HHA # 00436
Interviewee: Robert "Bob" Truxel
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz
Interview Date: June 25, 2003
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA
Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW067
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of "uhs" and "ums", repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability.]

Ethnographic preface:

Bob Truxell was born in 1924 in Illinois but moved to Nebraska when he was 6. He joined the Navy after high school, and then earned a Master's in Geology at the University of Nebraska. He was hired by Chevron in 1951, after interning with them during summers in college. He moved to Louisiana in 1962. He discusses his work in the oil survey industry, evaluation tools, and changes in Lafayette since moving there.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [RT]

SW: This is an interview with Mister Bob Truxell. It's June twenty-fifth, 2003, in the OCS office. And I usually like to start everything off, well, typically this is the study about the oil industry here in the area. Since you were a geologist and you worked in the industry, we like to interview you about your experiences.

RT: Okay.

SW: I like to [Clears throat] 'xcuse me. I like to start off by asking just a few biography questions about where you're from, where you were raised, and how you got into the industry. And last name Truxell, I don't think you're from around here, right? [Chuckles]

RT: No, I think most of the Truxells in the United States around Pennsylvania. [Inaudible, overlapping speech] looked up the name on the Internet there, looked like three-quarters of 'em were Pennsylvania.

SW: Is that where you're originally from?

RT: No, I grew up in Nebraska. Born in Illinois and grew up in Nebraska. And uh-

SW: You moved around a lot as a child? Did your-

RT: No, no. At, moved to Nebraska when I was six years old, so. Went to school there through high school in Nebraska.

SW: What year were you born, sir?

RT: Uh, 1924.

SW: And what did your family do for a living?

RT: Oh my dad was a house painter. He did a little bit of everything. He bought a motel, ran a motel for awhile. He ran a restaurant for awhile and later life he did a lot of painting. He's an a-, little bit of an artist too, he did oil paintings and barns, anything that needed paint. [Chuckles]

SW: Is that-

RT: My mother's, my mother is a nurse. Worked in a little local hospital there.

SW: And Mister Jim told me that you were a geologist?

RT: Right. Yeah, I d-, joined the Navy right out of high school in 1942 and then went to school on the GI Bill there at the University of Nebraska.

SW: Okay, yeah, you had mentioned that over the phone. Did you see any active duty during the war?

RT: Well I spent four years in the Navy. But, no shooting war.

SW: No shooting at all.

RT: No.

SW: They didn't ship you overseas or anything.

RT: No I did a experimental outfit up in Rhode Island for almost three years there. They were looking for different methods of antisubmarine war, and submarines were pretty bad up the East Coast there in '42, '43, even to '44, and they were experimenting with different methods of submarine combat.

SW: Be able to find those guys before they got too close or somethin' like that.

RT: Right, the radar was just coming in when, had sonic torpedoes they drop and things like that.

SW: And so you worked with a lot of that or did you uh-

RT: No, I just the radioman on board the, aviation radioman on board the ship. With the planes, yeah.

SW: And then you said after that you went back to school with the GI Bill. That's where you started to study the geology?

RT: Right, uh hm.

SW: Why'd you pick geology?

RT: Well I wanted outdoor science, but I spent 38 years at a desk. [Chuckles]

SW: See Jim said the same thing. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah. Well you come to south Louisiana, there's not much surface geology to look at, so it's all subsurface. [Inaudible].

SW: Oh okay, I see. So maybe if you were doing geology elsewhere you would be more outside and?

RT: Yeah, you get out in the West, in the Rockies, somewhere like that, and you can go out and actually look at the rocks and make some decisions. But down here it's either geophysical or uh… [Inaudible] surveys, so forth.

SW: That kind of stuff. Did you ever get a chance to go out into the outdoors and look at the rocks or anything or, um-

RT: Well, just on the company training schools. I did get out in the West there at, spent a month out in the Rockies and stuff like that.

SW: That's what Mister Miller said, he did the same thing. And he loved it, but then they, the company sent him over here. [Chuckles]

RT: Right.

SW: Is that what happened to you got out of school, you signed on with a company?

RT: Yeah, I signed on, well, I worked for Chevron one summer when I was a grad student out in Denver. They had come to the university looking for somebody to examine well cuttings and, geologists in Denver come down and hired me and another fella. And we worked there at University of Nebraska looking at well samples. And then they s-, that during the school year and then that summer we went out, or I did at least, went out to Denver and worked the summer out there. And then Chevron offered me a job when I graduated.

SW: Okay, sort of like an internship almost or somethin' like that.

RT: Yeah. Yeah, just a summer hire and they look at ya.

SW: Kind of thing, see if they want to keep you around.

RT: Right, right.

