PIERRE AUTIN
Cut Off, LA

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Date: November 15, 2011
Location: Pierre Autin's boat and truck— Clovelly Farms and Cut Off, LA
Interviewer: Sara Roahen
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
Length: 45 minutes
Project: Down the Bayou—Louisiana

[Begin Pierre Autin Interview]

00:00:00

Sara Roahen: This is Sara Roahen for the Southern Foodways Alliance. It's Tuesday, November 15, 2011. I am in Cut Off, Louisiana and Clovelly Farms with Mr. Pierre Autin. And I'm just going to ask you to introduce yourself, if you could. Please tell me your full name and where you grew up.

00:00:25

Pierre Autin: My name is Pierre Autin. I grew up in Cut Off, Louisiana—all my life. Today I'm going to take Sara on a little journey to check out a little bit of the erosion over the years and show her what the marsh looks like in my town.

00:00:37

SR: Okay, thank you, and hopefully we'll be able to do some recording while we're out there, but right now it's a little bit windy, so we're just going to take some photos. **[*Boat Starts*]**

00:00:56

PA: We can start an argument, me and him. Matter of fact—.

00:01:00

SR: Okay, we're--I'm here with Pierre Autin and we are—Pierre, could you tell us where we are exactly and what we're looking at?

00:01:08

PA: We're at the mouth of the Clovelly Canal, and we are looking at a buddy of mine skimming in a boat for shrimp. That's what he's doing.

00:01:22

SR: Yeah. So, I was surprised that you could skim in the canal. How many people can skim in the canal?

00:01:29

PA: Well it's over here just certain people in--that's on the lease. But in a canal like this, if it was an open area for anybody, you can have 20 boats in this canal at one time, if the--if the shrimp is good.

00:01:46

SR: And what kind of shrimp do you get here?

00:01:48

PA: The May season, you get what they call brown shrimp, and in the August season right now it's what they call white--white shrimp, the Brazilian shrimp. The white shrimp is more bigger

than the brown shrimp, actually. That's--that's what they're skimming for right now, is more of white shrimp.

00:02:13

SR: And it's freshwater?

00:02:14

PA: Uh, this is freshwater right here. Sometimes it's like a brackish; every now and then it may—if the tide is high enough, it'll be like a--like a sweet water they call it, in-between salt and fresh, but it's--it's normally more fresh right here where we're at. A little bit further that way, just like about the middle over there, is where the kind of saltwater starts.

00:02:37

SR: Okay, you're pointing over to—

00:02:40

PA: To the Little Lake, what they call Little Lake; you know, somewhere in Little Lake it kind of splits off a little bit from the sweet, from the freshwater to the sweet water—to the--to the saltwater.

00:02:54

SR: So, just for the record—I mean, we're looking at it now so it's obvious, but can you explain what skimming is?

00:03:01

PA: Skimming is—we used to call it "butterflying." If you look good on a--on a boat, they had frames that were square, and when you look at it from distance it looks like a butterfly coming to you. That's why they call it "butterflying." At night it's the best time to skim. We used to butterfly at night all the time because the shrimp come up and it was just simple to get out there and push butterflies. But these days they got what they call "skimmers." Skimmers can be used in the daytime or nighttime. If your skimmers are deep enough, they'll actually dredge the bottom of the canal and catch the shrimp just like the trawl that used—but at night the shrimp come up, and it—the purpose of this, of the skimmers, it's better because you can do it in the daytime or nighttime.

00:03:53

SR: That motor that we can hear—that's from the boat?

00:04:04

PA: Yeah, sure is. Sure is. Big diesel motor. I'm not sure if it's a Caterpillar or if it's an International. I don't know. But that's my buddy, T-Wes, right there.

00:04:17

SR: How long do you think they've been out?

00:04:19

PA: Him, he'll stay out three--four days at a time. He'll just come in to sell his shrimp and go right back up, fuel up and ice up, and come right back. Come right back out.

00:04:30

SR: And you were talking about the cost of a boat like that. How--how long is that boat, do you know?

00:04:35

PA: That boat is probably 32--36-feet, somewhere in there; costs a lot of money too. Costs a lot of money.

00:04:48

SR: Costs more than some people's houses?

