HHA # 00315
Interviewee: James Moville
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: June 27, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW060
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling has not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. The interviewee cleared his throat a lot and the majority of these instances have not been transcribed.]

Ethnographic preface:

Mr. Moville was born in Opelousas, Louisiana in 1943. His father worked for the Department of Agriculture. He went to the University of Lafayette (UL) for three years in pre-veterinary medicine, but after not making it into Texas A&M for veterinary school, he went to work as a laborer roustabout in a Texaco pipe yard near Vermillion Bay in 1965. Two and a half years later he was transferred to a gas plant in Erath, where he worked in a metering station. During that time he worked a swing shift and went back to UL under Texaco's tuition aid plan and received a degree in agricultural business. After he got his degree, he went to work in as a materials coordinator in the New Iberia office, where he stayed for about 10 years. After that he was transferred to the Henry Gas Processing Plant as a materials supervisor. He stayed there until he retired in 1999; since that time he has spent his time working on his cattle farm in Opelousas. During his career, he dealt almost exclusively with natural gas and describes the processing of natural gas and the market for it.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [JM]

SW: Okay, this is an interview with Mister James Moville. You pronounce it Moville right?

JM: Moville.

SW: Moville. [Inaudible] It's June twenty-seventh, 2003, in the OCS office. And I know you know a little bit about what we're doin' here because we, we talked to you guys last week.

JM: Right.

SW: We, I want to say Dr. Carriker and I had a great time with you.

JM: Did you?

SW: You guys really um, were very energetic and very um… y'all like congregating with each other and then talk about the old days and everything.

JM: Yeah.

SW: And uh, so we had a really good time. We enjoyed that. Uh [Clears throat] I like to start off with a little bit of background. Like ask you when you were born, where you were born, and where you were raised. And to see how that kind of led up to-

JM: Yeah. I was-

SW: Your later life.

JM: I've been in this area all my life. I was born and raised in Opelousas. [Clears throat] And uh, went to school there. And then came to school here at UL.

SW: What year were you born, sir?

JM: Nineteen forty-three. [Pause]

SW: I just had an interview subject that left, he was born in 1943.

JM: Yeah, I'm an even 60 now, man, it's bad. [Both laugh] When I was a kid, a guy 60 was old dude, you know, now it doesn't seem that bad at all.

SW: Naw, naw. You look pretty, you look really young, too. [JM clears throat] So um-

JM: I like the way to talk to me. [Both laugh]

SW: Just buttering you up. Um, what uh, what did you, did you uh, was your father in the oilfield?

JM: No. My father worked for the uh, Department of Agriculture. He retired from there.

SW: You uh, you came here to UL you said and what did you study?

JM: I finished pre-veterinary medicine. And at the time you could not get a degree in Louisiana. So you had to, there was a quota to Texas A and M and I didn't make the cut. So I uh, I went to work in the oilfield.

SW: From, oh, okay. How, what'd you start out doing?

JM: As a laborer.

SW: Like a roughneck or a-

JM: Well-

SW: Roustabout.

JM: A laborer roustabout. I worked in a pipe yard, pushin' pipe, and greasing and inspecting, and just oilfield equipment maintenance is what it was.

SW: How did, how did you get on [with them?]?

JM: I walked into Texaco office one day and said, "I'm lookin' for a job." And they said, "Good, fill this application out. And we'll let you know." Couple of days later, they called me.

SW: And they were hirin' at the time?

JM: They wanted to know how many words I could type a minute. And I worked for two or three years before I ever saw a typewriter. [SW laughs]

SW: It almost made you worry you were gonna do a lot of typing.

JM: Yeah. [Both laugh]

SW: [Inaudible] versus working on the pipe.

JM: Oh, yeah, that would've been a good thing, yeah.

SW: It was hard work?

JM: Yeah.

SW: And physical?

JM: It was physically, yeah. It was, you're in the heat, in the cold, and whatever conditions were out there, that's where you work.

SW: And that was here in Lafayette?

JM: This was south of New Iberia. Um, near Vermillion Bay. Texaco had a pipe yard out there.

SW: At that time, though, that must have been in the '60s.

JM: Yes. I started '65.

SW: Nineteen sixty-five. Was it difficult to get a job then, or, or, I mean, you said you just walked in-

JM: It wasn't for me. Uh-

SW: Did you see other people at that time?

JM: At that time uh, no, it wasn't real difficult, even comin' out of school you could get a job.

SW: Even without say a college degree or somethin' like that?

JM: Yeah. High school people went to work, it wasn't. [Pause]

SW: And you had a pre-vet, you had a bachelor's degree, but that was pre-vet, it wasn't necessarily oil-

JM: Right, it wasn't a degree yet. I, I wasn't degree.

SW: Oh, okay. It was a two-year, was it a two-year type-

JM: It was uh, yeah, I finished in three, three years. Uh, and I came back and finished after I was hired on with Texaco. I came back under their tuition aid plan and finished in uh, ag business.

SW: Oh, okay. So they, they, they paid for you to go back to school?

JM: Uh hm. Yeah.

SW: At ULL.

JM: I was on a schedule where I could come during the day. I was working a swing shift where I was off uh, two days a week and then I worked nights two days a week. So I'd come here during the day.

SW: So you were like workin' two and two? Two and two off, two on, two off sort of?

JM: Well it was uh, I had two days off and then I'd work uh, two evenings, like from three to 11. And then one graveyard. So, it, I was off everyday during the day.

SW: During the day you had time-

JM: Normally I would be sleeping, but I didn't do that. [Chuckles]

SW: Yeah, you were-

JM: Actually I came, a couple of semesters I came full-time, carried 16 hours.

SW: It's rough though, huh? [Chuckles]

JM: Yeah. You wanna do it when [handle?] it that way.

SW: When you, when you're young. I, I work nights myself. I used to come to school, yeah. It gets tiring after awhile. [Chuckles]

JM: Yeah. But uh, I wanted to finish it.

SW: Were you able to do any work, like say on night shift, could you do homework?

JM: Uh, no.

SW: You, you, y'all were still workin'.

JM: Yeah.

SW: The lights were on and everything?

JM: Yeah, I was uh, at that time we calculate offshore production. At [Tiger Shore?] and [Mount Hoint?] they'd send all their data into us on, on the [Inaudible]. And we'd do the calculations. So that took uh, once I was workin' took the better part of the night to do that.