SW: But you got to play around in the woods, so that was okay, huh?

RT: Oh yeah, I like those fieldtrips to go out and roam the Rockies and got up in Canada, Canadian Rockies.

SW: That sounds like fun. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah, got [the lay out?] of Canada. I figured my career was down here.

SW: Oh. I see that you said that you were a grad student, so you got your master's in geology as well?

RT: Yeah, b-, right, both at the University of Nebraska.

SW: Both of 'em.

RT: Yeah.

SW: Could you have, well, see, Mister Miller, Jim said the same thing, that he got his graduate degree as well. Was it, did y'all do that be-, well, did you do that because with just a bachelor's in geology you couldn't find one-

RT: Right, you needed the master's at least, well and it was just a, you know, the oil business is pretty cyclic and it was a dyna-, down cycle when I graduated with the uh, degree and nobody was hiring, so I went back for master's and then found out that Chevron didn't hire anybody without the master's.

SW: Oh, so that was a good thing to do anyway.

RT: Yeah, right.

SW: Chevron. And right when you got hired with Chevron they moved you down here?

RT: Right, I came straight to New Orleans. And-

SW: What year?

RT: And worked in their New Orleans' office.

SW: Oh okay, what year was that?

RT: Came down in '51, 1951. And stayed there in New Orleans office at Chevron 'til 1962. And I came over here.

SW: Right, [Inaudible, overlapping speech]. Nineteen sixty-two. And, oh.

RT: And I, after a few years here I told my boss that I felt my future was in Lafayette, I didn't wanna go anywhere else. I stayed here from '62 to '38.

SW: So uh… were you married at this time?

RT: Yes, I married the year before I came down to Louisiana. Yes.

SW: You were still in grad school when you got married?

RT: Yes, uh huh.

SW: And I guess your wife was from the Nebraska area as well.

RT: Right, she's from Nebraska too.

SW: So how was the move? Having to come back h-, come down here and start your life basically. How as that?

RT: Well I enjoy Louisiana. I liked New Orleans when I lived there, I wouldn't want to go back. And we've got five kids and they're all good Louisiana people. [Chuckles] So I, my wife and I, neither of us wanted to go back to Nebraska when I retired. Figured our family was all down here, we knew more people in Louisiana than we did in Nebraska.

SW: Was, were either of you hesitant about moving this far down south or?

RT: Well no, we were young and foolish and this sounded like a big adventure. We'd never been to New Orleans.

SW: Just go with it, huh? [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah, right. Put everything we owned in the back of a '46 Dodge and came down here.

SW: What about the, what about when you got moved to Lafayette? What, had you had a chance to visit Lafayette and see what it was like over here at all or was it sort of new to you again?

RT: Oh I'd been through Lafayette a couple times, came over here and spent a couple days once. But no, I hadn't really seen too much of Lafayette. I, I'd been through here several times, yeah. Partly, sometimes on, going out on wells and we, the first assignment with a lot of Chevron people and me was [production department?] where you went out in the field when they ran logs on a wells, so I got to run around south Louisiana, from Lake Charles to New Orleans to Lake Charles on any onshore wells that were being logged, you know, electric logs. But it wasn't offshore in '51, there was uh, it was all shut down there in '51, there was no offshore drilling. So all of our work was onshore. So I got to drive ba-, see quite a bit of onshore Louisiana those first years over there on [sitting?] wells, you know, Lake Charles, and driving down to Venice, and things like that.

SW: So you pretty much got the run of the whole place.

RT: Yeah. Driving around south Louisiana in a non-air-conditioned company car and.

SW: Wow.

RT: Drive down to Venice, you'd leave the little vent windows open and the mosquitoes would pile up on the floor there.

SW: [Oh right?]. [Chuckles]

RT: But-

SW: Those little windows that you turn to get the air in?

RT: Yeah.

SW: They work well, right?

RT: Yeah, they brought a lot in.

SW: [Laughs] Brought the air in, the mosquitoes.

RT: Right, right.

SW: I think it's pretty hot and humid down there. Of course that's all over here, too.

RT: Yeah, I still don't like that, but you learn to live with it.

SW: Get used to it. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah.

SW: Not quite as bad in Nebraska I would say. You said that in the '50s all the offshore was shut down. W-

RT: Yeah, there was a moratorium on offshore drilling. I can't remember the details, but uh, we had no offshore operation when I first came down here.

SW: That was when the federal government and the state government were fighting over who had the rights to the oil-

RT: That was probably part of it, I don't remember just what the, yeah.

SW: It sounds familiar I'm thinkin'. So there was nothin' goin' on? Because they had done some offshore at that point I know.

RT: Right, we had-

SW: But they shut it down.