00:04:49

PA: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. He's telling me there's some little bitty shrimp out there. Can we go on your boat? Yeah **[*Speaking to Friend on Water*]**. I didn't hear him. Okay.

00:05:14

SR: I think he was maybe saying he needs to get in there. Oh, I'm going to turn this off to take some photos. There are lots of birds flying around.

00:05:24

PA: Yeah, I'm going to tell you why them birds are there.

00:05:27

SR: Okay, go ahead.

00:05:27

PA: Them birds are there because—they're seagulls. They eat fish. When a trawler is trawling, you throw the fish out. They come and eat the little fish. You see, a seagull is very smart. Even if you're not throwing the fish out, they know eventually you will throw the shrimp out—the fish out—so that's what they're waiting for, to eat the fish as they throw it out the boat.

00:05:51

SR: Oh, so they throw fish out—oh, out of the net?

00:05:53

PA: Yeah, well what it is—when you trier the shrimp, you sort out the shrimp from shrimp to the little bitty fish. You throw the fish overboard because it's—you know, you don't keep the fish; you keep just the shrimp. And they throw it overboard, and the fish come and the birds come eat the fish as you throw it overboard.

00:06:13

SR: Was that a French word you just said—trier?

00:06:14

PA: Yeah, trier means "sort out," like sort. Take, you know, something like shrimp. You sort shrimp and crabs from each other, or shrimp and fish from each other. But trier is like the French word that we use.

00:06:27

SR: There are pelicans too, huh?

00:06:30

PA: No, not right here; sometimes there is pelicans.

00:06:35

SR: Wait, are those in the water pelicans?

00:06:36

PA: That--that sure is some over there. You're so right. They sure do got some pelicans right here. They got six--seven of them; the brown pelican, the State Bird.

00:06:48

SR: Yeah. Now, so, you were talking about Little Lake—we're right on the edge of the canal, the Clovelly Canal and what lake?

00:06:59

PA: Little Lake and Clovelly Canal. That's what we're at the edge of right now. We are about 300 yards from Little Lake on a friend of mine's camp, and that's where we're at right now.

00:07:13

SR: Yeah, we're standing on the deck of the camp. Nobody is staying at the camp right now. But when they do stay at the camp, what do they do?

00:07:20

PA: They come out here, they fish, relax. They just come out here to have a good time. And a camp is a lot of upkeep, so a lot of times when you see people at a camp, there are a lot of times they are working. But it pays off in the end. It really does. You can come relax, fish, stay here all night; you know, you ain't got to worry about getting out on the road. You just come over here and relax and have fun. It's like more of a family ordeal. And a lot of people, when they had camps back then, they used to build camps to—when the trapping industry was good and all that, they would come stay there for weeks at a time sometime. They would come trap. They would do their hides back here, and just when it was time to sell they would just go in with their boats and sell their hides. And when they needed more food, or if they need clothes, or if they need fuel or anything, they'd just go out and get their fuel and come right back to the camp.

00:08:19

SR: What sorts of animals would they be trapping out here?

00:08:23

PA: Over here it's mainly neutrals [nutria], sometimes otters, a little bit mink and muskrat, raccoon. The biggest thing is more or less neutral [nutria]. Every now and then you may catch a coyote or something like that, which, you know, it's not all the time but—. My brother has caught a few bobcats in the past just in back of where we're at, yeah. Yeah.

00:08:52

SR: So you have to be a little careful back here?

00:08:54

PA: Yeah, yeah, you got to be careful because when you're trapping you can fall yourself in an alligator hole, and then you're in trouble. **[*Laughs*]** Or if it's cold, freezing cold, if you fall in the water you're in trouble.

00:09:07

SR: Yeah, because we're surrounded by marsh. My untrained eye can't tell really what I would be able to walk on.

00:09:13

PA: Yes, and when you step on that bank you might sink because the marsh is basically a soft mud that grass grows on it, and if you don't watch where you walk you can get yourself in a bad--in a bad situation. And in the summertime you can find yourself in face-to-face with a big snake that you don't want to meet, **[*Laughs*]** or a good alligator. I don't know what's worse.

00:09:40

SR: So when you're out here trapping, are you in a boat or are you walking around?

