HHA# 00093
Interviewee: Ed Collins
Interviewer: Dr. Robert Carriker
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Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling has not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. Repeated words have also been left out of the transcript for readability.]

Ethnographic preface:

One of three boys, Ed Collins was born in 1924 in Laurel, Mississippi. His father owned a plumbing business. While in high school he roughnecked a bit on a drilling rig and worked as a rod man on a survey crew. After graduating high school and serving during World War Two, he spent a semester at Mississippi State before studying petroleum engineering at Louisiana State University; he graduated with his degree in 1949. After graduating from LSU, he found himself in a saturated job market and was lucky to get a job was Magnolia Petroleum Company where he first worked as an engineer in Snyder, Texas. Two and a half years later he went to work for Wilshire Oil Company in Midland, Texas; several years later, when that company was bought out, he went to work for a year for Wilshire Oil Company of Texas. A year later in 1954, he moved to Wichita, Kansas, to work as assistant production manager for Vickers Petroleum Company; not long after he was made vice-president of production; in 1959, he moved with the company to Denver, Colorado. After a deal with Alco Oil and Gas Company, he went to work for Alco representing the Vickers interest; in 1962, Alco centralized itself in Lafayette. He lived a year in Lafayette, before he took a job with the Vickers as a consultant and started venturing out on his own as an independent; he became involved in buying and selling leases and royalties. In 1963 he started a sugar cane bagasse (product used in drilling mud) processing factory in Belle Rose, Louisiana; he did this for 12 years while still doing the other independent work. In the late 1970s, he sold the company to Venture Chemical Company; he was involved in Venture until they were sold in the early 1980s. He discusses why Alco Oil and Gas made the decision to centralize their company in Lafayette and not other cities, as well as the Lafayette community.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [RC]

Interviewee initials: [EC]

RC: And this is Bob Carriker and it is April the eighth, 2003. I'm interviewing Ed Collins and we are at the office of, can you tell me again-

EC: Chalmers, Collins, and [Alwell?].

RC: Chalmers, Collins, and Al-, Alwell?

EC: Uh hm.

RC: In Lafayette, Louisiana. And that's the set up. Uh, so, like I said, just want to get some, some background information to begin. So where is it that you were born?

EC: Well I was born in Laurel, Mississippi in 1924. Finished high school in Laurel, went into service in World War Two, uh, returned after the war, and made one semester at Mississippi State. I had applied all over the country tryin' to get in petroleum engineering schools. And we didn't have it in Mississippi, so I wound up eventually getting a call from LSU, they had room for me down there. So I went to school there, finished in 1949 in petroleum engineering.

RC: What did your family do in Mississippi?

EC: Oh my dad was a plumber. Uh, had one man plumbing concern. And uh, uh, 'course my mother just kept house and raised three boys. Had no sisters. Very quiet little town-

RC: Where is Laurel?

EC: Laurel's in south central Mississippi. Uh, it's about 100 miles north of the coast. You may be more familiar with uh, Hattiesburg, which uh, University of South Mississippi. Laurel's about 25 miles uh, northeast Hattiesburg. [Slight pause]

RC: Okay. So, so… you came back from the war?

EC: Yeah.

RC: And then entered college?

EC: After LSU I went to uh, actually De Ridder, Louisiana, for about a six week so-called training program where I, I-

RC: So, let me just get the timeline.

EC: Sure.

RC: What year did you graduate from LSU?

EC: This was 1949.

RC: LSU-

EC: Yeah. I finished in uh, August of 1949.

RC: Okay.

EC: I went to work at Magnolia Petroleum Company. Was lucky to get a job. There was a lot of petroleum engineers and geologists who were not getting jobs at that time.

RC: Oh is that right?

EC: Yeah, the industry was saturated with uh, technical people. They thought they had all they needed and really the industry was just uh, in infa-, not infancy stages, but in a very, still an undeveloped state. Uh, the so-called big companies were hiring a few people, but that was uh, it was not a good job market for the college graduate. I was extremely lucky. Uh-

RC: And how big was Magnolia?

EC: Magnolia Petroleum was uh, let's see, I can't tell you for sure. It was a subsidiary of Saucony-Vacuum. Uh, it was really considered to be a major oil producer as far as employees and that kind of thing. I can't tell you how many they had, they were all over United States. We had uh… operations in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas, Oklahoma, and through uh, sister companies in California, Ohio, all over where there was any oil already developed. And uh, but I wound up with them in Snyder, Texas, which you may or may not have heard of. It was at that time uh, uh, a big oil boom town. When I went to Snyder there were about, 'bout 25 or 30 rigs operating in the area. And before I left there, I had 25 or, 25 to 30 rigs operating under my supervision in the Snyder area.

RC: Okay. So, so what did they initially hire you to do?

EC: Um. Well [Chuckles] at that time uh, petroleum engineers were hired by Magnolia sent through a training program of roustabouting and roughnecking. And, and for usually for a year.

RC: And that was in De Ridder that you-

EC: Well, I, yes. I had, I had worked in both those capacities. Uh, not so much roustabouting, but I had worked as a roughneck in summers. So I had, I was allowed to skip that part of our so-called training program since I'd already done that. And then the roustabout program at De Ridder was, lasted about six weeks. They s-, they uh, saw that I knew how to do that already 'cause I, my dad was a plumber and I'd worked with him. And so, anyway, they sent me on to the engineering department uh, right away. I guess they needed people, needed somebody to go to Snyder, Texas. I was the first uh, uh, engineer for the company to go there. We had two or three production people there when I went, but uh, I was the first engineer to go there. And sort of uh, uh, made that boom. D-

RC: Okay. Where is Snyder?

EC: Snyder's in Scurry County, Texas, uh… about 90 miles northeast of Midland, Texas. [Slight pause] Uh, that's the so-called Permian Basin, that geological area. But in Snyder we lived, my wife and I, we were married, my wife and I lived in what uh, back in the olden days it was called a [tourist?] court. A little half-moon development with little cabins around a central office and, and uh, one room uh, uh, no uh, no door to the bathroom. Had an entry to the bathroom with a hanging curtain rather than a door. [RC chuckles]

RC: Was this an apartment or was it a motel?

EC: It was a motel. Yeah, it was worse than a mo-, it was a tourist court. [Both laugh] In the olden days. And it was uh, uh, not a very good workin' environment. I, I was busy in the field all the time, worked many, many hours, and uh, my wife was in that motel alone, pregnant, expecting our first child. And uh, just a complete boomtown. We had people uh, uh, at least two families that I know or two groups of people, I don-, they never talked, so I don't know if they're families or not, but actually living in caves that they had. This is right in cotton field alongside the road, they'd uh, dug out holes and put a tarp over it and that's where they uh, where they slept at night. And we had people every place imaginable, we had people that sleepin' in trucks and cars and things of that sort.

RC: Because there was so much work?