SW: Wow, okay. So you weren't just pushin' pipe around at that point, you had-

JM: No, at that point-

SW: You had graduated to somethin' else?

JM: Right. I had moved from the pipe yard to a gas plant in Erath. And that's where I started the swing shift work. I stayed on the pipe yard about two and a half years.

SW: Two and a half years. What kind of schedule did you work there?

JM: It was straight days, but off two days during the week.

SW: Yeah, okay.

JM: The first seven, eight years I worked for the company, my days off were Tuesday and Wednesday.

SW: It just ended up-

JM: I never had a weekend off, yeah. Then after a while.

SW: So it was, it was a five workday week.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: You just-

JM: Right.

SW: Why did you, why do you think it ended up like that, that it was Tuesday and Wednesday?

JM: Well the uh, because it was seven day operations. So you rotated your guys.

SW: And just ended up like that?

JM: Yep.

SW: That's true the oilfield never stops, huh.

JM: That's right.

SW: [Chuckles] So you went to the, the plant in Erath. And uh, was that better? Did you find it a little bit better?

JM: Well it was much better. It was clean work. Natural gas is clean work. And we'd uh, the facility I was in at the time was a metering station. All the offshore gas would come in through this station and go into the process plant next door. And then we had sales outlets. The process gas would come back. So we'd monitor the inlet gas and volumes, we could control that by opening and closing wells offshore from Erath.

SW: That, that's where you operated?

JM: Yeah, it's a microwave control system. And uh, so we maintained flow to, to, to match the sales.

SW: That, that sounds uh, I've heard people talk about this and I, I'm not too up to date on it, maybe you could explain it, sounds like it's kind of [Inaudible] allowable? Do you know what the, the allowable?

JM: The uh, allowables were uh, uh, more oriented to the oil, the liquid production.

SW: Oh, okay.

JM: These wells would uh, had certain allowables. And you wouldn't, you couldn't overproduce that well each month, so you'd-

SW: And, and the government controlled [Inaudible, JM coughing]-

JM: Right.

SW: They, they set a limit on what you could do.

JM: When you drilled that well, it was assigned an allowable.

SW: What was the reasoning behind-

JM: Don't know. Because I never did uh, I didn't, I never did that work. Producing these wells. But uh, certainly in the oilfield it was, that was common term, you knew what it was.

SW: That's why I keep hearing [Inaudible, JM clearing throat] but I, I'm not, I've tried to ask it and most people say that you just went with it. [Chuckles]

JM: And uh, certain wells had to be uh, produced at a certain volume and you couldn't overproduce it or you'd kill it.

SW: Okay, yeah, well, that makes sense.

JM: So they had to uh, they'd, for example, an oil well would run on through the choke. That was a device on that flow line comin' out with an [orifice?] really is what it was. And uh, they'd flow it on that choke for a given pressure and that would produce the volume they wanted and they'd calculate that out.

SW: Okay. It's-

JM: Some wells produced for years and years because they took care of 'em and didn't pull 'em too hard.

SW: Instead of just openin' up and lettin' it all go out, they would just keep it-

JM: Yeah, you collapsed that formation over there if you flow it, the oil can only come out to that, to that well, to that pipe so, so fast.

SW: I see. Have you ever uh, what happens, and I know I'm askin' you stuff that you said you didn't necessarily work with, but you seem pretty knowledgeable anyway. Uh, if, if you pull it out too fast, it collapses the formation-

JM: It uh, well, the term was "sanding up." It would just pull all the sand and the junk.

SW: Ah.

JM: To the screen on the uh-

SW: Block everything up.

JM: [On their production screen that we had?]. Then you'd have to go in and rework it.

SW: Was that a [bad?] th-, was that a [Inaudible] rework it?

JM: Yeah, yeah, you have to put a rig on the well and pull the pipe out and go in and maybe drill into another zone and recomplete it again.

SW: So it was a big mess if you did that? So this was somethin' that they wanted to keep an eye on?

JM: Yeah.

SW: But it, that was oil, not, not so much natural gas. Yeah, right.

JM: Yeah.

SW: You, you worked only natural gas or?

JM: Yeah.

SW: Ah, okay.

JM: Natural gas has a, a liquid that comes out with it, we call it natural gas condensate. And we had to deal with that in the facility also, but uh-

SW: You'd separate it?

JM: We'd run it through separators and physically separate the liquid from the gas. And there was a market for that, we'd pump it out to the Port Arthur refinery. It's like uh, unrefined gasoline is what it is. It's a very light-

SW: It, it's in liquid and gas form?

JM: No.

SW: You said when you would separate it?

JM: We'd separate it. Yeah, gas would go one way, liquid would go another.

SW: Oh it was the, the liquid gas and another liquid that was all in it?

JM: Yeah.

SW: And needed to separate that.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Okay.

JM: It, it all flows out of the well together, you know, mist and a gas form. Then you can break it out.

SW: Trap it and break it out.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Okay. What uh [Slight pause] I hear, I hear some people talk about natural gas and say, "Oh, back in the day it was nine dollars an MCF and now it's two dollars," and I, I don't underst-, they, they say in the '70s it was, now I'm just usin' numbers, it was high and now it's low. I, I would've thought that uh, it would've gotten more expensive.

JM: It has.

SW: Oh it has?

JM: Yeah.

SW: I guess I'm gettin' that wrong.

JM: The market value now is much higher than it was then. Uh, back in like '70s or '80s. They uh, at one point there was no market for natural gas, that's why you'll see the flares in all the oilfields. They were burnin' off the natural gases, came out of the, with the oil. There was just no market.

SW: So they, they, they had nothin' else to do with it but get rid of it?

JM: Tremendous amount of gas went up in flames because there was no market for it. We uh, the Henry Gas Processing Plant, now, was Henry Recycling Plant when it was built in the '40s. And all they did in those wells around the plant was pull the natural gas out, extract the liquids, and pump the gas back into the ground. And then years later we went back and recovered all of that gas. But that's where it was. I have a, an interesting article on that I could bring you. It's uh, like the history of that plant and what it did. It was the biggest operation in, in the country at one time.

SW: Henry Processing Plant?

