MARVIN AUTIN
push pole maker—Cut Off, LA

* * *

Date: November 8, 2011
Location: The Autin Residence—Cut Off, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 1 hour, 46 minutes
Project: Down the Bayou—Louisiana

[Begin Marvin Autin Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, November 8, 2011. I'm in Cut Off, Louisiana with Mr. Marvin Autin. Could I please get you to say your own full name and tell me what you do as a hobby?

00:00:18

Marvin Autin: Okay. I'm Marvin Autin from Cut Off, Louisiana. Basically I do a lot of woodworking—pirogues, push poles, paddles; did a lot of carpenter work, cabinet work. Basically trapping in the past, a lot of hunting, stuff like that.

00:00:51

SR: Okay. Can you tell me, for the record, your birth date?

00:00:53

MA: Yeah. September 11, 1961.

00:00:56

SR: Okay, thanks. We'll get to all of those hobbies in a little while, but could you tell me—we're on West 106th Street, is that right, in Cut Off?

00:01:05

MA: That's right.

00:01:08

SR: And it seems like your whole family lives on this street. Did you grow up here?

00:01:11

MA: I sure did. I was born in Thibodaux, Louisiana and raised in Cut Off.

00:01:18

SR: On this street?

00:01:19

MA: On this street, yeah. West 106th. Back in the past it was Route 133, West 106th, and it's been changed. Now at house number 130.

00:01:33

SR: And you told me a little bit a while ago when we were talking that this used to be kind of surrounded by marshland. Can you tell me a little bit about that and when it changed?

00:01:44

MA: Yeah. When I was younger, we actually had a boat dock back here. It was called Bully Camp Dock. Gulf Oil Company came here and leased it from my grandfather, my mother's daddy, Annissee Autin, and the family worked back here. My daddy drove one of the crew boats.

One of my uncles was the actual port captain, and another uncle drove the crew boat when my daddy was off on his seven days, so they would rotate the shift. And actually not too far down the street there's still a hole in the area, a big old hole where it's pumped out now because of the new highway and all that. But actually there was marsh coming all the way up to about maybe 500-feet in front of where the new highway is right now. And that was actually pumped out around 1978—1979, when they built the remaining part of the hurricane levee that went from Bason's Marina north going to Larose.

00:02:46

SR: Were y'all disappointed when they pumped that out?

00:02:50

MA: I was. I was. I mean, we needed the levee, you know, but me as a kid growing up, I used to trap up in the front right here and we'd shrimp a little bit up in here and duck hunting a lot. And yeah, I was a little upset when they pumped it out at the time. But you know over the years I seen where it actually is--is helping us a lot with the levee we have right now.

00:03:15

SR: Protecting you from storms, you mean?

00:03:16

MA: From storm surge, yeah, yeah. We really need it now. You know it--I'm glad we have it over the years with all the coastal erosion that--that we're having back here.

00:03:26

SR: So you don't trap now like you used to when you were young. Was pumping the marshes—was that part of what made you kind of not do it as much?

00:03:35

MA: Well not--not really because the part of the marsh I trapped in, it--it was—I was a young kid doing it, and it was—you know I had a pirogue I would do it in so I couldn't actually get way back there. I didn't have a big boat at the time, which I had a cousin that would trap further back and that--that marsh still remained after the levee was in place. But since then, you know the last 20 years or so, we lost a lot of marsh and there's not much trapping going on back there because of the erosion.

00:04:03

I've--I've got cousins that do it across the bayou in the Clovelly Farms area. There's still some good marsh there, and they're--they're still doing it. He's one of the few remaining trappers that's left down here, you know.

00:04:16

SR: I'm sorry—what farm area?

00:04:18

MA: Clovelly Farms, yeah.

00:04:21

SR: So this is a little bit off-topic, but I'm curious. Before the oil industry arrived, what did your—say your grandfather—do for a living?

00:04:34

MA: My grandfather was basically a muskrat trapper, and he was trapping—he was born in Cut Off. His name was Pierre Benoit Autin, Peter Autin. Like I say, born in Cut Off, and he had six sons. My father was the right—he was the second-to-oldest, and he was taken out of school at six years old to help trap with the family. And it was done in what's called Lake Salvador, the other side of Lake Salvador, around Lafitte, Bayou Perot. There was a lot more land there back at that time than there is now.

00:05:19

My grandfather would—he had an old skiff with a Model-T Ford engine in it, and he would tow the six pirogues in back of it with the six boys and he would drop each one off in what we call a trenasse—like a little ditch cut through the marsh to run the traps. He would drop each boy off at one of the trenasse, and they would take a good part of the day going through the trenasse running the traps, getting the muskrats. And I was told back then they would get about a quarter a piece—25-cents each—for the pelts. And I was told by my father many times that the six boys—it wasn't unusual you know to hit a day now and then of 400 to 600 muskrats sometimes. Not every day, but it would--it would amount to that much sometimes.

00:06:08

And they had to go back to the camp. In other words, Bayou Perot, on one end, when they would drop the boy off, there was a—I believe it was Bayou Rigolettes on the other side—

so my grandfather would make the rounds and the boys would come through the trenasse and end up on the other bayou, and my grandpa would pick them up. And they'd go back to the camp and skin the muskrats and put them on the molds, which I still have some of those molds today. It--it was passed down, and I--I actually used some of those when I was a kid trapping. But when I trapped it wasn't—it was to make extra money, because I was like maybe 13 years old and no one would hire me at that time, so I just would go trapping after school and on weekends and make extra money.

00:06:51

But actually, my grandfather, it was in Bayou Perot around Lafitte and Crown Point; they were in that area. When they weren't trapping, when it was out of season, they would actually go into Lake Salvador, and they would get cypress logs out of the lake; they was called sinkers. What it was—I was told by my father and uncle that there was a logging company at one time cutting the cypress trees out that part of the lake, and there was this canal that would go—I believe it was called the Kenta Canal. I believe it's part of the [Jean] Lafitte Park right now. You can go and see that canal. It would go--it would go from Lake Salvador, I believe, to the Mississippi River. And the company would come cut the logs and float them through there. And now and then in bad weather some of those logs would break loose and they'd sink. They called them sinkers; they would sink in the lake.

00:07:51

So my father and his brothers and my grandfather would take this boat. They'd go out into the lake and they would feel with a metal pole, feel in the mud, and when they would feel a log they would take something—the best way I could explain it, he would call it a tong, and he would tell me it looked something like an ice-tong where they used to grab the blocks of ice with

at the ice factories. They would take this tong and--and grab, actually stick it underwater and feel until the tong would grab the log. Then they would attach--the tong was attached to a wench on the boat. So they would tighten up on the wench. He told me some of those logs were stuck so far in the mud that when they would put tension on the rope and start pulling, the side of the boat would start to lean. They'd let it go all the way to the water line and then they would stop. They'd take a break on the deck. They'd see the bubbles coming up like the log slowly getting loose. When the boat would start to rise a little, they'd tighten it some more until eventually the log would float up.

00:08:52

They had a little—what was called? —they would call it a "wez" [***Phonetic Spelling***]. They had like a little setup at their camp in Lafitte where they would take this log or logs, whatever they had for the day, and they would pull them up at the camp and--and dry them. I don't remember exactly how long they dried them to—at what point they would start carving them—but they would carve dugout pirogues out of these logs. And I was told one time that my father and his brothers and grandfather picked up a log so big in that lake that they actually got five pirogues out of this log: Two at the bottom—two wide at the bottom—and three going up. And you know, they--they had some big ones in there, and there's--there's probably still logs today in there, but I would not know how to look for them or find them. **[*Laughs*]** But they would actually sell these dugouts for about $40 at the time. And I don't have one; none of the six brothers were left with any because in those days they had to sell everything they would produce to make a living. And my grandfather sold each one of their trapping pirogues for that reason, you know. That's why I don't have one today, but I heard there was a man down the bayou, a Mr. Plaissance, that had one. Well I was told that a few years back, and I actually got to see the

pirogue. Mr. Plaissance did not want to sell it. I heard he passed away, and I have no idea where the pirogue is now, but that's the only one I ever saw.

00:10:23

SR: So that's one of the ones that your grandfather made?

00:10:28

MA: Yes, it was actually a pirogue that my grandfather made. Now there's a little story about him making the first. The oldest story I could recall was when my grandfather was about 14 years old. Right across the bayou from here in Cut Off, around East 72nd Street, somewhere in there—actually around where Southern Glass is located right now—they owned some of that property at one time, and he went back there with his father. And it was actually the same pirogue I saw by Mr. Plaissance; Mr. Plaissance told me this story—that my grandfather would normally charge $12 to go in the marsh, cut that log, hollow it out the best he can and bring it back to the front and complete it. And $12 back then was a lot of money, you know, and he—. The story went that he had to tell Mr. Plaissance, "Look, I'm going to have to charge you $1 more because we had a little bit of trouble getting this log out of the woods." So he had to charge him $13 for the pirogue, so Mr. Plaissance had to think it over a little while. And he said, "Well, okay. Being you worked for it that hard I'll go ahead and give you the $13." **[*Laughs*]** But I did get to see that pirogue, you know, the only one I got to see.

00:11:44

SR: Wow. Let me get really basic here. Could you tell us, for the record, what a pirogue is?

00:11:51

MA: Yeah, yeah. A pirogue—most people would call it a canoe. You know it's not an actual canoe, but it--it was made by the Cajuns to hunt. Basically, from what I understand, it was mostly used to trap at first, and then it—it's probably on average about 14-feet long. It's made—the original pirogues were dug out of cypress logs. My daddy told me they used to use what was called an adze. I don't know the English pronunciation for that, but it's like a—the best I could describe it was a hatchet that looked kind of sideways-like. They would dig out the wood with that. And I used to ask my father when they were digging out on the inside, "How did they know when to stop?" You see, they would form the outside of the pirogue, but I always wondered how they knew when to stop on the inside and not to go through and through and to mess it up.

00:12:47

So he said, "Look good." He showed me an old pirogue one time, but it was someone else's pirogue, but they had these little pegs. I thought it was just patches—you know, like for holes or something—but it was little dowel-looking pegs about maybe half-inch around; they would--he would drill a hole in the pirogue, drill a hole in certain areas, and shove these pegs in them so far in. And when he was carving on the inside, when he'd reach a peg, he knew it was time to slow down and start doing the fine work on it and not to mess up the inside. So that--that's how he would get the inside dug out.

00:13:24

SR: So they would drive the pegs in from the other side?