EC: It was a tremendous big oil boom, yeah. They uh, they were drilling wells on every 40 acres. And, and it uh, just stretched for miles and miles. It uh, it was uh, it was not a very pleasant workin' environment. I learned a lot. And I always appreciate that lookin' back on it. But I didn't treat my wife very well. There were times that I'd be out on rigs, uh, sometimes as much as 25, 36 hours. I would go back and take a shower and take her out somewhere to eat, which was a chore in itself findin', findin' a place to eat. She had a little one-eye hot plate in there and she, every now and then she'd make herself some toast or try to grill a sandwich in that little [Both chuckles] cabin. She, if she went

across the street to the grocery store well the, the roughnecks drivin' by would whistle at her and make fun of her bein' pregnant and that kind of thing. But it was a boomtown in really the old connotation of that work, yeah.

RC: Right, right.

EC: Yeah. So uh, that was my beginning experience with Magnolia. After I worked for them, let's see, two and a half years, and then I went to work for a company, Wilshire Oil Company out of California. They had office in Midland and it was a small company. They had two engineers already working and they needed another, so I moved to Midland which was little bit better conditions. I will point out, I'm sorry I left somethin' out, I wasn't in that motel but about uh, five months. And the company built oilfield camp. And we lived in a house in that camp. That was a, and I, I may be goin' into too much detail-

RC: No, no no, this is what I'm interested in hearing. It's very interesting.

EC: In that camp I was uh, when we moved in they had five houses. And the houses had been built by Houston contractor who really didn't understand the environment out in west Texas. We got in a house then and we'd been in it about two days and some of my friends were gonna throw us a housewarming party for Saturday night. And we agreed, "Yeah, that's great." On Thursday sand started blowin', blew all day Thursday, all day Friday, and all day Saturday. People came to our house anyway, bringin' little goodies to eat and drink and that kind of thing. And uh, the house was just full of sand. We had people actually smoke a cigarette, throw it on the floor, and step on it, cover it up with sand. The sand was that deep on the floor.

RC: In your house?

EC: And it was on the bed, it uh, I told my wife, "Don't open any can goods, it's probably already full of sand." [Both laugh] We uh, we had a terrible time getting that situation alleviated. But finally the contractor came back and recaulked all the houses and it was a little more pleasant then for the next year.

RC: So you were, it was a toss up between the tourist court or the sand-

EC: [Chuckling] for awhile, yeah. Yeah. I don't know if you've ever seen those sand storms out there, but back in those days they, they were uh, and they still have 'em out there I guess, but uh, there was so much cotton- [Interrupted by voice coming over the intercom] so much cotton planted and the fields uh, you know, were just torn up and ready to be [Chuckles] blown away you might say. Those [Inaudible] would come in and uh, sometimes would last several days. Couldn't see the back fence for two or three days, you know.

RC: Wow [Inaudible]-

EC: Made a tough work. The guys, 'course all the rigs keep workin' and the people have to keep workin'. But it was a pretty tough working conditions.

RC: It much gunk up the machinery?

EC: Oh yeah, it did. Sure, yeah. Pumpin' units and things of that sort would get [ground?] up.

RC: So-

EC: But anyway, then the Midland.

RC: Well, and why did you leave Magnolia?

EC: Well I left Magnolia for a better payin' job. You know, the industry was sort of boomin' out there at that time and uh, this little company that I went to work for had, made a substantial discovery, had a large field to develop, and just needed help. They uh, came by and interviewed me and offered me a job. So uh, I left for better pay, better working conditions you might say.

RC: Was that, did that happen a lot? Was it a pretty fluid-

EC: Oh yeah, people were, people were changin' jobs and things quite often. And it just uh, uh, it was boomin' conditions I guess is a way to say that. Demand for good people [when it's hot?]. Lots of activity.

RC: So then you moved to Midland.

EC: Moved to Midland, uh hm.

RC: And you were essentially doing the same job?

EC: Well… yes. Well, yeah, essentially the same job. In Snyder I was uh, supervising more 'cause I was the first engineer there. Later we had other engineers, engineer assistants come in. And uh, so uh… mostly I was supervise work, but I did do a awful lot of field work in there, you know. I was in the field a lot. [Coughs] But when I went to Midland, it was uh, a smaller company and had more direct control over drillin' rigs and things. We act-, the company actually had their own drilling rigs. Magnolia we'd use contract rigs out there. But uh, this company had their own drilling rigs and so quite often an engineer would just be assigned to a rig for the duration of drilling, and completing, and testing wells. Whereas in Snyder, uh, when Magnolia was just runnin' from one job to the other, 'cause we just had so much to do there. So it was more drilling and development work uh, actual hands-on supervision in Midland. It was an interesting company. Uh, they were out of California as the name Wilshire might imply. And uh, at one point in time they uh, uh, they developed or helped develop the technique of actually skidding a rig without tearing it down. You've seen big drilling rigs, you know, lot s of equipment around and all. And the big derrick and the engines on the derricks and so forth. Uh, out there where the country was kind of flat, you would get ready to want to move one rig from one place to another, rather than tearing it down, hauling it by truck, reassemble, uh, they uh, concentrated as much of the rigs that they could on the derrick floor. And detached your lines and things of the sort. And then just jack that rig up and put some skids under it. And tie some big trucks to it and haul 'em as much as 25 or 30 miles, you know, cross country.

RC: Really?

EC: Yeah. Cross the big ranches and all, you know, to the next location. And uh-

RC: Amazing. So they wouldn't skid them across the roads?

EC: No, they'd, uh, no they never allowed to get on a public hi-, there were times when they did cross roads, but they had to get special permit, build a, build a access over the [drain ditches?] and whatever.

RC: Alright. But-

EC: Oh yeah.

RC: But they weren't goin' down the road-

EC: Primarily they were skidding on, you might say, on the same ranch. That was mostly the deal that they did. But uh, uh, there was uh… a movie made called "Skidding Rigs," which uh, that company uh, and they hired some director out of California, I don't remember the man's name now, but uh, at that time he was pretty well-known movie

maker. And they came down made a movie called “Skidding R-,” “Rolling Rigs,” I believe was the name of the movie. ‘Bout a 35 minute presentation, very interesting film.

RC: Kind of documentary type-

EC: Right, yeah. Uh huh, showed how they did that. Uh, but uh, in Midland, ‘course our first child was born in Snyder while we lived there. And moved to Midland then. He, well, now I don’t want to get, I want to get into something. Anyway, back at, to the workin’ environment. Wilshire Oil Company after about uh, let’s see, had been there I guess two years, um, they sold to Monterey Oil Company, which uh, later was sold to Humble Oil and Refining Company. So they, they sold that.

RC: [Chuckling] Well let me see, it was sold to, you say, “Monterey”?

EC: Monterey.

RC: Monterey, okay, like as in Monterey, California?