RT: We had something at Bay [Marsan?] uh, earlier, prior to that, but, yeah, it was shut down '51. And.

SW: So you must've s-, how do, how did that effect employment at the time? I guess there were people that were employed, starting into the offshore area, but then they shut it down. I guess some of those people must've lost some jobs, right?

RT: I really don't know. It was all history by the time I got here. And probably didn't have that many people involved in offshore drilling at that time.

SW: It wasn't as big at the time.

RT: No, it wasn't like it has been since.

SW: Definitely. You mentioned also, or, when you said y'all "run the logs," that's an industry term of course, could you explain that to me? I'm not too familiar with-

RT: You know, Schlumberger? You know Schlumberger's the biggest… well evaluation people in the business here. And it's primarily, Schlumberger did most of our log-, electrical logs that they run a wireline into the well. And electrical surveys to identify oil or gas bearing zones. And that-

SW: So they would actually put somethin' in the pipe that's bein' drilled down there?

RT: Well-

SW: To measure?

RT: They had to pull the pipe out of the hole. They drilled the well and have it, well shallow casing had probably been set. At any rate, they drill the well and while, before it's cased uh, they run in a sonde tool on end of a cable, electric cable. Clear the bottom of the hole and then they slowly at a set pace pull that up through the well and it'll measure anything that the tool is designed to measure. Primarily the electrical survey. Showing what is conducting and what is not. And 'course the salt water, everything is salt water saturated most of the way below a few hundred feet here in south Louisiana. And salt water saturated be very conductive and they'd see a real resistance on, high resistance would be primarily down here hydrocarbons, oil or gas, which would not be conductive. Gas particularly, gas bearing bed would be quite, very conductive. I mean, very resistive.

SW: Resistive.

RT: So they were just measuring the resistivity on the primary logging tool as a means of detecting where the oil and gas was, if any, in the hole. And since then they [Inaudible] out into all kinds off well evaluation tools to run on a cable in a well. Measure density, measure sonic response, uh… they run dip meters which way the beds are dipping.

SW: Well that's how it's evolved, it's, technology has gotten a lot better.

RT: Right. Back in '51 all they had was a resistivity tool and a microlog, which'd get more detail over a smaller intervals there. And they had a basic dip meter that was not nearly as well-refined as they got now. I think those three tools about all we had.

SW: Oh okay. And so how did you fit into all of this?

RT: Well the geologist went out and b-, and monitored all this logging operation. And then we took sidewall samples in the well too. Where they ran in there with a, what they called a "core gun." That would shoot a little metal cylinder, they called it a "bullet." A metal, hollow metal cylinder in the wall of the hole and get a little metal s-, sample, I mean a little mineral sample. About an inch in diameter or l-, little less than an inch in diameter and maybe anywhere from a fraction to an inch long. So you get a sample of the rock. And then we would look at that with a fluorescent light where the oil would fluoresce. And those are the duties to, we were supposed to evaluate the well, is there any oil or gas in it.

SW: That, that's what you're doin'. Now, but they must've had a pretty good idea that there was some oil or gas there if they were buildin' a rig and they were drillin'.

RT: [You found?] a lot of dry holes.

SW: Oh really? [Chuckles]

RT: [Inaudible] oil well, I was in the production, well we had, production department evaluated oil wells where they were production department wells or exploratory wells. The geologists in the production department did the geology and recommended the, what we call "development wells," which were offsets to producing wells. Lower risk wells. And our exploration department would drill the new field wildcats in new areas and stuff like that. And the geologists in the production department would evaluate all those wells, the wildcats plus production wells. That was our primary responsibility, is there any oil or gas in the hole.

SW: You gotta tell 'em yes or no, and you, they wanna hear yes. [Chuckles]

RT: Oh yeah, yeah.

SW: Well I guess what I'm sayin' the seismic crews, I guess the ex-, exploration guys would go out there and do their dynamite or whatever they had to do. Kind of tries to give the company an idea, "This is where we think the oil is." So they'd set a rig and start drilling. And you would come along and put your instruments down in there, pull 'em out, and tell 'em yea or nay. [Chuckles]

RT: Right. Right.

SW: But you said they, you drill a lot of dry holes.

RT: Well, you know, not every well's a producer. [Inaudible] but depending on the area. 'Course in production department uh, drilled the lower risk wells, so the dry hole ratio wasn't-

SW: Wasn't as bad.

RT: Wasn't all that high.

SW: What do you think, based on the ones that you saw, what was the ratio if you could remember?

RT: Oh, I don't know. It varied so much. It depended on where you are, what the risk is. In later years the production department started drilling little riskier wells, so.

SW: They were runnin' out of-

RT: There was some kind, there was an industry averages I guess but I don't know what they are.

