

Frank “Dunk” Reno
Reno’s Seafood—Manchac, LA

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Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Middendorf’s and Manchac

00:00:01

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It’s Thursday, April 17, 2014. I’m in Manchac, Louisiana, and I’m sitting here with Mr. Dunk Reno. And I’m going to ask you: Could you introduce yourself, please, by telling us your full name and your nickname, and what you do for a living?

00:00:22

Dunk Reno: Okay. My name is Frank Reno, Frank “Dunk” Reno, and I live in Manchac, Louisiana. I’m born and raised right here in Manchac, and I was born on Pass Manchac, September 8, 1929, yeah. And I’ve been living here ever since, yes.

00:00:52

SR: Thank you. Can you tell me what you do for a living?

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DR: Well right now I’m--I’m retired, semi-retired. And I got a little seafood store right here that I--I stay out here about seven days—seven mornings a week. It keeps me going and it keeps me active, yeah. But other than that I’m retired. I’ve had several jobs. But the—and stayed a long time with them, yeah. I got a long history of that.

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SR: Can you tell me how you got your nickname?

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DR: I was fourteen months old and living in the house that I was born in on Pass Manchac, and I fell overboard. I fell in the water. And they--they missed me, and my two older sisters, which one of them was nine I think and one was seven then, and they come out and I had a big heavy wool sweater on. It was cold. And they saw the back of my sweater in the water, floating in the water, yeah. And they dove in and pulled me out. And they didn’t know nothing back in them days about artificial respiration and nothing like that, so they rolled me on a barrel and--and finally they worked on me about an hour and they brought me back around. And that’s how I got my name Dunk, my nickname Dunk, and it’s been with me ever since, yeah.

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They tried to call me Duck at first but my dad said, “No, I don’t want no duck.” So he called me Dunk, yeah, and that’s how I got the name Dunk.

00:02:36

SR: What do you mean they rolled you on a barrel?

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DR: Well you see now there’s all kinds of way for artificial respiration, which I’ve had a lot of training on in the services I do—I’ve done, and they--they lay you on a barrel on your stomach and they take you and they roll the barrel back and forth. They roll the barrel back and forth, which that--that moves you. I guess it takes the water out of your lungs if you got any. I didn’t

have any water in my lungs. And it--it just brings you—if you could be brought back, that’s the way to do it, yeah.

00:03:18

SR: That must have been pretty dramatic for your family.

00:03:20

DR: Oh, I guess so, yeah. I don’t remember that. [*Laughs*]

00:03:26

SR: Can you tell me where you mean by—when you say that you were born on Pass—on or in Pass Manchac? Oh, you got a customer. Let me pause for a moment.

00:03:42

I was asking you about Pass Manchac. Can you describe to me what that is?

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DR: You got Lake Maurepas right here; you can see it from where we’re sitting. And you got the bridge that’s going over next to—over the Pass. That is Pass Manchac. It dumps in through—it starts at Lake Maurepas right here. Seven miles to the east it dumps into Lake Pontchartrain. So from here to Lake Pontchartrain, it—this is Pass Manchac. It’s about seven miles long. And right here where we are now, I was born about three miles down on that Pass, yeah.

00:04:25

SR: Right on the water, huh?

00:04:27

DR: Right on the water, oh yes. Yes, yeah. Well we are—on the Pass they got land on both sides, you know, but waterfront. You call that waterfront property, yeah.

00:04:40

SR: What did your parents do for a living?

00:04:42

DR: Well my dad, he--he was in the British Army when he was fifteen years old, and he fought in the Boer War. He was in the British Army and he fought for the British in the Boer War alongside of Winston Churchill, somewhere in that area, because they was both in the War in— in the Military at the same time, yeah. And he worked for—. [*Phone Rings*]

00:05:17

SR: You can go ahead. I'm going to let this run.

00:05:27

DR: [*Answers Phone*] Reno's? Large catfish? Yeah. Did you happen to have one ordered? No, I got an order for a twenty-pounder. I was just wondering if you--if you had it ordered already. Was that Brian? Oh yeah, I was fixing to call you because I do have--I do have a fish that's going—. You want him dressed, right? Or, would you want him live? Okay, well I'll dress him

out for you and we'll—. That's—well that's what I'll do for you then. And you want one that weighs about twenty pounds? Okay, okay, well I'll have one somewhere. The biggest one I got, I'll give it to. I'll have it for you. And I'm going to have your fish and we'll put it on the side and just tell them to come on down. We'll be here. Thank you. Thank you very much.

00:06:39

SR: They want what? How much—how big a fish?

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DR: They want one that weighs about twenty-five or thirty pounds, yeah. And I got him out there.

00:06:46

SR: A catfish that big?

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DR: Yeah, you see them out there, the big ones, yeah? Yeah.

00:06:52

SR: Did you have a customer over there?

00:06:54

DR: That's either my son or my grandson, yeah.

00:06:58

SR: Oh, okay. So you were saying that your father—so your father was British?

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DR: No. My father—my grandfather was from Sicily. My father was born in New Orleans. My mother was born in Bogalusa. My dad--my dad has got—he's got a--a Sicilian and Irish. My mother is Indian and Irish, yeah. So yeah, but my dad, he did work for—he was a detective for the railroad. I forget which one it was. It had to be the Illinois Central back then I guess, yeah. But he worked for the railroad and later in life he went to fishing. He did—he was a commercial fisherman and he did that up until the day he died. He--he run catfish lines and crabbed and what have you, yeah.

00:07:59

SR: So neither of your parents were born in Manchac?

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DR: No, neither one of them were born in Manchac, no.

00:08:05

SR: Do you know how they wound up here?

00:08:07

DR: Well, my dad, when he—he lived in--in Bucktown, which is a fishing village, and he started fishing when he was over there. And then Manchac had always been a popular back in them days for--for commercial catfishing. So he migrated over here, some way or another, and he--he wound up being between Manchac and Bucktown. And we lived on Lake Avenue in Bucktown, and he died in that house in--in 1958, yeah. And the house is still there, yeah; it's still there—when he died. So he--he did all kinds of things. He was in the British Army. He worked for the—he worked for the railroad. And I don't know. He worked for the Highway Department. He did odd jobs and all, you know, but he did all his life, he worked, yeah.

00:09:05

SR: I'm sorry, I don't understand how he wound up in the British Army.

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DR: I can tell you that, but it takes a while. Let me make it short. He--he—what he did, he was fifteen years old and he was in the orphanage in New Orleans, yeah. And he left the orphanage and he went to the riverfront. And watching them unload the ships, and the ship's captain, one of the ship's captains, asked him if he'd like to—like a job on the ship? And he said, "That's just what I'm looking for." So he, at fifteen he caught a ride and he went to—he worked his way across and he got somewhere over there and--and he run out of money and he left the ship. And I believe it was somewhere in--in England or somewhere, and he joined the British Army when he was fifteen years old, yeah. So that's how he got to be a British soldier, yeah.

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SR: That's--that's an amazing story.

00:10:19

DR: I got a picture of him in his uniform with the British—but I--I had it, but I lost everything here in the storms we've had you know, yeah.

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SR: Which storms were bad for you?

00:10:32

DR: All of them. Betsy, Camille. All I can't name them, but right—and here the last one we had was Isaac [in 2012]. That was the worst. We had five feet of water right here where you're sitting here. Hurricane Isaac, that's a year ago, yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:10:51

SR: So you said—I'll just clarify for--for people who might be listening to this or reading this who don't know, but Bucktown is a fishing village on the other side of Lake Pontchartrain.

00:11:01

DR: Bucktown is, yeah, across the lake. It's about east, southeast from Manchac, yeah, about twenty miles across you go to Bucktown, yeah.

00:11:13

SR: So it sounds like for most of your youth your father was in the fishing business.

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DR: Yes, yes, he was, yeah.

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SR: And you kind of wound up in it, too, but what--what was your career trajectory? You said you did a lot of things.

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DR: Well I was—I was a game warden. I worked for the State of Louisiana as a game warden and enforcement agent, they call them now—later. I did that for thirty years. And I retired from there and I worked for St. John Parish [technically St. John the Baptist Parish], the sheriff’s office. I was the warden of the prison at St. John Parish. And I left there after two years. I didn’t care too much for it. I left there after two years, and a good friend of mine that was also a wildlife agent was sheriff in Tangipahoa Parish, so I worked in Tangipahoa Parish for fifteen years as a—and I retired as Captain over the Special Services for Tangipahoa Parish. I put a hitch in the Marine Corps, and I made my seventeenth birthday in North China. So and that’s about it.