EC: Yeah, Monterey Oil Company. Um. And uh, uh, at the time it was sold then the principal owner of Wilshire principle stock owner, and uh, and my local boss in Midland formed another little company with some financial backing from New York, which they called Wilshire Oil Company of Texas. And uh, uh, one of our engineers moved on with Monterey; one left and went to Wichita, Kansas, with the Vickers Petroleum Company; and I stayed with uh, with Wilshire of Texas. I went there just uh… stayed there just maybe a year, I’m not, I’ve kind of lost exact track of time. But the one engineer who had moved on to Wichita, Kansas, contacted me. He wanted me to move up there with the Vickers Petroleum Company. So in 1954, we took that job, moved to Wichita. [Pause] Uh, Vickers was a family-owned company. They uh, was a completely integrated company, they had all aspects of the business. They had uh, drilling rigs, geologists, engineers to drill wells, production staff, they had a little refinery, they had marketing, had uh, had their own brand of gasoline that they marketed, had a pipeline gathering system in the Kansas area to gather the [crude?] in their refinery. So uh, they did everything a major company did, but they were completely family-owned in a family trust. And uh, uh, at the time I went to work there, I moved there from Midland as manager of their production, drilling production department. And, well, no, that’s not true. I was assistant to the manager when I moved there. After a few months he left and then I took his job. And so we had uh… three more kids born there and-

RC: Oh wow.

EC: In Wichita, we were there five and a half year. [Sneezes] [Slight pause] We uh, my boss, Jack Vickery, the president of the company and the oldest of the Vickery kids, liked Colorado better than he did Kansas, and he decided we were gonna move to Colorado. They moved the drilling and exploration to Denver and, so we all uh, we had ample warning that we were gonna move out there. We had time to uh, to go out there and find a place to live. My wife and I bought a lot and had a house belt. We actually moved out there in 1959. Uh, spring of 1959 we moved to Denver.

RC: So did they, did Vickers completely pick up shop and move to Denver or-

EC: Just the, just the drilling and the exploration uh, management came. And the president of the company himself. Uh, the president of the company, financial uh, advisor to the president, uh, the manager of exploration, vice-president of exploration, vice-president of production, which was my job. And uh, and a few clerical people.

RC: Okay. So they remained in Wichita?

EC: They, the refinery, kept the refinery and all in Wichita. Wichita was an interesting story as far as their company there. The uh, the old man Vickers had started the company uh, was very successful and uh, you know, tremendous

big home had 'bout 160 acres out east of town. And uh, when I moved there this is where our office was, was in the old home. And uh, it was a beautiful workin' environment. They had a swimming pool, which they, employees had access to; tennis courts; baseball field; a golf putting green; and-

RC: Wow.

EC: One of the Vickers boys was a, was uh, NCAA champion golfer from University of Oklahoma. So there all the time there were golfers and uh… it was a great environment to work and families could come out and use the pool here and the workin' hours are whatever [you like?]. Wife brought the kids out there all the time. But that, that was uh, very interesting setup there.

RC: Especially the contrast in what you had started out with.

EC: Oh you got it. [Laughs] Right, you bet, yeah. Yeah. So then to Denver. We were, we uh, were not there very long. My uh, I liked Denver, but I was travelin' a lot, away from home a lot, and my wife was there at home with these four little kids, and those winters were long. When it uh, when it snowed she had to shovel the snow, and she had to transport the kids to school, and runnin' carpools and this kind of thing. And always without me seemed like then. I don't think we ever had a snow storm when I was home. [Both laugh] I, one time I was at a board meeting in Florida when [Chuckles] enjoyin' the sunshine and she had a terrible ice storm up there. So we kept lookin' for a way to get home. Back south. And uh, uh, actually, eventually the uh, Vickers company decided to sell their drilling end, their production business. They were not drilling wel-, not, didn't have drilling rigs, but sellin' their production. And, which was my direct responsibility. And, you might say, I sold myself out of a job. I had that job of findin' the buyer and help negotiate the sale and that kind of thing. And uh, the uh, sale did not involve uh, some in-, undeveloped acreage that we had under lease. It was tremendous amount of unde-, undeveloped acreage. And uh, we had uh, conducted a big geological study of a Anadarko Basin area out in Oklahoma and all of that uh, all those records of that study, everything pertaining to future prospects of that area, uh, were not involved in the sale. But uh, the trust wanted to get out of the business, so in subsequent deals, subsequent sellin' production, we traded our undeveloped acreage and our technology, you might call it, data that we had back then, sold that to uh, a company called Alco Oil and Gas uh, in exchange for stock. Vickers took stock in Alco. It became a, I guess the third largest stock holder in Alco by so doing. And then I went to work for Alco, representing the Vickers interest. Uh [Clears throat] Alco, well, was owned, the principal stock holder was uh, the Allen Family in Chicago, which uh, they're the family that owned the Chicago White Sox. And they were um, they were good people to work for, to work with. But they were more interested in baseball [Chuckling] than they were their oil business, the Allen's themselves were. But that little company was small company but it had scattered out. They had uh, one man offices in California, Shreveport, uh, Corpus Christi, Texas, uh, Mount Vernon, Illinois, somewhere in Kentucky, one in Jackson, Mississippi. They had these little offices and people tryin' to come up with drilling deals and then the company would take an interest in 'em, maybe, whatever. But we just eatin' up overhead. And so when the Vickers and I, two of the Vickers boys and myself went on the board of Alco and uh, we uh, suggested that we shut down all these offices, find one place in the country we thought was the best place to develop, look for oil and gas, move that entire company to that location. Uh, so after conducting a study of some sort, uh, we wound up considering Houston, Lafayette, uh, New Orleans, and Jackson, Mississippi. And we wound up moving to Lafayette. We moved Alco Oil and Gas down here. Um, brought uh, two or three people with us from the old company and that's how I got here. That was in 1962. [Pause]

RC: Makin' a timeline there for myself.

EC: [Chuckles] Yeah.

RC: Well that's really interesting. So what was it about Lafayette then that made the difference?

EC: Well one of the main things was it was south. [Laughs] From my standpoint. And I, I got accused [Chuckling] many times of, by my friends and associates in the company of riggin' the study to get us here, but that [Chuckles] I

really didn't do it. Lafayette, it was the sensible thing to do, move to Lafayette and concentrate it in one area. But uh, we uh, the so-called search committee had, made trips to Houston, New Orleans, and Jackson, and around, and uh, actually the committee as a whole didn't come to Lafayette, but in New Orleans we uh, learned that uh, Lafayette was developing quite a bit. The Oil Center was beginnin' to be uh, populated, you might say. Companies movin' in. And uh, uh, from the standpoint of living conditions, plus from the standpoint of working environment in the offices, plus uh, bein' in a good place to look for oil. Lafayette was uh, was the decision.

RC: Well when you say like the "living conditions" and the "working conditions"-

EC: Well, you know, people didn't wanna really move to New Orleans. Uh, they didn't uh, like the idea of tryin' to raise a family in New Orleans. And uh, same in Houston, Houston was too big for those of us who really wanted to make the move with the company. Uh, Jackson, Mississippi would've probably been my preference comin' from Laurel, you know, that's close to home. But uh, there was not as much uh, concentration of oil activity there. There was concentration of oil activity, I shouldn't say, there was. The thing is from the standpoint of reserve, it's the type, type oil and gas you're lookin' for, return on, the estimated return on your dollar, uh, this was the best area. Uh, and the Mississippi area at that time we all pretty much agreed we could find and we could drill wells and make oil wells, but those wells were not as good quality as wells as we would hope to make down here. They didn't have the potential reserve. So that was our reasoning really for coming to Lafayette. It's just the best place to look for oil and gas at the time.