SW: You did all of this onshore? Did you?

RT: Yes, well I was in the production department doing this well evaluation, that just for the first year and a half or so. There was no, it was all onshore.

SW: Right, because you said that moratorium.

RT: Yeah, it was all onshore between either goin' to Venice in the west to Lake Charles on the west.

SW: Did, when the offshore got back underway did you ever have to go offshore and evaluate anything?

RT: Uh, I went out a couple of times but it was later in my career when I was over here. A time or two on a what they called a "tight hole," where you were trying to keep everything close to the vest and take the logs, keep, make sure nobody looked at the logs except you, and so forth. I just went out a couple times.

SW: What was the reasoning behind that? They only wanted you to see it?

RT: Well, uh, just as a, a tight hole for security reasons uh, maybe they off-, offsetting block was unleased and you wanted to drill a well close to some acreage was unleased and have that information prior to next offshore lease sale. That was the main reason.

SW: You didn't want any other company to hear about it or know what was goin' on?

RT: Well you didn't want the Schlumberger people looking at anything any more than they had to. The people that were running logs [Inaudible]. They had to look a little bit to do their job, but you made sure there was nobody looking at the logs while they were in the process of gathering information.

SW: I'm getting kind of a picture there. You worked for Chevron, which is a oil company. Schlumberger you said was the-

RT: They were contractor that did the logging work.

SW: They were the log company.

RT: Right.

SW: And so, but if you were a geologist monitoring the logs, why did you not work for Schlumberger, why did you work for Chevron?

RT: Well, Schlumberger did nothing except run the log.

SW: That's it, that's all.

RT: That's it. That's the, all they did was run the logs. And it was a geologist responsibility to, with Schlumberger's help. If you had questions the Schlumberger engineers were very knowledgeable. And if you had questions, particularly a green geologist, they would provide answers. But it wasn't their responsibility really, it was only their responsibility to provide a good log. And then it was the company mans [Clears throat] 'xcuse me. [Says something

about having allergies] And it was the company man's job to evaluate the logs and decide whether we wanted to run more logs or what to do.

SW: I see, so that's why you worked for Chevron as opposed to a company like Chevron.

RT: Yeah. 'Course an awful lot of contract work done offshore. The people that run the casing in the hole, that's a contract job. Completing wells, you had [Inaudible, audio goes out] contract work done. And they had a, usually a, well the drilling rig is owned by a drilling company. They had a Chevron drilling engineer on board the drilling rig and it was his responsibility to see that everything was done right. And logging time, it was the Chevron geologist job to see that the logging proceeded the way they wanted it to.

SW: So everyb-, there was a structure.

RT: Yeah, yeah.

SW: It was pretty rigid you'd say? [Chuckles]

RT: [Hesitation] Well uh-

SW: He had his job, you had yours, everybody had to do what they were supposed to do.

RT: Yeah, yeah.

SW: It just seem like there was a lot of different people out there.

RT: Well there are, yeah.

SW: And uh, for this company and that company, and they all have to work together. [Chuckles]

RT: Right. And you got the drilling contractor that purchases the rig and all the roughnecks that work the rig, come time to, and you got casing crews that would come out and run casing in a well if you find something to case off. And uh, workovers, you had a workover crew that had a workover rig out there. So it, yeah, it, the drilling uh, contractors are big part of the oil business. In fact they provide, probably provide more jobs in Lafayette than oil companies did, the contractors. All of the drillers and workover people, and casing crews.

SW: All the, kind auxiliary support things.

RT: Right.

SW: Employing a lot of people.

RT: Yeah, support industry was probably I would guess more people than oil companies had.

SW: Well that would make sense because there was a need for it. And so to fill that need.

RT: Yeah, and I don't think any of the major companies own their own drilling rigs, it's all done by drilling contractors.

SW: Contractors, yeah. Going out onto these rigs and, well, you said you spent a lot of time in the office, too. [Chuckles]

RT: Well, yeah.

SW: But you went to the rigs a few times.

RT: Well that was mostly in that first assignment in production geology, which was in Harvey, Louisiana. Chevron's main office was 1111 Tulane in downtown New Orleans. And we had a production office across the river in Harvey. And that was when I did all the fieldwork, going out on the wells, for the first, oh, year and a half or so.

SW: What was your schedule like then? Was it, was there any sort of continuity to it or did you go and come back or?

RT: Well you'd go when they were ready to, when they had the hole down to that logging point and you'd go day or night. And come back when you were done. Sometimes it'd take a day, sometimes two days, three days. They have problems sometimes, they couldn't get the tool down the well. And when they have to rig up and run the pipe in the hole and clean it out again.

SW: Again, yeah.

RT: Things like that.

