opened his market?

00:09:19

BG: Thirty-two. It wasn’t too long after we—he had our little place living, the palmetto shack, that he realized [the fish] was there. All he had to do was get them and sell them. And he—it just kind of come natural to him.

00:09:40

SR: Did he keep fishing while he owned the market?

00:09:43

BG: For a while, yes. And then we ended up with like 120—I think it was 122 fishermen that just fished for us. We did good, and it was very successful. We had a contract with Campbell Soup Company, and we shipped turtles. We’d clean—you know, buy them and then clean them—and they wanted 1,000 pounds a month, and that’s what we did.

00:10:19

SR: Campbell Soup wanted 1,000 pounds a month of turtle?

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BG: Yeah, but I have never seen a can of turtle soup. And they said it all goes North, that they really use it during the winter. And that was the only turtle item I knew that, you know, they said soup. Now they may have done it just because it’s Campbell Soup Company because I never did see a can of turtle soup. *[Laughs]* I’d love to taste it.

00:10:49

SR: That’s a lot of turtle.

00:10:51

BG: Yeah, ma'am, it is. And when I got older—well I had the two children by then—I used to go to Florida and Alabama and Georgia, Texas and Mississippi, and go buy them. I'd go pick them up.

00:11:09

SR: I'm sorry, you'd go pick what up?

00:11:11

BG: The turtles, the live turtles. We had this cattle trailer, and Daddy put what we called hog wire, which is four-by-four wire you bought in rolls, and lined it with that. And then he fixed the gate over the top and in the back and I'd go buy the turtles and bring them and they would clean them.

00:11:39

SR: You'd go all around the region and get turtles from people who had caught them?

00:11:43

BG: Yes, uh-huh. And you know there's a trick to cleaning a turtle. You know how their claws move all the time? You'd take and chop part of the tail off, and then you'd take an old hanger, clothes hanger, and straighten it out and you'd push it up their spine and turn it and it comes right out and the turtle just relaxes.

00:12:09

SR: That's like anesthesia, huh?

00:12:10

BG: Yeah. *[Laughs]* We used to do that, and as kids we used to love to get the heart; the heart will beat as long as three days. We'd put it on a slab of glass and you would watch it and check it.

00:12:29

SR: The heart would just keep beating, huh?

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BG: For about three days before it really stopped. I didn't think anything could live without a heart, but they did.

00:12:39

SR: How do you catch a turtle?

00:12:43

BG: They caught them just with lines. You'd take a line and put a long string on it and a hook. And then of course they dug a lot of turtles, because during the winter they go into the bank. They would take and watch the nest and dig them out.

00:13:08

SR: Huh. When they used a line, would they use a kind of bait?

00:13:11

BG: Yeah.

00:13:13

SR: What kind?

00:13:14

BG: I don't know what all they used. I never—I know they'd get them off the lines, but you know I had a funny thing happen. During the spring, I was living on the river and I decided to put a bottle line out. And a bottle line is you tie it to the post and you get twenty or thirty feet and then you'd put what we call the drop. We'd put a gallon jug, and then you'd just put the line two or three feet deep. And the water was kind of high and I had this man working with me, and I told him I was going to put the bottle line out. He said, “Oh, I haven't had a bottle line in a long time.”

00:13:55

And I saw my little jug just spinning, you know, and I told him, I says, “I got something on that line.” He said, “Oh, not that fast.” Went out there and pulled it and I had a forty pound turtle, loggerhead turtle, yeah.

00:14:13

SR: When was that?

00:14:14

BG: This past spring. And that was the first time I ever caught a turtle, and I had used chicken for the bait. And [*Laughs*] caught that turtle and I tell that man and he says, "Oh, we're fixing to clean that turtle." I said, "Yeah, I'm going to cook him." And we—I made a sauce piquant, and man that thing was good.

00:14:40

SR: Wow. What river was that?

00:14:43

BG: Tangipahoa. It's about eight miles east of Ponchatoula.

00:14:49

SR: Can you tell me—for the record, describe to me what a sauce piquant is and how you make that.

00:14:55

BG: A sauce piquant is a red gravy, and of course you start off and you use a lot of seasoning. You use onions, garlic, celery, bell pepper, and you take and start with your tomato paste and you stir it. You cook it real slow and it looks like you stir it until about half of it disappears. And then you add your seasonings. And when it—you make your gravy, and then I take my turtle and I always scalded it because it's got a film—loose skin like—and I always cut all that off. And

when you boil it or scald it, it turns real white, and I take a sharp knife and cut it all off. And then I put salt and pepper on it, and I like to let it sit about two hours at room temperature. And then you lightly flour it and you brown it. And then you put it in your sauce. And of course that thickens your sauce up. And you cook it; you got to cook it slow. You bring it to a boil and then you just let it simmer about two or three hours. And then that’s it; cook it and eat rice with it.

00:16:21

SR: When you say scald, you mean you just drop it in boiling water for a minute?

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BG: Yeah, yeah, until that skin turns white, and then when you take it out you let it get cool and just clean all that off.

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SR: And after you, you know, butcher and clean your turtle, are there any bones or cartilage in there—or is it just meat?

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BG: No, it—I like to put anything with a bone in the gravy—get the taste better.

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SR: And so you said—so you put the tomato paste in the pan just by itself?

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BG: Starting off, yeah. And like I say, you just fry it real slow and stand there and you have to really watch it because it’ll burn easy. And I like to cook it until it gets to that part looks like it’s done about halfway, and then you add your onions. I add onions first and cook the onions, and I like to cook mine until they get completely done. You ever eat red gravy and it tastes like flour or anything like that? That’s it. You’ve got to cook it slow and you’ve got to plan on the day.

[Laughs]

00:17:31

SR: Right, plan on the day, huh. Does your tomato paste get dark brown while you’re cooking it?

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BG: No, no, it really doesn’t. It gets a little bit darker but not a whole lot. And then when you get your turtle about half done, we always put wine—white wine—and we cook it with that, and it’s the best flavor. **[Laughs]**

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SR: Do you use any dried seasonings like red pepper or—?

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BG: Oh yeah, I love cayenne pepper, a lot of cayenne pepper, and black pepper and your salt. But I just like a lot of seasoning and it just tastes wonderful.

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SR: So who taught you to cook that? Did your—did both of your parents cook, or was one of your parents more the cook in the house?

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BG: They both cooked, but my daddy was the one that loved to cook with the wine and stuff like that. Mother never did do that. She would cook it, and we’d cook enough—of course that forty-pound turtle wasn’t enough, and we added turtle to it, but we put like a whole gallon of wine and then you just let it cook.

00:18:43

SR: I’m getting hungry talking about this.

00:18:46

BG: That’s one of my—. Now I never did make the turtle soup. But I’ve eaten several kinds, and I like the one with the clear broth and add wine to it. And well, that takes a sherry wine. And then some of the places, a lot of the restaurants, make a thicker sauce piquant, but—I guess because they don’t want to take that long to cook it, but it’s just a different recipe.

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SR: Was there a specific kind of turtle that you would catch and sell at the market, or was it any kind of turtle you found?

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BG: No, it was primarily the loggerhead turtle. Do you know what the loggerhead is with the horns like on top? And that was primary—every now and then we’d get a soft-shell turtle, and they went fast. We had customers that we’d call and say, “Hey, I got a soft-shell.” “Oh, I’ll be there after a while.”

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SR: Would you cook those differently, or why did they like those better?

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BG: No, primarily the same. But I prefer the loggerhead. The loggerhead has, they say, seven kinds of meat in it. And I know around the neck, and then you have these big sockets of meat where you cut their head and that was supposed to be the chicken part. But they say it got chicken, lamb, beef, and I don’t know what all. But I think that was just a bunch of BS. *[Laughs]*

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SR: Were there other ways that you like to cook and eat turtle, or is that—is the sauce piquant the main way?

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BG: That’s our favorite way. And like I—the only thing is you got to take the day and plan on cooking it. You just can't put it on and leave it.

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SR: So I’ve never cooked with a turtle. What do you do with the shell when you’re done?

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BG: Put it out in the yard and let the ants eat it clean. And a lot of people like to take and shellac it. And some of them will make like a basket, some of them like a clam—they take two and three of them—but that was, oh, real popular around here for a while. And people would put pot plants in it and grow them.

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SR: Use it as a planter?

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BG: Yeah, uh-hm.

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SR: Are there as many turtles now as there were back then, or have they—? Are there as many?

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BG: I really don’t know because we’ve been out of the business for about twenty years. And back then, yeah, they were plentiful. But I know Dunk [Reno, owner of a seafood market in Manchac] gets one every now and then, but you don’t come by them like you used to.

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SR: Now you said that—I mean you knew how they got the turtles to settle down when they were trying to clean them. Did you work at the market? Did you do that kind of work?

00:21:55

BG: No, no. I was the boss. [*Laughs*] But we had like thirty employees.

00:22:04

SR: Well tell me—tell me sort of the trajectory. So it opened in 1932, you said, and it closed when?