RC: Yeah. And have you had any familiarity with Lafayette before this?

EC: Not much. I'd visited uh, here when, I have a brother who was here at that time with uh, Philips Petroleum Company. And he's the o-, I'll give you his name. Um. But that really didn't have any bearing on, on that decision. It's just that if you were gonna move to Louisiana and look for Louisiana reserves, uh, and uh, it was either New Orleans or Lafayette. And Lake Charles was not considered, although there was a few major companies had offices in Lake Charles. We didn't consider it for some reason, I don't really remember why. Probably all the refineries and things there were just, thought this would be better, I guess. Um. But uh, no, they would, I had not, I'd only been through Lafayette just one time in my life other than that, I think. [Coughs]

RC: So how many people were in on making a decision about that?

EC: Um… well there were, 'course all the board of directors of Alco eventually made the decision. But the three people who traveled were myself, and the exploration manager, and uh… and then the president of the company I was leaving, Jack Vickers. And so there were three board members you might say that [Inaudible].

RC: And the decision was, would you say it was an easy decision?

EC: Uh… it was an easy decision for me. I'm… I'm not sure about the other people. We had no, we had no opposition on the board. We went to the board with it, it was accepted without any problems. But there was a lot to be said for um, for our general idea, which was what we intended to do. It doesn't matter if we didn't wind up doin' what we're goin' to do [Chuckles] but uh, what we set out to do was to move here, concentrate on three or four parishes in south Louisiana, wherever they had good Miocene uh, reserves, and uh, and uh… try just really for our people to become experts in that area and uh, look for prospect. But uh, when we considered the type of wells that we would be makin' and the estimated cost to make those wells or drill those wells, uh, it uh, was head and shoulders above any other area that we could really point to, like Mississippi, California, anywhere else. 'Cause this was the best. And 'course that's the reason everybody else moved down here, too. It wasn't that we were pioneers in that thinking at all. It, we were, we were following a lot of other people.

RC: But you would say, would you say that uh, that the place Lafayette played a big role in making that decision? Aside from the business aspects of oil exploration-

EC: As far as the, no. As far as anything else in Lafayette, we knew that offices were available, that was no problem there. We could've found offices anywhere. As far as the existing situation in Lafayette, as far as its culture or [weren't?] a lot of people here, or somebody want to eat crawfish, or anything like that, no. That didn't enter into it at all. It was just, it's strictly a business decision to try to get in the place, close to the place where we wanted to uh, to look for good oil and gas reserves.

RC: But at the same time you said that you kind of crossed off places like Houston and New Orleans because they weren't the places that people would want to move to.

EC: Yeah. Right, yeah. And of course we, you know, we knew Lafayette was a smaller town and college town, and everybody said a good place to raise a family and that kind of thing. And all of our people that moved here with family, with people or with kids, so yeah, it was thing [to do?].

RC: Yeah, yeah, okay. Well that's interesting, really interesting. And so you, how many people moved here then with company in '62?

EC: Uh, let's see… I guess there were six of us that moved here and we hired a few people here.

RC: Okay. [Slight pause]

EC: I think that's right, yeah. Uh, as I told you, we set out, well our objective was to try to become experts in one area and stay with it. But it didn't work out that way. We uh, uh, I guess I can say all this. The Vickers' boys and I, the Vickers' brothers who were directors and I, found some things goin' on in the board that [Slight pause] let's, I guess it's best to say that we all three found situation that we couldn't cope with, we couldn't handle, and so we all resigned. And Vickers later sold their stock in Alco. Um-

RC: Okay. So h-, how long after did you notice-

EC: That was, I'd been here about eight or nine months when that started. We, we found somethin' we just, some things were goin' we couldn't uh, live with. Uh, we, not to point at any one person in Alco's board. Just, uh, I'm sure all that's been cleaned up and everything's uh, gone now, but at that time we just had to get out of it. So uh, the question then was what do I do. I been here just about a year and, I guess maybe right at a year when that happened and I was out of a job. And uh, the Vickers offered to move me back to Colorado and we'd do somethin' together up there, but I was closer to home and uh, and the South, which is where I wanted to be. Didn't want to move, so we worked out an arrangement whereby I just kind of stayed working on a retainer with them as a contract uh, employee. And uh, we started a little royalty buyin' program and we, we uh, participated in a few lease acquisition things and, but primarily just uh, representing their interest to, kept uh, for two or three years things kept comin' up havin' to do with auditors examinin' the sales we had made and dif-, of the two divisions of the company. And there were some tax situation and, in other words, there were times when they needed me to come back and handle a few things for 'em up there, which I did. I stayed friends and associates, so did some things independently in the oil business here, just buying and selling mostly.

RC: Okay. Buying and selling what?

EC: Well, leases and royalties. Uh huh, oil royalties and mineral rights. Um, so, but uh, in nineteen sixty… three I started a little manufacturing business over at uh, Belle Rose, Louisiana, they don't, you probably don't know where that is.

RC: No I don't know where that is.

EC: It's a sugar mill called the [Lula?] Factory at uh, Belle Rose, Louisiana. There was [Clears throat] these people were bailing sugar cane bagasse, if you know what that is.

RC: No.

EC: If, you fav-, familiar with sugar cane?

RC: Uh huh.

EC: Okay. When they cut the cane and chop it up and run it through a squeezing process, you might say, get the juice out of it, is what they make the sugar out of. Now then they the remainder is all this crushed up stalks and pith and that's locally called bagasse. It's a French word I guess. B-A-G-A-S-S-E. And uh, uh, the sugar mill bailed this material, big bails and stacked it up by their plants, and let it dry for a year or two, and then they sold it to [Soletex?] to make uh, mar board, ceiling board [things are out of?]. Uh. In the oil industry we, when drilling wells sometimes we'd, we drillin' a well, we'd, I don't know how familiar you are with the drilling process, but you pump mud down the pipe to help you keep the hole clean and wash the cuttings out as you cut a hole. And uh, sometime you drilling the formation where you start losin' the mud you got in the hole. It just seeps out, you might call it. And uh, it can lead to troublesome operations and so there're all kinds of material were used in the oil business to try to stop this leak-, leakage. And uh, there had been somebody to use this uh, sugar cane bagasse in years back, but uh, their manufacturing process gave 'em too much trouble or something where they went out of business. And uh, when I realized that they were out of [Inaudible] this product was no longer available, I started working on that project. And eventually made a deal with the sugar mill to build a little plant on their property. And they would furnish me the material, I'd buy the material from them, and grind it up, all I did was grind it up, sack it up, put it, and then sell it to the drilling mud companies who then sold it do the people drilling wells. And uh, I had that little business for uh, I guess about 12 years or so. But in the meantime I was still doing these independently as, for about five years of that time I was still associated with the Vickers Family and doing a few things with them and doing some things on my own. And uh, eventually I just gave up all the idea of ever going back to work up there with them and stayed here. And uh, uh, that was a little company they still uh-

RC: Well now where is this located?

EC: Um… on uh, you know where Donaldsonville is?