SW: So it wasn't very consistent. You were maybe gone three days, back two days, maybe sometimes gone [Inaudible].

RT: Right, sometimes they wouldn't go out for a couple weeks and then they'd go out twice a week. It just, you get some long work weeks sometimes.

SW: So how was that? Did you enjoy that or?

RT: Well it was all new and different and it was a learning process there. I didn't care for the up all night jobs when they were, go out there and start loggin' at midnight and finish at midnight the next day.

SW: How did your wife feel about all that?

RT: Oh she took it in stride 'cause, and I wasn't gone that much. Just two or three days at a time here and there. [Inaudible]-

SW: Did you have-, I'm sorry go ahead.

RT: And see that was only for the first year and a half, then I-

SW: So it wasn't-

RT: Went over to the office in New Orleans. And just worked out of that office until I came over here.

SW: Once you get inside the office your schedule's a lot more set, right?

RT: Oh yeah, right. It's nine to five job. Unless you got somethin' that needs to get finished [Chuckling] and you work some overtime.

SW: When you were doin' the logging on that wells that first year, did you have children at that point?

RT: Uh… no. First child was born in 1953, two years after I came over, yeah.

SW: I see. So it never really affected, it's not like you were away from your wife and your baby or anything like that.

RT: No, no.

SW: So it wasn't too bad.

RT: No, the family came a little later.

SW: Yeah, a little later. And then you stayed in the office and then moved to Lafayette.

RT: Uh hm.

SW: So when you did go on those rigs, though, those first two years, and also you said a couple of times you had to go offshore, I'm just curious, you weren't involved in the drilling or anything, but anything that you did was it dangerous at any point?

RT: Not really. No, there was minimal danger, no. 'Course there's always, somethin' can happen on a rig. Somebody drops a wrench on you. [SW chuckles] [Chuckling] Or you fall overboard.

SW: Did you have to wear a hardhat and follow all those procedures?

RT: No, no I didn't.

SW: They didn't have that then? [Chuckles]

RT: Didn't wear a hardhat or anything.

SW: The industry has changed. Now you wouldn't be able to step out of a truck without putting a hardhat on.

RT: Probably not, probably not, yeah.

SW: But uh, so that wasn't too bad. It was mostly those other guys that were doin' all the manual labor and-

RT: Right there on the rig floor, running that pipe in and out of the hole. But uh, yeah, that was dangerous, more dangerous part. Or the transportation was a little bit of a risk then. It's primar-, early it was almost always crew boats, they weren't flying helicopters in. So you'd have a, one hour to several hour ride on a crew boat sometimes in pretty rough weather where you had to hang on all the way out and back. So there was some risk there, I guess. But no, no, minimal risk for a geologist goin' out there, as little as they did.

SW: As for what you guys did basically, wasn't too bad, huh. When you got here in Lafayette in 1962, what did, lookin' around of course the town is different. But what was the biggest thing you noticed between now and then about this town?

RT: The traffic on the streets. [Both chuckle] Yeah. And loss of all the neighborhood woods, they're all developed.

SW: Oh they cut down the trees?

RT: Yeah, well everything's developed now where we had room for the kids to go out and play places like they called the pasture a block from the house. Everything is, everything's developed now.

SW: Paved streets and houses and subdivisions, that's what I'm lookin' for.

RT: Right, big change. West Bayou Park was a gravel road when we came here.

SW: I'm gonna write that down. West Bayou was gravel. I, what about Johnston Street?

RT: [Slight pause] I can't remember whether it was four-lane then or not. I can't really remember. But uh-

SW: But it was paved at that time?

RT: Oh yeah, yeah it was paved. And uh… oh the biggest change just the traffic and the growth that's happened. It's been over 40 years, it's, a lot has happened there.

SW: Where did you guys, when y'all first got to town, did y'all buy a house or did y'all build somethin'?

RT: Yeah. I bought a house it was on, just off West Bayou Parkway, close to the Alleman School, you-

SW: Yeah.

RT: Yeah, on Kim Drive there. Six months old that somebody had just had it built and he worked for the oil business [Chuckling] and was forced to move after six months.

SW: And you were movin' in. [Chuckles]

RT: Oh yeah, yeah. Right. We're still living in the same house.

SW: Oh you still live there?

RT: Yeah.

SW: Oh okay. Was it difficult to find a place or did they have enough amenities here in Lafayette?

RT: No, it wasn't difficult. The, we felt the price was kind of high, it got up to 12 dollars a square foot for a house. Now it's 112 dollars a square foot.

SW: Inflation. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah.

SW: But you didn't have too much difficult finding-

RT: No, there were houses available. And housing was really no problem. We were pleased we were a block from Alleman School, the kids could walk to school. So it was really a good setup, we enjoyed it here, have enjoyed it here all this time. 'Course my wife passed away in 1989, so.