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BG: We were in the—in the business I think thirty-seven years, and that was—everything was plentiful. But we knew that the fishponds and everything was fixing to open, and we knew we wouldn't—the business would probably slack off. But like shrimp and some fish and turtle meat—we had a big walk-in freezer and we'd flash freeze it and then, you know, store it. But most of the restaurants wanted a certain size fish, and when you're fishing you don't know what size you're going to catch. But in the springtime, starting first of April, we had what they call a spring rush of fish, and we'd buy them most of the time by 10,000 pounds a day. And we'd have people cleaning them and flash-freezing them, and by the time we closed—we closed at 9:00 at night—we had another 10,000 pounds of fish to clean yet. And that was in April and May. And we had a customer in Bagwell, Missouri [Interviewer's note: this may have been Bagnell,

Missouri.], Mr. E.R. Smith, and he had a restaurant up there. And he'd say, "Send us twenty-five barrels of fish," and a barrel held 210 pounds. And we did that all during the spring and he'd buy like twenty-five--thirty a week. And he froze them so he'd have fish all year round.

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SR: Do you know what the name of his restaurant was?

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BG: No, not off. My husband and I went up there and Mother and Daddy had gone on several occasions, and it was this restaurant right on the lake and he'd call it "Louisiana fish," and we'd go up there and stay a couple days and then come back home. And most everything up there was like knotty pine. Do you remember when it was in-style? And the—you just had the cottages and it was—it was real nice.

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SR: What part of Missouri was that in, do you know?

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BG: Bagwell, Bagwell, Missouri.

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SR: So when he would order barrels of fish, what kind of fish would you send him?

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BG: Catfish. That's about mainly what we sold.

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SR: Fished out of—

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BG: Lake Maurepas and Lake Pontchartrain, and out of the rivers. So it was busy.

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SR: So I'm guessing that when the market first opened in the '30s, you weren't flash-freezing things.

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BG: No, no. That didn't come about until later on, but it was good. We'd get the fish and clean them and just run them through this flash freeze. And then we used to use New Orleans Storage. And we'd freeze all the barrels of fish for him, and then he'd get them out like five or six—whatever he wanted—and we'd go down to New Orleans and pick them up and put them on a train.

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SR: Oh, I see. So New—where is New Orleans Storage?

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BG: On Tchoupitoulas Street, I believe it was.

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SR: So you’d store the fish there until they would go on the train?

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BG: Right. We did that and the stuff was sent to the Campbell Soup Company. It all got froze down there.

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SR: That is really a production. How big was the market?

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BG: I remember the building, I think, was maybe thirty-five, forty-feet wide, and I know it was sixty-five-feet long.

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SR: So when you were growing up and your—did your mother work at the market too? Did your parents run it together?

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BG: Yes, uh-huh, and then Mother and I, we had what we called a store but it was really just a little store where you—we bought some groceries and we had like thirty employees and they had no place to eat lunch because they certainly couldn’t go into Manchac smelling all fishy and everything. So Daddy had these three women that cooked, and we bought some groceries wholesale because of what we fed them—you know, like canned milk and milk and bread and stuff. It was just a little what we called kind of like a shack store because it was just stuff that we used that we bought. And then some of the fishermen would come and shop there. And then that’s mainly what we sold. We did sell cold drinks and beer, and then we had this deli box and we sold different kinds of lunch meat, and when people would come fishing they’d always come in there and get sandwiches or something.

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SR: So you had three cooks just to cook for the employees?

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BG: Yes, uh-huh. That’s all they did was cook.

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SR: What kind of food?

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BG: Just like anything you’d eat at home: your beans and rice, spaghetti and meatballs, and some kind of gravy. You know, sometimes they’d—we’d have a big roast, and I think our roasts,

most of them made fifteen pounds. They got to feed thirty people—it takes a lot of it. And we always had vegetables. We all loved vegetables.

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SR: Did you go to school in—where did you go to school?

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BG: Ponchatoula.

00:28:43

SR: So you took a school bus?

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BG: Yes, we had an old school bus and we get tickled. The other day we were talking about it. The seat was the same length as the bus. And it was just a little hard seat that we sat on and they had one on each side and they had a double one in the middle and that was it. *[Laughs]*

00:29:05

SR: Was there ever a school in Manchac?

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BG: No, uh-uh.

00:29:11

SR: Did you have siblings?

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BG: Yes, I had one brother. And he was sick a lot so we—Mother would take him. And we went to school at St. Joseph, which is only going to the seventh grade, the Catholic school, and they would bring Buddy to school and go pick him up.

00:29:38

SR: His name was Buddy?

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BG: Well, he was Dennis Jr., but everybody called him Buddy.

00:29:45

SR: Did he become a commercial fisherman?

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BG: No, no, he couldn't do that kind of stuff.

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SR: And now tell me about how you met your husband. Was he a fisherman?

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BG: No. He was raised in New Orleans in the St. Lutheran Home, and his grandmother and them lived in Ponchatoula. And when he got to high school he transferred from there, and the story is kind of funny and strange because I was in—. When school started and he moved up there with his grandparents, it was he and his sister and **[Laughs]** I was walking across the yard. And he asked a friend, he says, "Who is that redheaded girl?" He said, "Well, that's Beauty Rottman from Manchac." And he says, "You know what," he said, "I think I'll marry her." He didn't even know my name. And that's what he did: he married me.

00:30:51

SR: How old was he at that point?

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BG: Eighteen, and he left at mid-year and went in the Marines when he was—we were seniors. And then he had a furlough in February, and when he come home, that's when we were married. But he was a card. **[Laughs]**

00:31:13

SR: What is the St. Lutheran Home?

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BG: It's, oh I can't—I know you used to take the—I was trying to think—streetcar. I can't—I don't remember the address. He and I used to go there a good bit and during vacation we'd

always go get one of the orphans and keep them for a couple weeks, bring them home with us, and we'd rotate them. I just don't recall it right off.

00:31:53

SR: That's okay. I was—it was an orphanage?

00:31:54

BG: Yeah. Yeah.

00:31:58

SR: Okay, and you would bring some of the orphans home to stay with you?

00:32:00

BG: Oh yeah. And a lot of the holidays and stuff, if we wasn't doing something special we'd go get them and keep them during their vacation.

00:32:11

SR: And you had children?

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BG: Yeah, I had two boys, David and Keith.

00:32:18

SR: And what about your husband’s name? I don’t know—I don’t know if I heard that.

00:32:20

BG: David. David Theodore Gueldner. And it was kind of strange. My mother had a stillborn child before I was born, and her birthday was April 9th. And come to find out, my husband’s birthday was April 9th. And his—the other set of grandparents, the Gueldners, had first lived—you know, it’s the same set of grandparents, but they first lived over in Prairieville. And they were sharecroppers, and his grandparents did the same thing. And one day we were talking, and come to find out they were on the same property, plantation over there, and they come to Ponchatoula about a year apart. And then she was talking and kind of asking me more or less about my family and I said, “Well my grandmother died over in Prairieville.” And she said, “Oh,” she says, “What was her name?” I said, “Mary.” And she says, “Mary McCrory Hebert?” I said, “Yes, ma’am.” She said she knew her, and when my grandmother died, Miss Gueldner laid her out. You know back then they didn’t have funeral homes and everything. And she just started crying and I said, “Well, what’s the matter?” She said, “Mary was my friend,” and so when she died that she laid her out. And I said, “Whoa,” that was too many coincidences.

00:34:08

SR: You had a lot of connections you didn’t even know about.

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BG: Right, certainly didn’t. It was just—because when we got to talking and finding all that out I says, “Whoa, I can't believe all this.”

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SR: How did—how old—until what year did your father live?

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BG: He died in '64.

00:34:34

SR: And so after he died, you were running the market?

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BG: Uh-hm, yes, ma'am. We just stayed there, and like I said, we realized that the fishing industry was turning and that they're going to put the fishponds in, so they could get the restaurants all the same size fish more or less like they wanted. So we decided we was going to get out, and we did.

00:34:59

SR: When you say "we," do you mean you and your husband or—?

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BG: My husband, when mother died.

00:35:05

SR: So did your husband run that too, or did he have a different profession?

00:35:11

BG: No, he run it until we got out of the fish business, and then he went to work for Kaiser and we just—my mother, you know, was retired. And that was it. We moved to Ponchatoula, and my grandmother wanted to live with me, so I kept her, and I kept her sixteen years.

00:35:38

SR: That was the grandmother you told me about, Annie?

00:35:42

BG: Yeah. And it was kind of funny because towards the end she had glaucoma, and about the last six months she really got really helpless and so we put her in a nursing home in Hammond. And then I’d go up there every day and visit with her. And I used to make her little nightgowns, and when she sewed she always put little lace—just turned something under—so I made her a bunch of nightgowns and I’d go sit with her. And then one day one of her **[Laughs]** daughters brought her a—said, “Mama, I brought you something.” And right away she went feeling and she said, “Oh no, I ain’t doing this.” She says, “Beauty puts lace on them.” She was a little hellcat. **[Laughs]** Very fiery.

00:36:38

SR: That’s a good story.

00:36:39

BG: Yeah, she was cute. And when I was a teenager and she needed shoes we’d go to Krauss [department store] in New Orleans. That’s where she bought all her shoes, and I’d have to break them in for her because [*Laughs*]*—*we spoiled her, and she spoiled me.

00:36:58

SR: Would she ask you to do that?

00:37:01

BG: No. She’d just say, “I want a new pair of shoes,” and I said, “Okay Mama,” I said, “We’ll go to New Orleans and get them.” Because I knew where we was going to go. And we’d get to Krauss and this one gentleman used to wait on her, and I don’t recall his name. I think it was Henry, but what else I don’t know, and he’d go, “You like a certain kind of shoe?” And she’d get her little shoes and she said, “Well, put them on and see if they’re comfortable.” [*Laughs*] She was a mess. Like I say, and one time I asked her, I said, “Well, Mama, how come you don’t want to go live with Aunt Tootsie?” She had one daughter named Aline and I called her Mama Line. And she says, “No indeed. “I’m living with you.” I said, “Well that’s fine. That’s fine.” I said, “I just thought maybe you’d want to take a break.” “Nope.” That was all she’d say: “Nope.”