00:09:46

PA: Normally in a boat, but you do got to get out by every trap, and sometimes you do walk around when you got to—you know, if your boat can't get to a part where you need to put a trap, where there's a trail for a neutral or whatever you're trapping. But you do walk a lot, too.

00:10:01

SR: You were telling me earlier that this is also a place to hunt deer.

00:10:05

PA: Yeah, they got--they got a few deer in here. Marsh deer is—you know, it's kind of tricky too, because when you kill you a deer, you got to go out in the marsh and it's not fun sometimes when you got to go find a deer and you--you walk into alligator holes, or you sink in some soft mud. Basically, the marsh has a lot of soft mud that we call "boue," and it's--it's almost like a quicksand. It's--it's pretty nasty out here.

00:10:38

SR: So I see two vessels in the lake sort of coming towards us. What are those?

00:10:43

PA: They're crabbing. There's some little Carolina skiffs that they're—they're crabbing.

00:10:51

SR: So do they have crab traps, or how are they doing it?

00:10:54

PA: Yeah, they got crab traps out. If you look on top of the boat real good, he's got some crab cages on top of his--on top of his top. And yeah, that's--that's what that is, crab boats.

00:11:07

SR: Would you mind holding this?

00:11:09

PA: Sure.

00:11:09

SR: And can you tell me—while I take a picture, can you tell me how long they maybe have been out and how many crabs they might get on a day like today?

00:11:18

PA: Okay, right now it is 2:30 [p.m.]. They've probably been out here since 5 o'clock this morning. Some maybe have been out a little earlier; some may have been out a little later. These guys probably passed, I don't know, 500--600 cages, and right now it's not that good to crab

because there ain't much crabs out because it's cold. But normally—I'm trying to see how much crabs they got. Oh, it looks like they got a lot of crabs on that boat.

00:11:49

SR: How can you tell?

00:11:51

PA: Looking at the crates. You see the crates? He's got probably one, two, three, four, five, six, seven--nine, ten, eleven, twelve—he's got 24 crates of crabs, so he's got a good bit of crabs. And I really thought it wouldn't be that good, but it is good right now. He's got 24 crates of crabs.

00:12:17

SR: What is a crate of crabs? I'm sorry. I'm not—

00:12:18

PA: A crate is, pretty much you'll put about 50-pounds in a crate. I say "crate"; some people call it "pan"; people got different names for it. Most people call them "pans." I call it a "crate." All it is is a plastic box with holes in it that's got a cover that goes on top of it.

00:12:42

SR: Was that the white--the white thing you were looking at?

00:12:43

PA: That's in the boat itself?

00:12:44

SR: I'm sorry, yeah, uh-huh?

00:12:46

PA: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

00:12:47

SR: Okay.

00:12:53

PA: And they're going to—they got a few facilities back there. I call them "facilities"; it's like where in the past the oil rig was there and they found oil and they put like a platform and they'll put a big tank to store fuel or oil or whatever is they got, and that's what they're going to do. They're going to work back there, check it, or—

00:13:13

SR: A different little boat just passed us going out. And it passed the crab boat. And so those guys right there are going out to the facility, you mean?

00:13:22

PA: Yeah, yeah.

00:13:25

SR: So that's a pretty small boat. Can that—is that also a Carolina skiff?

00:13:29

PA: No, that's an aluminum boat. I didn't see what kind of make it is. It's an aluminum boat; it's about a 22-foot boat. I mean, for us it's a good size, but for some people they don't consider that a very big boat.

00:13:42

SR: I'm more thinking of the waves we experienced a little while ago. **[*Laughs*]** We went out onto the lake about maybe 20-yards, and the--the waves were kind of intense for me. **[*Laughs*]** How do they rate today?

00:14:02

PA: **[*Laughs*]** This ain't a very, very bad day. To be honest with you, I seen a lot rougher stuff than that. But that's me. I'm used of it.

00:14:14

SR: Yeah, yeah. So Little Lake—this doesn't look like a little lake.

00:14:22

PA: No. Ah, I guess it's about an average lake. To me it's kind of big. To me it's kind of big, but yeah, I guess it's not as big as you'd think, but it's big enough.