JM: Yeah, it was, then in '40s it was built as the Henry Recycling Plant.

SW: Where was it?

JM: Uh, just south of Erath. Highway three thirty-one, goin' uh, from the middle of uh, town, south.

SW: I see.

JM: It's about four or five miles out of town.

SW: Okay. When um, gettin' back to you said they used to burn it off, when did they stop burnin' it off? When-

JM: Um, I'm not sure exactly what, what time period, but they developed um, natural gas as a fuel. And then that's when it, when they developed a market for it.

SW: And then they started makin' money off of it.

JM: Exactly.

SW: Instead of just burning it off. Uh, can you use the same pipes that you were sh-, pumpin' the oil in with it or did you have to have separate pipelines for the gas?

JM: You had separate piping for gas, yeah.

SW: Keep the separate.

JM: They would come out of the ground together, and then that's when you'd go into a series of separators where you could physically-

SW: Pull 'em apart.

JM: Flash the gas off. You, and then do what you want to do with the liquids.

SW: That's pretty much what I have when I turn my stove on is natural gas, right?

JM: That's it.

SW: Then companies like TransLa and companies like that. Okay. Don't they have a [Pause] maybe I'm soundin' crazy, but somebody said you can run a vehicle off of that?

JM: Yeah.

SW: Natural gas.

JM: Uh hm. [Slight pause] Well it's uh, LNG, a liquefied natural gas, you compress and store it under pressure and it's a liquid. But as it comes out to feed the engine, it goes back to gas form.

SW: Is that economical or is that uh-

JM: It's a new technology that hasn't been uh, it hasn't been able, they haven't been able to market it like you do in gasoline.

SW: Yeah, well they have all those stations. Does, does it burn cleaner or somethin' like that? Does it have some advantages.

JM: Yeah. For example, uh, at Texaco we ran a lot of company trucks on propane, which is the same principle, under pressure it's a liquid. And uh, much cleaner burnin' fuel for engines, they run forever on pro.

SW: And you get the same power and torque and everything that you can get from gasoline?

JM: Oh. You can tell the difference.

SW: Oh really?

JM: I had trucks that I could switch to gasoline if the propane uh, I emptied it out. And you could tell when you switched to gasoline you had a lot more power.

SW: Lot more power.

JM: Yeah.

SW: Kind of like the diesel engine [Inaudible] turbo on it right? [Chuckles]

JM: Uh hm. Exactly. Help it out some.

SW: Give it a little kick. [Laughs] Um, so okay, yeah, we've, we were, sorry we got sidetracked there. I just, I ha-, uh, technical questions that pop up in my mind. You were at Erath, how long did you stay at Erath uh, at that point? Or that station.

JM: I stayed uh, at the uh, at the Erath plant about five years. Five to six years. And during that time I finished, I got my degree here.

SW: That's when you were goin' back and forth.

JM: Yeah. And soon as I, I finished school, they uh, I went back into the warehouse department, which was what I was working in at that pipe yard. But I came into the New Iberia office as a, a materials coordinator. Mostly procurement, buying oilfield equipment.

SW: You were kind of getting promotions along the way basically.

JM: Yeah, right.

SW: Whether or not you were staying doing the same thing, you were moving to a better position.

JM: Oh yeah.

SW: And gettin' out of the heat and into the air conditioning.

JM: This was totally in-, inside, yeah.

SW: So-

JM: We did uh, we had a large equipment yard associated with that warehouse office. So you had to, you had to be out there also. Uh, trucks would come in with material you had bought for a job and you may be accumulating it in a certain area. Well, you go out there, makin' sure the material was unloaded in the right place to be sent out to the job later. This was all drilling operations then.

SW: Kind of like a distribution center.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Kind of thing where this stuff was comin' in and then y'all'd send it out.

JM: And then along with that operation was day-to-day supplies for all these fields and everything. We took care of an area from Lake Charles to Port Barre.

SW: What kind of schedule were you workin' then?

JM: Straight days.

SW: And you gettin' better [Inaudible, JM clearing throat] as you went along.

JM: Oh yeah. [Laughs]

SW: Did that degree help out at all?

JM: Absolutely. Uh hm.

SW: That's what got you out of the fields-

JM: Yeah. [Pause]

SW: That's uh-

JM: It didn't matter what it was in, it was, I had a degree in ag business but that didn't matter.

SW: That's what uh, you said your father got too.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Your father was in the agriculture business so.

JM: Yeah.

SW: Uh, how did you, well, you said you, you uh, finished with school and you needed some, you needed a job, so you went hi-, what, what drew you to the oil industry?

JM: Well [Pause] I don't know, I guess just, I had an interest in that. And during those days, if you got a job with an oil company, you were pretty much set. If you did your work, you stayed there. After I was working a week or so, I knew that I wasn't gonna go anywhere else. I wasn't [Inaudible].

SW: It was consistent-

JM: Yeah.

SW: Because I, I've heard some people say, you know, they were worried about the layoffs and things like that. But not everybody's tellin' me that. So you were never really concerned about uh-

JM: Uh uh.

SW: Losin' your job or anything?

JM: No. That was very secured employment. I mean, some, some guys hired on with Texaco or Shell or Exxon and uh, they worked all their lives as a roustabout. They may have had a high school education and uh, but that's, they were happy doin' that and they worked 30, 35 years and retired. [Pause]

SW: I'm hearin' from some people and you might concur this point, uh, that if you did what you were supposed to do, the company took care of you.

JM: Oh absolutely.

SW: That's what I've heard back then, I, I know it's different now from what I hear. There's no loyalty in either direction. [Chuckles]

JM: Right.

SW: Well, uh, but uh, so you would say that uh, oh I guess, for Texaco or Chevron or whatever, you, you felt that if you did your job, that they would-

JM: Oh absolutely.

SW: They would take care of you.

JM: You uh, you knew several layers of management. People would come down. They knew what you were supposed to be doing and you knew them. Which was a, a, that was one of the major changes I saw over the years. Sometimes your supervisor didn't know what you were supposed to be doing.

SW: In later years?

JM: Yeah. [Pause] Because uh, a lot of people came into the oil industry with no industry background. [Slight pause]

SW: Such as yourself.