[*Laughs*]

00:38:01

SR: You took good care of her, I think.

00:38:03

BG: Oh yeah, loved her very much.

00:38:06

SR: So you said that you at one point had 120 fishermen working for you?

00:38:11

BG: Yeah, uh-huh.

00:38:12

SR: Were they all, you know, people who lived in and around Manchac, or did they live in other areas?

00:38:19

BG: Not at the time, but most of them come from Vacherie, around over there, and they were commercial fishermen over there. And you see, I used to go pick the fish up. And so Daddy asked if they wanted to move to Manchac and they said, "Yeah," so Manchac they come.

00:38:39

SR: Manchac at one time had a lot more people in it.

00:38:42

BG: Oh yeah, yeah. Like I say, we had 120 families and they lived all on the canal, some down on the Pass. And they just wanted to come wherever we were. Of course we were their livelihood and we knew it. So Daddy would hurry up and build a house and put it up on pylons and then move the whole family.

00:39:11

SR: Your father would build the houses?

00:39:12

BG: He would—no. He would supervise, and he had a floor plan that he liked so he built them—most all of them alike. And it’s one that’s very close to what we had, and it was just a nice big doublewide house with the bedrooms on one side and the kitchen and living room on the other and a big porch. And up on the pylons, and that was basically—just about everybody in Manchac lived like that.

00:39:46

SR: So are you saying there’s one that still exists that’s like that?

00:39:50

BG: No—it’s near what we had, and it’s high. And over the canal they got a little place, like a porch and everything, and then they have the ramp that goes higher to the living area.

00:40:08

SR: Where is that in Manchac now?

00:40:10

BG: When you get off the high-rise, you’d turn and then you’d go—you could see it. It’s about two blocks up from the lake.

00:40:25

SR: On the canal or on the main road in Manchac?

00:40:30

BG: Yeah.

00:40:32

SR: On the canal?

00:40:33

BG: Right on the canal, because when they’d get up to where that area was like a deck, and then their boats you know are down in the canal.

00:40:45

SR: So I spoke with Hayden Reno and Rocky [Rakosy], and they talked to me a lot about—you know, there aren't very many fishermen in Manchac these days.

00:40:58

BG: No, not anymore. Like I said, the fishing industry we knew was going to go out because of the fishponds.

00:41:08

SR: The catfish ponds, you mean?

00:41:10

BG: Yes, uh-huh.

00:41:12

SR: But there’s still other things to fish, right? Or not enough?

00:41:15

BG: I’m not real familiar right now. Like I said, we’ve been gone from there so long. Now, Dunk used to fish for us. He also dug the turtles. His brother—no, Jack was too young to really fish for us, Charlie—Charlie Reno, which was Dunk’s brother. He’s deceased. But he was one of our main fishermen. And he’d get—also a turtle hunter. So we enjoyed Manchac, and it was very close-knit I guess you’d say. And everybody enjoyed everybody.

00:42:08

SR: What did your husband think about moving there from Ponchatoula?

00:42:12

BG: He didn't really say. Whatever I wanted he'd generally do. [*Laughs*] And like I say, when he left mid-term he went into the Marines, and of course I followed him and we went out to California and North Carolina. And when he decided to get out I told him, I said, "Are you sure you want to get out?" He said, "Yeah, I think so." So he got out and then he just come and got the business with Daddy. And we stayed there until we got out of the business, and that's when he went to work for Kaiser Aluminum, and he retired from there.

00:42:57

SR: What about your sons? Did they work in the business or go into fishing?

00:43:03

BG: No, uh-uh. They played. They'd come on the dock and play but they were too young. And then when David finished school he went into the Army, and when he come out he retired. I think he stayed in six or eight years, and then he went to work at Kaiser and he stayed there until he retired.

00:43:30

SR: And your other son?

00:43:33

BG: Keith had gotten hurt. He was a crew chief on a helicopter. And he was in the Marines and he started bleeding from his ears because of the—they said of the height of the helicopter. But he

stayed in six years, and then he got out and he decided, “No, I’m going back.” He wanted to go back in the service, so he went in the Army. And he got in the missile program out in Washington State, and then when he got out he went to school and he graduated for—he was smart and he had gone to an engineer school out where Amy and them live now. But about two weeks before his graduation they had a piece of equipment out in the Gulf that was hung up and they couldn’t get it undone. And they called the school because it’s supposed to be one of the best in the United States, so they called and they talked to the teacher. They wanted to know which one of them to interview because they wanted to hire him. And Keith was picked.

00:44:57

And the gentleman told him what the problem was—they had this piece of equipment that would measure a mile underground, a seismograph crew, and he wanted to know if Keith was interested in going to work. And Keith said, “Yes, Sir.” And he says, “Well, would you come down and go on the equipment...” to see if he could undo this piece of machinery that was hung up. So he said, “Yes.” So they flew him down to Lafayette and Keith looked at it and he says, “I think I can get it.” And so there was some engineers in there and Keith told him, he said, “Well, I want to be in the room by myself.” He wasn’t wanting everybody to know what he knew. And so the boss said, “Okay, I’ll stay in.”

00:45:56

And my son smoked and he loved coffee, and he’d hold that cigarette and coffee in both—in one hand. And the boss looked at him and says, “Well, what do you think?” Keith says, “Well, let me try.” And they said it wasn’t five minutes he had it running. And so the gentleman offered him a job right then. And he said, “No, Sir.” He said, “I got two more weeks of school. And I’m going—I’m going to graduate.” So he says, “Well, okay.” He says, “Would you work

for us when you graduate?” He said, “Yes, I’d be glad to.” And he went to Lafayette after graduation and he worked two and a half months. And he got hit by a drunk driver and got killed. He was 40 years old. And then my husband had just died fourteen months before that. And it just—I just thought I was going to die when that child got killed.

00:47:02

SR: I am so sorry to hear that.

00:47:04

BG: Yeah.

00:47:06

SR: Especially all of the, you know, brave and probably dangerous situations he was in in the military, and then that happens.

00:47:14

BG: He told us he couldn’t talk about his job because he was in that missile program. But the only thing he ever said, he says, “Y’all would never know how many missiles we got ready.” He says, “Just give us a few minutes and we’ll—we’ll do what we got to do.” And they had put him on the ship and they were going to send him out and they pulled him back twice because—I don’t know. It’s only four or five of them that knew where all the missiles were. So they pulled him off the ship, so he never did get to go overseas. He wanted to go. He said, “I’d like to go.” But he says, “They’re not going to let me.” And they didn’t. They kept him there.

00:47:59

SR: He did a lot in his life.

00:48:01

BG: Yeah, yeah.

00:48:05

SR: But neither of your sons wanted to stay in Manchac, huh?

00:48:09

BG: Not really because, you know, they wasn't into the fishing or anything. And so we leased the market and for a while Dunk rented from us. And then we sold it to Middendorf's.

00:48:33

SR: And is—and that is where their deck area is now? Is that right?

00:48:36

BG: Yeah. Well, it was the last building right at the lake. Now we had a wharf out there with the building on it, but the fish market itself was always right next to Middendorf's.

00:48:53

SR: Do you remember what year you sold it?

00:48:55

BG: No, not right off, because Teddy had gotten out first and went onto Kaiser, so I'd go down there every now and then a couple days a week and work. But let me stop and think. One of the kids went to high school from there, and that was in '70. It must have been around '65—I somewhere along that way.

00:49:29

SR: Okay, and so then I guess Suzie's father must have owned it then.

00:49:34

BG: Yeah. Mrs. Middendorf was a Smith and her husband died. And then she married Mr. Middendorf, and that's how it come about. But I guess—did he take—she was a Bates.

00:49:54

SR: Okay. Did you all sell fish to Middendorf's?

00:49:58

BG: Yeah, yeah. But they had fishermen of their own, too, but if they run short they'd just holler at us and we'd fix them up.

00:50:09

SR: I wanted to ask you what was your father's personality like? What was he like?

00:50:15

BG: He was German and Irish [*Laughs*]. My daddy was a card. And back then, you know, you didn't go out partying. It was generally—right next door to Middendorf's [they] had Bill Williams, and he had a big large room in the back and that was our dance hall. And my daddy loved to dance. I loved to dance with him. On those nights everybody in Manchac came and he had some booths in his restaurant and if you got sleepy you generally brought a pillow and a blanket with you, and you'd go get on that because Mother and Daddy is going to play all night long.

00:50:59

SR: And they allowed the children to come in and be part of it?

00:51:02

BG: Well sure. Back then you didn't have baby-sitters either, you know. The family went everywhere together and the kids would dance.

00:51:14

SR: What kind of music?

00:51:17

BG: Oh Lord, old-time music. We had the family Saltzman, and for a long time that was our band. And did he tell you about—? One of them was Mr. George Saltzman, and he played a

fiddle. Mina played the mandolin. Mr. Willie played the mandolin. And Godfrey played the— what you call the big fiddle? Bass. And they would play, and I’ll tell you. This is cute: everybody drank, you know. And the band would get kind of tipsy and they talked very, very German, and [*Laughs*] Godfrey would lean over—and they had Mr. Willie. He said, “Willie, oh Willie, what are we playing [*Gestures*]?” They wouldn’t all be playing the same song. I tell you, back then it was just so much fun. Just we had a good time.