00:14:40

SR: And it leads to—you were telling me earlier that the Chénière—. What were you saying was over that way?

00:14:53

PA: Bayou Perot, Bayou Perot. They got Bayou Perot about two—wait, about two, two and a half miles, I want to say, east of us. They got Bayou Perot. They got what they call the Rigolets not far past Bayou Perot, and off a little bit more to the south they got what they call Bayou St. Dennis and all. And directly south of us right now is they got a facility called LOOP [Louisiana Offshore Oil Port] that's about four miles—three miles I guess—four miles from us.

00:15:32

SR: Do you go to Bayou Perot for anything?

00:15:34

PA: Oh yeah, yeah, I sure do. This year actually I was with my--with a friend of mine that I was crabbing with; we crabbed a lot over there, Bayou Perot and Bayou St. Dennis—not Bayou St. Dennis; the Rigolets. We did a lot of crabbing there.

00:15:50

SR: Now you were telling me that in this area along this canal, Clovelly Farms, your family has leases for--for trapping and for fishing?

00:16:01

PA: Yes, trapping, fishing, shrimping, deer, ducks, yeah. We--we got a—alligator hunting. We got a good bit over here.

00:16:15

SR: How long have you had those?

00:16:18

PA: I've been back here all my life. I'm 40 years old, so I've been back here pretty much all my life I've been back here. And off to the back of us is called Delta Farms, and I have another brother that does a lot of alligator hunting and trapping, and hunting back here, too.

00:16:41

SR: How long ago—I imagine that there weren't always leases in the--in this water and on this land. Did your father always have leases, or was it at one point open to the public?

00:16:54

PA: From what I know, my dad pretty much as long as I can remember always had the lease back here to trap and all that. But I could be wrong. I really don't know how if there was ever a time it was—I really don't know. I really don't know. I just know as long as I could remember,

it's always been a lease. The land always was owned by people, so it's you know pretty much—from what I know, it's always been a lease that we had back here.

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SR: And that means you pay a sort of rent on it?

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PA: Yeah, like we pay a certain percent of what--what we make on different things.

00:17:34

SR: And is it just automatically renewable, or do you have to worry about not keeping your leases?

00:17:39

PA: To be honest with you, I ain't got a clue. I don't know. **[*Laughs*]** I just know every year we come back here and we have a place to hunt and fish and trap and alligator hunt and all that good stuff. I really don't know.

00:17:55

SR: That's okay. This was like your backyard.

00:17:58

PA: Oh, that's just my backyard. It sure is. It's more my daddy's front yard, though. My daddy is always back here.

00:18:07

SR: Well I'd like to ask you more questions, but I'll wait 'til we're inland and not so windy. Thank you.

00:18:45

PA: Oh, he went out. Yeah, he went out. He ain't interested. A lot of the—when we used to go to Cypress Bayou, I used to get there and call them and people would freak out. **[*Alligator Calling*]**

00:19:36

SR: How did--how did you learn how to call an alligator?

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PA: My--my--my daddy, I believe. I think it's my daddy that had kind of did it in the past. Something else: I was in the Florida Zoo in Panama City and they had some little alligators and I was calling them, and the people came around and they were watching. Well, after a while I went to move just to walk away, and I didn't realize that there was a fence and on the other side of them they had two big alligators. I think they were like 12--13-feet long. They were right there trying to pass through the fence, yeah, because they heard me calling them and they--they were trying to get to me.

00:20:19

SR: So if he had responded, how would he respond? Would he come—would he have come toward us?

00:20:25

PA: Yeah, it would have came toward us. I'm not sure—you'd have to actually—. Someone like my father [would know] if it's the big alligator that makes that noise, that calls, or if it's the little one. I don't know. But that is how an alligator calls each other. I'm just not sure what—.I know when--when alligators want to mate. I seen this before in the marsh, and I didn't know what it was until one day I asked my brother. They get partially out of the water like their backs and all, and--and they got like a vibration and you can see the water literally vibrating around them. And it--it's some kind of a mating call. And I didn't know what it was, and my brother told me that's what it is. It's the mate call.

00:21:22

SR: So we're jumping around a little bit here, but you grew up in a family where your father pretty much hunted and fished for everything that's possible to hunt and fish and trap in this area. Can you kind of tell me what the seasons are like—like when would you go alligator hunting, for example?