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SR: And then after retirement—well, did you live here when you were—did you live in Manchac while you were a sheriff?

00:12:49

DR: Oh yeah, I lived in Manchac. I lived right here and I lived—for a couple years when I was working I lived in LaPlace. I had a home in LaPlace and I worked for the sheriff's office. But other than between Bucktown as a youngster, my service time away, and my little time in LaPlace, I've lived in Manchac all the rest of the years, yeah. And all total with the years that I've—with the service, I had I got fifty-two years, yeah.

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SR: And now you work seven days a week in your retirement?

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DR: I [*Laughs*]*—seven days a week, yeah, yeah. I just stay out here and I do my—I do all my boiling, and you know I stay busy, yeah, yeah.*

00:13:41

SR: Tell me what Manchac was like when you were young.

00:13:43

DR: Well it—Manchac, when I was young we didn't—when I was born there we didn't have no highway. You know, it was just the railroad. You had either waterfront—you had river traffic or railroad coming and going. And after the highway was built—after the highway was built, people started moving in. And at one time, at one time, we had about 200 families living in Manchac, from way back after the highway. Around 1930 they started moving in, somewhere around there,

and they lived up both sides of the highway. Both sides of the canal had little, little homes and, you know, where people lived. Both sides of—the St. John side and Tangipahoa side. And in—then when they started this new highway, which right now is another old highway that—we've had three highways through here. When they started building that, they took all the property. They bought all the property and all them people had to relocate. They all moved out. So we lost ninety percent of the people that we had here, yeah. And right now we don't have but maybe twenty families living on both sides of the—both sides of the water, you know, yeah—St. John and Tangipahoa Parish, yeah. But that's about—

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And this has been a fishing--fishing village for all them years, yeah, yeah. We had several fish markets. We had several restaurants at different times. We had several barrooms and it's been, you know, it's been a pretty good little active community all down through the years, yeah, yeah.

00:15:48

SR: Before they built the first highway, how would you get to New Orleans or to Bucktown?

00:15:53

DR: On a train or a boat. Train or, like I said earlier, you'd catch the train or a boat, yeah.

00:16:03

SR: Yeah, so when you were growing up, when there were those 200 families here, like how many restaurants did they have?

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DR: I think at one time they had five.

00:16:17

SR: And always Middendorf's?

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DR: Middendorf's is one of the first ones. They had one—Bill Williams, he was the first. Bill Williams had a restaurant before Middendorf's. And then I think—then they had—and Allen's had a restaurant, and that's—. Some of the Reno's had restaurants, and Middendorf's had a restaurant. And I think there's about five total altogether, yeah.

00:16:50

SR: Who in your family, who in the Reno family, had a restaurant?

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DR: One of my older brothers, yeah. One of my older brothers, yeah. He's--he's dead now. He's been gone, but him and his wife had a small restaurant, you know, but they did have one. And then I had another sister-in-law that had one on this side of the—on the highway on the—on the east side of the highway they had a little restaurant at one time, yeah, yeah. But at one time they had five. They had I think four on this side of the bridge and they had one on the other side of the bridge, yeah.

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SR: On the other side of the bridge, is that also Manchac?

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DR: That's Manchac. A different parish though. See, we have parishes in Louisiana, not counties. The other side, the south side of the bridge, is Manchac. The north side is—I mean the south side of the bridge is St. John; the north side is Tangipahoa, yeah. So when you get in the water on either side you can either be in St. John or Tangipahoa Parish.

00:17:57

SR: So from what I understand, Manchac isn't actually a name that's registered with the post office. It's called Acres.

00:18:05

DR: Well I'll tell you what: I can tell you the history of that. I can tell you the history of that. The first post office was--was brought here in the late 1800s. It was on the railroad, and the first postmaster's name was Acres. His last name was Acres. And he formed—they formed the first post office, which was on the railroad, and it was the address all the way up to the last few—to a few years ago. How it got changed, I can't answer that. But our address was always—we had no box numbers or nothing. It was Acres Post Office, Manchac, Louisiana. [*Phone Rings*]

00:19:08

SR: You can get that.

00:19:14

DR: [*Answers Phone*] Reno's? Yeah, Brian? Yeah, you know your wife just called me. She just talked to me a little while ago, yeah. I got a big one, yes, Sir. I got one that's going to be somewhere around twenty-five, thirty pounds, yeah. That--that's what you want, huh? And you want it—you want it gutted and skinned. That's right. I—oh, yeah. Oh, we're going to leave it whole for you, Brian, yeah. So whenever you want to come by and get it. I don't know exactly—we don't have him cleaned yet. He's still live, yeah. So we're going—we're going to clean him for you and you just come on down and we'll have it ready for you. No problem. I'll put you down for five o'clock, how's that? And if you don't be here, we'll be here until about six, yeah. \$2.79, Brian, yeah. Yes, Sir, uh-huh. Okay, buddy, thank you. Thank you very much.

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He's confirming the fish order, yeah. [*Laughs*]

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SR: What do you think they're going to do with that whole catfish?

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DR: I would imagine—I would imagine he's going to make probably courtbouillon, catfish courtbouillon. Because a lot of them, Good Friday and all, a lot of people cook courtbouillon and make different dishes. And courtbouillon, you use a big—you know they like them big fish

because it stays together better, you know, and they—. So I imagine that's what he's going to do with it. He's going to make courtbouillon, yeah.

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SR: Can you describe courtbouillon, for people who wouldn't know what that is?

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DR: Well, courtbouillon is like a—you make it—you can use any kind of fish. The original courtbouillon was always made from the fish heads, the big fish heads. That's the way they was always made. And what—it's just like a stew. You take the fish and you make—you make your roux and you put all your seasoning in it, your onions and garlic and whatever you want to put in it. A lot of people use different things.

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You cook that all down and it's for a couple hours until it all gets to the way you want it. And then you add your fish. You don't cook your fish too long. You don't want it to cook and break all up. You want nice chunks of fish in it. And then after you cook the fish about—let it cook about fifteen, twenty minutes, it's cooked. You—or you cook it to the way you like it, you know, and that's--that's courtbouillon, yeah.

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SR: So they'll cut up that big catfish?

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DR: They'll--they'll chop it up, and most of the time what they do, they make—they cut it across and makes steaks out of it. And then they—after they get all their gravies cooked down and simmered down the way they like it, they'll lay that fish in there and they won't fool with it no more. They'll just let the fish cook. See, that way you get a big chunk of fish out, yeah.

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SR: Did you say tomato? I didn't hear that.

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DR: Huh?

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SR: Do you put tomato in yours?

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DR: Yeah, oh yes. You put tomatoes—some people do and some people don't, you know. Some people do and some people don't, yeah. Everybody makes it different. Everybody has got a different way of making it, yeah, but it all winds up the same way, yeah. **[Laughs]** I like to use—I like—when I cook stuff like that I use a roux. You know what a roux is? And then tomato sauce. I mix it half—it's not brown and it's not red. It's--it's in between, yeah, yeah. So that's the way you make courtbouillon, yeah. And it's good.

00:23:15

SR: Did you grow up eating that? Did you eat that growing up?

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DR: Oh yeah, oh yeah, I grew up eating fish and turtle and coon and possum and everything out of the swamp. We lived out of the swamp, you know. We eat fish, turtles, deer, squirrel, rabbit, coon. We ate all that.

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SR: I think Karen Pfeifer told me that the first time she met you, you were butchering a turtle.

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DR: Yeah, I think—yeah, I think so. Yeah, yeah. As a matter of fact I cooked some last weekend and I promised her a dish and I got a dish of it there for her, yeah. Are you going to see her today?

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SR: I'm stopping over there, yeah.

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DR: Well tell her I got her—tell her I got what I promised for you, and she might invite you to eat a little bit of it, huh.

00:24:07

SR: I hope so. Well, how do you prepare that?

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DR: About the same way. About the same way, yeah, yeah. You start with a roux and you—I put a little bit of everything in it, but I start with a roux and--and tomato sauce, and then I put--put all my seasoning in it and let it get kind of blended in a little bit and put the turtle in it until it gets good and tender. And if she—if she happens to invite you, you'll see it. It's all cooked down and it's real tender and it's--it's in little chunks, you know.

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SR: You need to cook turtle longer than catfish right?

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DR: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Turtle, it takes a couple of hours for turtle because it's tougher, you know, yeah. The same way with alligator: you cook alligator and it takes a little longer, yeah, yeah.

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SR: I think she told me that she saw you cutting up an alligator once, too.

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DR: Yeah, we have a season on alligators and we, every—we clean them. My son, he catches—he fills the tag. You got to have a tag, you know, and he fills the tags and--and we clean the alligators and all right here, yeah. In fact, they give—we sell the meat and sell the hides, yeah.