00:52:27

SR: It sounds like it. So that was the Saltzmans—they were a family in Manchac?

00:52:33

BG: Yeah, uh-uh. Some of them lived down on the Pass, all the way down by Lake Pontchartrain where the lake passes into it. They lived out there. Some of the Halls lived out there. Oh, Mr. Jones, Otto Jones. I can’t think of this man’s name. And a couple of the Coltmeyers [sp?], they lived out there.

00:53:08

SR: You have a great memory. [*Laughs*]

00:53:10

BG: [*Laughs*]

00:53:13

SR: You do. You really do. When you would have big gatherings and families would all get together, would you cook and eat together?

00:53:19

BG: No, we generally ate at home. They came to party and drink a little bit and that was it.

[Laughs]

00:53:27

SR: Drink what? Drink beer?

00:53:27

BG: Some drank beer; some of them drank a little whiskey. But it was just a—and I want to tell you: the Saltzmans lived down the Pass, and **[Laughs]** when they would get to playing the music—and you know they got a little tipsy they'd just—somebody every now and then would get in a fight. And he said, "Willie I'm going home." So he'd go get in his boat—and of course they all come up in their own boats. And Godfrey was kind of shy and he'd get his family in the boat and he'd push the boat off into the canal **[Laughs]** and he'd say, "Fight, you sons of bitches!" **[Laughs]** And they would laugh at him because, boy, if problems popped up he was gone.

00:54:28

SR: Miss Beauty censored herself a little bit. [*Laughs*] I read something online. I don't know if this was your father, but it seemed like it might have been. Did he ever open a business in Des Allemandes?

00:54:42

BG: Yes, uh-huh.

00:54:42

SR: What was that?

00:54:43

BG: A restaurant dance hall. Same thing as—over there you still had the same kind of families as what we moved there. And one of them told daddy, he says, "We need some music and a band." So they stilled played at Manchac, but what is it that daddy called it? Bend—River's Bend, I believe was the name of it. And last I heard it was still there, unless the storm took it.

00:55:18

SR: Hmm. I'm not sure. Would he work there?

00:55:20

BG: Yeah, he and Mother run it, sure.

00:55:23

SR: Wow. Was that—and they also had the seafood market at that point?

00:55:26

BG: Yeah, we had the seafood market in Manchac but not over in Des Allemandes. But the same people that fished for us worked in the restaurant—the ladies, waitresses, and stuff.

00:55:40

SR: And you would probably sell—use the seafood from the market?

00:55:45

BG: Oh yeah, oh yeah.

00:55:47

SR: How long did they have that?

00:55:50

BG: I think it was twelve years. And then my daddy had heart failure and he was getting too sick, so they just closed it. Well, they sold it to Herman Granier.

00:56:06

SR: How far is that—Des Allemandes from Manchac?

00:56:10

BG: About fifty miles. We used to go across in a ferry, and then you’d get way back, and then when you got to the Catholic Church there was a road that went all the way to the restaurant.

And it must be about fifty miles.

00:56:28

SR: What kind of food would they serve there?

00:56:31

BG: All—just seafood, mostly seafood. And they would sell hamburgers, but the ladies did all the cooking and—how do you say? It was good food.

00:56:45

SR: Wow, you really grew up in the food business.

00:56:48

BG: Oh yeah. I still love it, and I miss it.

00:56:54

SR: Do you miss—well, what about it do you miss?

00:56:59

BG: About what?

00:57:00

SR: What do you miss about being in that business?

00:57:03

BG: When I see the children growing up. Because we—they had to play on the railroad, on the railroad tracks and the road. Or you got in the lake and swam and played games in the water. Because like I said, back then all of our houses was up on pylons. There were no yards. And that’s where we played. And when the water got high every kid in Manchac owned a pirogue and would pole through the swamp.

00:57:40

SR: Just with the kids?

00:57:42

BG: Yeah.

00:57:43

SR: I have a four-year-old, and the thought of that makes my heart race.

00:57:48

BG: [*Laughs*] Nah. Honey, when you’re that old you knew how to swim.

00:57:56

SR: Would you see alligators and things?

00:57:57

BG: Sometimes. We never was bothered with them. I think they're more dangerous now than when we were children.

SR: Yeah? I wonder why.

00:58:12

BG: I don't know. But we never did have an alligator try to get a child or anything, and now you hear about it, so—. I really don't know.

00:58:24

SR: Did you sell alligator?

00:58:27

BG: No, because it was against the law then. Now you could—they'd have a season where you could, and when you did you caught them and threw the meat away. And now it's such a [delicacy]. But then you would salt the hides and keep them almost a year in the cooler, and then you could sell them down in New Orleans. And, oh, we sold for that man—years.

00:59:03

SR: Just sell the hides and do nothing with the meat, huh?

00:59:07

BG: No, we threw that away. And we had a good trapping season there. And we'd sell them the fur and the alligator hides.

00:59:20

SR: Fur from what?

00:59:22

BG: Everybody trapped, and it was mink, coon, muskrat, otters—whatever fur you killed.

00:59:35

SR: Hmm.

00:59:35

BG: I used to go with Daddy when I was about nine years old. I got my own little high boots, hip boots, and I'd go with him and run the trap for him. But I liked that. I was a tomboy. I was a horrible tomboy.

00:59:51

SR: Well it sounds like you had a lot of fun.

00:59:56

BG: I did. *[Laughs]* And if I caught a little turtle I’d go tell Mama, “I love you,” and put my arms around her and then put that turtle down her dress. One day she almost undressed in the store. *[Laughs]* I was full of devilment.

01:00:14

SR: What—what was your favorite thing to eat as a kid?

01:00:17

BG: Fried shrimp, and it’s still fried shrimp. To me there’s nothing better than fried shrimp. Oh, we ate a lot of fish and, like I say, the three women cooked everything. But give me my fried shrimp.

01:00:39

SR: Do you fry your own shrimp?

01:00:41

BG: Oh yes, yeah.

01:00:43

SR: What kind of oil do you use?

01:00:44

BG: Hmm, no, I’ll tell you in a minute.

01:00:54

SR: Okay. How about, what kind of—what do you dredge it in? Or what kind of batter do you use?

01:00:58

BG: I don’t like to do that. I like just taking them and putting them in cornmeal and frying them—Mazola, corn oil. And I’ll just—I could eat them until it run out of my ears.

01:01:16

SR: So just cornmeal and no egg or anything?

01:01:20

BG: No batter, no batter. I like them like that—get the real taste of the shrimp.

01:01:26

SR: Well, and you had the freshest shrimp possible, huh?

01:01:29

BG: Oh yeah, and I like the white shrimp. You know they had the brown shrimp, but I find they got too much iodine in them. I like the white shrimp, and I generally put about 200 pounds in my freezer just for myself when the season comes.

01:01:47

SR: Can you tell me for the record what's the difference between the white shrimp and the brown shrimp, and when you get each one?

01:01:53

BG: Yeah, brown shrimp is in the water at the same time. It's according to what water you catch them in. But your white shrimp, to me, are sweeter and tender. I just don't care for the brown shrimp.

01:02:09

SR: Where do the white shrimp come from?

01:02:12

BG: Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Maurepas, and of course they'll go on the other side of New Orleans because they come through. But the white shrimp are just more delicate.

01:02:25

SR: Where do the brown shrimp come from?

01:02:27

BG: Same place, out in the lake, uh-hm. Out by the Rigolets. You know where the Rigolets are? They come through there, through Lake Borgne.

01:02:37

SR: Do you associate with either of the words “Cajun” or “Creole?”

01:02:41

BG: Not really. I think Cajun [*Whispers*]. What kind—?

01:02:55

SR: Miss Beauty is talking to her friend Celeste Layrisson now. Yeah, having a discussion about Cajun and Creole.

01:03:04

BG: I think we cook more Creole than anything else.

01:03:10

SR: What about as sort of, like, heritage? Do you consider yourself Cajun or Creole?

01:03:15

BG: No, Irish and German. Now my grandmother would cook and she’d show me how to cook German stuff. And that was it. I cooked a lot of cabbage, a lot of potatoes, and my grandmother used to put a little garlic in her cabbage. And she taught me how to do that.

01:03:42

SR: And that was the German food she taught you how to cook?

01:03:45

BG: Yeah, uh-huh.

01:03:47

SR: What about—so at one point, I guess back when you had the market, there were a lot more restaurants in Manchac, too, hmm?

01:03:55

BG: There was Middendorf's, Bill Williams, J. Y. Bates. That was—that was it. J. Y. Bates had a restaurant on—and Allen's. J. Y. had a restaurant on the other side of the bridge, and that was one thing. On Saturday night we used to walk across the bridge to go dancing. And we'd dance all night and walk back home. [*Laughs*]

01:04:30

SR: What was the—what were the differences between the different restaurants?

01:04:34

BG: It wasn't that—most of them just served seafood and all of them were good. There wasn't a whole lot of difference.

01:04:46

SR: Karen, the current owner of Middendorf's, has a picture of—an old picture of Middendorf's, and she doesn't know when it's from, and there's some women standing beneath a sign that says "Club Middendorf's." Does that ring a bell at all?

01:05:00

BG: Says what?

01:05:01

SR: "Club Middendorf's."