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PA: Alligator hunting is done once a year. It's around the ending of August/beginning of September to the end of September. It's a month—30 days. It's once a year. It's got something to

do with after the eggs, and after I guess the females have laid their eggs. It's something to do with that. I'm not sure exactly, but it's once a year that we can alligator hunt.

00:22:11

SR: And then after that, what would you roll into like in October?

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PA: Um, starting on the 20th it's trapping season—neutrals [nutria], coons, and otters, mink, muskrat and stuff like that. Trapping season. That's what we're getting ready to do.

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SR: And how--how long does that last?

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PA: Uh, I want to say March. Somewhere in March, I believe, I think.

00:22:43

SR: And then would you start with the shrimp season?

00:22:46

PA: May, the shrimp season starts, yes. That's when the shrimp season starts, in May.

00:22:53

SR: What about during the summer? What would--what would go on?

00:22:57

PA: You see, sometimes years ago we used to gill net, but you can't do it no more. I think you can gill net like maybe mullet at a certain time of the year. I'm not sure when that is. It's awesome fun to do, but you can mullet, but it's only at a certain time you can do it. I know that in the past, redfish and all, I don't think there was a season. I could be wrong. I could very be wrong, but I just remember gill netting, and then when I was around about 15 years old they stopped that. But May season comes around, and that's what you do until July, I believe, and then it starts back up in August.

00:23:47

SR: What about crabbing?

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PA: Crabbing is pretty much year-round. Now that don't mean you're going to do good year-round, because around I don't know—December, January, February—it's not that good. But there's no actual season on it. It's just that it's just not good at certain times of the year.

00:24:10

SR: Okay, so now we're driving through Clovelly Farms. We were out on the boat. And we had some motor issues, so we didn't go all over in the marsh, but we--we took the canal to the lake

and hung out there. Tell me a little bit, for the record—you've talked about it a lot, but how big Clovelly Farms is and what it is.

00:24:32

PA: I want to say Clovelly Farms, Clovelly itself—not the farm we're in, but out there in the marsh—I believe it's--it's around 24,000 acres. That's what Clovelly is that we get to trap, alligator hunt, and all that good stuff.

00:24:52

SR: Owned by one person?

00:24:53

PA: I'm not sure. I'm not completely sure. I just know that the Scullys own it. I think they own the majority of it. It could be all of it. I'm not sure, but that's—I'm not sure about that whole ordeal.

00:25:10

SR: I got the sense when we were out like on the edge of the canal where it meets the lake and we were hanging out at this camp, that you feel really at home out there. Tell me what you like about being out there. You kept saying "back here." You referred to it as "back here." Why do you like it back there?

00:25:29

PA: It's peaceful and it's the way I was grown up. Just like you're from Wisconsin—Wisconsin, right?—and I don't know what they got to do over there, but where I'm from that's just what I know. I didn't need a high school diploma for that. I was somebody that didn't like school, and it just so happened that I was in a family that--that did that, and it just came natural to me. It came very natural.

00:26:05

SR: But your father, he has a day job, it sounds like, right? That's not his only job—fishing and hunting and trapping?

00:26:15

PA: No, my daddy works for the Department of Transportation and Development. He's a bridge operator; that's his regular job. He'll work sometimes days, sometimes evening, sometimes nights. And he does all this other stuff on the side.

00:26:31

SR: All right, so it's just his passion for the land that sort of drove how y'all lived?

00:26:38

PA: Yes, yes, he loves to be back there. It's--it's like a peace. You know, you just—it's like a peace. Some people like to run a rig, for instance. To me, I would rather not run a rig. I'd rather be in the marsh in a boat and doing my thing back there.

00:26:56

SR: When did you get your first boat?

00:26:58

PA: I bought my first boat, I think I was 12 years old. I bought it from my dad actually. Yeah, I think I was around 12 or 13 years old. I bought my first boat. I want to say I paid—I don't know, I might have paid $500, maybe $500 for the whole thing, boat, motor, and trailer. Now I didn't have no use for the trailer because I couldn't—but in front of my house we had a wharf, and I'd put it on the wharf and that's how I had my transportation before I [could] drive. I would actually take my boat and I would actually take my boat and take off from Cut Off and go all the way to Leeville and trawl on my own.