00:13:27

MA: From the outside. Yes, from the outside of the pirogue, yeah, yeah. And it--it was a lot of work; you know, a lot of work by hand. They didn't have power tools back then. You know they would cut the tree down with what he would call a passe-partout, which in English probably translates to "pass through everything", you know. It was this long saw; you've might seen them in movies and all with the lumberjacks, but a man would grab each side of the saw and--and saw through the tree. And like I say, they would cut them down, and if--if it was in the lakes they took them to the camp. If it was in the swamps, they'd have to—sometimes they would—there was an old story with my grandfather; it--it's—I have an old—talking about pirogues and stuff like that, I've got an old article here from the *States-Item*; it was the *Times*—now it's *The Times-Picayune,* but it was once the *States-Item,* and it's a story on my grandfather. It kind of gives you a little bit of an idea of what I'm talking about, and I could read it to you.

00:14:35

SR: Yeah, that sounds great. You're good to have kept all this. Yeah, yeah, that's good.

00:14:45

MA: Yeah, it's an old article. I'm going to try my best to make it out. Okay, this was from Friday, March 24, 1972, the *States-Item* in New Orleans. There's a picture of Pierre Benoit on this article with his son, Alfred. Uncle Fred was the oldest son; he was deaf. At the age of three or four he had tonsillitis real bad and they didn't have the—you know, they didn't run to the doctor's. Doctors wasn't easily available back then like they are now. They were trapping and all and he caught an infection and his bad tonsils caused him to lose his hearing.

00:15:24

But he--he was the oldest brother, and my father was right under him in age, and back then my grandfather would put the oldest son in charge—you know, as far as backing up the other boys and making sure they did what they were told to do by my grandfather. Being that Uncle Fred was deaf, they put my daddy in charge, which gave him the nickname Duz. My Uncle Alvin would always call him Duz. I always wondered why, and he explained to me one day, "Well, Duz does everything because **[*Laughs*]** he's in charge of the other brothers," you know.

00:15:56

But anyway, this is the story that I do have, the only story I got of my grandfather. Okay, it starts—it's by Mr. Tom Frazer. *Works on Casual Basis But…At 75--Still Part of the Bayou Life*. This was in 1972 when he was 75 years old.

00:16:16

Okay, "On the advent of spring, the South Louisiana's Bayou country" —wait. "The advent of spring, the South Louisiana's Bayou country draws sluggish spirits from gray winter sanctuaries and thrusts them into the sunny out-of-doors. Fishermen head for the bays and canals seeking trout and redfish. Families seeking succulent crawfish line roadside waterways with baited nets, and shrimpers along the bayous ready their Lafitte skiffs and shrimp boats for trawling activity. Still a part of the unique life of South Louisiana is Peter Autin—" Actually, it was Pierre Autin, but in--in English it would be Peter. "—one of the true old-timers and a storehouse of knowledge on how to do it.

00:17:05

“Autin, now 75, lives at 2673 Barataria Boulevard. A passing motorist might notice him at work with his son, Alfred, weaving a trawl net or mending a trawl board. A sign in front of the house advertises trawl nets, boards, and repairs, but Autin explains he works on a casual basis. He says an acquaintance might buy the twine, corks, and lead, and ask him to make a trawl net. “And then he’ll give me a little something for making it,” Autin remarks. “I do this to pass the time. Sometimes I can work; sometimes I can't.” Now to remind you, he was 75 years old; at one time this was his full-time business.

00:17:49

“He explains his health no longer permits him to trawl, trap, hunt, and do carpentry, so he and his son make and repair nets and take life as it comes at a leisurely pace. The same fascination a child finds in an attic can be found by an outsider interested in bayou life when he visits Autin’s garage where they do their work. They weave the nets just outside the garage doorway shaded from the sun by huge canvas tarps stretched taunt over poles.” I still recall that tarp when I was a kid going and visiting there. “The spread of productive canvas is the same used on shrimp rigs to ward off the burning sun and drenching rains.

00:18:35

“In other words, the Autins are working in their backyard just the way they would a boarded shrimp boat. Other interesting items include a hand-cranked grindstone bought 62 years ago by Autin’s uncle. Autin says it was much larger then but since has been ground down to about a foot or so in diameter.” And I do remember playing with that as a kid. I got caught turning it too fast sometimes and my grandpa would correct me. **[*Laughs*]**

00:19:02

Okay, back to the story. "He remembers getting into the net-making business when only 14 at Leeville, Louisiana, where he worked on a seam and, later, a trawl. 'You've got to have a good head,' says Autin of the skill required to make the intricate net with thousands of knots."

00:19:20

Now remember, when he started making nets, there wasn't—he would not go to the store and buy your twine at that time. He would actually make the nets knot-by-knot. This is way back then, you know, but when this story was made he was making it with the pre-tied webbing.

00:19:37

Okay, back to the story. Let me find my place here. Okay, "…with thousands of knots. He noted that good eyesight is essential too. Incredibly to the uninitiated, he says it takes him and his son only two or three days to make a trawl 35 to 40-feet long. Other items in the garage include crab traps; hand-carved duck decoys; newly made trawl boards; bird houses; a strange-looking pair of two-by-fours hinged in the middle, which Autin explains was used to scoop up grease when hogs were boiled; short, hoe-like wooden scrapers used to sort shrimp; etcetera.

00:20:19

"Autin remembers the day when he and a friend decided to make an old-fashioned pirogue out of a cypress tree. He says they cut down the tree in the morning and by 4:00 in the afternoon had it hollowed out enough to paddle home. He also remembers the good ole days when waterfowl were more abundant; the day when he went out duck hunting using his homemade duck call and fired some 200 shot shells bagging a staggering total of 510 ducks."

00:20:51

That is the story in the *States-Item* dated March 24, 1972, and I did hear many stories about those duck hunts, and they are true. **[*Laughs*]**

00:21:02

SR: What would he do with 500 ducks?

00:21:06

MA: That is a good question. He had six sons to feed, but they had a lot of friends—you know, a lot of trappers around there—and I'm sure they--they were well-used. **[*Laughs*]**

00:21:16

SR: Yeah, because they're—

00:21:19

MA: They would also—it's not in his story, but it was also told: Another one of their side jobs, besides making the pirogues, out of trapping season they would also do some guided duck hunts. They would make blinds and bring in people to hunt. You know, like sportsmen to hunt—guided duck hunts back then, among a few other things. Carpenter work and whatever they had to do to make a dollar back then, they would use their skills.

00:21:44

SR: What do you remember—how do you remember eating duck when you were young?

00:21:51

MA: Oh, eating duck when I was young. Oh, my mama is still alive. She's 81 right now, and she's one of the—I call that "the original cooks" down here. **[*Laughs*]** She would, what we call it: rôti it; that was one of my favorites, like a roast in a pot. She would also make a fricassee, like a stew with the ducks. She still does that today when I can get ducks. And she's a great cook, and my best memories were back when—my best memories of ducks was back when she was what's called grillée-ing it. I'd get--I'd wake up in the morning and I could smell where my daddy would have cleaned the ducks outside. And the little feathers that was left on the duck, my mom had them over her gas stove burning those little feathers that was left on the body before she prepared it. And it would make this—you know, burnt-feather smell in the house. And it would get my appetite going because I knew she was getting ready to rôti some ducks. **[*Laughs*]**

00:22:47

But--but we had a lot of that back then, you know.

00:22:51

SR: What about gumbo? Did she make gumbo?

00:22:54

MA: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Any Cajun recipe you could think of, she--she can do it, you know. Great gumbos, fricassees, jambalayas. Not the stuff you buy in a box; the real stuff. She--she's good; she's still good at it. That's one of her favorite pastimes right now, is cooking, still at age 81. She--she cooks every day; you know, she loves it.

00:23:16

SR: What kind of ducks would those have been, do you know?

00:23:18

MA: Mostly I remember what we called a black duck; it was mostly the blacks, a lot of teal, not too many mallards—now and then a mallard, French duck, but mostly blacks. Black duck and teal; now and then a pintail or a spoonbill; some poule d'eaus, like coots— poule d'eaus—but it was mostly blacks and teal.

00:23:42

SR: Was there a difference in taste—like, did you like one better over the other?

00:23:45

MA: I surely did. Blacks were pretty much my favorite in a rôti—you know, just cooked. I'm not a cook, but the best way I could describe it, she would just cook it in a pot like that, rôti-ed. And now the teal would make—. I loved the teal in a fricassee. Teal fricassee was great, and the rôti-ed black was hard to beat.

00:24:10

SR: What is a fricassee?

00:24:12

MA: Fricassee is a brown gravy. Basically a brown gravy—you know, brown-gravy-stew-type meal.

00:24:23

SR: Oh, I have so many questions from all of that. I guess—well, first of all, where is Barataria Boulevard from here? Is that in Cut Off?

00:24:33

MA: No. Barataria Boulevard is actually in Marrero, Louisiana. Yeah, it's--it's a road that leads to Lafitte, yeah.

00:24:39

SR: Yeah, so he—your grandfather, at one point, moved to Marrero?

00:24:43

MA: Actually, back to the story. When they were trapping in Crown Point, the reason they stopped trapping, the neutrals—I call it neutrals, but it's known as nutria—was introduced. I believe it accidentally was introduced here through a World's Fair or something. Some type of fair, someone brought one in—brought a few in—and they were released in the marsh and over-populated. And when the nutria came out they kind of messed up--started messing up the muskrat mounds and eating up some of the marsh, and they wasn't worth much. So that's--that's—from what my daddy told me, that's what drove them out of muskrat trapping—nutria. And after that, you know they got away from that and my--my father and all grew up and moved out, and my grandfather moved to Barataria Boulevard, where he started his net business, which he always made nets before for himself. And to the best of what I was told—or I could remember

—when he quit trapping, he may have lived a little while in Lafitte, but at one point he moved to Barataria Boulevard, and that's where he started his net-making business and so on; decoy carving; all kind of apparatuses for trawling like the crab—you see them now out of metal, what you catch crabs with, like these fork-looking things that—we call them a fork to grab the crab. But he used to make them out of wood.

00:26:05

He also--he'd make a variety of things. He--he also made shoe shine boxes for the fellows that would shine the shoes in New Orleans on Canal Street and all. My mama had polio as a kid, and she had to get corrective shoes, and once a year we'd go to this Buster Brown shoe store on Canal Street and my daddy would get his shoes shined. And I think it was like for 10-cents or something, and my grandfather made the majority of those shoe shine boxes. I actually had one but lost it; it was a little box probably about a foot and a half long, maybe eight inches wide, a little bit of a—it was a little bit wider at the bottom than on top, but on the top what used to interest me, he had a piece of wood cut out in the shape of a shoe. And people would put their foot on that and the--and the fellow doing the shoe shine would get in his box and grab the shoe shine and his rag and all out of the box. **[*Laughs*]** But that's another story there. But he made all--all types of things; like I said, whatever it took them to make a dollar back then, he would--he would do it.