01:05:04

BG: Yeah, yeah. That's when segregation first started and you had to belong to the club to get in.

01:05:13

SR: So was the club the whole restaurant or just a part of the restaurant?

01:05:17

BG: The whole thing.

01:05:20

SR: Did you pay dues to belong to the club?

01:05:22

BG: I don't know. I know we didn't. But I used to go lots of times and spend an evening with Miss Josie. That was Dick Smith's mother, or Mrs. Middendorf, and I just—I played a whole lot with Dick, her son. He was much older than us, but there was just a group of kids, you know, and you always found something to do or something.

01:05:54

Now they had one, two, three little houses in the back of Middendorf's, and that's where some of the help lived. And that was the only blacks I ever knew that lived in Manchac.

01:06:12

SR: Oh, really? It wasn't a mixed race community ever?

01:06:15

BG: No, no, no, definitely not. Uh-um.

01:06:19

SR: Hmm, but the Middendorf's—you mean kitchen help?

01:06:23

BG: Their help, and they never went nowhere. They stayed right there. If they went anywhere they went in a car to go somewhere.

01:06:35

SR: You mean they didn't shop at the businesses and—?

01:06:36

BG: No, no.

01:06:40

SR: Interesting. How long was that—were the restaurants segregated?

01:06:48

BG: I guess five or six years, until it more or less got forced.

01:06:54

SR: Like in 1964, I guess the—

01:06:56

BG: Somewhere along that line, and they don't have a big black customer service. I think they still realize, you know, that we—we were all segregated.

01:07:11

SR: That's fascinating. Where were the more black communities in the area?

01:07:16

BG: Well, here [in Ponchatoula] and Hammond—you know, all around here. Wadesboro I don’t think has any, right off that I can remember. That was a German settlement, and it wasn’t none there.

01:07:35

SR: I’m not familiar with that. Where is Wadesboro around here?

01:07:38

BG: All right, when you get back down to the cemetery on 51 you’d turn right and you’d go down and you’ll come to a sign that says Kraft Road where you’d turn left, and that takes you back to where they lived. They had a big dance hall back there, too.

01:07:57

SR: Is there still a lot of German heritage in that area?

01:07:59

BG: Yeah, uh-hm. They had that, and then when you’d get over by Albany you’d have the Hungarian group.

01:08:08

SR: Did you eat at Middendorf’s?

01:08:11

BG: Oh, I couldn’t tell you how many times. [*Laughs*]

01:08:14

SR: What would you order there?

01:08:16

BG: Mostly shrimp and gumbo, and of course Miss Josie didn’t ever charge me anything.

01:08:24

SR: And so shrimp and gumbo when you were young. And—and now if you went in there, is that what you would get?

01:08:30

BG: I would do that. I’d probably order a cup of turtle soup also. I like—like I say, I like it. But shrimp primarily, and then I’ll get—sometimes I get a seafood platter to get the fish and the shrimp. But first choice: shrimp.

01:08:54

SR: It seems like from everyone I talk to—and you know talking about when there were more restaurants and more businesses in general in Manchac—I don’t hear a lot talk about—it seems like people were friendly.

01:09:08

BG: Yeah, yeah. I mean, you know, you’d go sit down at a table and you look around and you’d see about ten, fifteen people you know. So you hop and go tell them all, “Hello.”

01:09:19

SR: And it just seems like there was friendly competition also between the businesses.

01:09:23

BG: It was. It was. Just like J. Y. Bates, they used to crab, and if we run short of an order we’d go get them or Jeanette would holler at us and say, “I got more than I can use.” We’d always say, “Bring them on.”

01:09:42

SR: Jeanette. Was that Jeanette Bates at—?

01:09:44

BG: Uh-hm, yeah. She’s married to J. Y.

01:09:48

SR: And for your market, what kind of clientele did you have? Was it mostly local and wholesale, or did you have a lot of people who just were coming through Manchac on the—on the highways?

01:09:58

BG: We had both. A lot of the people that bought fish were primarily from New Orleans or up North—you know, Hammond and stuff like that. And we had a lot of families come down on weekends. And they’d go to eat at Middendorf’s and then they’d come over there by us next door and buy whatever they wanted. But that—that was our main thing on the road, but like I say, we sold to just about all of grocery stores going up Highway 51 up into Mississippi and stuff. They got their fish and everything from us.

01:10:45

SR: It sounds like it was a pretty good way to raise a family.

01:10:50

BG: It was. It was. And all the fishermen made a good living, you know. It wasn’t nothing for no—make like \$100 a day. But that’s changed. Like I say, we could see everything changing so we made the change too.

01:11:11

SR: Like in what year would they be making \$100 a day? What decade—what era?

01:11:15

BG: From, I would say, ’45 to ’51—about ’53.

01:11:23

SR: That’s pretty good.

01:11:24

BG: Yeah, yeah.

01:11:26

SR: Did you have any black fishermen back then?

01:11:28

BG: No, no.

01:11:30

SR: Can you tell me—I’m going to—I’m not going to take up a lot more of your time, but—

01:11:35

BG: That’s okay.

01:11:36

SR: —I would just like to know, in that business, I guess both fishing but mostly running the market, what were some of the biggest challenges? And then, what were some of the biggest rewards in that business?

01:11:51

BG: We never had too much of a challenge. Like I say, we had that contract. And then we had what we called a fish route, and my husband would leave on Wednesday and we'd load the truck up like with 5,000 pounds of fish and he'd go as far as Jackson, Mississippi, and then they'd cross over and go to Hattiesburg. And lots of times he'd holler at me, "I'm out of fish!" "Okay, I'll meet you," and I would load the second truck and go meet him and spend the night with him in Laurel or Hattiesburg and come back in the morning. But we had—we had a contract with A&P, Winn Dixie, some of the Kroger stores; that was kind of more or less on that route. We never did go out of our way. And we'd sell two truckloads of fish a week. It—so we always had money coming in rather easy.

01:13:02

SR: Right. So I guess money wasn't a challenge, but that still sounds like a—to me, that sounds like kind of a hard life. Like you have to get up every morning pretty early and keep going.

01:13:13

BG: We opened up at 5:00 [a.m.]. I got up at 4:00 [a.m.], and then we didn't close until 9:00 [p.m.]. And when we closed at night everything was scrubbed in Clorox. We never left a dirty market. A lot of people say, "We come in here and you don't even smell the fish." It just had to be cleaned. And back then we'd—daddy would—Teddy would go get a load of sand, and when we went to clean up at night we'd sprinkle the tubs and then put sand in them, because there was no such thing as a whole lot of cleanser. And that sand would cut that fish slime real easy. So they had that down pat.

01:13:58

SR: Did you—were you open every day, or did you take a day off?

01:14:02

BG: We closed two days a year: Christmas Day and Easter Sunday. And when the boys was little we'd rotate. Mother and Daddy would work one weekend and then we worked the other, so we only had like two days a week off. But we didn't mind it. We were always more or less happy. And the men that worked on the dock, you know, were always all full and jolly.

01:14:34

SR: I guess you've answered this in a lot of different ways, but is there anything specific that you found most rewarding about that work?

01:14:46

BG: No, just being in the seafood business, because we all loved it. And so we stayed with it.

01:14:55

SR: How about, is there anything that you can think of that I'm not asking you that you'd like to talk about—memories?

01:15:04

BG: No. My fondest memories is just growing up and playing. And like I say, when it first come about that you'd put a nickel on the railroad track, and then when the train would run over

it, it would get so big—we played with that a whole lot. And of course we swam all the time. You know lots of times you got up and put your bathing suit on and you didn’t take it off until the afternoon. But we—yeah, I--I had a real joyful childhood. We all loved it. And we all played with one another. There was a big, big tree that leaned over the canal and the boys put a rope in it and we’d swing out there and dive in the water. And one of the challenges we had was you had to swim from like the bridge from one end of the bridge to the other. You could not stop and you could not touch anything. And of course we had—all the kids had--had their pirogues, and that was a game with all the teenagers. And if you couldn’t dive to the bottom canal and come up with mud you couldn’t play with us sometimes. **[Laughs]** Like I say, it was fun. You know we just never did fight or anything. Just—.

01:16:31

SR: Must have been one strong group of kids.

01:16:34

BG: It was; it wasn’t that many. You know there was—what?—seven, eight girls in the whole town, you know, that were teenagers. And we just all played together. And one thing that Daddy did every year: drove to Texas and got a truckload of watermelons. And the back-end of the truck would be covered with kids. And going over, back then you didn’t have all these motels and stuff. And we’d just stop at some farm and Daddy would ask them could we spend the night? And they’d say, “Yes.” And we all had a pallet. Some slept in the truck and the rest of them slept on the ground. And that was always—the kids looked forward to that trip.

01:17:25

SR: They looked forward to sleeping on a pallet?

01:17:27

BG: Oh yeah. I mean just to sleep outside on a farm, you know. Now that was big, and like I said, Daddy gave everybody watermelons. We didn’t sell them. We just give them to everybody. And for Easter and Christmas they all got a gallon of oysters and a turkey or two chickens—whatever they wanted. We give them a whole basket to cook.

01:17:55

SR: By “they,” do you mean your employees, or the fishermen, or who?

01:17:57

BG: The fishermen, the whole town. Anybody who wanted them got them. Like I said, we—it was just a whole lot of fun.

01:18:05

SR: That must have been a little expensive, no?