RC: Uh huh.

EC: Okay. About six or seven miles south of Donaldsonville on Highway One.

RC: Okay, so it's-

EC: Down towards Napoleonville.

RC: Yeah. And it's on the river road to New Orleans, right?

EC: Uh, it's on this side of the Mississippi River.

RC: Uh huh.

EC: Right. Yeah, uh hm. On Highway One.

RC: So between New Orleans and Baton Rouge, but closer to New Orleans?

EC: Right. Yeah. Clo-, well, closer to uh, closer to Bat-, we only about-

RC: Is that right?

EC: Um, only about 35 miles I guess from Baton Rouge, yeah.

RC: Oh okay. Okay. [Slight pause]

EC: Uh-

RC: And so, so you would process this bagasse.

EC: Yeah.

RC: Grind it up.

EC: Ground it up.

RC: Would you have to treat it?

EC: No. Just grind it. All we did was grind it and sack it. Put it in sacks. Forty-pound bags, uh, paper bags.

RC: And what was the consistency of it? Was it like sawdust or was it-

EC: Uh, kinda, kind of like sawdust, uh, finer than sawdust.

RC: Oh, it was finer than sawdust?

EC: Oh yeah, yeah.

RC: Okay.

EC: We uh, yeah we ground it up 'til it would go through a half-inch screen. If you uh, you see that grid up there is about a three-quarter inch. But we'd put it through half-inch circular holed screen, yeah. Uh, but uh, and I sold that to the major mud companies like Magcobar and Bayroid and, and [Milkie?].

RC: And so they would pump this stuff down the hole-

EC: They'd mix it in their mud.

RC: And mix it in their mud. And then it would, if it was leaking down there, it would-

EC: It, screen out.

RC: Yeah, and it would-

EC: Yeah and [stop?] a leak, yeah.

RC: Block up the leak.

EC: And this was not a, this was not the only prod-, pe-, they've used everything you can imagine. Any uh, they used like cellophane sheets, just cut it up. And they u-, they used uh, cotton stalks and-

RC: C-, cellophane?

EC: Yeah.

RC: That would be strong enough?

EC: Some wei-, well, uh, they would try anything. [Inaudible] And the cellophane never really took on, took off, I guess, but uh-

RC: They sell a product now for tires, for bicycle tires and automobile tires that you, it's call "green slime." And you put that in your tire. And what it is is it's these microscopic rubber strands and so if you get a flat, the, those strands quickly fill up the hole where the air's escaping. It sounds like it's something pretty similar to that.

EC: Yeah. Well, yeah. It uh, as I said, they used everything, there were cotton seed hulls was used extensively, uh, just sawdust has been used extensively. Just a, there've been some uh, well I was on one location in Snyder, Texas, one time where, we were only about 4,000 feet deep, but everything we pumped down the hole for about 30 days we just lost. Just thousands and thousands of barrels of stuff that we put in. Tried everything. And eventually just we'd pump cement in there and uh, we cemented that hole maybe a half dozen times. It was bulk volumes of cement and still couldn't done. Finally just had to, to drill without getting returns on the surface until we could get to a point where we could send a string of pipe through that, through that zone. So, what I was doing was not anything real new, it was just filling a niche that had developed. I called somebody after he'd gone of the business in a year or two before that.

RC: And what was the quality of the bagasse that made it useful in this?

EC: Just bein' a rather strong fiber you might say. You know, you've seen sugar can stalk, you know that uh, it's pretty tough material, really. And uh, it was just a strong little fiber that uh, uh, like so many other things that they pump into there.

RC: So were you living in Lafayette?

EC: Yeah.

RC: You were doing this-

EC: I was living in Lafayette at that time that I did that. And, you know, that little plant and uh, I'd later uh, all this time, as I told you, I was continuing to be more or less an independent uh… although I was trained as an engineer, I didn't ever really do much consulting as engineer. I, I was more interested in uh, buying and selling the leases or buying and selling royalty. And, and trying to establish some producing interest of my own. So I would work with people on drilling deals and try to carve out a little portion of the thing for myself. You know, earn, earn a position in the deal you might say. And uh, so I was doing these, both these things and eventually we sold that little plant to uh… [Venture?] Chemical Company. And I went on the board of Venture then. And then later we sold Venture and uh, so that was the end of that business. Uh, but been here ever since doing uh, independent work.

RC: So what year did you sell that thing? [Slight pause] Seventy-five?

EC: We must, I sold uh, I sold the Collins, well, I sold the Belle, Belle Rose plant probably I'd have to guess about nineteen seventy… seven or eight, I guess. And then we sold Venture in maybe eighty… sometime early '80s. Just before the oil industry crashed in the early '80s. We got out just in time. We uh, uh, we sold out, show you how smart I am, uh, I was the second largest stock holder in Venture I guess and uh, the company that was buyin' it wanted the president to continue workin' for the company. So they wanted to keep him on in a stock position, they wanted everybody else out for cash. And I kept on, "No I want stock." And I nearly blew the deal. [Chuckles] They had to have 100 percent approval and I played, I stayed tough. I said I wanted stock, I wanted stock. And finally saw that it

was gonna blow the deal unless I changed and I was gonna lose a dear friend if I didn't change and agree to go along. So [Coughs] I said, "Okay, I'll take the cash." I took the cash and uh, three months later the stock was almost worthless.

RC: Wow.

EC: Uh, so that's how smart I am. [Both laugh]

RC: Despite yourself.

EC: I knew that stock was not gonna be any good. Uh. But uh, I don't know how much more of this you want me-

RC: Well, this is just what I want. Uh-

EC: How 'bout if we uh, j-, how 'bout we took a break and I go get a cup of coffee. [Discuss beverages; recording turned off]

RC: Yeah so one thing that I'm not clear on is how, is the difference between on and offshore oil in what, the work you were doing here in Louisiana and Lafayette. I mean I realize that in Colorado and Kansas and Texas that was all onshore obviously.

EC: Right, sure.

RC: But when you came to Lafayette that was around the time that the offshore industry was really kicking into high gear it seems.

EC: Oh yeah. Yeah. Um, but let me, let me tell you, I said, when we came here, we had no intention of getting involved in offshore. Um, we had uh, in the company we had looked at a possible uh, venture into offshore drilling with uh… let's see, what was the name. All of a sudden I can't think of the name of the company. Oh yeah. Zapata Offshore Drilling Company. When they were being formed. Uh… they were two brothers, Hugh and Bill [Leaky?] and their third partner was George Bush, who later became president of the United States. The three of them uh, and I'm talkin' about George Bush, Senior. Uh, the three of them came to our office in Wichita, Kansas, and proposed to us that we join them in the building of a drilling rig which they were gonna name the "Scorpion [Inaudible]." It was an offshore rig that, a moveable offshore rig. We uh, we declined simply because we didn't have the money, my, our company didn't. Uh, and then later of course when we had made a decision to move down here, the decision was based on exploring for and developing onshore reserve. We uh, offshore was big business and we knew we were really not in a situation to get into that. I personally have had no working experience offshore. Everything that I have done has been uh, onshore type. Now, people here of course are involved in offshore work. And there's been much developments from the time that I first came here in the offshore industry. I've watched it, but I've never really participated in it, in work or anything.