SW: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that.

RT: [Inaudible]. I'm a widower.

SW: You have a lot of grandkids to keep you company?

RT: Only got four grandkids. We have five children, but only four grandchildren.

SW: And did your children stay here in the area? Did they come to UL, USL?

RT: Most of 'em, yeah. Three of my kids came to USL, UL or USL [Inaudible].

SW: Yeah.

RT: And well one went on to Baton Rouge for a master's [Inaudible]. Most of my, they didn't all graduate here, but they call came here for awhile.

SW: For awhile.

RT: Yeah.

SW: And some of 'em still live here in town?

RT: Yeah, I got two here in this area, two in Houston, and one in Baton Rouge, so nobody's very far away.

SW: Well that's good. Any of 'em go into the oil industry at all?

RT: Well my son works for Chevron. [Chuckles]

SW: Oh, well there you go. Like father like son. [Chuckles]

RT: He's a electrician. Works seven and seven offshore. [Slight pause] He likes it, seven and seven. I don't think his wife cares for it, but he likes that seven and seven. He's a avid hunter and loves to fish. That way he gets, spends his hunting season [you know?] seven days off in the woods.

SW: So she doesn't see him at all, he's gone.

RT: [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

SW: He's either offshore or he's hunting. [Chuckles]

RT: He's from October, when they start the black [Inaudible] season in Arkansas, until end of January when the deer season finishes in Mississippi. He's branched out, he's got a camp in [Inaudible] in Arkansas. And a camp in Mississippi on some land I bought. And he hunts in both those places. So he uh, she doesn't see him too good, every, you know, he's either working or he's up in Arkansas or Mississippi for the deer season.

SW: The wife of an oil man, right? [Chuckles]

RT: Right.

SW: It's just interesting, you didn't really have to experience that too much because of the, because of your geology background.

RT: Right.

SW: Because of what he's doing, because everything's moved offshore from what I hear, too, there's not much onshore anymore at all.

RT: No. In fact I don't think Chevron has any onshore uh, properties anymore.

SW: Yeah, it's all offshore.

RT: All offshore, yeah.

SW: There you go, that get a change in the industry and so now a lot of guys are workin' offshore as opposed to onshore.

RT: Right, uh hm. Yeah, he doesn't have a degree and he just went on, he had electrical, he'd been workin' for an electrician here in town. And he was hired and been offshore ever since. It's been… close to 15 years I guess.

SW: I hear they can, they make very good money offshore, from what I hear.

RT: Well, I'm not sure exactly what he makes, but, yeah, it's probably better than he could make doing work, same work on the shore.

SW: For an electrician, yeah.

RT: Yeah.

SW: As a contractor or somethin' like that. And, like you said, he likes that seven and seven, that, I hear that from some guys. Some of 'em even like the 14 and 14.

RT: Yeah, [which?] you work, I think maybe Jim Miller who you talked to probably had a 28 and 28.

SW: He did when he was in, when he went to west Africa.

RT: Angola. Yeah, yeah.

SW: He said that was interesting.

RT: Yeah, uh huh.

SW: A month on and a month off.

RT: Right.

SW: It's amazing. [Both chuckle] Um-

RT: Yeah, I been, I didn't care, I didn't want to try to experience that.

SW: Yeah, I don't know if I'd be too up on that either. I think after seven days I'd be getting a little bit of cabin fever.

RT: Yeah.

SW: Especially if I was on a platform. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah, I would too [for in there?].

SW: Um [Pause] when you guys were comin' into town in the early '60s was, obviously it wasn't just you, did you see an influx of a lot of other people comin' in from the oil industry? Or were there people movin' out? You said that you bought the house from somebody who was moving basically-

RT: Yeah. Well, I think it was a period of growth here for quite a while. 'Course there were some ups and downs. Some bad times there too. [Slight pause] Seemed like uh… oh I can't remember the years, but there were a time or two when oil companies through these 40 years were letting people go. But overall up to the late '80s I think when the bottom kind of dropped out. It's never been quite the same since. The early '80s we were drilling nineteen, twenty

thousand foot wells for gas. Gas was nine dollars a thousand, nine dollars MCF. And we were drilling multimillion dollar wells [Chuckling] to the great depths of 20,000 feet. But with gas, and since it's got as low as, you know, two dollars an MCF. The boom days have never quite returned here.

SW: I don't quite understand that if, well, we talked about inflation, your house was 12 dollars a square foot, now it's 112. So inflation for everything it seems the price is always gonna go up. But why is it for oil and gas I hear people say in the '70s it was 30-somethin' or however many dollars a ga-, a barrel. But you can have a point in time 10 years later when it's less. I don't understand that.