01:18:07

BG: It was to a certain extent, but I mean we--we had the money, and we just give it to them—just like the people that worked on what we called the fish dock. We had thirty employees there, and they all got their baskets also. Yeah, it was just easy back then, you know, and it wasn’t—of

course we didn't have no competition in the business, really, to speak of. So we just enjoyed it all. Everybody enjoyed everybody. And even though we'd be closed Christmas Day, a lot of them would cook and bring it over by our place and sit out in the yard and eat, laugh, and talk.

01:19:04

SR: Sounds pretty ideal.

01:19:05

BG: It was. It was. And like I say, it wasn't a whole lot of anger or anything around there. Everybody was jolly.

01:19:19

SR: What do you see as the future of Manchac?

01:19:23

BG: Well it's pretty dead right now. I can't see it ever growing like it was. I don't think it will ever come around again.

01:19:37

SR: And why is that?

01:19:38

BG: Well it's no businesses to speak of. Just like they got one restaurant and that's it. You know it's just no competition, but the people aren't there for the competition. And Middendorf's enjoys good business but they're, you know, known. And a lot of people from New Orleans and all the surrounding places come there to eat. But I don't—I just can't see anything else going on.

01:20:14

SR: Sounds like you were there in the heyday.

01:20:19

BG: Yeah, oh yeah. I think they'd say we were the heyday because we had all of the employees. But I can't, you know—the fish market will never be again because of the fishponds, so that's gone. And crabs are scarce. They don't have the trapping, you know, like my daddy had. My daddy trapped, and I got some fur pieces that he made for me. And he brought them to the man where we sold salt hides, and--and I got fur pieces made out of Manchac fur, and I treasure them.

01:21:10

SR: What are they?

01:21:12

BG: Mink.

01:21:14

SR: And they're stoles or—?

01:21:17

BG: Scarves. I would say scarves. I got like six, and you could dress a suit up or dress—

01:21:26

SR: Are those in Arkansas now?

01:21:29

BG: Yeah, yeah, everything I own. [*Laughs*] Like I told you, I went to the hospital in a pair of panties and a hospital gown.

01:21:40

SR: Miss Beauty is gearing up to move to Arkansas, for the record, yeah. Will you miss this area?

01:21:47

BG: Probably so. I’ll miss the people. But I can’t live by myself anymore, and they told me I’ve got to do something, so I—my granddaughter, she told me. I got tickled out of it because around Christmastime when she came down to visit, she says, “Either you’re going to come up there and move voluntary, or I’m going to kidnap you.” I said, “Oh, Courtney.” [*Laughs*] But her and I have lived together three times, and we just get along, and they say she’s so much like me. We’ll get to talking, and sometimes we’ll both come out with the same phrase or something like that. She’s very much like me. She’s got my personality. It’s a scream. It’s the last—

01:22:35

SR: That’s so great that you have that—

01:22:38

BG: Yeah.

01:22:39

SR: —oh yeah, someone to take care of you.

01:22:41

BG: But I get so tickled at her. She’s a scream.

01:22:46

SR: Well, see if you can catch any turtles up there.

01:22:47

BG: Nah, they don’t—they’re twenty years behind us. They—I mean they—hillbillies.

[Laughs]

01:22:57

SR: You know, one thing I wanted to ask you, and I should have asked you earlier: Did you sell crawfish at the market?

01:23:02

BG: Oh yeah, yeah. We had these tanks, and they were 100-feet long, and I’ll never forget this—and six-foot wide, and they were about four-foot deep. And then Daddy took boards and drilled holes in them and put them in the bottom of these cement tanks, and we had a flow well. You know what a flow well is? It’s a natural spring of water that comes out of the ground, and sometimes it takes as much as a four-inch pipe it’s so strong. And they put hoses on top and then just let the water run down in there. And that cleaned them out. So you didn’t get them with all the black string and everything in them. They were clean. And we always kept them in there a week before we sold them. And so we’d sell a couple thousand pounds of crawfish a day.

01:24:00

SR: I guess that’s what people call “purging.”

01:24:02

BG: Yeah, yeah. And that’s what we did, and that just came natural. We put our crabs in there. The only thing we didn’t do was the fish. But that—it was just something to see. Now we had one tank where we shed the crabs and made the soft crabs. You know—you know what about them? You get them when—underneath—and they’re kind of pink-looking, and that’s what you call a buster. And a crab opens from the back and backs out. And every—their eyes and everything shed. And when you get it, it’s got to be no longer than an hour, hour and a half, before you put it—and preserve it on ice. If you don’t, it turns hard again, and when it turns hard again that’s when they’re very skinny. A buster is a very, very fat crab.

01:25:03

And we’d do crabs, and I used to do a lot of the cooking for some of the restaurants going around the lake, a couple of restaurants in Baton Rouge. We had a black kettle, and we’d put twenty dozen crabs in it at a time and boil—or the shrimp or the crawfish whatever we had to cook. And then they’d come get them or we’d deliver, and that would be their weekend seafood. A lot of people thought they cooked their own seafood, but we did it. We delivered it cooked.

01:25:43

SR: I see. So when you cooked for those restaurants, it’s like you were wholesaling their boiled seafood.

01:25:48

BG: Right, right. We always had a good income from something. And that was part of it.

01:25:57

SR: Did you always have crawfish, like from the beginning were people eating crawfish?

01:26:02

BG: No, no. I guess we was in the business maybe fifteen years before you started eating.

01:26:12

SR: And how did that start?

01:26:15

BG: I have no idea other than I think a few of them started eating them at home and it, you know, just spread.

01:26:23

SR: Did you like them right away?

01:26:26

BG: I love them. The only thing I don't like I believe is lobster. I don't care for it. But the local seafood, yeah.

01:26:39

SR: Okay, well, Miss Beauty, I'm out of questions. **[Laughs]** If you—I feel really lucky that I got this much of your time because I know you have to go back to where you're staying now.

01:26:53

BG: I can stay out pretty good. The funny thing was if I—we started cooking at 5 o'clock in the morning because we had to do it, you know, early. And if we were boiling crabs, or whoever was helping, that's what we ate for breakfast. If we was boiling shrimp, we'd eat the shrimp.

[Laughs]

01:27:14

SR: For breakfast?

01:27:14

BG: Yeah. Probably I bet you over time we'd eat five pounds of shrimp apiece because all day long you nibbled on the shrimp or the crabs, whatever.

01:27:29

SR: What time would you go to bed if you were up at 4:30?

01:27:31

BG: About 11:00. Well, we closed at 9:00, and by the time they scrubbed everything up and then you'd get home and take a bath, it's 11 o'clock. But we did it for years and never—never phased us.

01:27:47

SR: So then, would your boys eat dinner at the—at the market?

01:27:51

BG: Yeah. Well, in the back of our little store with our kitchen, because we fed those thirty people. So rather than have two kitchens to clean up, we had that one big kitchen.

01:28:04

SR: That was your—like your home kitchen?

01:28:05

BG: Yeah, yeah, but you know it was funny. The beer men—I’m talking about the deliveries—that and the bread man and a couple more people, they always managed to get to our place for lunch. *[Laughs]* And we knew they would eat, you know. “What do we got today?” They’d say, “we.” *[Laughs]*

01:28:29

SR: Did you sell cooked food to the public?

01:28:31

BG: No. No, other than to the restaurants. But in the springtime when the—some of the fish would get small and they had to be fifteen inches or whatever, once you caught them they wouldn’t—you couldn’t put them back in the water because it would die. So we just would get by the front of the fish market and fry them. Fry it whole, and whatever customer would come in, they would eat all they want. I said my daddy was a generous man—comical. *[Laughs]*

01:29:11

SR: He was funny?

01:29:11

BG: Oh yeah, yeah.

01:29:15

SR: What about your mother? Was she also?

01:29:16

BG: No, no, she didn't do like Daddy. And we used to love to play cards, and we'd play this little game Crazy Eights. I don't know if you've ever played it or not. And I mean I was always lucky. One time I whipped Daddy so bad. He said, “Baby, I got to ask you something?” I said, “What, Daddy?” He said, “Do you have a conscience?” **[Laughs]** I said, “Not when it comes to playing cards.” But we--we always just—we found something to have fun with, and that was most of it, you know. You just was happy.

01:29:54

SR: No TV, huh?

01:29:55

BG: **[Laughs]** We got the first TV in Manchac and Daddy put it on top of that deli meat case, and come nighttime we'd have twenty chairs sitting in there and they'd all be watching TV. We had a regular movie. **[Laughs]**

01:30:13

SR: When was that?

01:30:15

BG: Fifty, what—when did TV come out? Because I know we had one of the first ones. Fifty-six, something like that; '57. And when—? Huh? Yeah.

01:30:35

SR: What would you watch?

01:30:37

BG: They'd like “Shoot ‘Em Pete,” westerns—old. But that was just country people back then.

01:30:45

SR: But when you were young, you didn't have a TV, right?

01:30:48

BG: No, no, uh-uh. I had a radio but that was it.

01:30:54

SR: Right. I think that's good for kids.

01:30:57

BG: Yeah, yeah. I don't particularly care for the TV because they got so much vicious stuff on. That's like the movies. I don't remember last time I went to the movies. Now when Mother was living and she had gotten old, really old—in her 89, 90—I used to take her to the movies three

times a week. She loved the movies. And I’d take her to eat and then we’d go to the matinee, and that was a big deal for her.

01:31:29

SR: What did she like to eat before the matinee?