RC: Okay. What about um, like when you had the bagasse factory, or would you call it a factory?

EC: Well, uh, actually I call it a drilling mud additive factory is what.

RC: Okay, um, was that used on and offshore or?

EC: Yeah. It was used, yeah, its used anywhere they're drilling wells, but principally in what we call the hard rock country. Most of our sales were to uh, west Texas, Oklahoma, Wyoming, some in Montana, um, but that was, that's where most of it was, yeah. The drilling situation down here, the environment's a little different and not uh, as concerned about fractured [Inaudible] drilling into dry fractured reservoirs with, it just consumed anything we pour down there. Here uh, at, you drill through gumbo and drill into very soft formations for long period of time. They do

sometimes break a formation down, lose circulation or drill into a depleted reservoir and lose circulation, but it's just not as frequent as it is out in hard rock country. So uh, no, that was not directed at offshore at all.

RC: Okay. [Pause] Well, so did you make a, you made a conscious decision then not to participate in the offshore?

EC: Yes we did. We sure did because, just simply because uh, you might say the initial cost. Uh, and considering [the size?], we were a small company. Yeah, we just uh, we could not get out there and compete with the major oil companies buying leases and that kind of thing. And uh, contractin' for drilling rigs at the rate that it would take. It just a different aspect of the business. We were on the fringe of the, not the, I won't say on the "fringe" of it, the onshore business was still a very good business, it was not uh, not a minor part of the oil business. It was a big part of it, see. Lots of oil and gas been discovered and produced in south Louisiana onshore.

RC: Right. So, I mean, onshore there was a lot more room for smaller companies to participate and they couldn't do that offshore? Is that-

EC: There was a lot more room offshore as far as space and prospect where to go and all. But just took a lot more money.

RC: Money, right.

EC: Yeah, this was big business.

RC: Yeah, when I say "room," I mean "business room."

EC: Right, yeah. For us, oh yeah, no question about it.

RC: So was it, it was the big companies that were really going to put the capital in to develop offshore.

EC: Had the-, right, very much so, yeah. Uh, there were very few so-called "independents" offshore at that time. They uh, Magnolia Petroleum Co-, which later became Mobil Oil, was big offshore. Uh, California Company was big at that time. Shell Company and the Standards. They were the one doin' the work offshore at that time.

RC: Okay. So you came to Lafayette then in '62, is that right?

EC: Uh hm.

RC: And what sort of a place was Lafayette in six-

EC: Lafayette was a [Chuckles] it was a uh, just a little country town. But, you see, when somebody like me would come to town in the oil industry, already with the job and that kind of thing, uh, you might say that it's just natural that the people you rub shoulders with everyday are, in your work environment, are uh, other people in the oil business. And although there were lots of let's say native Lafayette people had gone to work for oil companies, they were in the oil business. And they didn't, they themselves didn't change that much, but they were part of the oil community and those are the ones you saw, uh, primarily. 'Course you go to grocery store, you go to school, the PTA meetings, you get out and visit people and we'd do shoppin' in whatever. You with uh, run into other people who had no connection with the oil business. But our ch-, our stay here form the beginning has been just uh, [a pleasure?]. We didn't see but I've heard referred to as discrimination against uh, the oil people. I didn't see that, I never saw that. Uh… I did uh, I did notice some differences in say small town as opposed to bigger town and that kind of thing. I had lived in two cities where when you came to stop sign you actually stopped your car. And shifted gears and then drove off. And uh, when I came to Lafayette, uh, people didn't do that. And I was a slow learner. One day drivin' up uh, University, I came to Johnston Street and I stopped. And a florist delivery truck behind me was squealin' on brakes and the truck turned sideways and slide right up to my car. And I get out and I go back and I say, "You got a problem?" He said,

"No, you have a problem?" I said, "No." He said, "Why did you stop?" [Both chuckle] I said, "Because of the stop sign." [Both laugh] Uh, he said, "There's nobody comin'." "I know," you know, that was things. So uh, big difference was just uh, I, getting to learn the local customs and things. And I drive through stop signs now. [RC laughs] You know, I've never had a ticket. I try, I don't think I've ever done it when there's somebody comin'. I don't think I've interfered with anybody. But-

RC: I bet, I've learned the same thing. [Both laugh] But what other local customs uh-

EC: Well, stayin', I will stay with the traffic thing just a minute.

RC: Yeah sure. Sure.

EC: At uh, one point I became concerned about the traffic on my street out there, I live on [Duce?] Road and I guess everybody lives on Duce Road is concerned about traffic and, but I was concerned about it very early, even though Duce Road was not uh, even paved all the way to Johnston Street from, I live right off of West [Inaudible] Parkway. And that was blacktop there for a couple of blocks and then it was shell road from there on up to Johnston Street, but we still had a lot of traffic. And, anyway, I was concerned about the traffic. And somebody in the na-, in the safety council here that I became acquainted with said, "You really ought to get acquainted with and talk to the mayor of the city. He's concerned about traffic." And I, I was talkin' to the mayor, I went to his office and was talkin' to him. And he was glad to see me and all that. And we talked about traffic. And uh, he told me at the time, he said, "Would you believe we actually have policemen on the payroll who have been here for years and have never written a traffic ticket." And I said, [Chuckling] "No, Mister Mayor, that's kind of hard to believe." And he said, "Oh, they'll stop people if they, they'll stop 'em and say, 'Michelle, you don't want to do that now.'" [Laughs] "'You need to learn to drive a little better,'" and that kind. But he said, "He won't write him a ticket." [Both laugh] That was a long time ago and I'm sure nothin' like that now. But uh [Both chuckle] I still haven't gotten my ticket and I don't want any tickets. [Both laugh]

RC: I don't blame you. That's funny.

EC: But yeah, Lafayette was different then. Uh, shoppin' was completely different situation. Uh… my wife loved the Heymann Department Store, which was downtown and [Inaudible] build one big place that she could go and buy about anything and get lots and lots of personal attention. Everybody she talked to though knew that she was from somewhere else and they all called here, "cher" and "honey" and she loved it. [Laughs] Uh… and the, everything about Lafayette was smaller, or course you know that. This city has had tremendous growth over the years since we've been here. But it's been a lot of fun to see it, to see it grow and see it change. A few things [Inaudible] but uh, and I think it never will, Lafayette traffic will never run like it's gonna run in places we came from.

[END OF CD 1]

EC: One city we'd spend a lot of time in in Kansas. There was a main thoroughfare ev-, every half mile. And it was like a big grid. And all these streets that were a half mile runnin' this direction, they all had a right away. A half mile street runnin' [Inaudible]. And uh, and it was easy to get around in the town. You just, if you wanted to go five miles east, you got on a east-west street and went five miles east and then you were in the neighborhood you wanted. I got lost one time when I first came here tryin' to leave the First National Bank up in Lafayette and goin' to [Oakmore?] Country Club to meet my golfin' buddy and play lunch. And I thought, "Well I know I'm here and I know the country club's there, so I'll just start workin' these streets goin' in that direction." And I came to so many dead ends and I came to the river about a half dozen times, [Chuckles] I couldn't get across it. And I was about 30 minutes gettin' to Oakmore Country Club. And I'd been here three or four months already. [Both chuckle] So uh, it's always gonna be bad I think.