JM: Yeah. My, like when I started out, my supervisors were promoted up the ranks within the industry. So he may have been a roustabout doin' what I was doin' and now he's a district manager. But he went up through the ranks of the business.

SW: Learned from the ground up.

JM: Or as, uh, in later years, they'd hire marketing managers right out of college and put 'em in a managing position, but they didn't know the business. They knew marketing.

SW: Yeah. And so they were making decision based on marketing-

JM: Yeah.

SW: And not based on the industry? [Pause] So that, I've, I've heard that too from a lot of the guys, guys I've interviewed. It's uh, it's like bein' run by bean counters, you know, instead of actually people who were in the field.

JM: Yeah.

SW: That can create a, or it does create problems. [Slight pause] Um. [Pause] But uh, yeah, so you, you learned from the ground up just like you're talkin' about some of these other guys.

JM: Yeah.

SW: Um, you stayed there at uh… at uh-

JM: At New Iberia.

SW: The New Iberia plant, how long did you work there? [Slight pause]

JM: Oh maybe 10, 12 years. If that long, 10 years maybe. And then I was transferred back out to the Henry Plant, the Henry Process Plant. As a materials supervisor. One of the guys out there was retiring so.

SW: They needed somebody.

JM: Yeah.

SW: You doing the same job you were doing in New Iberia, but-

JM: Basically yep. It just uh, different equipment. And uh, there was a little more urgency in some of the purchasing because a gas plant is a seven day, 24 hours, it's a 24/7 operation so-

SW: [Inaudible]

JM: It's almost like a drilling rig, I mean, you had, except much bigger. And a wide variety of materials we'd buy. You know, chemicals for the processing, pipe valves and fittings, pumps. And as uh, the function of the warehouse was uh, procurement, repair. We tracked all the, the movable assets when pumps going out to a shop for repair, coming back in, we'd uh, do the paperwork, account for where your equipment is going and into what shop. Transportation. We hired all the trucking to move. It was uh-

SW: Pretty big operation.

JM: Big operation, yeah. [Pause]

SW: Any uh, just maybe not also at the warehouse but, you know, at the pumping station and all the other stuff, what kind of uh, what kind of level of danger did you see there? Was involved in [Inaudible] high pressure stuff or anything like that?

JM: It uh, you know, any time you deal with pressure, there's uh, you have to be aware of the safety, safety aspect of it. But uh, we'd go to safety meetings and as uh… through the years, safety became a much bigger issue as we roll along. In 1965 when I started we'd have safety meetings but it uh, it wasn't as intense. And as we, as the technology developed and we went along, a lot more emphasis was placed on uh, on safety. And uh, lot more equipment was put in place. Safety devices. For example, on vessels, uh, you'd uh, a lot of ladder safety devices were installed. You just didn't do anything, put anybody at risk.

SW: Was that because people were getting hurt or company-

JM: They uh-

SW: How did that evolve?

JM: They got to a point where they realized that lost time accidents were very, very costly. [Slight pause] And there was a payout for the money they spent on safety equipment. When I went to work, you had to buy your own hard hat and your own steel-toed boots. They gave me a pair of safety glasses, that was the only piece of safety equipment they gave us. And I wish I had kept those things. [Laughs] They're round glasses with a hinge in the middle, a groove, tinted, and that's all you got was safety glasses. And when I left the gas plant operation, we'd by Movex, fire retardant clothing, steel toes, slicker suits, uh, certainly you'd furnish the hats and the, the hats, gloves, safety eye wear, protective eye wear, everything. Hearing protection. Yeah, you bought all that for the employee.

SW: Including the boots you said?

JM: Oh yeah.

SW: I, I mean, and uh, it makes sense, the hard hats, you know, everything that you [Inaudible], but seems to me a man's shoes are his own shoes and-

JM: They got two pair of safety shoes per year.

SW: But steel toes, had to be a certain-

JM: Yeah. This is steel toe.

SW: Oh. You, you used to wear 'em? [Chuckles]

JM: Yep, absolutely. But uh, as part of what I did also, I'd get a um, now the safety shoe industry has these big trucks full of every kind of shoe imaginable. They'll come onsite, fit ya, and do the sales right there.

SW: Ah okay. So it created another little niche in the industry right there.

JM: That's right. Uh, lack of safety, uh, work clothes also.

SW: You said the flame retardant clothes.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: That could actually keep the, if, if something got on you and it was on fire-

JM: Yeah, it uh, keeps the flash from gettin'-

SW: The flash?

JM: You know, if you got in too intense heat, well then [Inaudible] like anything else, uh, like a flash of flame that could ignite regular clothing, this'll keep you in pretty good shape.

SW: That's interesting. It's amazing what they develop. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah. Well it's the same fabric firefighters have been using for years.

SW: Oh, okay.

JM: It's called Movex.

SW: Movex.

JM: Yeah. [Slight pause]

SW: Did you, did you ever get hurt yourself or?

JM: I had one lost time accident. When I first started I pulled a muscle in my back. And that was the only accident I ever had.

SW: How did-

JM: That was in the pipe yard.

SW: That was in the pipe yard?

JM: Yeah.

SW: You were liftin' somethin'? And what happened? You, you just, you took some time off, the company-

JM: Yeah. They uh, they brought me from the pipe yard to a hospital in New Iberia in the back of a Ford Falcon. Face down on the backseat. I was hurtin'.

SW: You just pulled a muscle or somethin'?

JM: Yeah, they treated it with ultrasound for, I was in the hospital a couple days. And uh, I got better. Every now and then I pull a muscle in my back now, but it's, I don't think it's related to that.

SW: You didn't have any lun-, long, long term effects from that or anything?

JM: No.

SW: That's uh, you ever see anybody get seriously hurt?

JM: No. I haven't seen any serious accidents. [Pause] I've been fortunate.

SW: Yeah. I mean, you know, you hear stories.

JM: Hm?

SW: People get killed and things like that.

JM: People have gotten killed, for example in Erath, but uh, I wasn't in that, in the area when it happened.

SW: Um. I wanted to ask you also I guess somewhere in the middle of this, about the kind of pay you received. It must have been pretty good, they have you work all those crazy hours and you stuck around. [Both laugh]

JM: Yeah. The pay was always good. Pay was always a little better than you could do anywhere else. When you factored in security and benefits. Lot of, I saw a lot of people leave Texaco because they could make more money with a service company, for example. But uh, they didn't last 34 years with 'em.