00:27:05

SR: Yeah, talk about self-sufficient. I guess your grandfather just grew up with that way of life. Did he grow up in this area, or did he—was he born in a different country?

00:27:18

MA: No, he was actually born in--in Cut Off. And like I say, when my father—he was raised across the bayou from West 106th right here, about where Southern Glass is located right now, and when my father was about six years old, that's when he brought them to Lafitte to trap.

00:27:35

SR: What about his heritage? I mean, I know that you mentioned that everybody spoke French. Did--did your ancestors come from Nova Scotia?

00:27:45

MA: Oh yeah, oh yeah. That's something I didn't take out, but I've got some family history I could show you. If you go on the Internet and put in Benjamin Autin—now, Autin at one point was spelled with an 'H.' It was H-a-u-t-i-n. Somewhere along the line they lost the 'H.' I've got documents on that tracing all the way back to France. There was an Archbishop, Francois Autin; I have paperwork on that—descendants from him. Also all the way back to Queen—I believe it was Queen Catherine or something. I would have to look up the paperwork, but we traced all the way back to the year 700-something AD. Actually traced back to the ones who started--the ones who started the Roman Catholic Empire, the family blood all the way back then. And there's an Autin—Benjamin came from Nova Scotia, but there's an Autin before Benjamin that the Queen —I'm not sure; I might be incorrect on some of this, but I'll get as close as I can. I would have to look in the paperwork, but when France was part of the US, we've got some documents showing that either the King there or someone with high authority there wanted to bring—I don't know the actual word for it—bring like authority from that bloodline to the New France. And one of

my ancestors actually married some bloodline to the Queen Catherine. And, again, I'd have to look all that up to be more accurate on it, but I do have the paperwork on it. And Benjamin married—he's the actual Autin that came down from Nova Scotia down to Louisiana, and he married a German lady, which ties us into the Rommel family, and that can also be found on the Internet. And he had to live in a—I don't know what parish it was, but I believe he had German—married to a German, you had to live in that certain parish at the time.

00:30:07

I want to say St. Martin [Parish], but I'm not sure. But, again, I would have to bring up that paperwork to be more accurate. That's the best I could remember on that, you know.

00:30:15

SR: Wow, so they go deep back into France. What about your mom's family. Same kind of story?

00:30:21

MA: I don't have as much background on my mother, but it's basically in the French--French area. She's got brothers that fought World War II. I've got an uncle that died in World War II, one that came back from World War II and died offshore in a boating accident. It's a long story, but her--her brother, the one who died overseas, from the best I can understand it was—I believe it was the last battle, Battle of the Bulge I believe, and he was in a tank. And I've got documents on that and all and pictures, and he was with a buddy and the enemy—his tank actually jammed, and he told his buddy, "Look, get out of here. Save yourself. I'm--I'm stuck." And they didn't have time. And that's how we know the story. The fellow left and he was—I believe they threw a

grenade in the tank. But he--he died in the tank. We never—they never recovered the body or anything.

00:31:25

And the story goes the fellow that--that saved [him]self, that got out of the tank, came down to my mother's--to my grandfather—. Now this is a different; this is Annissee Autin, my mother's father. He was an oysterman. The man came down and went to tell the story to my--my grandma. My grandpa was already deceased; my grandmother did not want to hear it, so she sent the man away.

00:31:53

So my mother told the man while he was leaving, "Look, come back one day." So they set up a date when my grandmother wasn't there and he came to tell the story. That's how we know the story, you know.

00:32:04

And the other brother, he came back from the war and he went--he got a job. His girlfriend was expecting a baby and they were going to get married. And he went offshore on an oil field boat, and there was a storm coming and actually a few people didn't want to go, and he was still all brave from the war and all and said, "Well, I'm going to go. I'll take the boat out there." And I believe they was carrying explosives. And you know he went out there and the storm came around and they just found little pieces of the boat. It was a wooden tug, and they never found his body. So she lost one to the war and one to a boat incident in the oil field. And that was just a few years after my mother lost her daddy of an ulcer. He was an oysterman and he went in for a—which now is a simple surgery, for an ulcer, but back then they didn't have the technology like now and he died of a blood clot before he came home. So my grandmother lost

her husband and one son to the war and one to the oil field within a short period of time, and she never was the same after that. You know she was--she was quiet after that; you know stayed in her room a lot over the years, wouldn't watch a war movie. Anything that would come up on TV about the war, she'd turn it off. She just—it was a lot of impact on her, you know.

00:33:29

SR: I can't imagine. Being a mother, I can't imagine what that would be like. Boy that's survivors. What is your mother's name?

00:33:38

MA: Gloria. Gloria Marie Autin.

00:33:42

SR: What was her maiden name?

00:33:44

MA: Autin. Actually, I'm 100-percent Autin. We're probably—it's a few cousins, third cousin or something to my daddy, yeah.

00:33:54

SR: Oh wow. Again, I have a lot of questions. One thing that comes to mind is, it sounds like your father and his brothers, they worked hard as young people. And he would tell you these stories. Was it with nostalgia, or did he—did he dislike, or did he like, his upbringing?

00:34:17

MA: He liked it. He did like it. It was--it was a tough living, but it was a good way of living. You know it wasn't fast-paced, but they were--they worked very hard for the little bit they'd have, and they—it made them appreciate everything they had. You know my grandfather was very strict. I was told that by my father and some of my uncles. My daddy used to have this story in Crown Point where in their yard there was a fenced-in yard, and on the outside of the fence the grass might have been a foot or two high, and on the inside it was just a dust because they wasn't allowed to play outside that fence. And they had this tire with a stick they would roll around to play with, you know. That was one of their toys and my--my father used to joke that my grandfather was so strict that the first time he got to see a picture show he was 19 years old. They didn't get to do much outside of their work; you know they had to help support. You know it was in the time of the Depression, and he used to tell me when even the sugar was rationed and they--they'd get like one pair of shoes a year back then. And they had to make do with everything they had.

00:35:34

You know it was a tough living, but he was proud of it. My grandfather raised them right, and I--I got to know my grandfather until I was about 15, and I really do miss that man. You know the little bit I got to work there. I was 15 years old, and I wanted this eight-track tape player. That was the big thing at the time and it cost(ed) like $40. And I was bothering my parents about it and I said, "You think Grandpa could give me a job," to where I could try to make $40? And they talked to him a couple times and one day they approached me; they said, "Marvin, look. We're going to bring you by Papa"—which was Pierre Benoit Autin—"for two

weeks, and you could go there and he's going to show you how to work, make nets." Oh I was all excited. I got there and first night I was there I was scared because it was around New Orleans. You know back then you wouldn't hear of much crime or nothing, but I was never in the city and I was afraid to go there. And for the—you know, as a kid it was a new area to me.

00:36:35

And my grandfather that night got by the bed. He knelt down and said his prayers before bed. He says, "Are you scared over here?" I says, "Yeah." He said "Well, look what I got." He raised up his pillow and he had this big ole pistol in this pillow **[*Laughs*]**, so when I saw the pistol, man, I felt so protected I fell asleep and slept the best I ever slept that night. It took the worry out of me. **[*Laughs*]**

00:36:58

But anyway, he--he put me about three--four days putting twine on the needle that was used to sew the trawl, and I started to get bored with it. I said, "I want to learn how to make a trawl." I was a little kid but I would catch onto things, and he--he kept me a little too long on that twine, and I wanted to progress, you know.

00:37:19

So I'd bother him and he'd say, "Are you sure you got that? You--you got that done?" I says, "I want to make some nets." So he showed me how to sew the main net onto the main line, and anyway, make a long story short, by the end of those two weeks he came to pay me, and he knew through my parents how much I had to make. I didn't know he knew that, but he--he came and he said, "Well, I'm going to pay you. We're finished; you did your work." He says, "How much you need to make that tape player?" And he--he had the money ready, but he wanted to see what I'd tell him. I said, "Well, $40. I don't know if I worked for that much or not, so—." He

had the $40 in his hand and he came to give it to me. And there's one saying that stuck with me all my life from that day on. He--I came to get that $40 from him and he wouldn't let it go. And he told me a simple line. He says, "Look, it's not what you make that's going to count. It's what you save." And that stuck with me through all these years, and it's—. He had a lot of simple lines, old man, and but if you'd listen to him-— That's why I—you know, I lost him; at least I got to know him until 15, but I wish I could have known a lot more what he knew because he--he did have—he had a lot of wisdom, and what he would say he meant it. And if--if you were in a room and he was talking and he knew you was in that room and there was a few people in there and he said something important, he--he figured you heard it because you was in that room. So the next time he came around and you didn't know, he would correct you on that and say, "Well, I said it."

00:38:53

You know he was the type, he'd say something one time and you better have heard it. **[*Laughs*]** He didn't want to repeat things, and you had to pay attention when you was around him. But he was a great man. You know very—missed a lot by a lot of people, you know.

00:39:09

SR: Did he have any girls, or was it all boys?

00:39:12

MA: All boys, all boys. There was an obituary a year or two ago from my Uncle Alvin, and in the obituary I saw the--the remaining brothers and the ones who were deceased, and at the end it said something about an infant girl. But I'm investigating that right now **[*Laughs*]**. You know,

I'm not sure if that was a mistake or--or what. But I never heard about it, but it's a possibility, but I got to ask a couple remaining uncles about that. But it was six brothers.

00:39:43

SR: Well now, we haven't even gotten to the way that I found you, which is fine. This is how it goes and this is really fascinating and perfect. But, the way that I found you was that I was driving along the bayou. And there are signs all along the bayou of people advertising things for sale. And I kept seeing this little sign that said, "push poles." And finally one day I turned into this street and met you. Can you tell me what a push pole is and how long that sign has been out there?

00:40:20

MA: I sure can because I've made a few of them. A push pole is basically when you're paddling your pirogue in the deep water—using your paddle, of course—but when you get up in the marsh to, let's say to duck hunt or trap, it gets really hard to paddle so you use a pole to push you with. You--you're sitting down paddling, but to use a push pole you want to stand up in your pirogue. And back when I was a kid and trapped, the marsh was a lot harder at the bottom and I could push that pirogue a lot faster because it would—you know, you had something, a hard surface in the trenasses and little canals, to push.

00:41:03

Now you get back there because of the erosion and all and you--you'll stick that pole in there and sometimes it goes five feet down because the mud is so soft. It's not the same. But there are some areas that--that's still like it used to be, but not many.

00:41:14

But actually the push poles used to push the pirogue around, and I seen—go up in a north wind, what we call a nor', to duck hunt and have just some soft wet mud in the hard marsh, and to get to my duck blind I needed that pole. And many mornings I hoped that I wouldn't accidentally break my push pole because I'd have been stuck on that mud flat. It got me out of a lot of binds **[*Laughs*]**, you know, and--and I still have my same push pole my daddy made for me as a kid. I sell push poles now to keep the tradition going, and my grandfather made them out of necessity. My daddy did and at one point. When my daddy neared retirement he started making them to sell to have extra—to keep, basically keep the tradition going. My uncle sold them. He's deceased now. My daddy is deceased. I still make them. I don't make much money on them. It's just the idea of keeping the tradition going.