01:31:32

BG: She liked—she liked steak if they could cook it done, but not burnt. And then she liked potatoes, and she never ordered seafood.

01:31:48

SR: You probably didn’t have a lot of steak when you were running the market, huh?

01:31:52

BG: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Like I told you, our roasts were generally weighing like fifteen pounds. And I’d make sure everybody got enough. Now, I love meatballs and spaghetti, and we used to cook that once a week. They always wanted that. What else you got?

01:32:17

SR: [*Laughs*] Oh, okay. Miss Celeste has a question.

01:32:23

Celeste Layrisson: I was curious about when you first--first went to Manchac as an infant, six months old, and you lived in the little palmetto shack. What about mosquitoes? What did you—you didn't have screens, you didn't have Off [bug spray]. Did you just become immune—?

01:32:41

BG: [Beauty says something unintelligible in the background here.] Uh-hm, yeah.

01:32:45

SR: What is that?

01:32:46

BG: It's a fine mesh kind of like cheesecloth, and now Daddy put ours on the windows. But like you say, we—I'm trying to think what they used to use because I can remember Daddy going around the house and putting it even when we was in the railroad car and it would deter mosquitoes. But I don't remember what it was.

01:33:16

SR: Some kind of scent or chemical or something?

01:33:19

BG: He'd mix something up together probably some kerosene, yeah. Yeah, you never have seen a pump? It's a can about this big [*Gestures*] and it holds maybe like a quart of what we call spray dope, and then it had a tubed handle that you'd push and have to pump it. And it would spray.

I’m trying to think. I don’t know where one would be now, do you? I mean I haven’t even seen it in decorating in the little shops or anything.

01:33:56

SR: That’s a really good question though. I imagine that even outside the home you dealt with a lot of mosquitoes?

01:34:00

BG: Oh yeah, yeah. Of course I don’t think they had as many then as they do now because every--everything is just covered with mosquitoes.

01:34:10

SR: And you don’t remember that?

01:34:12

BG: Uh-hm. I was too busy playing. [*Laughs*]

01:34:18

SR: Did you have running water in that palmetto shack?

01:34:20

BG: Oh no. We didn’t have—most people had cisterns. And a few of them had—now I know we had the first water well and we had the first—. [*Laughs*] The first—Daddy called it the

shower house because it was large, maybe fourteen by fourteen or something like that. And we had the water in the—you know, for a shower. Of course you only had cold water. But Mother used to laugh because she'd come in there and there was all the girls in the shower room. And then the boys would take a turn. But I remember all of them used to come to our house to bathe. They just got fascinated with just standing there with water on you, you know.

01:35:13

SR: No warm water, though, huh?

01:35:14

BG: Oh no. Uh-uh, straight out of the ground. [*Laughs*]

01:35:18

SR: Wow. Do you have any more questions, Celeste? That was a good one. Well, Miss Beauty, I want to thank you for your time and sharing your stories. I feel like you have another one. Do you have another story in there?

01:35:36

BG: Not right now, no, Baby.

01:35:38

SR: Oh wait. Before I wrap it up, let's look at these photos and you can tell me a little bit about them.

01:35:44

BG: Okay.

01:35:45

SR: Sorry. I almost forgot—because I will try to get scans of these photos from Karen. Here, you can open it up. Miss Beauty has some old photos from Manchac, which is great because quite a few of the people I’ve interviewed for this project do not have any photos left because they flooded in Isaac—Hurricane Isaac.

01:36:09

BG: You see, this was the market and this was the door—the main door going into the market. And this little room here was the turtle room, and that’s where we kept most of our turtles when I’d go pick them up because they’d get five or six turtles and they’d just keep crawling on all over everything. And one time we had a sea turtle. I let the kids ride it.

01:36:36

SR: So would you keep the turtles alive until somebody wanted one?

01:36:40

BG: No. We’d keep them alive until we could get them cleaned. But we—I went over there every two weeks, so we did a lot of them.

01:36:51

SR: Would you feed them?

01:36:53

BG: No, uh-uh. They just hibernated in that room.

01:36:58

SR: And you had a—you sold fuel?

01:37:01

BG: Oh yeah.

01:37:01

SR: Looks like there's a gas tank.

01:37:02

BG: Yeah, yeah. We had one there and then that—the lake was over here. I don't know if you can see part of Middendorf's right here. That's part of Middendorf's building.

01:37:13

SR: Right up against there?

01:37:15

BG: Uh-hm. That was a little space about that big [*Gestures*] that our land separated—our land met. That’s a picture of them catching a garfish, and that was my daddy. And these two men, I don’t know where they came from but they came every week and got gars.

01:37:44

SR: Do you know who took these photos?

01:37:46

BG: Probably L. C. Denny. He used to be our bookkeeper, and he liked to come down there and do a little junk.

01:37:57

SR: Did you sell garfish?

01:37:59

BG: No. That’s why I said back then you didn’t—we threw all the meat away, and now it’s a delicacy. I don’t eat it. I don’t care for it. This is my daddy, and this is such a real picture of him with that cigar—keep moving that cigar in his mouth.

01:38:22

SR: A what—kind of cigar?

01:38:24

BG: Keep moving. [*Laughs*]

01:38:25

SR: He always had a cigar in his mouth?

01:38:28

BG: Ninety percent of the time. See that kind of grin on his face? He was tickled pink. Look how big that thing is.

01:38:42

SR: So this you would—an alligator gar, right? You would keep that for its hide?

01:38:47

BG: We’d skin it out and salt them down to a certain part of the year. Guess who? That was my mother, daddy, and myself. And this is on the highway bridge and there’s the railroad right there.

01:39:13

SR: How old were your parents when they had you?

01:39:17

BG: Let’s see, Mother and Daddy got married—Mother was born in 1908 and Daddy in 1909, and they were married five years I believe when they had me.

01:39:29

SR: It’s a beautiful picture.

01:39:30

BG: Uh-hm. Waving at my daddy. This is the cooler that I showed you where we kept the alligator—the turtles. It was behind there and that’s when they were building it. And of course that’s Daddy and then that’s my cousin Cecil.

01:39:49

SR: He’s holding like a big brick or something.

01:39:51

BG: That was cork. Back then you—that was the insulation.

01:40:00

SR: On the back of this photo it says, “Rebuilding after the 1953 fire.” What was that?

01:40:07

BG: That’s when we caught fire and burned.

01:40:14

CL: We took a picture of the building on fire.

01:40:17

BG: And then—yeah. That’s why I say Celeste did a lot of it.

01:40:23

SR: How did—how did it catch fire, do you know?

01:40:25

BG: Yeah, back then you didn’t have air-condition[ing], and they had these big fans and Daddy had put it in the attic because it would pull the air all the way through the building. And the bridge tender saw the smoke. Well, we couldn’t see it because it drew away from us. And he kept ringing the bell but nobody realized he was ringing the bell to try to get attention. And finally he just got off the bridge and run in there and said, “Y'all are on fire.” And by that time the ceiling was falling in. So they said evidently it was an electrical fire. But we didn’t get nothing. We didn’t even get—I was coming home on the school bus and they stopped us up at the curb and they said—he told the bus driver that we were burning. And I wanted to go and he told me, “No, you got to stay here.” And I jumped out the window and went anyway. **[Laughs]** I’m telling you, I was something else.

01:41:36

This is the store and this is Mary Majesty. Sid you talk to any of the Majestys? Okay. And this is her daughter-in-law, Rose, and then this is Linda, the little girl.

01:41:49

SR: Linda Majesty?

01:41:51

BG: Uh-huh.

01:41:53

SR: And they were shopping in your store it looks like.

01:41:55

BG: Well sometimes she was shopping and lots of times they'd just come spend the afternoon and we'd play cards.

01:42:01

SR: Could I take one little closer look at that, the store? You had a lot of shelves.

01:42:06

BG: Oh yeah, and it--it was almost a full line of groceries because, like I say, by the time you buy grits and oatmeal and couple cereals, Pet milk, spaghetti—everything we cooked, you know, we could buy wholesale and naturally get it cheaper.

01:42:31

SR: Uh-hm.

01:42:31

BG: And with the—having that many employees, we had to have somewhere to put--put the groceries, so we just put them on shelves, and then you’d come in there and want to buy it; naturally you could buy it. But rice—oh, I tell you. Whatever you think you could cook for thirty people, that’s what we bought.

01:42:58

SR: Did the fire destroy the whole market?

01:43:00

BG: Oh yeah, we--we burned. We didn’t even get the cash register out of the store, and it melted. And Daddy took it down to the Mint in New Orleans and they replaced everything in it, so we were lucky there. That’s the only thing we got out of it. I never did have no hand-me-down clothes, and one day I was crying and my grandmother’s stepmother said, “What’s the matter, Baby?” I says, “Everybody has got hand-me-down clothes, but I don’t.” And she went and she made me some dresses and I just adored them. *[Laughs]* But it was strange—

01:43:42

Miss Celeste: Tell her how quickly they rebuilt the market.

01:43:45

BG: Oh yeah. From the time they cleared it off, we moved in in three days.

01:43:52

SR: How is that possible?

01:43:53

BG: That many friends just showed up, and Mr. Byard [Edwards], they was—they would come down there with a couple truckloads of lumber and asked Daddy, “What are you building?” And he told him and the next day we got another big load of lumber, and it was just friends that donated all their time. And three days we moved in.

01:44:16

SR: That is incredible.