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SR: What does that mean, you “fill the tag?”

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DR: Well with wildlife and fisheries there’s a regular—there’s regulations on--on alligators. You got to have property—you got to have property, is the first thing you got to have. You got to own the property or you got to lease the property, and then you got to have a license and you get your license and what have you and with your license: however many acres of land you got, how many alligators they’ll allow you to take. They give you one tag for each alligator. So like, we used to have I think 150 tags at one time, yeah. But I don’t think he’s got that many now.

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SR: Where is your land?

00:26:13

DR: I don’t have any. I don’t—I got a few little pieces, but no alligators, yeah.

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SR: Oh, but your son—is that Hayden?

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DR: Hayden, yeah. He works for Southeastern [Louisiana University] and he's got all of Southeastern—he gets all their tags, yeah. They own a good bit of land down here. And he also gets—he got—we used to have all the refuge. We used to have all the tags for them, but we don't have that anymore, yeah. They put that out on bids, you know, yeah.

00:26:44

SR: So you said that you sell the meat and the hide here—or the skin?

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DR: We sell the meat here. And next door at Fat Boy's, we serve dinners over there and what have you, and we package the meat here. And Hayden sells—he sells the hides, yeah. He sells—he cures and does the hides and everything, yeah.

00:27:09

SR: And could someone come here and buy a hide?

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DR: No, no. You can't do that, no. You can't sell them to individuals, no.

00:27:16

SR: So he sells them to like a company or something?

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DR: Sells them to a buyer, yeah. The buyer has got to come down and bid of them and go through the process, yeah.

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SR: Can you tell me, for the recording, what's the sound we're hearing right now?

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DR: That's my grandson cleaning catfish, yeah. You hear that, huh?

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SR: Uh-huh. I have a million questions for you, but--but one thing I'd like to ask is that—so it sounds like your family really lived off the land, and I'm sure that a lot of the other 200 families who lived here at the height of Manchac's population also did. Who was eating at all the restaurants?

00:27:57

DR: Transient. Mostly transient. It's like now: we get very few--very few locals that deal with—you know what I mean. Because they get all their fish, they get all their crabs, they get all their shrimp, they get all their—. They get everything, you know, like we always did down through the years. But some of them do. Some of them--some of them every now and then, they'll buy—. And like Middendorf's, they—like I told the lady the other day, I told her, I said, "If you had to depend on the local traffic you, couldn't open your doors." Which is true. And--

and Middendorf's is a drawing card. They draw a lot of people from all over. And that's good for me. It's good for every little business in Manchac, which there ain't too many left, yeah.

00:28:52

SR: Yeah. What are--what are the businesses in Manchac besides Middendorf's and you?

00:28:56

DR: Well we got Middendorf's and we got—we got us right here, Reno's, and we got Reno's Boat Works in the back. They got the—they manufacture boats up to forty-five foot. Then they got another little—a fuel dock. They sell gas and stuff over the water. And then we got across the—over across the bridge, we got two barrooms and they--they do real good over there. And we got two barrooms—excuse me. We got two barrooms; got one crab factory over there. They buy and sell crabs and ship them. And we got one crab factory here on this side of the bridge. So right now we got two crab factories that buy and sell crabs in Manchac from the fishermen, yeah. And we got the Middendorf's Restaurant. We got the two barrooms. We got the Boat Works. We got the fuel dock. And that's about it.

00:30:01

SR: What is Fat Boy's? Is that one of the barrooms?

00:30:04

DR: Right. You're looking at it right next door there. That's a restaurant. They sell--they sell lunches and fish dinners, po-boys, hamburgers. They sell just about everything, yeah.

00:30:20

SR: And they buy some product from you?

00:30:23

DR: No, that's Hayden that owns that, my son. He catches his own. He don't buy nothing from me, yeah. [*Laughs*] As a matter of fact, I got to buy from him, yeah. But they do a good job. They got a good business. They got a good restaurant.

00:30:39

SR: I'm going to have to go over there.

00:30:41

DR: They call it Fat Boy's. There's a reason for that, too, yeah.

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SR: What's the reason?

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DR: Well, my—I had three—I have three sons and one daughter. And my youngest son was Kerry. His name was Kerry, and we had—we had at that time we had a restaurant and market in Hammond, which—and he was running it. And we called him Fat Boy. He was heavy. When he

was a little fellow he was chunky and we called him Fat Boy. And when he had that restaurant in Hammond, he closed up at two o'clock and he had an accident and he got killed, yeah.

00:31:31

So that's how Fat Boy come.

00:31:37

SR: I'm really sorry to hear that. It doesn't get easier, huh?

00:31:44

DR: It's hard. [*Emotional*] It's twenty-two years ago. And it's just like it was yesterday. It will never go away, never. But that's Fat Boy.

00:31:57

SR: Well it's nice that he has a place in his name.

00:32:02

DR: You'll see his picture when you go over there. They're not--they're not going to be there [today]. Hayden will take you over there and show you around, yeah.

00:32:09

SR: Oh, so your grandson is Little—no, no that's fine [to be emotional]. That's your son.

So this grandson here that's working, that's Hayden's son?

00:32:22

DR: That’s Hayden’s son, yeah.

00:32:24

SR: It’s interesting to me that, well, you had these careers that weren't in the seafood business, and yet as we talk there are all these ways that you’ve been in the seafood business. You know, like you had the store in Hammond, you said. And so I guess it was always kind of just in your-- in your blood.

00:32:45

DR: Born in it. You know, I was born in it. My dad was a commercial fisherman. Just about all my brothers—until later life, they was all commercial fishermen. And I did it, too: fished and trapped and all through--down through the years, yeah. [*Phone Rings*]

00:33:06

[*Answers Phone*] Reno’s? Yes, it is. It don’t look good at all, no, Sir. It don’t look good. They run yesterday and they zipped out. I didn’t get--I didn’t get a one, though, so it don’t look good at all, no, Sir. When do you want that for, Saturday? I tell you what you do: why don’t you check back with me tomorrow evening around about one o'clock and if at all possible I might be able to get something for you, yeah. Yesterday? Oh yeah, yeah, I remember you, yeah. You work for the district attorney, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I went and saw him yesterday. I went yesterday. I went and saw him and he--he recognized me, and he talked, and he told me he wasn’t going to give up. I told him, “Well, don’t quit. Don’t quit.”

00:34:48

SR: I paused it once you started talking about personal stuff, but I like to keep it on when you’re talking about what product you might have because I’ll just say, for the record, that this is Holy Week. Easter weekend is coming up and everybody wants seafood, and it sounds like specifically people want a lot of crawfish. Is that what this customer wanted who was on the phone?

00:35:11

DR: He’s wanting crabs. His last name is Levine, and he works for the district attorney in Tangipahoa Parish, yeah. Scott Perrilloux, yeah. He was a good friend of mine, yeah.

00:35:25

SR: So he wanted crabs for this weekend?

00:35:27

DR: Yeah, he wanted crabs for Saturday.

00:35:30

SR: And those aren't—those, like the crawfish, aren't looking good, huh?

00:35:33

DR: No, no. We might get a few, but I'm not going to have enough to--to go around, you know. And like crawfish, one time I used to sell 500-600 sacks of crawfish every week. When we had the store in Hammond, we had this place here; between the two of them, we'd sell thirty--forty—about 3,000 or 4,000 crabs a week, yeah. We had a—you know, everything. But we had a lot of people working, too, you know. You had a big overhead. But you can't get it no more; you know, stuff just ain't here no more, yeah.

00:36:11

SR: So you mean—. So I know this is a particularly harsh time because we've had cold weather, but just in general, you don't get the volume you used to get?

00:36:18

DR: Well in general we don't—we don't have the volume that we used to have, yeah. One thing due to the hurricanes, the storms, the oil spill—. Now I saw on the news last night where some areas, the oysters are kaplook: they're not getting no oysters at all, you know. But something is taking effect. It's either the climate changes, or it's hard to say. Who knows? Ain't no—there ain't no biologists or no scientists in the world can tell you what's taking place and what's causing these things, you know. But something is causing it. It's just maybe just a downslide for marine life. It might be that, you know. Things change, yeah.

00:37:04

SR: But this is generally probably a pretty busy weekend for seafood.