00:42:11

You know it's more fishermen now than hunters down here, but I do sell them to a couple little sporting goods stores that—. We don't sell a lot of them, but it's just enough—some people that appreciate them, they'll buy them because you got a lot of aluminum—. Not to talk bad about the aluminum poles and all, now. I'm sure they're good. But your wood, when you--when you're creeping up on ducks, if you're a good duck hunter, you don't want to make a sound. And that wood, it's a natural sound if you tap it on your pirogue or anything like a stick or something hitting. That duck is going to—nine out of ten [times] it won't affect them. But you tap that aluminum pole on that pirogue a little too hard, your ducks will take off in the air. You know it--it does make a difference to the experienced hunter. Not that I'm putting down aluminum poles again, but some people still appreciate that wood and still want them, you know. So I'm just keeping the tradition going on that, and I'll do it as long as I can. That's the story on that.

00:43:11

SR: Tell me how you make that.

00:43:15

MA: Okay. I'll step back a little bit to my--when my father first made them, and my grandfather used to make the actual pole out of a tree. They would hand-carve all that; they would cut the tree. It was a lot of labor in it. That's why I was—that's why my push pole lasted so long. My daddy told me how important it was, the work that went in there to make it, and the consequences I'd have if I break it. **[*Laughs*]**

00:43:47

So anyway, through time—I mean they--they had made it because they needed it. I'm making it to sell, and for it to be economical I have to buy the round part from the lumberyard already made. I can carve them, but the amount of labor that goes in them, I would not sell very many because of the price I'd have to charge. I don't mind making one if somebody asks for one, you know, but economically I have to buy what's called a full round molding now already made.

00:44:26

Now what's called the fourchons, the fourchons, the forks that go on the end of the pole, what I'm using right now I would—I'd buy wood when I can't get it by hand, but I actually had cypress trees growing in my yard right here, four of them, and the roots were coming up around my slab and all, so I--I cut my cypress trees, and in the process—they were about 15--18 years old. My cousin was here helping me, and we never really cut it for that reason, but we say, "Hey, wait. We're cutting some cypress trees here. Let's make use of this."

00:45:03

So we took them—the logs—to the local mill by Dufrene Lumberyard and had them cut. And I remembered my daddy's stories and all, how to dry the wood, so no one showed me, but I remembered those stories they said in French when I was a kid. A lot of things I learned was just hearing them talk years ago, and I was taught to listen when people—older people—talked, and I remembered a lot of that. So I remembered how they said to dry the wood. So I took those cypress boards and dried them, and I still got enough left right now. I've been making push poles for the last four or five years out of those four cypress trees. The forks with the fourchons, and the head, the handle on it. I still have cypress from those trees. And when that runs out, if I don't find more cypress trees, I guess I'll have to go back to the lumberyard like Robichaux in Thibodaux where I get my cypress.

00:45:55

You can make push poles with harder wood like oak and all for the forks, which would actually last longer. But I'm trying to keep the tradition my daddy and grandfather used, so I try to use the same—most of the same—product as what they used. And your question was: How do I make them?

00:46:16

Yeah, yeah, and actually the--the end of the pole, I have to taper it down. I have to make an angle on it, and I use the--the wood from the tree. I make the forks and I actually glue them on and I clamp them down and nail them, and then I use—this is my little secret. A lot of people try to figure out what it is. It looks like a bolt, but it's not. I drill a quarter-inch hole through the forks through and through, and there's a--there's a piece of metal I use to hold it together where if the glue by any chances gives out, or the nail, this piece is going to hold. And I tell everybody,

if you buy a pole from me and that undoes in any kind of way, I'll fix it for free for you. That's how confident I am in that process that a pole is holding together.

00:47:08

As far as the head, the handle on it, I dowel the end of the full round down and I drill a hole in the head and I glue that onto the end of the pole that is hand-carved, the head. And the forks are carved out to match the push pole.

00:47:27

SR: What did your father and grandfather use to keep the fork together? Did they use metal?

00:47:33

MA: Yeah, pretty much the same thing I'm using. They passed that down to me. It's very simple. If you look at it, it looks like a bolt, but it's not. It--it's handmade and there's some riveting that goes into it on an anvil. It--the more you work it, the tighter it gets, so it--it really, really secures the forks to the pole. For you to--for you to break it, you really got to try to break it, you know.

00:47:59

SR: You mean the metal part is handmade?

00:48:01

MA: The metal part pin-type deal I make that holds the—that goes through and through the whole push pole and about four inches long from fork to fork. And that's what holds it together.

00:48:18

SR: We're looking at one right now. Now, oh, so tell me about the molds that you have that you showed me earlier.

00:48:26

MA: Okay, let me--let me grab one of them. I could get the right—I got the date on them.

00:48:34

SR: Is that what you called it, a mold?

00:48:35

MA: Um—

00:48:38

SR: Or, what did you call it?

00:48:37

MA: I call it a pattern. Yeah, a pattern. It's an actual wood pattern of a push pole fork, of a fourche. This one is the original push pole fork pattern by Alvin Autin, which was my daddy's brother, and it was used--also used by my father, George, to make poles and which I used after my father's death. This is dated from 1960; this is the oldest one I have. It's an actual fork of a push pole. There's a little jig nailed on it to where you could put it in the saw and cut them out. I

have--also have a later-dated pattern of 1978. The reason for that is the pattern from 1960 was when they used to hand-carve the whole pole like I was explaining earlier. Once they started getting it from the lumberyard, they had to make a narrower fork because the full round from the lumberyard is a little narrower. That's the reason I have a different pattern that my daddy changed. I'm still using that pattern today.

00:49:46

SR: Somebody had some real foresight by putting the dates on those. Or did that happen after the fact, do you think?

00:49:52

MA: Okay, that's after the fact. That's--that was told to me by my daddy, the one in 1960. That's approximate. That's within a year or—give or take a year. That's the best we could figure. And the one in 1978 was actually given to me by my daddy. I remember that because that's when he was sure—I remember that date well because that's when he was starting to show me how to make the poles, and he died, he passed away, in 1982. And he made them until his death. And you know it was natural for me to just keep making them since then. And I do it every year before the winter. I get started on them and make enough to where I think it could hold me through the winter.

00:50:38

SR: Winter is the season when people use push poles?

00:50:42

MA: Basically the season, yeah. The season when they're using them. You know, the two duck seasons and—but like I said, again, I sell some all year-round now sometimes. Now and then I'll get a fisherman that's going to Grand Isle or something to fish and they'll stop and buy one.

00:50:54

SR: How much do you charge for one these days?

00:50:57

MA: These days a push pole—I have them painted and unpainted. An unpainted push pole right now is $35. A painted one is $45.

00:51:06

SR: Do you—

00:51:06

MA: Your painted push pole is going to last you a lot longer, but a lot of people would rather save that $10, but if you go to buy you a can of paint to paint it yourself you're going to spend that on the can of paint. But I put—you know I have two coats of paint on them for $10 more, and that--that pole—. But 90-percent of the people want it unpainted. But you paint that pole, it'll last a lot longer.

00:51:29

SR: You have one here that's painted green. Is that what color you use when you paint them?

00:51:33

MA: Yeah, basically it--there's two colors. There's a duck boat drab, it's called, like a tannish color, and there's a marsh green. Lately I've been painting them with marsh green paint, the same original colors we used to paint our pirogues and hunting equipment with. They still make that paint today.

00:51:51

SR: Who are your customers? Are they all local, or do you get people like me who come and think, "Wow, this is a cool little local item"?

00:52:00

MA: Mostly—I never really advertise my push poles except for this sign in the front. Again, it's to keep the tradition going, but I've sold a few to people from out of town, but mostly if they're from out of town it'll be somebody coming in to fish or something that—you know, they might have an aluminum [one]. And then I've had people come and say, "Man, we didn't realize anybody was making these wooden push poles." But when they realize that they—a lot of them want it just to have to say that this is a wooden handmade product, you know.

00:52:33

SR: Do you have siblings?

00:52:36

MA: I have one daughter.

00:52:38

SR: But do you have brothers and sisters?

00:52:39

MA: Well siblings, yeah **[*Laughs*]**. I've got a sister, yeah.

00:52:44

SR: I'm wondering if she—. It seems like you were born with this interest in keeping the—learning the crafts and keeping traditions alive. Did she have that too?

00:52:55

MA: My sister, she's—the craft she would have probably took—picked up more like sewing and cooking from my mother. You know she--she never really did get into the hunting part. She got into eating what we hunt **[*Laughs*]**, and my daughter is a hunter. She—oh yeah, big time, yeah, yeah. She picked up from me. I've got one daughter, and I joke with my friends that have sons. Some of my friends say, "Man, your daughter does more with you than what my son does with me," as far as sporting and hunting and fishing.

00:53:29

SR: What is your daughter's name?

00:53:29

MA: Katie, yeah.

00:53:33

SR: And how old is she?

00:53:34

MA: She's 19.

00:53:36

SR: And do y'all—you currently hunt?

00:53:38

MA: Yes, we do. Yes, we do.

00:53:42

SR: For ducks or for what?

00:53:43

MA: Yeah, I took her on a duck hunt last year. And we just recently came back from Tennessee. I brought my nephew on a youth deer hunt a couple weekends ago.

00:53:56

SR: Now to the pirogues. Because you have two pirogues sitting here, and before we started recording you told me the history of those two. Could you revisit that, please?

00:54:06

MA: Sure can. Okay, the older pirogue you're looking at, it's a pirogue built by Alvin Autin, my daddy's brother. He used to work in a shipyard on the Houma Shortcut. At the time it was called Allied. He used to finish the cabins inside the boats, the supply boats, and all that was being built. When he would return home, he would build these pirogues at night for extra money. And I had—originally I had a pirogue from Pierre Benoit Autin, my grandfather. It wasn't a log pirogue but it was a plywood pirogue that they started making after the log pirogues.

00:54:48

That pirogue from [my grandfather]—which I do not have—was used by me as a teenager to trap in back of my house during school and during the winter vacations, holiday vacations during school. That pirogue was actually stolen from me. When my uncle found out about that my—we would go visit a lot; he was making these pirogues to sell, and he told me, "Well, me and Duz"—being my daddy's nickname, George Autin's nickname—"is going to make you a pirogue because you like to trap. You need it to trap and make you extra money."