RC: Yeah, it, that has everything to do I suppose with the layout of the city.

EC: Yeah, right. Yeah, the way it was laid out originally.

RC: Well, so you said that um, some people were, recognized some discrimination of oil workers.

EC: Yeah, well people told me that. As I say, I never experienced it. Never. Uh, but I heard people say that the natives don't like us 'cause we're in the oil business. And the natives are envious of us because we're in the oil business. Uh… may-, maybe I was too naïve and I thought everybody that greeted me was happy to see me, like I was happy to see them, but I didn't notice that in anybody. I made lots of good friends and still have lots of friends that never had anything to do with the oil business. It's possible that it was there, it's possible it was there before I came, 'cause see by the time I came in '62 they'd uh, the, I guess the Oil Center must have been built, started in about '57 or so.

RC: Yeah, right. Right around that time.

EC: So uh, there were people who uh, were here before us and maybe they got rid of all the, maybe they accepted all that and we didn't.

RC: But what about um, religion? Because, you know, this area was historically very Catholic.

EC: Sure. Yeah.

RC: And a lot of the incoming people were not Catholic.

EC: Yeah, that's-

RC: Did you see any uh, any results of that?

EC: We noticed it, of course, you couldn't help but notice it. You know, on Ash Wednesday people'd come to work with ashes on their head. And that was strange for me, bein' a Protestant, that was uh, uh, different for us. And uh, people that we might have over to our house, they didn't eat meat on Friday and sometimes, a couple of times we caught nappin' on that, weren't prepared for 'em, you know. But uh… I, as, you couldn't be in Lafayette and not notice the difference, it was a Catholic community. But uh, we really uh, we coped with it. We had no problem copin' with it. We, people seemed to accept us uh… I think I only one time in my life uh, felt like a person misunderstood me about it. They asked me somethin' about a particular uh, Catholic school football team. And I said, "Oh, I don't keep up with them." "Oh, yeah, I know why you don't keep up with them." You know, and it dawned on me, "Oh, he thinks I'm opposed to Catholics," you know. And really wasn't the case at all. It just uh, I just didn't keep up with that particular team, I was interested in the Lafayette High School, 'cause my son was playing football, you know.

RC: Sure. Sure.

EC: So I, that's the only uh, one experience that I remember of something like that. Uh-

RC: And that's pretty minor.

EC: Yeah, it is. Very, very minor, yeah. But uh… it, it's, I just didn't see any discrimination against us and I didn't feel the need to discriminate against anybody else, you know.

RC: Well it's interesting here because, you know, that, Cat-, Catholicism is such a fundamental part of this community now and even more so then. A person would think that there may have been some more maybe clashes of cultures of religious cultures.

EC: It could have been that I didn't experience. As I said, when I, well I, when we first came here, uh, I guess one of the first local families that uh, that we became friends with was a family that, a man named Chester Martin, he was a physician. Uh, he was recommended by a lifelong friend who lived in Lafayette when I came here and got reacquainted with him. And we needed a doctor, said, "See Doctor Chester Martin." Uh, and Chester and I became good friends and he treated all my family. And was devout Catholic, went to church everyday I think. And he was the son-in-law to uh… the family that owned the general office supply uh, company. And uh… that, got acquainted with his family and his wife's family and brothers and sisters and so on. And they were very good friends. And occasionally they would ask us to go to church with them on a special occasion. We accepted on one occasion I know, I forgot exactly what it was, but uh, they woke us up one night, "Come on, go to midnight mass with us." And [Chuckles] and uh, and so we got all the kids out of bed, got 'em dressed, and went to the Catholic midnight mass, and uh, went back to their house and had coffee and pie or somethin'. [RC laughs] Or I don't know what. Anyway, uh, they weren't really, I don't know whether they were actually tryin' to convert us or not, but we never had any clashes about, never had any discussions about it. We were just close enough friends, I guess, they figured they wanted us to be with them at that particular time. And we were close enough friends we said okay, we'll go be with them.

RC: Sure, sure.

EC: But uh, and I have many other friends who are Catholic, and I just have never really noticed that they feel any differently towards me than they do their Catholic friends.

RC: I suppose that's then one of the components that made this a more desirable place for a lot of these oil companies to come to.

EC: Yeah.

RC: You know.

EC: Well, the ground was broken I guess, you know, for us. They, you may talk to people who saw this differently. But uh, we didn't experience then and we really don't now. That's, we, actually my wife and I uh, now have become Episcopalians and we a little bit closer to the Catholic community I guess and some others. But still we just, we haven't seen that at all. We like Lafayette, as you know, as you can tell.

RC: Yeah, sure.

EC: Yeah. And uh, and like all the people. I, my only regret about it is that I never learned to speak the Cajun language. When I first moved here I said I'm gonna enroll in a language program and uh, try to learn to speak to these people that I meet out on the bayou. And uh, when I'm fishin' out there I had people hollerin' boat to boat, speakin' in that language and I didn't know what they were sayin', I wanted to know. [RC chuckles] Well they might've been catchin' fish and I wanted to know how. But uh, at any rate I regret that I never did do that, I should've.

RC: Was there any, in doing business with locals, was there ever any difficulty posed by not speaking the language for example?

EC: Uh, no, not speakin' the lang-, I never ran into language barrier. Now I know that some of the people that worked as land men, who actually go out buyin' oil and gas leases, and dealing with more of the local people, they have. And there were lots of stories goin' around, there have been lots of stories going around about the uh… problems that have arisen just from misunderstanding of languages, that kind of thing. Uh, we noticed I think, or I didn't notice it because I wasn't out buyin' leases, but I've had people who were out buyin' leases tell me how much they found there to be quite a, illiteracy out there. They had lots of people make-, makin' their signature on their leases with "x"s. Makin' their mark so to speak. And uh, and that was noticeable back in the early '60s. Now I don't know how, I'm sure

things have changed an awful lot. And one man you might be interested in talkin' to about something like this is Alfred Lamson. You know Alfred Lamson?

RC: We've talked to Alfred Lamson, yes.

EC: You've talked, yeah. I'm sure he can tell you some stories about, yeah.

RC: Uh huh.

EC: Um, but uh, we, yeah, we did notice, I know that that was there, I didn't get involved in it. I uh, I had one misunderstanding with the people at the sugar mill one time because [Chuckling] one thing I noticed, I, I, this was when I was over there tryin' to make a deal with the board of directors to get uh, get 'em let me build that little plant there. And uh, in the board room, we sittin' in a place like this, and here comes a little man with a little tray about this big around and he's got these little cups on there about that tall, and one cup for every [Inaudible] serving coffee. And uh, and I took a sip of that coffee and it was loaded with sugar and one thing I cannot abide at all is sweet coffee. I, yeah, you can put a half a gram in there and I would detect it and get rid of it. [RC chuckles] And there I am dealin' with the board of directors of the sugar company and I take a sip and I set it down. I said, "Oh that's got sugar in it." [Laughs] And 'course they all woke up, "You don't like our product." [Both laugh] That's a great way to try to make a deal, isn't it.