00:37:12

DR: Good Friday, the Good Friday week, the whole week from Monday through until Sunday is always the best for it. People don't eat meat all this time, you know, and they want seafood. And they do their yearly thing, you know. They do this once a year and they buy. The price don't mean that much. They're going to buy what they want. They're going to have their little cookouts. They're going to have their parties. But that's it, you know, and after that it—you still sell a lot of stuff. But the big—the big week—this weekend is the big weekend starting tomorrow, Saturday, and Sunday. That's the three big days, you know. Yeah. And that's why I'm turning all the orders down for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday: because I can't fill it, yeah.

00:38:01

SR: Can you tell me the history of this store? When you opened it?

00:38:07

DR: Well this--this store was owned by local people. It's been local for many—all the time it's been here. And they had a little—they had something like we got here, but not as big as I got it. They sold fish and they sold crabs. They sold shrimp and--and all the little things, you know, like that goes—. And they also sold—at the time they had sno-balls. They sold sno-balls, and under this little shed you see out here where we go out, the fellow that owned it, he built boats, little skiffs, skiff-type boats. So it's been here for a long time, and it's been a seafood—. It's been, like I say, mostly seafood all the time, yeah, yeah.

00:39:02

SR: So is this when you were young it existed, or what years are you talking here that—? What year do you think it opened, or what decade?

00:39:11

DR: We bought this—I bought this place in I think somewhere around 1970. I bought all—I had one—I had a couple houses and apartment buildings, which burned down, you know, later. But that's somewhere in 19--early 1970, I bought all this property here, yeah. And we still--we still got every—we still got it, but the apartment building and one of the houses, they burned down, yeah, and that's where Fat Boy's is at over there you see.

00:39:48

SR: So were you still working for the Sheriff's Office when you bought this place?

00:39:51

DR: Oh yes, yeah, and I was a game warden when I bought this place. I retired in 1975, yeah. I was a game warden when I bought this place, and then later on I had a store on the corner. I worked for the Sheriff's Office then, when I was next to Middendorf's. I was on the corner. I had a fish market and I also had a restaurant there, yeah.

00:40:23

SR: What do you mean, "by the corner?" You mean on the waterside of Middendorf's?

00:40:26

DR: Yeah, where Middendorf—where they got their place over the water and all, right next to the—well, I used to own all that yeah, yeah.

00:40:36

SR: And you had a seafood market and a restaurant there?

00:40:38

DR: I had a market—I had a market at first and then we remodeled the old building where the market was at and I built the new market next to the lake, yeah. So I had two—I had a restaurant that would sit 130 people and I had a market, the seafood market, which we sold--we sold everything that year. So I had two places going, yeah.

00:41:03

SR: So you had two places with Middendorf's in the middle?

00:41:05

DR: It—

00:41:06

SR: They were both over by the water?

00:41:09

DR: No, Middendorf's was on this side, yeah, yeah.

00:41:12

SR: Okay, so—

00:41:13

DR: And I also owned the barroom across the bridge, yeah.

00:41:18

SR: You've done a lot.

00:41:20

DR: Yeah, and I don't own none of that no more.

00:41:23

SR: What happened to the seafood market and the restaurant that was next to the water?

00:41:26

DR: Well I--I had it for a good many years and I sold out. I sold it to Middendorf's, yeah. Not the people that own it now, but the--the people that—original owners. Dick Smith, who was Mrs. Middendorf's son, and original owners of—they founded Middendorf's way back and they owned it. I sold it to him, yeah.

00:41:54

SR: Was that strange to have two seafood restaurants side-by-side? Was that some strange competition?

00:42:00

DR: Well it was, yeah, but we both did a fairly good—. You could put three restaurants there and you're not going to hurt Middendorf's. They got their clientele and they got their customers and they—. When they say they're going to Middendorf's, they are going to Middendorf's. The only thing is when they got a big line, [*Phone Rings*] a lot of them people don't stand in line and they're—. So we all had lines, yeah. That's, you know—

00:42:24

SR: Go ahead.

00:42:25

DR: [*Answers Phone*] Reno's? Live crawfish? When do you want them for? I won't have any for Saturday. I got some today. I got a few in today, yeah. Yeah, it's really—I got—I won't be able—Saturday I'm going to get a few, but I got orders for everything I'm going to get, you know, and I can't take no more orders, yeah. We--we're booked up, yeah. Well if you come today I'll sell them to you, yes, Sir. In Manchac, yeah. Yes, Sir, uh-huh. You know where Manchac is? Yeah, we're just down the street. Yeah, yeah two doors—you can't miss us, yeah. At \$2.89. They just took a jump, yeah. You know that. You can call around; they're going to be high, yeah. If you decide, just come on down, yeah. Thank you, Buddy, all right.

00:43:42

SR: I wonder where that person was calling from. They didn't even know where you were.

00:43:48

DR: Huh?

00:43:49

SR: It didn't sound like they even knew where you were located.

00:43:51

DR: Yeah. [*Laughs*] They're looking in the phonebook. He's going to call me. He's going to call every seafood dealer in the book and they're all going to tell him the same thing, [*Laughs*] because I know they're all booked up and they ain't got no crawfish, yeah.

00:44:09

SR: Is it harder to make--make a living in this business now than it was—?

00:44:13

DR: Oh yeah. Yeah, it's--it's hard. It's hard to—everything that's perishable, you know. You--you can't keep stuff like the grocery stores and the meat markets and all. They--they keep stuff. You know, they turn it over and they put specials on and they move it. We can't do that. You see it's hard to hold—it's hard to keep seafood especially. Live stuff. You get crabs out of the lake two--three days, they start dying on you. The crawfish, two or three days they start going the

other—they can't live. You know, they just cat live out of the water. That's it, yeah. So it's hard, yeah. It's not like it used to be.

00:44:52

SR: Why was it easier before?

00:44:56

DR: Because you had more people, and you had less outlets. You got right now, you got shrimp being imported, you got pond catfish. Every store and every restaurant, you got imported—. You can go to Wal-Mart and get any kind of fish you want. You can go to Albertsons and get any kind of fish you want. And that's it. Every store, every gas station, every little place you see, they're either are selling crabs, they're selling crawfish, they're selling fish, they're selling everything. That's what you call competition, and people's not going to drive twenty miles to save a dime. They're going to go to the nearest place they can go. And that's what's making—that's what makes it hard, yeah.

00:45:54

SR: It sounds like unless there's a crawfish shortage, and then they're going to drive over to Manchac if you have them.

00:45:59

DR: Yeah, yeah, yeah, but they'll come here if they can't get them nowhere else. And I got customers that they dedicated to me. They come, they won't go nowhere else but here, yeah. For

the catfish, the same way. They won't go nowhere else for their catfish. Boiled crabs. I sell a lot of boiled crabs because they--they come here and they like the crabs and they won't go nowhere else, yeah.

00:46:24

SR: So you--you boil the crabs here?

00:46:25

DR: I do. I boil—I do all the boiling myself. Every now and then my grandson over there, Hayden, he'll help me. You know when I'm not feeling too good, yeah, yeah. *[Laughs]*

00:46:36

SR: Do you have a recipe that you use?

00:46:40

DR: Not really. I just--I just go by ear, by the amount of crabs. And I know just what—just about what to do. Yeah, they all—they're all within the same all the time, yeah.

00:46:55

SR: Well I'd like to go back to when you had a restaurant. First of all what was your restaurant called?

00:47:02

DR: Called Dunk's.

00:47:05

SR: I imagine it—

00:47:06

DR: Plain Dunk's. Dunk's, just Dunk's. That's what it was, yeah. And all my barrooms and everything was called Dunk's. We called this Reno's, yeah. It's been Reno's.

00:47:17

SR: Did you have a specialty at your restaurant?

00:47:21

DR: When I first opened that restaurant I had a--a fellow that was a local, but he was from France. He married a local lady and he was a French chef. And you couldn't hardly understand what he said and you couldn't hardly understand what he—you know, when he talked to you, but he had special dishes that he fixed, a bunch of—Pearls of the Sea, he called it. [*Phone Rings*] Snapper Pontchartrain, lobster—steak and lobster. And yeah, we had a special menu. But we also had the regular--had the regular fish dinners and the crawfish. And we sold everything, but we had no specials, yeah. And it was good.

00:48:15

[*Answers Phone*] No, Sir. I got—I might get a bushel or two, but I got--I got orders for them and I doubt if I'll get any, yeah. So I won't be able to help you. They all—no, they're not

catching nothing. They're catching—they run 100 traps and catch twenty pounds of crabs, yeah.

Yeah, it's--it's—yeah, that weather has been so bad and all you know. It's just the water is—

Well, I thank you very much. Thank you very much, okay.

00:49:00

What were we saying?

00:49:01

SR: Oh, you were talking about your French chef.