RT: Yeah, I, I d-, I wouldn't, I really don't know and I [SW chuckles] that gets to be kind of sticky field there on what regulates the price of oil or gas. It's-

SW: Yeah. I'm always curious. [Chuckles]

RT: I couldn't give you a good answer.

SW: Oh okay.

RT: Too, it's too complicated an issue there [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

SW: There's no just-

RT: 'Course when I first came to work, or just before I came to work I remember gas was as low as five cents an MCF. That was back in the late '30s, very early '40s. And I think maybe it was up to maybe a quarter an MCF by the time I came to work, but [I was reading memos?] there that were mentioned the five cent a MCF gas.

SW: Wow.

RT: Some, one of the older hands I was talkin' to recently talked about three cents gas. It was somethin' that you just, a byproduct to finding the oil. You burned the gas off and produced the oil, just burn it to get rid of it.

SW: That's what they used to do is burn it off.

RT: Yeah, oh yeah, we flare the gas, yeah.

SW: And, but then they said that, at some point they discovered that they could separate it and sell the gas too, right?

RT: Well you got to have some pipeline someplace to move the gas, you know.

SW: [Send it?], yeah.

RT: Yeah. And of course that's, the distribution has developed to the nth degree that we have pipelines everywhere now.

SW: But before that it was, it wasn't economical, so they were just burning it off.

RT: Yeah, right. Uh hm.

SW: It's interesting. Interesting. And like you said early '80s nine dollars a MCF and then late '80s two dollars an MCF. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah. But we get a little bit now I guess. They're talkin' about gas goin' up, the price here again this summer. But power companies are using gas for electricity now, so the air conditioners in the summertime make a gas shortage where before power companies were burnin' coal or, and gas got cheaper in the summer. But now you get a summer shortage as well as a winter shortage.

SW: It swaps, yeah. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah.

SW: It keeps developing like that, that's interesting. I wanted to ask you as well, when you guys moved into town, y'all were comin' in um, depending on who you talked to they'll tell you different things about the reputation of the people in the oilfield. [Chuckles] I've heard from some people, "Oh they didn't want us here in town at all," and I've heard from others, "Well, yeah, they welcomed us with open arms." [Chuckles] How was it when you and your wife showed up here in town bein', you know, workin' in the oil patch?

RT: Of course I lived in a area where there were a lot of other people in the oil patch, but around town I don't remember anything negative. I never felt that anybody [Chuckling] didn't want me here. We uh, 'course brought money to town, too. But 'course some people that weren't benefiting from a job or somethin' like that uh, may not have wanted to see the growth or wanted to, yeah, I know what you're talking about, I've heard that too. But personally I just didn't, well never anything really negative about people's reactions to us.

SW: Well maybe not the reaction, but did you feel that also or maybe or maybe not that you guys in the oilfield have a reputation as a rough bunch? [Chuckles]

RT: Uh… [Speaking with slight pauses] it really uh, never came across that as a, personally, no.

SW: Well I've tended to notice when I ask this question in interviews that prior to 1950 you might hear that yes to that answer. But later on, when you got here in the '60s it was business was booming and, you know, you don't hear that as much. In the '30s and '40s they said, "Oh, they thought we were rough." [Chuckles] I guess the reputation kind of changed a little bit.

RT: I'm sure-, there probably were some rough characters that [Pause] although the, a big share of the people in offices in town were clerical or college graduates and weren't motorcycle ridin' toughs [Chuckling] or anything.

SW: Yeah. Think in the early days you had your drillers, roughnecks, and whatnot.

RT: Yeah, right.

SW: But then you guys came later and y'all had your education behind you.

RT: Well of a lot of the roughnecks came from out of state, too, they still do. Didn't live here, you know. But no, I didn't, don't remember, didn't experience much in the way of any feelings like that the, 'course we filled an empty office building when we first came to town. We, name of it was the Mouton Building, down on Jefferson Street. Close to where Lafayette Advertiser used to be. And we were in that building for quite a while there. [Inaudible] downtown building until we moved into the, what was called Cal-, on Calico Boulevard there was a office building, Bill [Ashy?] owned the local, owned the building on Calico Boulevard. We moved in down there. But I don't know, I didn't have any, notice any really bad feelings personally. And didn't [Slight pause] wasn't a problem that's for sure.

SW: Not a problem. [Chuckles] What about the food? Comin' from Nebraska, or, and born in Illinois it m-, must be a little different.

RT: When my first-

SW: You guys got here.

RT: My first cup of coffee in Saint Martinville was a bit of a shock. [Chuckles] But other than that we uh, got acclimated quite quickly there. My wife loved everything, all the Cajun food.