00:27:47

SR: On the bayou?

00:27:49

PA: Yeah. Well in—I'd take off in Bayou Lafourche and I'd head all the way to Leeville and Fourchon. When I got there, I'd just go in the canals or the lakes or wherever I wanted to shrimp. That's what I did.

00:28:02

SR: And your parents just were fine with letting you do that alone?

00:28:06

PA: Yeah. You see, back then it was--it was different than what it is now. You know when my--my daddy—my daddy trained us right to make a living on the land, and he trained us how not to be dangerous, and he trusted us enough that he pretty much let us do that. Because that was our way of living. And--and that's what he taught us because, for him, at a certain age he had to make a living for--for his mom and dad, because I believe my my grandpa got sick at one time, and that's what he had to do. And I guess in his heart he felt he did that, so you know he--he trusted us enough; he thought he raised us good enough to where we did what we did.

00:28:54

Whenever—

00:28:57

SR: Yeah. Okay, should I pause this?

00:28:59

PA: Yeah.

00:29:01

SR: We're back, and you were just kind of pointing out how Clovelly Farms used to have a lot of homes on it, or in it.

00:29:11

PA: Yes.

00:29:11

SR: And now we just passed over a protective levee. Around when was that built? During your lifetime?

00:29:20

PA: Um, I guess around 13--15 years old. I'm 40 years old, so I'm guessing that's about—and it was taking place before that, but I want to say when I was around 15 years old, give or take. I think that's when it was completed. I think.

00:29:43

SR: Okay, back to when you were younger. You know, you--you told me earlier that your parents had three boys. What was your mom doing when you were all out trapping and on the boats? Did she come with you, or did she stay home?

00:30:01

PA: Sometimes she did come with me. Sometimes she did come with us. Most of the time, like for trawling, she was always in the boat with my dad. We was in the boat, too, with my dad. Trapping itself, I never seen her go trapping, but for alligator hunting and trawling she always was in that boat. And when we would get home, she would be the one that would help do a lot of the skinning. You know, she--she did a lot of—she was a hard laborer as for that part. But she took care of her—she took care of me and my two brothers like we should have been taken care

of. And she always did all that good stuff—trapping and trawling, and you know she--she was a tough woman.

00:30:49

SR: What about—there's so much to ask you about. Did your parents both grow up in Cut Off?

00:30:57

PA: My mom is from Lockport, and my dad is from Cut Off. My mom and dad actually met at the old Noah's [Drive Inn] in Lockport, a very famous place. She was the—I want to say my dad told me the story—she was the one that made the milkshakes and all, and I guess she would come to the window because back then; that's how they did that. And that's where they met.

00:31:22

SR: What is their heritage? Are they both Cajun through and through?

00:31:27

PA: Yes, both Cajun. My grandpa on my mom's side, actually, was more of a cowboy-type-Cajun. In other words, he--he dealt with horses and cows, and he also trapped. He--he did all that stuff, too. He--he was a hard laborer. I think they had nine--ten kids in the family. They had a lot of kids, and they--they did a lot of hard labor. And my--my grandfather on my mom's side was—he went through a lot, yeah. He lost fingers. He got electrocuted already. Yeah, he almost—quite a few times he almost lost his life. But he was a hard laborer, too; he did all that good stuff.

00:32:04

SR: What are your parents' names?

00:32:06

PA: My dad's name is Paul and my mom's name is Deanna Autin.

00:32:12

SR: Did you grow up hearing French spoken in the house?

00:32:16

PA: Not really in the house. I've heard my daddy talk about it a lot with his friends and all, and they still do, but it just wasn't something that we was taught to do. We wasn't taught, you know, much of it. I don't know a whole lot of it.

00:32:30

SR: I hear you say a lot of French words, though, in your conversation.

00:32:34

PA: Yeah, sometimes I do. It's just kind of natural. You know, you hear it—kind of natural.

00:32:40

SR: I wanted to ask you about your decoy carving. You showed me some of your decoys that you were working on the other day. How did you get inspired to do that?