00:49:04

DR: Oh yeah. His name was Geroid Delacruz. He's--he's gone now. He's dead for—but he made--he made all these specials and he made the—what they told me back then—. [*Phone Rings*] The best turtle soup anybody ever ate. And I had plenty turtles at that time, and he made that turtle soup, and from the way it went he had to be right. They claimed it was the best they ever ate, yeah.

00:49:40

[*Answers Phone*] Reno's? Not today, no, Ma'am, no. No, I doubt very seriously if we have any. We're just not getting any yet. When do you want them for? Uh, I tell you what you do. If you don't find them no place else, call me back here about ten o'clock in the morning. I might be able to help you. And if--if possible, if I got a crab or two, I might be able to help you with that, yeah. Thank you, okay.

00:50:20

SR: It must be very hard on the fishermen this time—this season.

00:50:25

DR: Oh they--they can't make a living. Oh, no. There's nothing there, you know. It's just very hard on them. A lot of them had to go to work. My son is a fisherman and he's working up in Iowa now. He had to go get a job, yeah. No shrimp, no crabs, but everything goes on for them, you know. It's just like everybody else. If they can't make a day's work, they can't make it, yeah.

00:50:51

SR: What kind of job did he get in Iowa?

00:50:54

DR: He does--he does turnarounds and construction, yeah, and they built a new plant in Iowa. They got a four-year job up there. So he's up there now. He'll be up there for I imagine another five or six months until he can make enough money to get back down here, you know.

00:51:18

SR: But he would like to keep fishing?

00:51:19

DR: Oh, naturally. He can't do nothing else. *[Laughs]*

00:51:23

SR: What's his name?

00:51:25

DR: Frank. His name is Frank, Junior, yeah.

00:51:28

SR: Not Dunk?

00:51:28

DR: Not Dunk. We don't call him--there's only one Dunk, yeah. [*Laughs*]

00:51:32

SR: So you have—and then your daughter, does she live in the area?

00:51:37

DR: She lives in [*Unintelligible*], yeah.

00:51:40

SR: I don't know where that is.

00:51:41

DR: That's east of Ponchatoula. You go to Ponchatoula and take [Hwy.] 22 about ten miles out and she lives out there. It's a nice--nice neighborhood where she's at, yeah.

00:51:51

SR: Is she in the seafood business?

00:51:52

DR: She works here, yeah. She works here, yeah.

00:51:56

SR: And what is her name?

00:51:57

DR: Katrina. They named Hurricane Katrina on her birthday. So she's witched. [*Laughs*]

00:52:07

SR: Yeah, I don't know if that's good luck or bad luck. I don't know.

00:52:09

DR: Well that's what I say. I don't know, yeah, but they named the storm when it was coming on her birthday. They named it Katrina, yeah. And it's one of the worst they ever had, too, yeah, so you can imagine what my daughter is. [*Laughs*]

00:52:27

SR: Did you--did you ever eat at Middendorf's?

00:52:31

DR: Oh, many times. Oh yes, many times, yeah. I haven't been there in—it's been quite a while. Oh yes, I've eaten at Middendorf's. I've went down there with a friend of mine, you know. We—sometimes eight, ten of us will go down there at a time, yeah. Yeah, my daughter, she buys—you know, they get stuff from Middendorf's, yeah. But oh yeah, I've eaten there many times.

00:52:57

SR: Well when you had—when there were a lot of restaurants here—you know, the five restaurants here—what was Middendorf's specialty? Was it always the thin fried catfish?

00:53:07

DR: Always—I don't think it was thin catfish back then. No, it was catfish. They were all specializing in catfish, you know. But back then it wasn't thin catfish. No, they didn't—they didn't start that until several years ago, yeah. [Interviewer's note: according to the Middendorf family, thin-cut catfish was a specialty early on at Middendorf's, which opened in 1932.] But it was regular, you know, the catfish dinners with the catfish and—. Well they sold everything—shrimp—but there wasn't no—they wasn't big. Middendorf's started out and they had about four tables in the restaurant. When--when Bill Williams had [a restaurant next door], he didn't have but about four or five—he had booths in his, you know, yeah. Bill Williams was the first, but he didn't have but about four or five tables—small. When Allen's opened, they had a little bit

bigger restaurant. And then Middendorf's burned down in 1950, yeah. They—Middendorf's and Rottman's and that whole corner burned down in 1950.

00:54:05

SR: Fifty?

00:54:05

DR: 1950, and then when they rebuilt they rebuilt it a little bit bigger, yeah.

00:54:10

SR: Rottman's was a seafood market?

00:54:14

DR: Yeah, yeah.

00:54:17

Customer: Hey, Mr. Dunk.

00:54:18

DR: Hey, how you doing?

00:54:20

Customer: All right, all right. How you feeling?

00:54:21

DR: Pretty good, pretty good. How are you?

00:54:24

Customer: Mike.

00:54:25

DR: Yeah, Mike. I didn't recognize you at first.

00:54:28

Customer: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

00:54:29

DR: That's all right. That's all right.

00:54:30

SR: That's okay. Do you need to get up? I'll pause this.

00:54:36

All right, you got some customers here but we'll--we'll grab a couple stories while your grandson is cutting up their fish. You just told me that you've cooked for a lot of politicians.

00:54:45

DR: Yeah, I cooked--I cooked all over the state of Louisiana for different reasons, and different ones. And I cooked in Baton Rouge; of course me and some of the other fellows that I was— with Wildlife and Fisheries, we cooked for 500 people.

00:55:12

What did he say?

00:55:13

SR: He said seven and three-quarters fish.

00:55:16

DR: Okay.

00:55:17

SR: You got to get up?

00:55:19

DR: Yeah, I got to get—.

00:55:19

SR: Okay, that's fine.

00:55:19

DR: Can you hold it just a minute?

00:55:20

SR: Yes, I can.

00:55:22

So you were saying that you cooked for 500 people in Baton Rouge?

00:55:25

DR: Yeah, in Baton Rouge. We had—I forget just what it was, but John McKeithen was governor then, and we had the governor and I think just about every state representative and senator in the state. We--we fried 500 pounds of filleted catfish, yeah. And it was real good, yeah. That’s one of the—but we cooked—“public relations” we called it, you know, with Wildlife and Fisheries. They had sent us all over the state cooking for different meetings and different fundraisers and people and different things like that, you know, yeah.

00:56:06

SR: I think in other states that wouldn’t necessarily be part of the job description.

00:56:12

DR: Well it wouldn’t be—it’s not part of the job description, but the only thing is—and I’ve been charged with that: with conflict of interest. See, and there’s an ethics code that you work by, you know, but these ethics codes and these conflicts of interest is one thing. And--and the way you do it is something else. See, and I’ve had—I went through all of that. I’ve had a lot of

experience with--with being a conflict of interest, as being a game warden and the seafood business, see. And I won all of them.

00:56:56

SR: You mean you were actually taken to court?

00:56:57

DR: I was actually taken to court, yeah, and before the Ethics Committee, the State of Louisiana, yeah. And we beat every--every charge I had against me. And they had to reinstate me and give me all—everything back, yeah.

00:57:14

SR: Who took you to court, the State?

00:57:16

DR: One of my bosses. One of my bosses brought this—you know, they had all kind of--all kind of charges but nothing standing. They accused me of dealing in alligators, dealing in alligators, which was a bunch of crap. I didn't do that, you know. I had receipts for everything. The alligators I picked up as an agent, I had that. But it was—everything was legal. But anyway I beat all the charges, yeah.

00:57:46

SR: That's good. And then you said there was someone else you cooked for.

00:57:50

DR: Yeah, I had a good friend of mine who used to stop every now and then and he was a country and western star, Jimmy Dickens. And he loved the way I cooked that courtbouillon, and he'd take it back with him and what have you. And I had another real good friend of mine that used to stop and he wouldn't come through—he wouldn't come to Louisiana without coming to see me. And that's Billy Carter. You know who that was, huh, yeah? And I got pictures of—my daughter has got them. I got pictures of Jimmy Dickens, Billy Carter. I got pictures of all of them. But he used to stop and see me.

00:58:32

SR: So when you say he'd stop and see you, this was at your restaurant, Dunk's?

00:58:35

DR: Yeah, on the corner, yeah, yeah. And I also met Billy's brother Jimmy, yeah. Let me—I got a customer.

00:58:43

SR: Okay, another customer.

00:58:47

Okay. You know, I'm going to try not to let this go on too much longer, but I still have a few questions for you. So you just—you just dealt with a customer who came in for fish. And she was specifically asking for Yellow Catfish. What is that?