00:55:31

So I got there at night like I'd do before when we'd go visit at least once a week, and he was building the pirogues and I'd watch him. He never got there and--and I'll get back to that, but mainly this pirogue here was the one used by me to trap and hunt when I was a teenager. It's got a lot of wear on it. Like nowadays, you know, the kids are on computers and stuff, which I guess is okay as the thing now, but back then we didn't have all that. And we'd get home and I'd

go make me some extra money. I'd bring my pirogue and a bag and trap and whatever else I could do. And that is the original pirogue.

00:56:15

And when I turned 19 years old, I told myself that I'm going to make a pirogue just like it. A couple people told me, "Well, how are you going to do that? Nobody showed you." I said, well again, like my grandpa, I--I would always pick up things easy as far as making things. I would--if I would just see somebody doing it or get a general idea, don't ask me how but I'd end up making it.

00:56:45

So one day I took a piece of black roofing paper and I put it on the side of the pirogue and I made a pattern of it, just like you would—like my mom would have been sewing something, a dress or something. So I took a pattern with the—I found this paper, this roofing paper, and said, "Well, this might work." So I put it on the side of the pirogue and I made a pattern, which I still have today. I got it right here. I made a pattern of the pirogue, and I recalled my uncle making these pirogues; he would explain to my daddy in French that it cost(ed) them $30 of lumber and he was selling them for—of lumber and material—and he was selling the pirogue for $100. He was selling them as fast as he could make them, and back then that was a good price. He was making some money with it. That's when I was about 13 or 14.

00:57:36

By the time I decided to make my pattern and make my pirogue, it cost(ed) about $80 of material. Things were starting to go up. I took the pattern. I went to Robichaux Lumber and got the wood I needed like my uncle used to do, and I recall them saying that that side of that pirogue, what I made a pattern of, if you lay it down on a four-foot wide sheet of plywood you

can get four sides. In other words, you can make two pirogues with it. But he used to tell my daddy, if that saw blade is off just the thickness of a blade, you're going to lose that third pattern. That's how tight it was on that--on that wood to get them four pieces out. So I was very careful; marked my four pieces and cut it out. And proceeded to make the pirogue. And it was—I made two because it was more economical to make two at a time.

00:58:29

It took me two days. My first day was mostly getting the wood, cutting it out, and getting everything ready. And the next day I put them together. And it was work from sunup to sundown, and I actually accomplished two pirogues in two days. And I had the big idea I was going to sell these things like my uncle was doing. So for me to profit on them I had to ask—I figured, well, I didn't want to ask too much because I wanted to sell them so I had to make a reasonable price. So I came out with $250.

00:59:05

I sold my second one. I was keeping the--I was holding the first one—you know the first one I made—so I sold the second one and I was going to make some more. It took a while to sell it. Started wondering why I can't sell these pirogues fast like my uncle was making them. I made the same—identical. All Spanish cedar trim, moldings, and marine plywood. Come to find out they was coming out with fiberglass pirogues and people were all going to that because it was so easy. You could drag that on the ground and not worry about scratching it up like a plywood pirogue, and--and it was light, and you know I—at the point I was getting ready to make wood pirogues the fiberglass came out.

00:59:45

So I told myself, well, if I can't sell my wood pirogues I'm going to keep this one **[*Laughs*]**, and it never touched the water. I just took it out of the garage yesterday for this interview. And it's still here, and I told my daughter, "Look, you never rode in a pirogue." We're going to put it in the bayou one day now that it's down and I'll let her ride my pirogue. It'll be the first time it touches the water. **[*Laughs*]** But I'm not saying I won't make them again. Maybe in retirement if my health holds out, I'll probably take them by special order, you know. I'll consider it; I would like to do that when I get more time. I'm probably going to look at that and maybe making some decoys, because I was asked to make decoys with the old-time name on it from my grandfather. He's in Mr. Charles Franks' book for the decoy carvers, and all I've been asked many times to make--just make the decoys because we want those with dad's name on it. And I didn't do it yet, but I'm probably going to end up doing that one day.

01:00:44

SR: So are there still people who use the wooden pirogues?

01:00:47

MA: Yeah, there's a few people, some that saved them. I hear there might be a man in Galliano that's still making them. I don't see many people using them, but there are some that still use them, you know.

01:01:02

SR: Do you think people would buy them just to have an old-fashioned wooden one?

01:01:05

MA: I believe maybe a collector or somebody—. You know, the price of building it right now, the labor and all, I don't think your average guy could go buy a [wooden] pirogue just to use to hunt and all. It's so economical to go get a fiberglass one. I wish I could sell more wooden ones to where it would be profitable, you know, but if someone would approach me to make one we'd have to negotiate on that. I might possibly consider it.

01:01:34

SR: So do you use a fiberglass boat then?

01:01:37

MA: Right now I've got a fiberglass boat that I fish in and all—you know, an outboard, a bigger boat, but I don't use--I don't hunt much in the marsh no more back here. You know where—where I always—I always hunted in this one area and, like I say, a lot of it is washed out right now. I've hunted—not that I don't like to hunt. I hunted so much as a kid that's all I'd do, hunt and trap and fish, and I'm not going to say I got tired of it. I just—back then my daddy would drop me off. He was a crew boat driver. He'd drop me off to hunt. I'd just get out there in the--in the marsh and just start shooting ducks. And when he'd come back **[*Laughs*]** I'd have me a pile of ducks and he'd bring me to the front, and then when I approached my 20s I realized, "Wait, there's--there's some game wardens here. There's laws you got to follow in this" **[*Laughs*]**. And I hunted so much as a kid, you know, I haven't actually hunted much duck except for last year when I brought my daughter. I haven't hunted in a long time—ducks, you know—except for that one time last year. It's more like a little bit of deer hunting now, which I'm not saying I don't

like to hunt. I--I would have to go so far out of my way right now to find a—I don't have private marsh or anything. I'd have to go out of my way to find an area to--to hunt right now, which I'm very busy as it is. But if my daughter wants to hunt I'll bring her to shore and all, you know.

01:03:10

SR: So these pirogues, would those be called dugouts, or is that just the kind that's made out of the tree?

01:03:17

MA: This is made out of plywood. They're not dugouts. No, this ain't the original dugouts. Again, my father had to sell his to make ends meet as the family. I wish I could get a hold of one, but maybe one day; but no, I myself have never made a dugout. But again, hearing the stories, hearing my daddy and uncle discussing how to make it and watching them making the plywoods—I never saw them make a dugout, but I heard enough from them that I--I know I can make one if I put my mind to it, you know.

01:03:52

If I want to go cut a log and make one, I--I can make one, you know, which would take a lot of effort, but I can do it.

01:04:00

SR: So you--you were showing me the traps earlier. Can you tell me—I mean, those are really old traps from like when you were a teenager.

01:04:07

MA: Oh yeah.

01:04:09

SR: Right. What were you trapping? And then, also, you kind of showed me the process of—

01:04:16

MA: Setting the trap.

01:04:16

SR: —yeah, setting it up. Can you talk about that a little?

01:04:18

MA: Yeah. I believe I was about 12 years old the first time I trapped. Basically, I would go—I didn't have a—at that age I couldn't drive for sure; I would get my buddy, one of my cousins. We--we had a shell street right here out of clam shells. It was a Gulf Oil Company road, which we had a dock back there again. My dad would drive the crew boat and all and I would take my pirogue and get my little buddy to take it, and we'd walk down the street with it all the way to the back. Again, we were young teenagers, and we'd walk it to the back and I'd get in my pirogue and I'd go set my traps.

01:05:03

And we had a long trenasse going all the way to the 40 Acre Canal. It was actually a pipeline that--that passed through that trenasse. They dug it to put a gas line for an oil—for a gas

well—and by them digging that, they put some dirt on the side of it and made like a little ledge along the marsh. And I used that little canal basically like a ditch, like a trenasse, to trap in, and it was about 30-something acres long. And I would go in there and run my traps each day.

01:05:35

I wouldn't catch a lot, but back then they were probably-—this is in the '70s, and they were worth probably close to $10 apiece back then, the neutrals, nutria. And there wasn't much muskrat left. My--my cousin, Pierre, he would trap muskrat further in the back, but he--he had a boat that he would drive back there and all. And it—I did that for a few years until I was able to get a job where people would hire me, you know. And after that I would do it part-time sometimes. But then--back then, it was a lot more profitable than now.

01:06:09

I've got a cousin that still traps to this day. He's got a place where he traps across the bayou. But basically it was a matter of getting my traps ready each year and keeping them preserved. I used to take pig lard, and at the end of the year I would take all my traps and clean them and put them in this big ole pot with a burner outside like a—similar to the way you boil crabs and all—and I'd heat up the pig lard like I was shown by my daddy, and I would dip my traps in there. It would make a wax on the trap and it would preserve them until the next year where they wouldn't rust. It would make a coating on them. That's why these are still good.

01:06:53

Basically I'd bring my neutrals [nutria] back; I'd skin them. By then it—I'd go after school and run my traps. By the time I got home it was getting dark. I'd skin my neutrals [nutria]. I'd put them on a mold, and in the morning before school I'd put them out in the sun to where they would dry. It would take two--three days of good sun to dry a neutral [nutria]. When

they were dry, I'd take them off the mold and I'd put them in burlap sacks. And about every two weeks this fur buyer would come by in a van and he would--he would buy the furs from me. He would come grade them and give me so much depending on the quality of the fur.

01:07:32

He would then take that and ship them to wherever--wherever he'd get the best price. As far as the meat from the neutral [nutria], we used to call him "the meat man." There was this man that would come around probably twice a week. He had a pickup truck with a little wood box on the back, like a seafood-looking truck. He had this little scale hanging with a wash tub, and we would take an old freezer and put that on the side of the street and throw the carcass of the neutral [nutria] in there with ice and it would stay for two--three days. You'd see a couple of them down the street—one from me and one from my cousin. And you'd ride up and down the bayou and you'd see them, people with these old ice boxes, freezers on the side in their yard.

01:08:16

So we'd throw them in there with some ice, and when the meat man would come he'd take them out with a pitchfork and put them in the tub that was hanging on the scale and weigh them. And he'd give us like 10-cents a pound or whatever was the price at the time for the meat. So we'd make use of everything from the neutral [nutria], you know.

01:08:32

There was even this one man; sometimes he would come by to tea, and he told me he would make necklaces or something with them. **[*Laughs*]** We'd sell whatever we could off of them back then.

01:08:42

SR: Where would the meat go?

01:08:45

MA: Back then, I believe at that time there wasn't too much alligator farms, so they would—I believe they would go to like cat food plants. There was a Tabby cat food plant down the bayou one time; he used to bring it down there. But now I believe a lot of it goes to the gator farms and all where they use it to feed the gators, you know.

01:09:03

SR: So this is still something that people do, trap the nutria?