00:32:52

PA: Um, to be honest with you, one day I was digging in the shed and I found some old decoys. I'm not sure who they were for. It was from my dad, but I don't know who made them. And that's what inspired me. I looked at them. I went and painted on them, and I used them as decoys, and I found it was more fun to—so that's what got me into the carving. **[*Phone Rings*]**

00:33:22

SR: And what--what do you intend to do with them when you finish?

00:33:27

PA: Well, use them, display some, and sell some—you know, sell some.

00:33:34

SR: That's a real traditional craft from around this area, I think.

00:33:37

PA: Yes, my--my great-grandfather was pretty famous with that, and you know it just--it kind of touches you to know that I got that in my blood. It's fun to do, and you know it's just--it's pretty cool to be doing that in life. It really is. I enjoy it.

00:34:05

SR: Tell me how—if it did affect your life—how the last year's oil spill affected your life as far as recreational—. Well, and you also make money with it, fishing and--and trapping and hunting.

00:34:23

PA: Personally, me, at the time of all that it hasn't done nothing to me because I was sick and I--I really couldn't do nothing. But as for my brothers and a lot of people that I know, it has impacted them because it just seems that there's—it seems that there's possibly less crabs. It seems like the fishing industry has slowed down. I never paid very much attention to it, but I'm sure if I was out there trying to make a living at the moment and things slowed down, I would have looked more into it. But personally, me, as of right now, it has not to me because I really ain't been on the water for the last few years. But it has impacted my--my family.

00:35:14

SR: What about bridge operations? Does it affect that? I know your dad works—what bridge does your dad work on?

00:35:23

PA: My dad works on the Galliano Lift Bridge right here.

00:35:26

SR: And I know you worked on the bridge, too. Does it affect that at all, the traffic on the bayou?

00:35:31

PA: No, I don't think it—no, it didn't affect that. Now, you know what? Come to think about it, it very well could, because trawling—if trawling is slowed down, then that means there's less boats on the water. So it very well—you know, never know. It--it might. It very well could.

00:35:51

Now, as for job-wise, you need someone on the bridge at all times. For the fact—you know, to have the bridge open when it needs to be open. But maybe there is less boats that I'm not noticing. Come to think about it, you're right; it might just impact that.

00:36:11

SR: I was wondering earlier: How many bridges are there on the bayou that need to be opened, that need bridge operators? Do you have any idea?

00:36:21

PA: Two, three, four, five—south of the Intracoastal [canal], about five bridges that you need—five. And north of it you need one, two, three, four—four. And the other bridges are what they call "call-out bridges." They just call whenever there's a boat that's needed and needs an opening. They'll go open it, but they don't stay on that bridge. But south of us it's five and north is four—no, five north. Sorry, five of them north.

00:37:01

SR: What about Katrina? How did that affect your life?

00:37:04

PA: Wow, I seen a lot of chaos, devastation; a lot of people died. Personally, we stayed for Katrina. We was here for Katrina, and that was—I seen some interesting things fly in the air. Me and my brother was in my vehicle a couple of times, and it feels like you're in a simulator, like literally. It was--it was pretty tough. A lot of people lost a lot of stuff. And I just feel that a lot of things could have been avoided after the storm. I just found that at the time when we was most at need, it wasn't there right away.

00:37:53

You know, people still dying when you could have gave people food. It just took a while, and things were not—it just wasn't expected to be as bad as it was. So it--it just caught us—it really caught us all off-guard. I guess like an earthquake. That's what happened to us.

00:38:15

SR: Your houses stayed intact?

00:38:17

PA: Thank God, my house had not one scratch on it. Very fortunate. My two brothers lost some shingles. One of them had a lot of leakage in it, but for the most part we were very fortunate. Thank God we were spared. We really were.

00:38:40

SR: What about the bridge? Did it have any damage?

00:38:42

PA: Oh, a lot of the bridges had damages. All the gates were gone. A lot of the bridges had—yeah. They had a good bit of damage. They had some damage.

00:38:54

SR: I wonder what would have happened if they hadn't built that protective levee. Were your—was your house in particular protected by that levee?