SW: There's more turn-around on that end?

JM: Yeah. I always felt that I liked the security. [Pause]

SW: It uh [Pause] what else could you have done? There was nothing, there was not really anything else that, well, yeah, you say factor in the security whatever if you go with another oil company, but outside of the industry altogether was there anything else in the area that you could have done that would have paid you on par?

JM: Given the degree I had, I could've gone into agriculture business around here somewhere.

SW: [Inaudible]

JM: Yeah. But uh, I just liked the oilfield. [Pause]

SW: So. One of two things, it was oilfield or farming. [Laughs]

JM: Yeah.

SW: Not much else goin' on around here.

JM: There was, you know, bunch of jobs with the service companies. The oilfield service industry was big in this area at one time. And it still is uh, some of the big boys are still there and the supply store industry. There's not as many supply stores, but those that are there do pretty good.

SW: That's sprung up as a need to support the-

JM: Exactly.

SW: The, the drilling and exploration that was goin' on.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: So it goes hand and hand basically.

JM: Yeah. And as the rig count goes down, then you see those support companies dried up.

SW: Yeah. You uh, you were tellin' me about the evolution or the evolvement of the safety as it came. Bein' that you got in, in the mid-'60s and you continue to work, what, what happened to the industry's view, views towards the environment?

JM: Got much better. Much better. Um, standard procedure when you'd uh, start up, start a land location, you'd dr-, you, first thing you did was dig a pit. And all your waster water, uh, slop from the drilling operation would go into that pipe. And then when they left they'd clean it up, suck that out. Now you don't drill, you don't dig anything. Nothing goes in the ground. You, you bring Frak tanks out there and uh, all your waste goes into these tanks.

SW: And then it gets brought somewhere else?

JM: Yeah, they truck it out. It's a tank on wheels. They literally hook it on to the truck and pull it out again.

SW: So they don't want it, they don't want it touchin' the ground at all.

JM: Nothin' touches the ground.

SW: Is that, is that uh, company policy or government regulation?

JM: Well it's uh, now it's company policy. I'm sure all those drilling companies. But I think it evolved from government regulation.

SW: They're pushin' for that kind of thing?

JM: Yeah. I mean, in the s-, in the '70s, if you would've told that crew setting up a location, "You can't let nothin' touch the ground." They, that would've killed 'em. "We can't do it." And now it's done with no problem at all.

SW: It won't get done any other way.

JM: That's right.

SW: So, so, so physically the, the way the, with the equipment and everything that was being used and the methods that were being used back then, that's just the way it got done.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: They didn't do it, they didn't have the ability to do it any other way.

JM: Yeah, right. I don't recall ever seeing Frak tanks on these big trucks that collect all this stuff. It didn't exist. That evolved from the uh, regulations.

SW: So they had to come up with a way to do it.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Prior to that they weren't even really thinking that way.

JM: Yeah.

SW: Did you ever do any work offshore? Did you ever go offshore?

JM: No, I didn't work, I worked for the offshore department when I was at that little uh, metering station. Offshore division had that because that's where we calculate the offshore production at night. But I never had work out there.

SW: Well I was just wonderin' if uh, what, what they did out there for certain things, too, how did they store-

JM: Well they used to let uh, saltwater go back overboard, things like that. That, that doesn't happen anymore.

SW: And that's saltwater comin' from the reservoir?

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Oil reservoir.

JM: Yeah.

SW: 'Cause there is saltwater in there.

JM: Yeah, it's just pure saltwater. I don't think they can do that anymore.

SW: It's, it's, it's not the same as the saltwater that's in the ocean itself?

JM: It uh, there may be a difference in the salinity, but basically it's just naturally occurring saltwater.

SW: So how do they get rid of it?

JM: Now, uh, I'm sure now they re-inject it in wells. Saltwater disposal wells. Yeah.

SW: That's interesting, everything comes around like that. [Chuckles]

JM: Uh hm.

SW: One day they were burnin' that stuff off and now they're pipin' it and sellin' it and then today they're puttin' stuff back in the whole. [Chuckles]

JM: Well now, uh, even at the process plants if you have to flare, you still have a flare set up, flare system. And if any vessel gets into trouble, it relieves to the flare system and it's burnt as gas comes out. But uh, you have to report that incident to EPA.

SW: Oh okay. 'Cause nobody's supposed to be-

JM: Within, within a matter of an hour or two you have to let 'em know. "We had an incident and we flared." [Pause]

SW: That's, you're bringin' up a good point, 'cause when I went to uh, I drove out down past New Iberia last Friday night on Highway 90, right there past the airport, I think it's Knight Oil Tools.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: There's a, some sort of equipment out there and there was a flare going.

JM: There was?

SW: It was a flame comin' out the top of the hole and I don't know what it was.

JM: Oh right here.

SW: Right there.

JM: Right out of town. They were uh, bringin' that well in.

SW: I mean it's right off the highway, it's right there. You can see it even 100 yards-

JM: I saw the flare. It's uh, they were flowin' the well, tryin' to bring it up. And you have this gas comin' out with it that they have to release.

SW: In the beginnings-

JM: Uh hm.

SW: You have to do that in the beginning?

JM: Yeah.

SW: There's no other way around it?

JM: I don't think so, no. You have to set this flare up and burn off this gas as it, as the well is comin' in.

SW: But, well, obviously the EPA lets them do that.

JM: Uh hm. [Inaudible] permit.

SW: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

JM: In this, well it's a known case, well then you get a permit ahead of time. "We're gonna bring the well in, we're gonna flare." And you probably have to give 'em an approximate volume and about how long you think you will flare. [Pause] So they have a handle on it.

SW: It, it looked pretty odd. I mean, I'm drivin' down the highway right there and that thing was just lightin' up the night sky. [Chuckles]

JM: Yeah. They were tryin' to complete it.

SW: I didn't know they had drilled anything right there.

JM: I think that was workover. Maybe a well that had gone dead.

SW: I, I think so, because I, I think in the past I have seen somethin' there a long time ago there was somethin' there. And then it just went away. So when you say "workover," they, they, do you see a lot of workover's right now these days?