01:44:18

BG: It was. And you see, our living quarters was behind the store right there, you know, all in the same building. I mean it was the fish market and then the store and then we had a little hall right there and it went to the bathrooms and big sun porch—and over here was our four bedrooms.

01:44:47

SR: Did that all burn also?

01:44:49

BG: Oh yeah, yeah, that’s what I said. We didn’t have a stitch of clothes or anything. It just was—it was almost burned when the bridge tender got to us. But by having those fans, and

evidently it didn't burn that fast there; it just made a draft and that fire just—shew!—right on through.

01:45:10

SR: I guess it's lucky that it didn't jump over to Middendorf's.

01:45:12

BG: Yeah, yeah. Oh look, we had the fire--a fire truck did come, but we had everything soaked down. And they were lucky. Well, the fish market was all cement and they pulled the hoses out and started cooling them down so they wouldn't catch.

01:45:34

SR: Was that the local fire truck, the Manchac Fire Department?

01:45:38

BG: We didn't have no Manchac Fire Department. *[Laughs]*

01:45:41

SR: Well no, but two waitresses who work at Middendorf's were telling me that they started a fire department in Manchac.

01:45:52

BG: Yeah, they did. Oh yeah.

01:45:55

SR: So it was maybe they started it after that?

01:45:57

BG: Oh it was much after, yeah.

01:46:00

SR: Okay.

01:46:03

BG: But they finally got it.

01:46:06

SR: That’s very dramatic, but three days—you can't do much better than that.

01:46:10

BG: No, no. Daddy said it was 50 or 60 people showed up and come to work.

01:46:21

SR: Well, thank you for sharing those photos with me, too.

01:46:24

BG: Okay, you’re quite welcome. Thanks to Celeste for so many of them. [*Laughs*]

01:46:28

SR: Yeah. Celeste, you had the photos, huh?

01:46:31

CL: Well, some of them. I had the one of the burning building that I gave to Karen, and I had given one to Beauty years ago.

01:46:38

SR: And how did you have—come across that?

01:46:40

BG: I have been in the antique business all my life, and through some of the estates and all I would come across pictures.

01:46:50

SR: Yeah, that’s great to have a picture of that.

01:46:53

BG: Yeah.

01:46:54

SR: Okay, well, thank you very much.

01:46:57

BG: Thank you. It was very nice meeting you.

01:46:58

SR: Yeah, nice meeting you, too.

01:47:02

[End Beauty Gueldner-1 Interview]

[Begin Beauty Gueldner-2 Interview]

00:00:00

SR: It's hard to see with the sun. Okay, this is Sara Roahen. I'm back here with Miss Beauty Gueldner. I wanted to ask another question for the recording that her friend Celeste Layrisson asked, which I don't know the answer to, and that is: What kind of warnings did you have for hurricanes in Manchac when you were coming up, and what would you do in preparation?

00:00:25

BG: Well, for the biggest preparation you got boxes and put your beds and stuff up on them so they wouldn't get in the water. One of the funniest things is we had cattle and we had them down on the lake by the lighthouse and then some up on the island. And two weeks before a storm my daddy and several of the old ones said, "Uh-oh. We're fixing to have high water," because the

cows would come up to the high point in the swamp and low. And we--we knew we was fixing to get high water. And we just—like Daddy and everybody put their beds up because you knew you was going to get water in your house. I could remember lily pads going through my bedroom. And of course it was just natural for us to get out canoes and get ready to go through the swamp, [*Laughs*] and we'd play catch or whatever going through the swamp.

00:01:34

And the storm was always fascinating for us because we'd play. Now one time they had a—the only waterspout that I know of that really hit Manchac—and where the highway is, the old road, it went down that canal and it just curled trees and everything up. I mean it--it just destroyed all that. But that's about all that we would do other than the kids playing. We knew—you know, my daddy and them knew that we was fixing to get high water. And now the cows would eat moss and stuff out of the trees, so they were okay. But during the winter Daddy would come up to Ponchatoula and we'd get hay and then we'd take the hay and—you know what a skiff is? We generally had eighteen-foot skiffs and my daddy would pile it full of hay. And before we could get there the old cows would start lowing and some of them would swim out to the boat. So then they had to swim back in. [*Laughs*] But, they knew we were coming with hay.

00:02:52

SR: So the cows were your only warning for a storm coming, huh?

00:02:57

BG: Yeah, back then you know, until later years, until the TV come and—but before that, God bless you, they would just rely on that—just old nature.

00:03:10

SR: Could you protect yourselves at all from the wind or—?

00:03:16

BG: Everybody watched the wind. Everything was built strong back then. There never was a house destroyed. But every—the kids would get out there and watch and wait for all the wind and everything. And we'd—and we would play in that wind thinking that was just great.

[Laughs]

00:03:34

SR: Did your mom ever tell you don't do that? It's too dangerous?

00:03:38

BG: **[Laughs]**

00:03:39

SR: Did you ever hear that?

00:03:42

BG: No, not from Mother. If Daddy knew I was doing something, he'd tell me. One time there was about eight of us and we got our pirogues and we went gar fishing, and you know how to do that? Okay, you have a noose and you'd fill the middle of it with fish entrails and everything

because a gar sucks its food down. And you’d get that, and then you’d put about a ten-foot piece of string and then you’d tie your cork on it. And then you had just a whole handful of rope. And when the gar really pulls that cork under, you know he’s got it down, and then that’s when you’d spring it and spring it shut and hold it to the gar.

00:04:38

And Daddy looked out there in the lake and he saw all of us moving too fast, you know. So Daddy decided to get in the boat and he come out there. And he says we were lucky that that gar didn’t flip and put that lead rope and turn that little old boat over like nothing, you know. Because a pirogue is not too—about two-foot wide and that’s it. We was out there and we had that gar and Daddy said, “Now if that fish would hurry up and turn around and you didn’t flip your string, what would happen?” I said, “Yeah, we’d turn over.” So he says, “You don’t do that no more.” And he says, “I don’t want you doing that because you may get that tangled around your ankle or something.” So he wouldn’t allow me to--to gar fish anymore. **[Laughs]**

00:05:32

SR: Did you ever wear life jackets?

00:05:34

BG: We didn’t even know what a life jacket was. **[Laughs]**

00:05:39

SR: What did you use—did you use just oars to paddle your canoe, or did you use push poles, or what did you use?

00:05:45

BG: No, you used a short paddle. And except for the high water, and that’s when you’d do your push poling. But other than that we just had the little small paddle.

00:05:59

SR: You mentioned the lighthouse. One other person mentioned that. Where was that?

00:06:06

BG: All right, from Manchac you go down five miles, and then the island—water goes that way and then the big Pass going into Lake Pontchartrain—. There’s a light—a beacon there now. But it used to be a residence and different ones that were caretakers lived there.

00:06:32

SR: Hmm. All out there by themselves?

00:06:35

BG: Yeah. Some of them were larger families than others.

00:06:42

SR: Uh-hm, huh. And that—but the lighthouse itself doesn’t exist anymore, does it?

00:06:46

BG: No, it's just a beacon out there. And the lighthouse, when it come for sale my daddy bought it and tore it down, and that's where we got a lot of our brick and stuff.

00:07:02

SR: Why did he tear it down? Just it wasn't necessary anymore or—?

00:07:05

BG: They was going to do it anyway, and that's why they sold it.

00:07:09

SR: Oh, when was that?

00:07:10

BG: Fifty—'50, '51, somewhere along—. It hadn't been that long. Probably '51, somewhere along in there.

00:07:24

SR: Okay, that's interesting. I had the impression that it got washed away or something, but no?

00:07:28

BG: No, no.

00:07:30

SR: What was it called?

00:07:34

BG: Manchac Beacon, far as I know.

00:07:40

SR: Okay. Celeste, do you have any other good questions I haven’t thought of? Okay, that was a good one. It sounds terrifying to not—to us, I think, to not have a lot of advance warning for hurricanes. But it sounds like it wasn’t terrifying for you.

00:07:58

BG: Nah, we just took it with a grain of salt and got ready for it, and that was it.

00:08:03

SR: And did it—did you flood most of the time? Or, how frequently?

00:08:07

BG: Everybody flooded any time we had a storm. Like I said, I can remember the lilies going under my bed and going on out through the boxes. And everybody—that’s more or less what you did.

00:08:20

SR: And then what would you do to clean up?

00:08:23

BG: Get busy and start scrubbing. **[Laughs]** Now the next place we built—well, we started filling in and made a yard. Middendorf's filled in some, and Mr. Bill. Everybody started filling in some. And if you go down there now, you know, you can see a couple of them, don't have—they haven't done it. Now they haven't done it on the west side. They just built up high.

00:08:59

SR: Your homes were raised a bit, right?

00:09:02

BG: Yeah, yeah.

00:09:04

SR: But the water would still come? What did you do with the cattle?

00:09:10

BG: We sold them for beef. And we say a couple of them are still out there in the woods wild because couldn't catch them.

00:09:22

SR: Your dad was a real businessman.

00:09:23

BG: Oh yeah, yeah. Like I say, he was a character. And you see, I was a daddy's girl. I said, because if daddy went anywhere I was in his hip pocket. And he'd take me to the auction in Amite, and then when we had to go find some new customers and stuff and Daddy would go, I was with him. I was with him ninety percent of the time. About the only time I wasn't with him was when I was in school.

00:10:00

SR: Sweet. Okay, thank you.

00:10:03

BG: Okay.

00:10:08

[End Beauty Gueldner]