01:09:07

MA: Oh yeah. I got a cousin that's doing it right now, but it's--it's rare. You don't have too many people. He's one of the last remaining ones doing it down here. He alligator hunts and all and does--still does it.

01:09:19

SR: What about the muskrat? Was that meat edible for humans?

01:09:24

MA: Uh, I never ate it myself. I never could get myself to eat it, but my daddy told me they used to love it. It was a rich meat, red rich meat, and he ate a lot of it growing up trapping. His mother would prepare it, and that was—many days they ate muskrat. You know I've got an uncle

that used to come down here from New Orleans just to get nutria legs from me to eat. Oh yeah. I never—I tasted it, but they were raised eating that and they liked it. I tasted; it tasted all right. It's just the idea, I guess, but my daddy would eat muskrat, raccoon, muskrat, nutria.

01:10:04

SR: What do you think appealed to you so much about the trapping that you would go from school to doing that instead of whatever your friends were doing?

01:10:15

MA: I guess it's the way my family was raised. You know, seeing—being able to spend the time with my grandpa and hear all those stories. We're a very close family. We'd go out there; he lived in Barataria--on Barataria Boulevard, again, in Marrero, and back in those days we didn't have the interstate. We had the old road going there on the side of the railroad track on Highway 90, and that was a big trip. You know, that was a big trip to go there, and we'd go at least a couple times a month. And we'd—I'd hear so much of it, and my daddy and uncle talking. It was just part of growing up. I just took to it naturally, you know, just like making a pirogue. Or, actually, I--I built—another subject, but I--I built my mama's house. My daddy was sick at an early age and he passed away, again, in '82, and we were in a trailer house. And as far as carpenter work, my daddy knew it. He was an oil field worker, but he knew carpenter work. My uncle was pretty much—is a full-time carpenter. And amongst my other uncles, too, one day—well, again, when my daddy passed away my mom was left in a trailer house. And I told her—it needed a few repairs, and the most I had done as far as carpentry was maybe work on a

pirogue, repair some little bolts or something. And as far as houses, I had built like a chest of drawers, little minor things like that. Jewelry boxes.

01:11:50

So I was worried about the trailer. I looked at it; it needed a lot of repair, and I woke up one morning thinking about it. I told my mama I was going to build her a house. She says, "Oh shut up, Marvin. How you going to build a house?" You know, I said, "I'm going to build you a house. My mind is made up; I'm building you a house."

01:12:10

So I called my Uncle Alvin. He was a carpenter, and I told him, I said, "Look, Uncle Alvin, I'm--I want to build a house for my mama. My daddy always wanted to build a house. He was sick; he couldn't do it, so I'm going to build her one. And he said—I said, "But the thing I don't understand, I need to make a material list and I don't know how to make the rafters, the peak on the roof. I'm going to need a little bit of help with that." So he went along and he said, "Yeah, all right. Whenever you're ready to build a house, give me a call." He thought I was joking, you know. So I said, "All right. I'm going to get started." "Yeah, call me back when you're ready." You know, and he--he just blew it off like, "Oh, yeah, sure. He's going to build a house."

01:12:50

So I started the forms. I took a line, a string and a level, a line level, and squared it off the best I could; called some guys to come pour the slab. I poured the slab. The slab dried. I measured with a tape measure. Well, the house was 24 feet by 40, and on one end it was three quarter inches narrower than the other end. So I got all worried. I was--some people call me a perfectionist. I try to get things too straight, you know. I want it done too good. So I called my

Uncle Alvin and I said, “Uncle Alvin, I poured the slab and it’s three quarters of an inch off on one side.” He says, “Wait, you poured a slab?” He says, “Hold on; I’m coming down the bayou.”

01:13:36

So he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. He pulled up in his truck, and he stops midway in the street and stuck his head out the window and shook his head like, “Man, I can't believe this.” So he came up and he said, “You actually poured the slab?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “What’s wrong?” I said, “Well, it’s three quarters of an inch off on one side.” He looked at it and he said, “An inch and a half would be damn good, doing that by hand.” He says, “Go get some wood. Let me make you a list so you can get some wood to start building this before something moves.” **[*Laughs*]** So actually he got there and helped me do the rafters, and after that I took it from there.

01:14:15

The inside of the house—it took me six months to make that house because I had never built a house before. And to this day it’s my straightest set of cabinets I ever made because I was so particular **[*Laughs*]** on every little thing. And after that, a couple years after that, a man approached me and wanted to see the house. He was from Leeville, and he was building him a house. They had just framed it, but he was looking for a carpenter to finish the inside. He came there and offered me $10 an hour. This was back in the ‘80s, which was good--good money at that time, and he asked me go finish his house.

01:14:52

You know I was—I told him no because I was too afraid to mess up. That’s how particular I was on getting things done just right. I didn't take the job. So a couple years later another man came with his wife and he looked inside my mom’s house and he said, “You built

all this, right?" I says, "Yeah." He said, "Who showed you that?" I said, "Well, I just did it because my mom needed a house." And—and, again, it goes back to listening to my daddy and all just talking and explaining those things. I remembered all that so I just put it into use.

01:15:29

He said, "You built all this?" "Yeah." He said, "Well, I want to—." He said, "Get a pencil and a piece of paper. I want to bring you to a house in Cut Off. Come ride with me. Would you do that?" I said, "Okay." Him and his wife brought me. We looked at the house. There was this gigantic kitchen, to this day the biggest kitchen I ever built. Big old kitchen in that house. And he says, "Can you build that kitchen?" They had all kind of angles and this and that in it. I looked at it one time and I said, "I can build it." He says, "Okay, take that tape measure and that pencil and paper; mark the measurements the best you can on there because I want a kitchen just like this." I said, "All right." I did all that. The man hired me. I brought my cousin with me. His house had burnt. We went in there and gutted it out and rebuilt the house part-time, and I made a replica, a copy, of that same kitchen like in that other house, and to this day it's the biggest kitchen I ever built. And that's when my carpentry work started. I never advertised to this day. It was just word of mouth. A lot of finish work I did, over the years.

01:16:30

SR: Wow. How old were you when you built your mom's house? I'm sorry if you said that already.

01:16:33

MA: No. The best I could remember, that was about—I was in the oil--working in the oil field. I welded. I was a welder at LOOP [Louisiana Offshore Oil Pipe], the super pipe right here. I was welding pipe right when I got out of high school. I went to trade school and learned that. After that, when that job finished, I went to work on a drilling rig as a rough neck, and that's when the oil field went bad in the '80s. And we got laid off, and that's about the time I decided to make the house. I used that free time to build that house. And the way I had income during that time was I would work on the house and then I would go shrimping for extra money, you know. I would stop temporarily to go shrimping, and then I'd start back on the house after. I built that house for a cost of $14,000 in materials **[*Laughs*]** in 1984. That's about the time I started building houses. But as far as carpenter work, I've got something I could show you here back when I was sitting in my old shed in the front. I was probably about eight years old. I hand-carved—I had a stone, which I would sharpen my knife on, my pocket knife. Before I actually trapped I would help my dad skin neutral [nutria] and stuff. I might have been seven--eight, a kid, but still I was messing around with it.

01:17:53

And I had this little stone that I would sharpen my little muskrat knife with, and I was--I nicked my finger now and then. And I thought to myself, "I got to do something better than this." So I got in my shed; it was a rainy day. And I took a block of Spanish cedar, a piece that I got from my Uncle Alvin. He used to make the cabins—inside the cabins—for the supply boats at the shipyard, my dad's brother. I took this piece of Spanish cedar, and I had-carved me a holder which fitted this stone in to where I could--I wouldn't nick my hand no more. **[*Laughs*]** I still have that in the house right now, but that's--that was my first carving experience.

01:18:36

SR: Wow. It was just in your blood, it sounds like.

01:18:40

MA: It was out of necessity. Yeah, yeah. You know, I used to question myself. When people would ask me, "Who showed you this?" I used to question myself, "Yeah, who showed me this?" Like, where did it come from? It--I questioned myself on it sometimes, and it—when I see something and I decide to build it the way I think is—I can see it built and I picture it finished. I'm building it, but I'm not necessarily planning as I'm going along. It's already finished in my mind, the same way my grandpa used to do things. That's how I've always been, and it's just a natural thing. I can't explain it, but you can show me something. I'm not going to say I can build anything. I told a few people sometimes, if it's out a wood I can make it, but I--I caught myself there because some people tried to make me do impossible things **[*Laughs*]**. But in general, if I see it, I can pretty much build it if I put my mind to it, out of wood, you know.

01:19:41

SR: Did you make those little pirogues?

01:19:43

MA: No, no. That's another thing, just like the decoys, I plan on doing one day. Those are from my father, George Autin. Yeah, he made little models. Actually, one is on a trailer, and he actually took that idea—that trailer—from a trailer I built when I was in welding class in high school. And that's another thing. I had a lot of things going on as far as making ends meet back

then. I knew how to weld also, and my daddy would get pipe out of the oil field and bring it to me—used pipe that they didn't need no more. So I started building boat trailers with it, and my--my cousin was a sandblaster, so he would sandblast them for me and paint them and I would sell them in the front yard.

01:20:27

And my daddy—I've got pictures of some I made, and my daddy looked at one of my trailers and made a little model of it with one of his pirogues on there, and it actually hand-cranks up. It's all made out of balsa wood, and that--that is his models. He used to sell them about $150 apiece with the decoys in them, the paddle, the shotgun, like you're ready to go hunting. They're about a foot long, little replica of what he used to use in his trapping days, hunting days.

01:20:55

SR: They're beautiful.

01:20:56

MA: Thank you.

01:20:58

SR: So when you were making all that money as a teenager, were you spending it, or were you putting it towards the family expenses?

01:21:07

MA: Actually, I wanted a boat really bad. You asked me earlier if I had a boat. I actually saved up enough to buy my first boat, and I bought me an outboard motor, which was a 50 horsepower Evinrude back then. I think it cost(ed) me like $1,300 for the motor, and I bought me a little Boston Whaler hull, a nice little hull, a little 13-foot hull. It was a little sporty, but you know I wanted to show off the money I had made in a good way. I had put it in my boat and I used that to trap for a while, and fish.

01:21:38

Actually, another—after the boat I wanted a dirt bike, a motorcycle, and my daddy told me "I don't"—I'm not going to say the exact words he used, but he said, "Look, if you want to do something that stupid, use your own money." **[*Laughs*]** So that was from neutral [nutria] trapping. I went and buy(ed) me a Honda dirt bike for like $800 or $900. I used that for about three months, and then realized how bad I could get hurt on there and put it in the front and sold it. **[*Laughs*]** But no, I would use the trapping money for extra things that my father couldn't afford to get me, you know, and it was good. I'm glad it was that way because it showed me how to support myself, which--which now if I got to go work to get something, it doesn't bother me.