00:39:06

PA: Personally, where I live, we live on a very high ground. But a lot of these places over here would have flooded and people would have lost a lot more. That levee really is—thank God for that levee, because that levee protects us. It really, really does. We're very fortunate where we lived that our levee is there, because if it was not there we would be in trouble. We'd be in serious trouble.

00:39:36

SR: Would you stay for another hurricane of that size?

00:39:39

PA: Yeah, I would. I would.

00:39:43

SR: Why?

00:39:45

PA: Because I just—I would. **[*Laughs*]** I'm not saying I'm not afraid of it, because it is something to fear. Maybe if I had kids. Maybe if I had kids I may have changed my mind about it, but I just never really—I left for a couple of storms in the past, and it's just—I just feel safe. I mean I really do feel safe. Maybe I'm being hard-headed about it. I don't know. But I would. I'd stay. I really would. I'm not going to lie.

00:40:23

SR: Okay, there were a couple—I know we need to pause this here, but I'll just ask you one more Katrina-related thing. There were a couple times today when we were out on the water when you pointed out to me huge pieces of—well, huge areas that were land before Katrina and that are now water. Can you talk a little bit about that?

00:40:46

PA: Basically what happens when you got the--the water that's so high and there's so much pressure, it's just is a thing of something has to give. And that's what gave, that land. You know, it's marsh. And when you got so much water passing through a place at one time like that, you know something--something is going to give. And that's what gave, the--the marsh, the--the land that they had. That's what gave.

00:41:14

SR: Okay, Pierre, could you please describe to me—you were just showing me your family's mud boat, and we saw a few of those out on the water today, and I was wondering if you could describe for me what a mud boat is versus the sort of boat that we were in today, which you were calling a Carolina skiff.

00:41:41

PA: Um, outboard is what we normally use to crab, fish, but the difference between a mud boat and an outboard: Mud boat, you can go in the mud with it, and what you got is a coolant system inside the--inside the boat that is made so that your motor don't overheat; unlike the outboard—don't have the coolant system to where when the water being sucked in from the canal or lake or wherever you're at, there's always got to be a flow of water going through it. And if anything is stuck to where water can't get to it, it'll burn your motor up. It'll overheat it and burn it.

00:42:28

A mud boat, the coolant system don't go through the water like an outboard from natural water, such as the canal or lake or whatever. Your coolant system is like a vehicle where you have your radiator and you have the fan to suck in the air, and the coolant system goes through the motor and you don't need the--the water from outside. So what it does, it allows you to go into barely any water, and sometimes none at all, on--on soft mud. And the way the propeller is, it is made and designed to go and chop up through that mud and to go through it.

00:43:09

And outboard propeller has three blades, and I'm not sure of the difference on how it works, but the three-blade is not good to go through mud. Your motor won't barely move. But the two blades, for some reason, it just pushes it and--and you can; your mud boat will go

through the mud and all that. And like I said, the coolant system is what has a big part to do in it, for it not burning up.

00:43:37

SR: Were there mud boats around when you were growing up?

00:43:41

PA: Oh yeah. Yes, all the time.

00:43:45

SR: So before there were mud boats, what would people use when they wanted to go in the marsh? Just a pirogue?

00:43:50

PA: Pirogues, yes, pirogues.

00:43:53

SR: And so like you were saying, your grandfather would row a boat from here—before there were motor boats—to get to the marsh. Would he be--would he be rowing a pirogue then?

00:44:05

PA: A pirogue, yes. They'll either paddle or push pole. In French a push pole is called the "fourche." What they do is just push themselves through the water with the push pole. Or you

can paddle through the water with your pirogue. When the water would get real shallow, it's harder to--to go through with a paddle. So they would stand up, and they would literally push themselves through the shallow water with their push pole.

00:44:35

SR: Very different from today. We made some real ground even with a motor that wasn't fully functioning.

00:44:41

PA: That's right. People don't realize how good they have it today. Should I say *we* don't know how good we have it today?

00:44:48

SR: Okay, well, thank you so much for giving me your entire day, and I look forward to coming back and maybe doing some alligator hunting or--or crabbing or shrimping.

00:45:00

PA: That's fine with me. Any time you want to come.

00:45:03

SR: Thank you.

00:45:04

[End Pierre Autin Interview]