JM: No. Not really. [Pause] But uh, lot of times you see a workover uh, the, the drilling rig is so expensive, so much per day sittin' on there, once they complete the drilling operation, they move that drilling rig off. Then they'll put a small workover rig on it to complete it. So that's a lot of the workover business you have now. They get much better rate on a workover rig.

SW: Yeah, less expensive-

JM: Yeah. And it's lighter work. You know, they run in tubing, your production string, and the completion tools, and it's lighter weight.

SW: So um, what's the purpose of the workover rig? They didn't get all the oil out the first [Inaudible] or?

JM: Sometimes you'll have a problem, uh, you may have a hole in the tubing that you develop down there. So they'll set a workover rig on a producing well and just pull the tubing out and maybe go in with new pipe or reperforate. To uh, in that zone that they're producin'.

SW: So if they had problems or-

JM: Yeah. Put all new equipment back in that. [Pause]

SW: Um. We had talked again earlier about the uh, about job security. You were still workin' during the big '80s bust?

JM: Uh hm. Yep.

SW: Didn't affect you?

JM: No. [Pause]

SW: How did it effect the company or, or other people that you saw?

JM: Uh, you see, Texaco, Texaco survives on their production and these producing fields. So, you know, in, in that period of time we were still intact and sellin' product and makin' money. So it uh, the rig count went down, we wasn't drilling any. And that has a domino effect on that end of the business. But uh, producing was still, was still in pretty good shape.

SW: But Texaco was known as a oil company. Y'all do drilling, production, exploration.

JM: Yeah.

SW: You do the whole, the whole thing, right?

JM: Vertically integrated company.

SW: So, I guess I can say if one industry part is lagging the other can make up for it?

JM: Uh hm.

SW: But uh, if you had, if you would have something like a strict drilling company, when that rig count goes down, those guys are hurting, right?

JM: That's right. See we uh, we owned our own drilling company at the time. And that's slowly been sold. [Pause] You uh, it depends on the nature of the business sometimes. You'll, it's cheaper to hire rigs and contractors to do that. Then if you get so much work, well you might be better doing it in-house with your own drilling operation. And that's what prompted all that. [Pause]

SW: Speakin', speakin' of in-house, does Chevron right now, do you know, have any of, any of those, I see some of those real deep water rigs that the ones, the only one I can think of right now I think it's Exxon, the [dynamic?]. It's not even anchored into, it's, it's the, the thing that the rig sits on top of is not touching the ground.

JM: Yeah, the dynamic positioning holds it.

SW: It has that thing that they flood the bottom and it sits up like that. Does Chevron have anything like that?

JM: I don't know. [Pause] I don't know if Chevron has their own or they just get Ocean Drilling or somebody.

SW: To, to contract out?

JM: Yeah.

SW: It's awfully expensive to go out there. I have heard that uh, sometimes big companies will even get together with each other to put a rig out there and then take percentages because it's so expensive to, to drill.

JM: Yeah. Well that's what brought on the uh, these uh, multiple completion into one platform. They just sit there and you direction drill. Complete all these wells onto one platform.

SW: In one area.

JM: Well I heard somethin' interesting the other day. I have a friend of mine that does a lot of uh, land drilling, he's a consultant, ex-Texaco hand. And they gonna try that concept on land. Settin', settin' a rig and complete all, several wells on one platform. On one, one production area on land.

SW: Seems uh, that seems [Inaudible] I guess before direction drilling came along, if they had a big field, that whole area would be dotted with production platforms after they drilled, right?

JM: Yeah. Uh hm.

SW: Now you can kind of solidify that in one for the whole area.

JM: That's what it looks like.

SW: And uh, I guess that saves the company money, 'cause they can put just one platform out there, one big one, as opposed to 20 small ones. The man power and everything can be localized.

JM: Yeah. And they've uh, the directional drilling technology is much better than it used to be, so.

SW: They've gotten better-

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Yeah, that's always evolving. [Pause] That's uh, that's interesting. What uh [Slight pause] I don't know if I asked you, what year did you retire?

JM: Ninety-nine.

SW: Ninety-nine. You just retired basically.

JM: Yeah. [Pause] It's been a fast four years.

SW: You have hobby?

JM: Yeah, I have a cattle farm in Opelousas.

SW: Oh.

JM: When I called in the other day, I was uh, sittin' in the middle of a field on that. [SW chuckles]

SW: Cell phones are amazing.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: I remember back big box phones. [Inaudible]

JM: Yeah.

SW: Now you use a little bitty thing.

JM: But uh, like I told you, if I'm not in a high noise area, I've been sittin' on a tractor for two days and I can't hear a phone. I just have to keep checkin' every once.

SW: Just look at it every, yeah. Uh, but the guy that I just interviewed a little while ago, he retired about the same time as you and uh, he said he doesn't have any hobbies. And now he spends his spare time aggravating his wife. [Laughs]

JM: Oh no. [Laughs] I would've had to continue to work.

SW: I've heard from the guys that worked all their lives seven and seven or 14 and 14, the only time the marriage was strained is when they quit workin' and they were at home all the time. The wife was, wanted them to get out of there for seven days at a time. [Laughs]

JM: That's right.

SW: It's odd.

JM: I guess, you know, if I wanted to move, probably in '99 I could have gone somewhere else in Texaco and continued to work. But uh, I just didn't see any need for that.

SW: And they gave you an incentive package or something?

JM: Yeah.

SW: You know, I've heard that when they move up to the, you get to a certain level, they, they like to uh, if they can, offer retirement to the higher end employees that are makin' good salaries and all of you experienced guys. And uh, then bring in the lower level ones. The problem is they lose all that experience.

JM: Yeah.

SW: When you guys move out the, the newbies comin' in.

JM: Well what happened at uh, at Henry, the, the production, Texaco production kept goin' down offshore. And it finally got to the point where it wasn't bringin' enough gas in to run that place. So now it's a much smaller operation. And uh, they do procurement with credit cards. Everybody has a credit card. [Pause] So [under the control is after the fact?], the plant manager whoever looks through these purchases every week or so. And calls somebody down if they're spendin' to much money on your card. There's just not the volume to need a control purchasing agency warehousing. [Pause] We had so much material moving in and out that you develop a lot of surplus and junk. And we

controlled that also. I did surplus sales and junk sales. Just turned that money back into accounting. And uh, now you don't have that anymore so a lot of the functions I did just not needed.