01:22:21

You know, I hear these people sometime complaining: "Man, I'm working hard"; this and that. You know, the more I work, the more--the better I feel. It doesn't bother me, working. I always did do things—whatever it takes, you know.

01:22:37

SR: Sounds like it. Do you ever go on vacation?

01:22:43

MA: Yeah, yeah, we do. We go on vacations, yeah. **[*Laughs*]** Yeah, we take one now and then, yeah.

01:22:49

SR: Okay, good. What about some of these other things that you brought out?

01:22:55

MA: Again on the vacation, not too many. When my daddy was growing up, a vacation—when I was growing up, a vacation to us was a weekend to Biloxi. That was big-time, you know, but now we--we get to take a week now and then sometimes.

01:23:08

SR: And I'm sure when your dad was growing up there was no such thing, I imagine.

01:23:13

MA: Oh no, no, no. Not at all. I think my dad brought us to Biloxi just to show us—you know, to bring us—but he never got nothing like that. Oh no, no. He--it was strictly work. Strictly out of necessity. They didn't have that leisure money back then.

01:23:29

SR: Did they live on this street?

01:23:31

MA: Who now?

01:23:32

SR: Your dad?

01:23:33

MA: Yeah.

01:23:36

SR: When he was growing up?

01:23:36

MA: Oh no. He--he was raised across the bayou.

01:23:40

SR: Across the bayou, okay, yeah.

01:23:42

MA: Yeah, until he was about six, and then he was brought to Lafitte to trap. And probably in his 20s or something he met my mom. He would come down here and visit some of his family, and that's when he met my mom, yeah. And then they stayed—my mother had—again, she had polio, so her daddy, he had—he was an oysterman. He was doing okay in those days, and he was

a hard worker, too. And he would be home maybe one day out of the month. He had a camp. He had two oyster boats, 10 skiffs. He had a big operation going at that time. And he got this house built in the front for $1,800 at the time. It was $1 a day for the carpenter. No, excuse me, $5 a day for the carpenter and $1 for the helper. He got the house built for $1,800 back in 1924. And I still have that house right now. It's one of my rent houses. I purchased it from my mom and turned it into a rent house.

01:24:42

As far as my daddy living down the street, when he met my mom, they got married and they lived in that house with my grandmother, my mom's mother, for many years until my dad afforded a trailer house and we moved in the backyard—the same trailer I've replaced with the house my mom is in now.

01:25:01

SR: Okay.

01:25:03

MA: Yeah. Now, my daddy—they were employed down this street. The same dock that Gulf Oil made on my grandfather's land gave my daddy and uncle and some of the family employment back here. Through Austin crude oil, they started back here, oil field company.

01:25:20

SR: It's--it's like we've covered the entire spectrum of how it's possible to make money down here. You've done shrimping, oysters, trapping, oil field—

01:25:31

MA: Carpentry.

01:25:32

SR: Yeah, carpentry. I'm sure there's more that I'm not coming up with right now.

01:25:38

MA: Back then I did it more full-time, but now I'm employed by the State and I do it part-time now. You know the trapping has been—I stopped that years ago, but I still do a little carpenter work part-time, still make the push poles, not as much as I used to do. I don't build whole houses no more. You know I'll do a little finish work for somebody now and then, or for myself. Or, over the years I built me a couple rent houses and got that going, and you know when—I do my own repairs. Whatever. I've never had to hire nobody—electrical, plumbing, carpentry. I do all of that. You know, I always did.

01:26:13

SR: What about these paddles? Did you make those?

01:26:17

MA: Yeah, yeah. Those were made with a hatchet. One of them was made with a hatchet out of a solid piece of wood. The other two is—actually, the other two is a plywood paddle. I've never seen that by nobody else but my grandfather, Pierre Autin, would make the hand-carves, and

[for] people that couldn't afford them, he would make these little plywood paddles and sell them a lot cheaper. And actually, that plywood paddle is harder to break than that wooden paddle. It's just a plywood blade, slide(d) into a full round pole, and it—I've been--I've made hand-carved paddles again. But the amount of labor in them, very few people want to buy them. But I'm not saying I won't make them again. But these little plywood paddles is so fast to make, and you can sell them so cheap that people will--some people will buy them. But they're really a tough little paddle. **[*Laughs*]**

01:27:12

SR: Wait, which one is the plywood paddle?

01:27:15

MA: The one--the two on the left.

01:27:17

SR: Oh okay, yeah.

01:27:17

MA: And let me show you, this one was never completed. It's just something that—I sold all my paddles. This is the only one I have from my daddy. This is a solid one-piece paddle. This is carved out of a two-by-six board. The head—everything is one piece, and that was important to him, not to glue nothing. He said he wanted things made right, which it's harder to make a paddle without gluing the head because when you're carving it you got to watch not to break the

ends and all. You know, but this is all handmade and no machines on this. It's roughed out with a hatchet, and then there's a plane with a round bottom on it that he would rub to make the curve on it. And I used it; I started to wear it out and it cracked on me, so it was the only I had from him, so now I just save it. He sold many of these. Actually, it's a piece of long-leafed pine. That was his favorite, and some people questioned that long-leafed pine for a paddle. But I'll tell you what: It makes a very strong blade on the paddle, and it doesn't bend. A cypress paddle in the sun will bend, and it's soft. This long-leafed pine, he would go in the lumberyard and pick through a pile of two-by-six pine until he'd find a long-leafed pine.

01:28:34

Right now you go in a lumberyard, I don't know if you could find a piece of long-leafed. You might have to special order it or something, but the grain is way tighter and straighter. It's not a regular number two. It's a long-leafed pine. But he knew in that load of wood there might be two--three long-leafed, so he had this lumberyard where the owner didn't mind. My daddy would get there for an hour or so and dig through that pile of wood until he'd find him two--three pieces of long-leafed and bring it home and make paddles with them. Really hard wood to carve; he'd put a lot of labor in it, but he sold a lot of them—one piece.

01:29:08

SR: Nice. And what are some of the other things that you brought out over there, those wooden pieces?

01:29:15

MA: This?

01:29:17

SR: Yeah.

01:29:18

MA: This is some mold. I call it a neutral [nutria] mold. This is what I'd actually put the fur on for the neutral [nutria]. You'd reverse it where the skin would be exposed to dry in the sun. You can see all the nail holes. These were actually used by me. I saved them. I almost threw them one day. A lot of things I threw and I never thought they'd be important to save, but something told me to save this and the few items I have here. But you can see there's original stuff that I got from my daddy. I believe the wood—it's a special wood. I believe it's fir. I'm not sure. But I think it is fir, some type of fir or Douglas fir, and this was actual molds that I would dry my pelts with.

01:30:05

Now, if I had a raccoon, you can't put a raccoon on a mold like this. You would put him on a flat board or something. Now, otter was really big, so I had something like this but made a lot bigger for the otter—you know higher and longer.

01:30:18

SR: I can't really envision what it would look like when the nutria is on the mold.

01:30:24

MA: I've got a picture.

01:30:25

SR: Yeah.

01:30:27

MA: I've got old pictures right here.

01:30:27

SR: Because the mold is like a plank, maybe three-feet, two and a half--three-feet?

01:30:33

MA: Yeah.

01:30:35

SR: So are you hanging that up, or is it sitting on the ground, or how does that work?

01:30:40

MA: Sometimes I would lean it on the ground against a building like a shed, but sometimes let's say like I'd have nails up on a rack where you could hang them from the bottom. See these holes on them, where they would just hang in a line if I had a lot of them. If I just had a few, or if I was in a hurry to get to school, I would just put them on the ground real quick and lean them up against the shed, you know. But basically the real way to do it, you wanted them off the ground

where the cats couldn't get to them or something **[*Laughs*]**, and you'd hang them up on a rack or nails like off the ground so high.

01:31:16

SR: Yeah, you just reminded me you have some pictures. I forgot about that. Maybe we should look at those before we wrap things up. Oh, and one other thing. There's that—oh sorry. Is that a net over there?

01:31:28

MA: Oh, this is just something else I grabbed. This is an old—this little dip net that my daddy used that my grandpa built, and it's basically—it was used in a salt box when they were trawling. You would put salt in a big box on the back of the boat full of water, and the salt would make—you'd throw your catch in there and the fish would float up. The high salt level would make your small fish float up, so you would scoop the fish out with this net. And after you were done you'd take your shrimp out and finish picking the remaining fish, and it would make the job a lot easier. But that--that's just—I thought I'd just put it in the mix. It's a very old item that I still have that was made by Pierre Benoit Autin. One of the few things I have from him, just something I thought I'd show you.

01:32:18

SR: Thank you.

01:32:18

MA: This is the actual ax I used to cut some trees down to make paddles and stuff. This is the actual hatchet my daddy used to cut the--cut the paddle. The reason the handle is sharp, he could chop better. He would--he would just cut the handle. Normally the handle would be this long on an ax. He'd just saw it off to where it would--it would work better for sharp chopping, you know. The bar wouldn't get in his way.

01:32:47

SR: Looks like a hammer.

01:32:48

MA: Yeah, yeah. This is a--what we call a sob. It was a cane knife. We'd cut roseaus with it, these reed-looking grass. "Roseaus," it's called; you see it on the side of the road and all. We'd make our duck blinds with it. We'd cut the roseaus and bundle them up and bring like four or five packs in a pirogue to make our duck blind. We'd stick it around the pirogue to hide the pirogue.

01:33:13

SR: And that's what you would use to cut it?

01:33:14

MA: Yeah, that's what we'd cut the roseaus with.

01:33:18

SR: Do you know how you spell "roseaus"?

01:33:23

MA: I believe it's—my best guess would be r-o-s-e-a-u. There's actually a bayou named Bayou Roseau down the bayou. But I don't know the English pronunciation of it, but it's a little round—something like a bamboo-looking grass, you know, with the long leaves on it. You'll see them on the bayou sides and all. But my cousin actually sells roseaus right here to some duck hunters. They'll come; he'll cut them in packs and sell the roseaus to them, the guys that don't want to cut their own. They come buy them from him. But I've got—if you want to see pictures here, this is kind of an idea of one of the things I used to do as a kid. Someone threw an old boat away, okay, that was almost nothing left to it. I dragged it home, and now I might have been—1979, okay. I'm going to guess I was about 15 back then, 16; I dragged this boat to the front that was in a junk pile. And my mom said, "What are you doing with that old junk?" I said, "I'm going to fix it up, rebuild it and sell it." I rebuilt it, built a trailer, put a motor in it, and sold it. **[*Laughs*]** This is the same boat—

01:34:32

SR: You sold it with the trailer and everything?

01:34:33

MA: With the trailer and everything.

01:34:35

SR: How much did you sell that for? It's beautiful.