SW: All the spices.

RT: Oh yeah, yeah. All my kids are, cook good too, yeah. My [men?] all barbeque and the girls all cook.

SW: What was with the cup of coffee in Saint Martinville that shocked you?

RT: It's strength. [Both chuckle] And it might've had some chicory in it too, but it was pretty potent. As well as some of the coffee on the rigs I'd go out on there. The [Inaudible] had a coffee pot puttin' on boil someplace hot all the time there, some of that stuff you almost need [a spoon to eat?].

SW: [Chuckles] It was thick?

RT: Pretty thick and hot. Pretty thick and to me [Inaudible]. [SW chuckles] Pretty tough.

SW: So you guys all eat Cajun food now more or less or uh-

RT: Oh-

SW: Or spice, get spices in it.

RT: Yeah. Oh right, yeah. Crawfish. Older boy, crawfish is once a week during crawfish season. I mean, he boils crawfish once a week during crawfish season. Everybody loves all food down here. We couldn't, we didn't wanna go back to Nebraska and eat anymore. [Chuckles]

SW: That was my other question. Now you can definitely tell a difference between the food from where you were from after you've had the spice here.

RT: Oh yeah, it-

SW: [Can't go back in?] [Inaudible].

RT: Right, a little salt and pepper maybe, yeah. That was it.

SW: Quite a difference. I also wanted to ask you since you pretty much stayed in geology the whole time, at what point in the chronology of the last 40 years did you start seeing women or black geologists coming into the workforce?

RT: Uh… first woman geologist in Lafayette… can't remember just when it was… hm… probably in the '70s. I've got a list of some of our personnel things here, maybe I can find her name on my list here. [Papers shuffling, pause] Oh, no, I wouldn't, 'cause she, this was a list of all of our new hires and she came over from New Orleans, she worked there. But I'd guess… somewhere in the mid '70s. [Slight pause]

SW: That's when you started to see a few-

RT: Probably late '70s, mid to late '70s and we only had three or four women geologists in all the time I was there. And they fit in well. Were very competent people.

SW: Well, yeah, you guys were all um, obviously they had gone to school and got their qualifications and everything, so.

RT: Yeah, they were all degreed geologists.

SW: Yeah. Wasn't like them goin' offshore and havin' to prove something. [Chuckles]

RT: No, no.

SW: Yeah, they could work as hard as a man physically strong or anything like that.

RT: No. 'Cause there was nothing physically involved, even if they did go offshore, which they did now and then, there was nothing very physical involved. They were out there evaluate a well like we were, so there was no physical requirements other than being able to climb a ladder to [Chuckles] get up on the rig floor.

SW: It wasn't too hard I guess, huh? [Chuckles]

RT: And they were probably flying out by helicopter at that time, too.

SW: At that point anyway, yeah. The transfer wasn't as bad as going from the boat. [Chuckles]

RT: No, swinging on a rope from the boat to the rig, yeah.

SW: Which I guess you did a few times, huh? [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah. Not too often, though. And they still have that rope on the rigs.

SW: Sounds like it would be fun almost. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah, except when that b-, the seas a little rough and that boat you're swinging from is going up and down.

SW: And the rig is staying stationary. [Chuckles]

RT: Yeah.

SW: And so you gotta time it right.

RT: Yeah. They still do that. [Slight pause] And most, all the hire, we didn't actually hire geologists here, so women we get that had been hired and most of 'em started in New Orleans and came over here later. And one of our women was, moved over from Gulf Oil when we bought Gulf Oil back in eighty… '85 or '86. So we had another women geologist came over then.

SW: What about, as I said before, did y'all start to see any black professionals come in at any time? Even the '80s? [Pause]

RT: Uh… we never had a black geologist over here. Had a black chemical engineer. But we never had any black geologist. Just-

SW: You didn't see any in the office here?

RT: No, in our office here, [yeah/you know?]. May have had some in New Orleans, I just don't know. Or elsewhere in the company.

SW: New Orleans was a bigger office?

RT: Right, yeah, it's a much bigger office, yeah. And like I say, all the hiring was done f-, out of the New Orleans office.

SW: I just have one more question. Any regrets for your career in the oil industry as a geologist?

RT: No, I enjoyed it all the way. Something a little different all the time, like you run these surveys in a well, it was a mystery until you ran that log and found out what was down there. And then you'd take these logs and do your mapping, too. That was the days before we did computer mapping, yeah. And it was really kind of exciting to get your electric logs and go back to your maps and fit that new data in and recontour things and, I enjoyed every bit of it.

SW: Excellent. Well I thank you for all the information.

RT: Okay.

SW: It was very helpful.

RT: Now that list I had-

[END OF RECORDING]