SW: Not needed anymore because of the changes.

JM: That's right.

SW: So you stayed at Henry for a long time and uh, as materials uh-

JM: Yeah.

SW: Supervisor. Is that what you ended up finishing out in?

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Or did you, did you eventually transfer to something else?

JM: Not that was it. Retired as materials manager. [Pause]

SW: And so um [Pause] you basically, but I was gonna a-, I wanted to ask you some questions about your family and how, how uh, workin' in the industry affected your family, but it doesn't sound like you moved great distances a lot. You kind of stayed in more or less in this area-

JM: Yeah.

SW: New Iberia or Erath.

JM: [Yeah?], I was fortunate I didn't have to move.

SW: So you didn't, you guys had a house or something. You would just-

JM: Yeah.

SW: Live in New Iberia-

JM: I've been livin' in New Iberia throughout all of this.

SW: Oh, yeah, so you didn't have to move around.

JM: Uh hm. That's right.

SW: You didn't have to change school districts or anything like that.

JM: Right.

SW: 'Cause some of these guys, man, they, I mean, they move every two years.

JM: Sure.

SW: I'm sure you've seen plenty of that. [Pause] Um, movin' around, so that, that's a good thing that you can kind of [Pause] keep that uh, consistency I guess.

JM: A few years I retired they'd post jobs uh, on the intercompany websites and there was a nice job in Houston doin' freight forwarding internationally, which needed a background like I had in oilfield materials and warehousing. And required some overseas travel. And we [Inaudible] that close. Uh, but I think they eliminated that job before I retired. So you had to be careful what you moved to.

SW: 'Cause in a year you might not have anything.

JM: It got, yeah. They might decided that well we'll contract this out or, there wasn't a lot of stability toward the end, near 2000.

SW: But that, that's not necessarily just Chevron, that's all these companies. That's the way the industry is now.

JM: Yeah. That's right.

SW: They, they decide they need to cut costs.

JM: Yeah. I sensed that so I didn't, that's one move I would've made probably.

SW: Oh. [Pause] Where, where would you have gone? Would you-

JM: Houston.

SW: Oh.

JM: Houston. It was a job, Houston-based job. In the Texaco office downtown. [Pause]

SW: So. [Pause] Time, you decided it was time to get out while the gettin' was good sort of?

JM: Yeah. That, that package, uh, the package was good. And after 34 years I said, "I'm done." [Chuckles]

SW: I already finished, yeah. It was a nice run, though.

JM: Yeah.

SW: Any regrets at all about it?

JM: No, absolutely not. Uh, and I particularly liked the work I did because I met a lot of people both within the company and in the business outside Texaco. I dealt with these people everyday, you know. And I just enjoyed that.

SW: Would you um [Slight pause] I'm not askin' you to say anything bad about any other company, but would you think if you worked somebody, a company other than Texaco or Chevron, you mighta had a different experience?

JM: I don't think. Guys uh, in the other major companies that did what I did, it was pretty, it was like a mirror image of what I did.

SW: Industry standards operations and things like that.

JM: Uh hm. Yeah. There's always differences, you know. We bought out Getty [one?] and oh they complained that we didn't do things right. When Chevron and Texaco merged uh, oh, "Chevron doesn't do it right." [Laughs] But uh, you got to be flexible and they doin' somethin' right.

SW: Exactly. Whether they're doin' it right is in the eye of the beholder half the time. [Chuckles]

JM: Uh hm, that's right.

SW: But uh, what uh, what do you think of the oil industry in, in your opinion, what do you think the oil industry did for south Louisiana?

JM: Oh my goodness. It had a tremendous impact on us. In this area, Lafayette for example, uh, I can recall in, in the '70s uh, kids would come here to UL and graduate, get a degree, and they wouldn't leave. Uh, recruiters, recruiters had a hard time comin' in here and tryin' to entice graduates to go to another part of the country to work. There were so many jobs here and they'd, they come down from all over the country and stay. That says a lot of what was goin' on at the time.

SW: And 10 years later, everybody's leaving. [Chuckles]

JM: Yeah. And-

SW: Couldn't keep-

JM: No matter where they go, it's hard to find job.

SW: Yeah. [Pause] Um, you, you uh, how, how many children do you have?

JM: Two.

SW: Two children. And they goin' to school here in [Inaudible]?

JM: Yeah, well, my daughter graduated here. Um, my son is workin' in the area, he graduated from the business college.

SW: Is he in the oil industry?

JM: Yeah, he's workin' for an engineerin' firm here in Lafayette. He does uh, [Inaudible] drawing.

SW: So you and the son, following, sort of following in-

JM: And uh-

SW: Dad's footsteps.

JM: They're busy. Right now he's workin' long days and weekends sometimes. Well they're uh, they have a resident engineer that stays in the Chevron office. Yeah, Chevron is a big customer. They do a lot of uh, production platform design, electrical design.

SW: That stuff. He enjoys it?

JM: Yeah, he likes it.

SW: That's great. [Pause]

JM: My daughter works for an attorney, so she doesn't uh- [Chuckles]

SW: [Inaudible]. I'll, I'll turn the other question around. I, I, the first one was what did the oil industry do for south Louisiana. Um, what do you think south Louisiana did for the oil industry?

JM: I think south Louisiana was a good place for the oil industry uh, to develop because of the uh, the resources they had in people. Uh, somebody went to work for the oil company and liked it, they was loyal as you can get. They stayed here. I think that's the nature of the people in this area. [Pause]

SW: Reciprocal.

JM: Uh hm.

SW: Kind of thing.

JM: Yeah.

SW: They, they fed off of each other almost, basically.

JM: It will be interesting to see, I don't have a number, but just what percentage of the people in this area worked for oil industry or had somebody in their family that did. It's kind of a symbiotic relationship.

SW: Um, I guess also since you were here and set up and worked in here, but uh, you, I'm sure the company, Texaco, you were workin' for was hiring people and bringin' them in from out of the state, right?

JM: Oh yes.

SW: Did you see lots of people that were, that were not native here, that were moved here?

JM: Yeah.

SW: Where were they comin' from?