00:59:04

DR: Well the yellow cat is—it's catfish, freshwater, but it's yellow. Its color is yellow and it—the real name for it is Opelousas Cat. They call it Tabby Cat and they call it Flathead or Yellow Cat, yeah; so we call it yellow cat here. It's a little bit different than the regular blue. A lot of people like it a lot better.

00:59:32

SR: Can you describe to me how it's different in--in flavor?

00:59:36

DR: I eat it and I don't see no difference in the flavor, and the texture is a little bit different. The texture is a little different, yeah. And it ain't much difference in them, yeah, but they're good.

00:59:49

SR: You got another customer.

00:59:51

DR: Yeah.

00:59:54

[End Dunk Reno Interview 1]

[Begin Dunk Reno Interview 2]

00:00:00

SR: I just saw for the first time since I got here the live snapping turtle.

00:00:09

DR: Yeah, live snapper, yeah. That’s a common snapper, now. They got a common snapper—and that one weighs twenty-four pounds, which is real big for a snapper around here—and then they got the alligator snapper.

00:00:27

Customer: Hello?

00:00:29

DR: Which gets bigger—you know, bigger.

00:00:33

Customer: Hello. My husband said this price is not right.

00:00:38

SR: This is a busy time of day here, I guess. Is it always?

00:00:40

DR: Sometimes, and sometimes we—you know, it fluctuates. Sometimes we get more and sometimes less. It's hard to say, you know—

00:00:48

SR: All right. Well, you were telling me about the--the turtle. So it's live. How many pounds is it?

00:00:54

DR: It weighs twenty-four pounds, yeah.

00:00:57

SR: And when will you cut that? When will you kill that? When someone buys it, or before that?

00:01:03

DR: Well, we'll sell it live, yeah, and if they want the head cut off we'll cut the head and all off for them.

00:01:09

SR: Okay, but do most people want to buy it live?

00:01:11

Customer: I'm back again.

00:01:13

DR: Hey, how you doing?

00:01:14

Customer: Pretty good, pretty good.

00:01:17

DR: What can I do for you?

00:01:18

Customer: I want two more pounds of fillets.

00:01:24

SR: We'll try this again. [*Laughs*] What--what did that customer just buy?

00:01:28

DR: Catfish fillets. He bought two pounds of—he was in here the other day and—. Well, he comes in all the time, but he said that last one was the best he ever had, so he had to come get some more, yeah.

00:01:43

SR: So people can tell a difference between one catfish and another?

00:01:45

DR: Oh yeah, they can tell the difference. Yeah, they—once they eat it, once they eat that fish there, there ain't no other one. And if you try to put something else, they know it, yeah.

00:01:56

SR: It's all wild catfish?

00:01:58

DR: Oh yeah, yeah. We don't handle no farm or no nothing, yeah. If I don't get it out of here we don't get it. We are out, you know, so—

00:02:08

SR: So the turtle. I just want to go back to that for a minute. So, when people want to buy it live—that's what you're saying?

00:02:14

DR: Yeah, well a lot of them do. Now sometimes if Little Hayden, my grandson, or somebody is here and they want it cut out of the shell, we'll cut it out of the shell for them. But I don't do that because I can't hardly see too—I don't see too good anymore, you know. And every now and then it gets kind of close to that old finger. And I don't want to lose it yet. [*Laughs*]

00:02:36

SR: Your grandson works here and your daughter works here. Who else works here?

00:02:44

DR: Well, I'm here. I ain't saying I work. [*Laughs*] My daughter, my daughter-in-law, my granddaughter, my grandson, they all—off and on they work different--different times for me, yeah.

00:03:04

I've got to keep them going, yeah.

00:03:08

SR: Where did that turtle come from?

00:03:11

DR: They come out of the—out of the Ponchatoula Swamp. They got—it's called Weinberger Road and it goes back out--out east of Ponchatoula, back there, yeah. They got quite a few turtles in there. But they don't get too many anymore, yeah.

00:03:28

SR: Is there a quota on that?

00:03:30

DR: No, there's no quota, no size limit on them, on these. You can take them and there's no quota, yeah. Now that's the common snapper. The alligator snapper, there's a size limit on them. And there's a—there's one per boat, one per person. That's it.

00:03:52

SR: Per season or per day or—?

00:03:55

DR: That's per day, yeah. You can catch one today and if you take him and get rid of him or do—. You can't sell them, though. You're not supposed to sell them. You take him home and you go back the next day and you catch another one. That's why they say one per boat, one per boat, so if you go the next day you can still have one.

00:04:16

SR: But you're selling them.

00:04:17

DR: Huh?

00:04:18

SR: You're selling them. You can sell them?

00:04:23

DR: No, the snapper—not the alligator snapper.

00:04:26

SR: Oh, I see.

00:04:28

DR: We sell the snapper, the common snapper, yeah.

00:04:30

SR: Why is that with the alligator snapper? Because there aren't enough?

00:04:33

DR: Well they claim they're getting—they're becoming extinct, yeah. Yeah, so that's why they got—that's why they put a law on them. They used to didn't have no law. You could take all you wanted, you know, yeah.

00:04:47

SR: Is there any local seafood that you don't sell?

00:04:51

DR: Not really. Not really, no. If it's good and if it's edible and it's fresh we'll sell it, yeah. We will buy and sell it, yeah. We sell garfish, we sell alligator meat, we sell the turtle. What else do we sell? We sell it all, yeah, yeah.

00:05:11

SR: Do you ever sell any game?

00:05:14

DR: Game? You can't sell game. No, you can't sell no kind of—you can't sell no kind of wild game. The only thing we can sell here, which I sell a lot of, is coon. We sell a lot of raccoons, yeah. And you can sell possum and we can sell muskrats, which I sell that too, yeah.

00:05:38

SR: People are lining up to buy raccoon and muskrat and possum?

00:05:42

DR: I sell a lot of coons, yeah. Oh yeah. That's a good—that's a good dish, really, and there's a season on it. You can only have—you know, during trapping season is the only time you can do it, yeah. It's commercial and it's a fur-bearing animal. And that's the only one you can sell like that. All the rest of them you can't do that, you know, yeah.

00:06:05

SR: Tell me what you mean by, “that's a good dish.” How would—how do you prepare coon?

00:06:09

DR: Well there's all kind of ways you can—. The first thing you got to do is--is know how to clean it. They got glands in it; you got to know where they are. You got to take the glands out. They call them musk glands. And then after that you got to know how to prepare it. You know, it's like anything else. If you're not—once you get it prepared, you fix it right, it's--it's delicious. Now you can—the way I like it is the common way. We--we take it and boil it and parboil it and clean it real good and put it in a baking pan and put sweet potatoes, cut the sweet potatoes up and put sweet potatoes all around it. Sprinkle it all, season it all down good, and put it in the oven and bake it. And you eat the sweet potato and the coon, you see, and it's delicious. Really good, yeah, really good.

00:07:12

SR: Do you make gumbo with it ever?

00:07:14

DR: Gumbo. It will make the best gumbo you ever wanted to eat, yeah. Coon gumbo is delicious, yeah. I've made that a many, a many time, yeah.

00:07:24

SR: What's the flavor like? Is it real strong?

00:07:28

DR: No, it's not strong. It's not--it's not strong at all. It's like a rabbit or a deer or squirrel. It's different. It's different but it's not strong, no. That's why you got to know how to prepare it, you

see. When you take the glands out, you take all the fat off and--and you clean it good and you parboil it, see, and that takes all the musk out. Yeah.

00:07:51

SR: What about the possum and the muskrat? What do you cook with that? How do you cook those?

00:07:54

DR: Well we—usually the muskrat, we just fry that. You know, take it and clean it and fry it like you would rabbit or chicken or squirrel, anything else, yeah. We make it—we also make a gravy with it, a gumbo. It's very good, yeah, very good.

00:08:10

SR: What about possum?

00:08:13

DR: Possum is a little different. You got to take a possum—when you get him out of the swamp we used to take and pin them up and feed them for, you know, a couple weeks—two or three weeks. And that way they--they shed some of the excess weight that they—. They usually are pretty fat, you know, and then you clean them. And the way we always—we always baked them. We never did fry them or nothing. And clean them good, and you know just like—and bake them. They're good. They're real good, yeah, yeah.

00:08:46

SR: Do you still eat those?

00:08:47

DR: Huh?

00:08:48

SR: Do you still eat those animals?

00:08:49

DR: If I get somebody to cook it for me. I don't cook them no more, you know, yeah. I had a good friend of mine that put a cookbook out and he—one of his biggest deals in there was the possum, yeah.

00:09:05

SR: What cookbook was that? What cookbook was that? Was it local?