01:34:36

MA: Nine hundred dollars back then.

01:34:38

SR: Wow, you made some money.

01:34:39

MA: Yeah, well $900 was a lot of money back then. Look, this is—

01:34:43

SR: It does not look like the—the original piece of trash that you found does not look like it could become anything.

01:34:52

MA: Yeah, I made use of whatever I could use and sell at that time. I would make use of it, and I took advantage of—you know, we were show(ed)--we were raised not to waste things, and that boat I found ,I said, "It can be repaired. Why let it rot?" So I made—I brought it back to life. **[*Laughs*]** That's me with the boat. That's the same ole shed in the front right there. This is the same ole shed with my neutral [nutria]. That's on the mold. That neutral [nutria] on the mold; that's me holding—this neutral [nutria] was so big I had to put him on an otter mold. See how long this is; this is an otter mold. But this--this was caught next to where this subdivision right

here now, this big subdivision. That was all swamp. This is actually where the subdivision is now. People don't believe that, but this is a neutral [nutria] in a trap. You see him? Here's the right past the Pizza Hut right there; there was a swamp in there, and I would go trapping.

01:35:45

SR: Now there's a cat, just like you have cats all around now.

01:35:51

MA: Yeah. I had a raccoon as a pet. I had a nutria as a pet. **[*Laughs*]**

01:35:58

SR: Okay. Why do you have to put them on molds?

01:35:59

MA: Well you have to dry the pelt. When you skin them, the--the fur, the skin, is still wet so it would rot. You have to reverse it and put the skin facing out on the mold, and the sun dries it just like you would dry shrimp or something. Once it's dried good, you can store it for a long time, you know. You--you have to dry it, so they could go ahead with the next step in processing it into a leather, into fur—you know, a coat or whatever they want to make with it.

01:36:28

SR: Is that what they do with the nutria, is make coats?

01:36:32

MA: Yeah, a lot of it. When I was young they used to go to Russia, like those Russian hats and stuff you'd see—or France and all that. A lot of it goes overseas, and they make coats and furs—fur jackets and stuff. Right now it's different; a lot of that demand is down, you know.

01:36:50

Here's one of the trailers I built. This is my cousin's house across the bayou with some of his alligators. This is my daddy with an alligator.

01:37:04

SR: Would you all eat alligator?

01:37:05

MA: Yeah, yeah. Actually, it's pretty good, you know, pretty good.

01:37:10

SR: And what--what would you make with it?

01:37:12

MA: They make sausage with it. You can fry it. You can do a courtbouillon. You can do a few things with it. Again, I'm not a cook. I'm a good eater, but I'm not a cook, but my mom would know how to prepare that. **[*Laughs*]** Here's my daddy with my pet coon.

01:37:28

SR: Aw.

01:37:30

MA: There's one--there's one we built. There's Alvin Autin, my uncle. This is when we was building my sister's house next door right here.

01:37:38

SR: How old was your daddy when he passed away?

01:37:41

MA: He was 57.

01:37:43

SR: That's too young.

01:37:46

MA: Yeah, yeah, he was. His--his surviving brothers made it up into the 70s and 80s. You know, he died really young—57.

01:37:54

SR: He looks so fit.

01:37:56

MA: Excuse me?

01:37:57

SR: He looks very fit.

01:37:58

MA: He was. Yeah, he was. He was an active man. They always were; you know they worked hard and they would stay in shape. He just caught coronary artery disease, and he needed a bypass when he was in his early 40s, and back then it wasn't too routine, so he was afraid to do it. So he waited, and in his mid-50s he decided to do it, but then he had kidney problems also. It was just too much; you know, he couldn't take the surgery. Yeah, they operated on him but he lived about two weeks, yeah.

01:38:30

SR: Was he like your grandfather? Was he a strict person?

01:38:34

MA: Uh, if you'd look at it right now you'd say strict, but back then we--we were raised at a young age to listen, so it wasn't a surprise. You know it wasn't like—they didn't have to force us to--to listen, and we were—. Back then when the adults would talk, no matter what you was doing you'd listen. You know, you would listen. Now I notice kids nowadays, you try to talk to them, they, "Oh, we're doing this or doing that," you know. But it's hard to try to show them that way when all the generation is—when all the other kids are being raised just like them. I mean

it's--it's not the same way, which I'm not saying that's bad or not, you know, but I know I wouldn't—. My daddy, he was strict in a way, and in a way he wasn't.

01:39:25

If I had an idea and he thought it was something good, he wouldn't talk me out of it, you know. That I appreciate a lot now. I see that that's how I got the courage to do things. Like if I had an idea, and even if it—you know, if he thought it would amount to something, he wouldn't push me to change my mind. He let me freely use my mind, and that helped a lot to where I wasn't afraid to try things, like to create things or something. You know, no; strict in a way, but I'm glad I was raised the way I was raised.

01:40:04

SR: I wonder if you grew up with computers and the Internet and videogames if you would have been this resourceful.

01:40:14

MA: I probably wouldn't even be in this town no more. **[*Laughs*]** I don't—no telling; no telling. That's a joke, but I--I don't think I would have been because I would have lost a lot of concentration on the real—I call it "the real world." Again, I'm not saying computers are bad. I use them now. **[*Laughs*]** I didn't know how to start one until my daughter started school and I got me one, and now I can't do without it. But growing up, yeah, I'm glad I didn't have them growing up. I'm glad I didn't.

01:40:46

It was come back from school and watch *Gilligan's Island* for about a half hour and take off in the woods, and mom would worry about when we were coming back. We'd come back in the dark, but that's how it was.

01:40:57

SR: Well I was going to ask you—

01:40:58

MA: We didn't need to go to a gym to exercise. We'd go in the marsh, and you can't get that kind of exercise in a gym, what we'd do there. We stayed in shape.

01:41:08

SR: Would you take a little snack out there with you or anything?

01:41:10

MA: That reminds me of something. I can't remember bringing a bottle of water most of the times. I--I seen myself drink out of the canal sometimes, I got so thirsty as a kid. Oh yeah, yeah, not intentionally but just not even thinking about bringing something, you know. That reminds me about something. I had a close friend, still got a close friend, that he's an attorney now but he would trap with me sometimes. And we had this big idea; we were going to live off the land. So we packed up his boat. I mean we got tents ready. Thank goodness he brought a bag of potatoes with him. I mean we got—you should have seen this. His boat was loaded up. We was going back there for three--four days; was just going to survive off the land.

01:41:59

So we got back there. We had our guns. The first plan, we was going to shoot some ducks and cook them on an open fire, you know. We hunted all morning and couldn't kill a duck. One of the first times I go back there and can't kill nothing, but we were going to survive on the land. We--for some reason we couldn't kill nothing to eat.

01:42:14

So luckily towards the end of the day my daddy passed on the crew boat to bring the crew back, and we flagged him down. We were in a bind. **[*Laughs*]** And he said, "What are y'all doing?" He said, "Y'all got you something to eat?" I said, "No, no. We're hungry." He said, "Well I just killed three poule d'eaus," three coots, so he threw them to us. We took off with them poule d'eaus. We plucked them the best we could. We cooked it on an open fire. Some of the meat was still red. We was eating it too early, we were so hungry. **[*Laughs*]** We didn't try to live off the land again after that.

01:42:44

But that--that reminded me of those days back then, you know. It wasn't a computer; it was going on an outing like that or something. You know, me and my buddies would go back there and we'd get whatever wood we could and we'd build little camps and stuff, you know, way back in the marsh, and we would camp out in there and all. We were always outdoors, you know.

01:43:04

SR: How old were you when you got your first gun?

01:43:07

MA: Oh I want to say probably about--about eight years old, a little Remington Pump 410 my daddy bought me, and I wish I'd still have it but he had to sell it to upgrade me to a 16-gauge when I was a teenager, you know. You didn't have a lot money back then, a lot of extra money. Of course he raised us good, but he had to sell that 410 to get me my 16, which I was glad he got me the 16, but I'd really like to still have that 410. But I was about eight years old when he bought me that.

01:43:39

SR: You mentioned earlier that your mom would get worried. And I wondered about that as you were talking—many times: If I could ever let my son have that long of a leash. And I thought, well, maybe people just didn't worry back then. But she worried?

01:43:54

MA: Oh she still worries. Yeah, when I'd go shrimp she would stay up until I'd come back [at] 3:00--4:00 in the morning, and I'd always tell her, "Mom, what are you doing? Why don't you just go to bed?" And I didn't understand that until I had—now I have a daughter, and I see what she means. My daughter asks me the same: "Why are you staying up for me," this or that, you know? But I seen one morning, I work—I had a friend stay over from school and it snowed that morning. One of the rare deals, and he and I snuck out of the house before daylight with our guns and took off in the snow to go hunting, and we were gone all day. And that was probably one of the worst times my mom had as far as worrying, but yeah. She--she worried a lot. But they

would give us the freedom, you know. They--they wouldn't hold us back. We--we got to do what we wanted to do as long as they knew it was something productive, you know.

01:44:43

SR: Your daughter, do you think that you'll teach her how to make a pirogue, or do you have anybody in your family who might be interested?

01:44:50

MA: Uh—

01:44:50

SR: So you can pass it on?

01:44:53

MA: She's got a general idea of all that, but as far as getting there and manually making it, she might have a few problems with that. **[*Laughs*]** I've got a nephew, you know a couple other kids in the family, but it's not—I don't see the drive in them to do it, the determination. They--they can—you know when I was—again, when I said I was going to do something as a kid I'd get it done, you know. And that's how we were raised. If you were going to say something, you were going to do this, before you say it, you better make sure that's what you're going to do because that was expected—a result from what--from what you were claiming you were going to do.

01:45:39

No, I--I don't—it's a shame in a way, you know but I don't see it. I think this is disappearing, you know. You--you're going to have a harder and harder time finding people that know how to do this, that can actually do it.

01:45:59

SR: Well I hope that your retirement gives you some time to invest, and you never know who might step up and want to learn.

01:46:04

MA: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We'll see, uh-hm.

01:46:10

SR: Well I'm going to wrap this up unless you can think of something that we haven't touched on, that you think we should have.

01:46:17

MA: Uh—

01:46:17

SR: Which is always a possibility.

01:46:19

MA: I've--I've got a cousin that got decoys and knows a lot about alligators. I don't know if you'd be interested in talking to him, but he's--he's 10 minutes away if I called him, if you want to talk to him.

01:46:32

SR: Yeah, let's talk about. Let's look at the time and talk about that. And I want to get some more pictures, so—.

01:46:34

MA: All right, sure.

01:46:37

SR: Thank you so much for your time.

01:46:38

MA: You're welcome. I enjoyed it. I'm glad you came over.

01:46:39

SR: I appreciate it.

01:46:42

[End Marvin Autin Interview]