JM: Um, the biggest influx I saw was uh, over period of two, three years perhaps, uh, we hired engineers out of Indiana State. I mean, almost every engineer you talked to, young guy comin' on to work was from Indiana. And lot of 'em, when I retired, they were still workin' for Texaco.

SW: Texaco recruiters probably knew some professors up there and just-

JM: That's right.

SW: They kept that chain a long time.

JM: But uh, you know, you got people from all over. I had a real good friend, uh, went, graduated from Rice. I just talked to him a few days ago after Rice won the college World Series. He was ecstatic. But uh, they come from all over. [Pause]

SW: They uh, they, they moved into this area. Um, how, how was it, I mean, what did you, did you notice um [Pause] movin' in they had to adjust to this area and everything. What kind of reception did they get from this area? Were they treated as outsiders or-

JM: Oh no. No. Those guys had a good time here. We've had some, like uh, a couple of engineers from uh, maybe Panama. [Slight pause] Panamanians they had to be. Loved it here. And they came here and stayed, they retired uh, a few years ago.

SW: Still here?

JM: Uh hm.

SW: New home, huh? [Chuckles]

JM: Yeah. But it uh, you didn't see anybody comin' down and say, "I'm gettin' out of here. I can't stand it."

SW: They wanted to stick around.

JM: Yeah. [Pause]

SW: That was, what about uh, when they first got here, though, when they were first transferred here, did you, did you hear any-

JM: I didn't work with 'em that closely to get the comments and exactly what they thought.

SW: What they thought at the beginning of it-

JM: Yeah.

SW: Versus what they thought after awhile. Huh.

JM: Yeah.

SW: How did they take uh, to our food down here? I know we, we've got a lot more spice than they have a lot of other places.

JM: Uh… yeah. They uh, seasonings, they were overwhelmed with that at first.

SW: They get used to it.

JM: Oh yeah, they got used to it.

SW: They go back home where everything's bland.

JM: They uh, when they go back home, they'd take seasonings with 'em.

SW: Oh. So they, they, they sort of became expats almost if you could look at it like that.

JM: I have a brother-in-law that lives in San Antonio. I'm goin' in a couple of days, he, he sent me a list of stuff he wants.

SW: [Inaudible] a lot of it you only get down here.

JM: [Inaudible] Community Coffee.

SW: And your wife is from here, too?

JM: Yeah.

SW: So your brother-in-law-

JM: Yeah, she grew up in Bunkie.

SW: Oh okay. And your brother-in-law is from here, too, then he just-

JM: Yeah, he was in the military, he was in the Air Force and left home when he was early 20s. Had assignments everywhere else but here. And uh, he retired from Randolph Air Force Base in San Antonio and stayed there. [Pause]

SW: If you could put your time in the military and retire after 20 years that's uh-

JM: Yeah.

SW: That's a neat thing to do, I just don't think I could do it. Have somebody barkin' at me, [I wouldn't like that?]. [JM laughs] But it's, it's uh, it's appealing sometimes. I just had basically one other question. Um, we talked about politics earlier, I always like to ask this question uh, mostly down here, especially say when you started out in the '60s, and, and this area was Democrat. That's all there was to it. But now there's a lot of Republicans around here. Uh, I've noticed that there's a lot of uh, Republicans slash conservatives in the oil industry. Would you say that you noticed that a lot as well? [Pause]

JM: I really don't ever ask anybody their party affiliations.

SW: Oh, that could be a fight at work. [Both laugh]

JM: It uh, it just never occurs, we don't talk politics at all.

SW: I guess what I'm drivin' at is uh, I'm, I'm tryin', I'm wondering that a lot of these people come from Texas, Oklahoma, and other places and were Republicans, and then came in here. And is, did that help the growth of the Republican end of things.

JM: Oh I see.

SW: [Inaudible] because it just seems that there's a lot of guys in the industry that lean to that side.

JM: Uh hm. I, it's just a trend I've never noticed.

SW: Yeah, I, I, I can't say that I'm, I'm, I'm finding anything out, I'm not gonna be able to write a book on it or anything, it's just somethin' I keep noticing when I'm asking about-

JM: Texaco, politically, was strong in this area. Uh, you, they did so much for the state. And uh, they were well-connected with Baton Rouge and if uh, if you went to a town in a marked truck, you, you just didn't have a problem. [Chuckles]

SW: Reputation proceeded.

JM: Yeah. [Pause]

SW: That's a good thing.

JM: I was uh, travelin' to a gas plant near the, near Grand Isle one day. I was in a Texaco pick-up truck. And I had some empty barrels in the back that they wanted to collect some, some oil and stuff. We were dismantling the plant. And it was barrels that had uh, methanol, like alcohol. But they had been dumped and drenched and dipped and closed up. And this state trooper stop me. And he wanted to know why, what was in the drums. I told him it was empty. But I still had the methanol stickers on it. And to have been perfectly legal, I should have painted over those stickers and maybe put an empty sticker on the drums. So he was explainin' that to me and he wanted to know who I

worked for, where am I going. So when I told him I was traveling from one Texaco facility to another, in a Texaco company truck, and I was a Texaco hand, and that was Texaco barrels in the back, then he left me alone. That was the end of the story.

SW: You were all good after that.

JM: But he explained to me I should not have those drums marked if that's not what was in it.

SW: Yeah.

JM: And I never did that again. But it's, it's little things like that, you know. Texaco uh, Texaco had some clout in this area.

SW: Sounds like it. [Pause] That's a neat little story. Um, did you want to add anything? I, I, I've asked the questions that I needed.

JM: I don't think I do. I would like to get, find that uh, history of that uh, Erath recycling plant.

SW: I, I'd be very interested in that.

JM: Henry Plant.

SW: The Henry Recycling Plant.

JM: Yeah. And then it was later upgraded and remodeled and it was name the Henry Gas Processing Plant. Which was a completely different operation.

SW: And that, that's over in Erath?

JM: Yeah.

SW: I'd be very interested in that. If you could give me some [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

JM: I was uh-

SW: I would like to read that.

JM: It was published in somethin'. Maybe it was in like a World Oil or, but I have the, copies of that.

SW: Okay. I'd appreciate that.

JM: I'll give 'em to you.

SW: Okay, well thank you for the interview.

JM: Sure.

SW: Turn this thing off. I need to get a picture.

[END OF RECORDING]