00:09:09

DR: No, it's from East Feliciana Parish. A friend of mine, his --his daughter did the—he was sheriff of the parish over there, Art Doty, and his daughter had composed a cookbook, yeah. And she had his recipe in there for possum. I used to have a copy of it but I don't—it's gone. I don't know what ever happened to it.

00:09:35

SR: I wanted to ask: Do you associate with either of the terms “Cajun” or “Creole?” Are you Cajun or Creole?

00:09:43

DR: Well, I’m a coon ass.

00:09:48

SR: What does that mean?

00:09:49

DR: That means that you’re either registered coon—registered Cajun or Frenchman or what, but a coon ass, you know. You ain’t nothing. You just—. [*Laughs*] You ever hear that expression? Yeah.

00:10:03

SR: I never really know what it means, though.

00:10:06

DR: I don’t either. [*Laughs*] You know what it means—?

00:10:12

Mr. Bates: South Louisiana coon ass.

00:10:14

DR: South Louisiana coon ass and registered Cajun.

00:10:18

SR: So you're not registered Cajun?

00:10:20

DR: No, uh-uh.

00:10:22

SR: Okay, so we've--we've been joined by Mr. Bates, a local who—

00:10:27

Mr. Bates: I don't have to say anything. *[Laughs]*

00:10:30

SR: —who stops in. Just going back a little bit, I just want to focus in a little bit on what Manchac used to be like. When did the train stop go away?

00:10:44

DR: When did what?

00:10:44

SR: When did the train station go away?

00:10:47

DR: Oh, that was here until—. I imagine, that the--the depot shut down, I imagine it was in the '60s, yeah, when the highways and all got opened and the railroad and all, and then they--they shut all the little small depots, the Ponchatoula depot. They shut them all down. The building was there for a long time, but they finally tore it down and it, you know, got away. But somewhere in the--in the late '50s or the '60s, yeah. You could still ship. We used to ship out of—on the corner down there. You could put fish, barrels of fish, on a train and stuff like that. But around the—in the late '50s or '60s, yeah, yeah.

00:11:37

SR: Was that disappointing when it went away, or was everybody just using cars by then and so it didn't matter?

00:11:43

DR: Do what?

00:11:43

SR: Was it disappointing when the train stopped—went away?

00:11:47

DR: I don't think we noticed it because you had all the highways, you know, and the cars and more convenient in and out, you know. The train, you could get on here and the only certain—you'd have to go to a certain stop and that's it. You know, and in Ponchatoula you could get off or you could get off in Hammond and then you had to go a long way before you could get off anywhere. They didn't stop in every little town, you know; they didn't have a depot, yeah. That was the way all over the country.

00:12:18

SR: What about the post office that you were mentioning? Is there still a post office here?

00:12:23

DR: No, no, we don't have a post office anymore. We've got boxes now, yeah. We used to have a post office, yeah. Like I said, the first one was in 18--in the late 1800s by the railroad, yeah. And then it moved out here and different people like the Middendorf's, Mrs. Middendorf, the old lady, she run the post office way back then. She was a postmaster. Then I had a sister-in-law that was married to my oldest brother. She run the—she had a post office at one time. And then we had another lady that run the post office. We've had several different ones that run the post office after the railroad. When it was run by the railroad, it was a guy by the name of Acres who had it back then. And different ones, you know, yeah. But then again out here the—when the railroad, when they quit sending by train, they sent it by—you had to go—they delivered by truck. The train used to—they used to put the flag up when you had mail by the depot; they had a flag they'd put up. And the train wouldn't stop. It was—zip!—and grab the—they'd grab the

mailbag, you see. The mail would be all put in a sack and hung on the side, and when the train come through they had a picker [*Gestures*] and he grabbed it off, you see.

00:13:55

SR: They wouldn't even stop?

00:13:56

DR: No, no, no, no. They wouldn't stop. They'd keep going.

00:14:00

SR: Do you know what year the post office closed?

00:14:04

DR: I don't--I don't know. It was around the same time the depot and all like that, yeah.

00:14:09

SR: What about, somebody was telling me about a tugboat that sunk in the past. Does that ring a bell?

00:14:20

DR: Well they've had—they had a tugboat sunk right out here, yeah. They've had several of them sink. The ship and the schooner sunk. They had one—a freight boat that sunk, yeah, years ago when they was delivering by freight, by boat, yeah. And they had sailing ships that used to

come through here. But yeah, they had a tugboat sink. They had one that sunk right on the corner that stayed there for a long time, and they just cleaned it up, what a couple years ago? Yeah.

00:14:52

SR: Yeah, that’s what I heard about. Why did they finally clean it up?

00:14:55

DR: Well after Hurricane Katrina with all the—all the boats and all that was lost and displaced and sunk, they went all over cleaning them up. They—FEMA did all that. You know, they hired—they hired barges and people, and that’s what they did there. They picked that one up, yeah. But it was right over by the corner of the bridge there, yeah. That thing stayed there for thirty years, I guess.

00:15:26

SR: What year did your restaurant close?

00:15:30

DR: 19—I think it’s 1980. No 19—1982, yeah; 1982 I closed it, yeah. I run it from 1975 until about 1982. 1973, maybe. Somewhere around in there yeah.

00:15:49

SR: I saw a picture of Middendorf’s and there was a sign that said “Club Middendorf’s.” Does that ring a bell?

00:15:59

DR: Club Middendorf's? It didn't—it wasn't Middendorf's Restaurant when they first started. I forget. Now he's related to Mrs. Middendorf, yeah.

00:16:15

Mr. Bates: She's my aunt.

00:16:17

SR: Oh, Josie was your aunt?

00:16:20

Mr. Bates: Yes, Ma'am.

00:16:22

SR: Okay, so you grew up going to Middendorf's?

00:16:23

DR: I did.

00:16:27

SR: Could you tell me your first name?

00:16:29

Jack Bates: Jack.

00:16:29

SR: Jack Bates, okay.

00:16:31

Jack Bates: In person. [*Laughs*]

00:16:33

SR: No nickname.

00:16:34

DR: I worked with Jack's daddy for years. He was a game warden, yeah. And he was a state game warden before he was a federal game warden.

00:16:45

Jack Bates: You're right.

00:16:47

DR: And then he was a federal game warden, you see, and I was a state game warden, and also federal. I was a head of the Federal Commission. Deputy, United States Game Warden, which

was one of the very few anywhere in the country, yeah. But I worked with his dad, Jack, up until the day he died, yeah.

00:17:07

SR: So does that ring a bell to you, Club Middendorf's?

00:17:10

Jack Bates: No, Ma'am, it does not.

00:17:12

SR: No, okay. We just—Karen [Pfeifer] has a picture of that.

00:17:15

DR: That might be when we they first opened. It wasn't Middendorf's—just Middendorfs; it was Middy's or Middendorfs, or more than likely it was Club Middendorf, yeah. I guess. I don't know. I can't--I can't say that for sure.

00:17:33

SR: Mr. Middendorf didn't live very long, huh, after that restaurant opened?

00:17:35

DR: No, he died not too long after they--after they opened the restaurant, yeah.

00:17:45

SR: And then you—you touched on hurricanes a little bit earlier, but what were Camille and Betsy like out here?

00:17:52

DR: Betsy—

00:17:53

Jack Bates: Betsy was bad.

00:17:55

DR: Betsy was one of the first--the first worse storm. It come right down the Mississippi River and it did a lot of damage in Louisiana and Mississippi, was the two biggest—and Alabama was—. It hit all them states, yeah. That was in 1965, yeah. September 9, 1965. That was Betsy. Four years later the next worse storm we had was Camille.

00:18:31

Jack Bates: It hit Biloxi.

00:18:31

DR: It went across the mouth of the river and wiped Biloxi and about seventy-five or 100 people drowned in that storm over there. That was the next worse one. Then the next—they had several smaller ones, different—. Every year they have one, you know, but nothing—no big

ones. And then the next big one they had—the worst big one they had was Katrina, yeah [*Phone Rings*] in 19—

00:18:58

SR: Two thousand five.

00:18:59

DR: —2005 yeah. And then the worst we ever had was Isaac. That’s the—with the water. No wind, no hardly nothing—and then water damage. It wiped just about everything on the Pass out here. That was Camille. No, Isaac.

00:19:25

Jack Bates: Camille messed Mississippi up bad.

00:19:24

DR: Huh?

00:19:26

Jack Bates: Camille messed the Mississippi Gulf Coast up.

00:19:28

DR: Camille, yeah, but Camille was a bad one over there, yeah.

00:19:31

SR: Did it flood here for Isaac—I mean, not Isaac. For Betsy or Camille?

00:19:39

DR: We--we didn't get much water for—. Camille had a little water. Betsy had a lot of—a lot of water went through, but it didn't stay. And as far as real bad, some of these smaller storms was worse for the water for the tide to rise than it was like, you know, for the big storms, yeah, yeah.

00:20:09

How you doing?

00:20:12

Customer: Hi. Whoa, we got plenty of fish today huh?

00:20:16

SR: Somebody told me that you might have been in a documentary with Jacques Cousteau.

00:20:20

DR: Yeah, I was, yeah.

00:20:23

SR: When was that?

00:20:24

DR: That's a few years back, yeah. The old man was—the old man was living then and we did a documentary on turtles. It's a Cousteau Production, and it's--it's still around. It's in all the libraries and wherever you can get it, yeah. I did that, yeah.

00:20:52

SR: Do you know what that's called?

00:20:54

DR: What it's called? "Something No One Else Has." "Something No One Else Has."

00:21:00

SR: Okay.

00:21:01

DR: Cousteau Productions, yeah. You can get it. You can get a copy of it. I got my son, Hayden, he's got my copy of it, yeah.

00:21:11

SR: So when you said—did you mean that your father was still alive? Is he—

00:21:15

DR: Oh yeah, yeah. Dad was—I had—that's when I had the restaurant and all on the corner down by the lake. Now that must have been about 1975 we made that--we made that

documentary, yeah. And they come back later and they made another one and Hayden was in it and all and I narrated a little bit of it for them, yeah. But I had a turtle at that time when they made that documentary, I had a loggerhead that weighed 135 pounds. And I let the director, the guy that was shooting the movie, he wanted to put it in the pond so I let him have it, yeah. But the turtle weighed 135 pounds, and you can see that in the movie, you know yeah.

00:22:05

SR: So you didn't eat that one?

00:22:07

DR: No, we didn't eat that. But I used to handle a lot of turtles back then, yeah. We—

00:22:13

SR: You were—you're something of the local turtle specialist, it sounds like.

00:22:18

DR: Probably so. Probably the only one, yeah. *[Laughs]* *[Phone Rings]* Probably the only one, yeah.

00:22:28

[Answers Phone] Reno's? No live crabs today, no, Sir. Sorry. Thank you.

00:22:40

SR: What do you think it is that interests you—and interested your dad—about turtle in particular?

00:22:45

DR: About turtles? They’re so good, that’s why. Wait until you taste that, yeah. [*Laughs*] It’s something—you know, the title of that movie is “Something No One Else Has,” and--and that’s about the way it was. Ain't very many people that had them or will fool with them. I used to buy turtles out of Florida and Alabama but they all shut down. They’re like Louisiana now. I used to have a truck back up every week with truckloads of turtles and I’d buy the whole truckload and we sold them all. But nobody else had them either. You know, now ain't nobody got them, yeah, yeah.

00:23:27

How you doing, Sir?

00:23:33

Customer: Crawfish [*Unintelligible*]?

00:23:35

DR: [Addressing the interviewer.] No, they ain't paying no more for it. I said—the fishermen ain't getting it.

00:23:44

SR: Right.

00:23:44

DR: The--the dealers are getting it, yeah. I got to pass it onto my customers. I can't—how can I—I can't pay a lot. I don't make but \$.20 on a pound anyway. How can I make—you can't do it, you know.

00:23:58

SR: We're talking about the crawfish. The price of crawfish went up \$.50 a pound this week, is what we're talking about, yeah.

00:24:05

DR: \$.50, yeah, it went up. Tuesday they was one price; Wednesday went by and Thursday they delivered my crawfish and they was \$.50 higher today than they were Tuesday.

00:24:16

SR: And so what is the—

00:24:20

DR: Yeah, after Easter they'll go back down.

00:24:22

SR: What is the price today per pound for live?

00:24:27

DR: For me what—what you would have to pay?

00:24:32

SR: Yeah, what I would have to pay.

00:24:33

DR: What you—\$2.89 is what I got to get for them, yeah. About three or four weeks ago they was \$4.00 a pound. But they went down quite a bit and now they—but they do that every year. It happens all the time, but—. They’ll cut the price two or three weeks ahead of Easter and get rid all the excess they got and then they’ll go down. And they’ll go up a little. And after Easter, next week, they’ll probably drop fifty—seventy-five—probably drop \$.75, you know yeah, because there ain't going to be as many people looking for them. They ain't going to have no sales for them. That’s the way it goes.

00:25:14

SR: All right, I’m going to wrap this up by asking you what’s the hardest part about this way of life, and what is your favorite part about this way of life? And by “this way of life,” I mean living here in Manchac and also working in the seafood business.

00:25:33

DR: What’s the hardest part? Getting up in the morning. [*Laughs*]

00:25:38

Jack Bates: On the right side of the dirt. [*Laughs*]

00:25:39

DR: Getting up in the morning. And the worst—and the worst part is not being able to drink beer every day like I want to, yeah. [*Laughs*] Huh, that's it, yeah. That's the best and the worst.

00:25:54

SR: Wait, what's the best part?

00:25:58

DR: When I get a chance to drink beer, yeah. [*Laughs*] Or talk to a beautiful young lady like you.

00:26:06

SR: Oh, well, thank you. But I mean, there must be a reason that you're working seven days a week in your retirement. There must be something you like.

00:26:14

DR: Well, it's something that keeps me going. It gives me something to do. You know, I got something to do every day. I don't have to—I don't have to worry about going fishing because I don't fish anymore. I can't drink beer every day, that's for sure. You know that wouldn't--that wouldn't work good with me. [*Laughs*] No, it gives me something to do. He knows it. It gives

me—. Well anyway, it keeps me going, you know, and it keeps me active and I can still walk and I can still see. I still drive. So it--it gives me something to do, yeah. Besides, I make a dollar or two here and there. And I need it, too, yeah. *[Laughs]*

00:27:02

Jack Bates: Yeah, we're in the poor house. *[Laughs]*

00:27:03

SR: When you were growing up, did you envision yourself being a fisherman for a living or being in the seafood business, when your father was fishing?

00:27:14

DR: Well that's going to be kind of hard for me to answer--for me to answer because I was—I was surrounded by commercial fishing. Commercial fishing and trapping and all. We trapped, we fished, we hunted. So no, I--I grew up with it, yeah. But I went to school, and then like I say, when I was sixteen years old I went in the Marine Corps. I made seventeen when I was in North China, yeah. And that changed things. You know, that made a lot of difference. And then I went into law enforcement and stayed in that all my life, you know. But I've been--I've been in business, too, just about all them years, the same way. You know I always had--I always had some kind of little shop or something going, you know, yeah. So that's about it.

00:28:15

SR: Well thank you so much for your time. It was a real pleasure getting your story.

00:28:20

DR: I hope you—I hope it helps you, and I know it will, yeah.

00:28:26

SR: Yeah, it's great. Thank you so much.

00:28:29

DR: You don't have another interview like this. And I'm still the shot.

00:28:37

SR: The shot?

00:28:38

Jack Bates: The shot.

00:28:39

DR: Yeah.

00:28:40

Jack Bates: Big shot.

00:28:42

SR: I would agree with that.

00:28:44

Jack Bates: Been knowing him all my life.

00:28:48

DR: Yeah, they gave me that—they hung that name on me because they used to call me Johnny Ringo, and I smoked a big cigar and I had my old—I still got it, my thirty-eight Smith & Wesson combat masterpiece that was my side arm. And I didn't have a bunch of bullets and all that. I had one—I had a little holster that Hayden, my son Hayden, made me. And I wore that—I had that pistol and I wore it on this side with the butt sticking out this way. Do the cross draw. You don't see many—you didn't see—. So they called me Johnny Ringo.

00:29:33

SR: You would wear that when you were, what, at work or—?

00:29:36

DR: At work, yeah. That was--that was my side arm, yeah, yeah.

00:29:40

SR: To protect yourself?

00:29:41

DR: Oh yeah. Sure, yeah.

00:29:44

SR: Against people or alligators?

00:29:46

DR: All policemen, all police wear side arms, you know. Anyway that was my side arm, yeah.

00:29:54

SR: So you've got two nicknames.

00:29:55

DR: Huh?

00:29:56

SR: You've got two nicknames then.

00:29:58

DR: Yeah.

00:30:00

SR: Okay, well, thank you so much and thank you for joining us Mr. Bates.

00:30:03

Jack Bates: I didn't say much [*Laughs*].

00:30:04

SR: This is great. Thank you.

00:30:07

[End Dunk Reno Interview 2]