RC: With a sugar company.

EC: They sent the little man back to make some more coffee and he brought me a cup without sugar in it, I thanked him profusely. [Chuckling] And I was so embarrassed. I wound up makin' the deal, though, and had a very good relationship with 'em. [Chuckles] We noticed lots of differences in customs down here that, and they, but it's uh… I, I've never, well, I guess the point is, we have seen a lot of differences, but we have not been bogg-, bothered by any of those difference so to speak.

RC: Uh huh. What other differences did you think, anything else?

EC: Uh…

RC: Comes to mind?

EC: Well. [Pause] I think the uh, I think children as a whole had more freedom to make their own decisions. Uh, seems like every kid that my kids grew up with, uh, were makin' big decisions for themselves before our kids were.

RC: Oh yeah?

EC: Uh, s-, I don't know that we were that watchful over them. Uh, or not, I think it was just we had come from two larger cities, Wichita and Denver, comin' down here, and I guess we had seen and heard of a few more perils out there that might face kids. And we were uh, a little bit, uh, I guess we're just a little leery, more leery of things that could happen to our kids than the local people were. And, of course, that speaks very well for the community. I mean, they had fewer problems and consequently they uh, I guess they didn't have to be quite as concerned about what might happened to their kids out, so their kids were doin' things that ours weren't' allowed to do. You know, stayin' out late at night, runnin' around unsupervised and that kind of thing. That was a big difference for us when we first moved here. Our kids loved the change, though. [Laughs]

RC: I bet they did. [Laughs]

EC: Yeah.

RC: Well what do, if you could put your finger on the most dramatic change that you saw happen in Lafayette as, in some way tied to oil development, what do you think it would be? [Pause]

EC: I don't know that it is all attributable to the oil industry. But I've thought quite a few times uh, and wondered, what would Lafayette be like now if it hadn't been for the oil industry, if it hadn't been for uh, really a lot, Mister Heymann's vision of an Oil Center I think contributed a lot. But I'm not sure we would have all the big growth, I know we wouldn't have the growth that we've had. We seem to have had a… just a change that would indicate prosperity more in the community I think than let's say comparable cities, towns of its size across this south band, band of the Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, east Texas. Comparable cities haven't grown like Lafayette has, haven't uh, blossomed with the indication of prosperity. Like all the real estate and commercial development that this town has had. Uh, and I think a large part of it is directly attributed, attributable to the oil industry and I'm sure there are some learned economists who can tell you have much, but I can't. But I've often wondered uh, would Lafayette still be this same little town with most people speakin' French to each other and uh, and knowin' everybody on a first name basis or not? I don't know.

RC: And it's interesting what you say because other people have said the same thing and they all come back to that one person, which is Heymann.

EC: Uh hm.

RC: As being the result of that. For the-

EC: When I came, when we moved the little company Alco Oil and Gas down here, I made a trip down to Lafayette to, well, before actually movin' to make arrangements for office space and that kind of thing. And I went to meet Mister Heymann in his office at his store. And this was in 1962 and he told me at that time that he had 19 million dollars worth of real estate on his books. Commercial real estate. And I looked out, and I walked around, and I, "Where in the world is it?" You know. [Chuckles] I just uh, couldn't believe that store and, and oh then, 'course then he told me how much of this area he owned down here. And uh, you know, the man was a business man and his motive was to make money, like every other business man. But he had to be a little bit more of a visionary. Had to be a little bit more cooperative with his prospective clients and uh, he had to have some faith himself in the oil industry to go overboard towards building to make them have comfortable, working quarters to live in. He built some, quite a bit on speculation. A lot of 'em I'm sure he had contracts ahead of time, but those contracts were probably for brief, three to five years. They were not forever, you know. And he could still have been hurt had he been wrong. But the man had a lot of vision, there's not question about that.

RC: Well what was it like dealing with him personally?

EC: Very pleasant. He uh, I was comin' in here representing a small company looking for uh, six or eight offices and he treated me as if I were wantin' him to build me a big building somewhere. And just very, very congenial, very pleasant, very business like. Welcoming us to the community, that kind of thing. Yeah.

RC: So he really did have an active hand in that.

EC: Pardon?

RC: He had a much more active had in the whole development, aside from just putting up the-

EC: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, he had an active hand at that point in every remodeling job, I guess. He was uh, his building contractor was Marvin [Mashota?] and uh, he said, "Oh, I can have Marvin move those petitions for you." You know, do this and do that. He was directly involved in whatever you wanted. It was pleasant doing business with him. Didn't ever do business with him after that. That was the only time. But uh, it was a pleasant experience.

RC: Yeah. So would you do it all again?

EC: Would I do it all again? Oh sure.

RC: Yeah, if, go into the oil industry?

EC: I, say the question again?

RC: In the oil business.

EC: Oh, um, would I go into the oil?

RC: Right.

EC: Oh yeah. I never considered anything else when I was uh, uh, very young, hadn't even finished high school, uh, we had a drilling rig move into the countryside over there near us in Mississippi. And a friend of mine and I went out one day, lookin' around, wanted to see that rig, I wanted to see it and I asked him to go with me. We got out there and looked around and uh… I asked the driller if I could climb up to the top of the derrick and see what the countryside looked like. He uh, looked kind of puzzled and said, "Yeah, yeah, go ahead if you can climb up there." Well my friend started up and he got up a little ways and stopped, stood aside, and went back down. I went on up to the top, climbed to the very top and looked around. And uh, back down and I was, I, 'couple days later that driller called me and asked me if I wanted a job roughneckin'. That one of his hands had quit. And I was roughneck for a little while with him, you know. Just as a kid. And I, uh, then also I had a job workin' uh, as a rod man on a gravity survey crew, which had really nothin' to do with rigs or actively searching for oil, but we were conducting this gravity survey through the countryside and I was just working, holding a rod, driving a pick-up truck for the surveyor, you know. And uh, but it uh, was a fore runner of some oil development work. And just had it always in the back of my mind I was goin' in the oil industry. So when I got back out of the service that's what uh, what I decided to do. And as far as my career and where I've been and what I've done, it's been a, my wife tells me every now and then, "It's been a hell of a ride," she said, "but I've enjoyed it all." But we uh, we enjoyed, we didn't enjoy livin' in Snyder as such, as far as, yeah, we, you had to, there you just had to know it was temporary. You just knew you couldn't do that forever. And Midland was just about the same because it uh, the sand blowin' and the kids with sore throats all the time, all from the sand storms, you know. Kansas we loved. Uh, I enjoyed the outdoors in Kansas, just like I have down here. And Colorado, I enjoyed, but my, say my wife didn't. But lookin' back on it all, I wouldn't change it. And Lafayette, it's home. We uh, a few years back in the '80s we uh, considered movin' to Florida. Another couple and my wife and I built a little house down there on the beach. And then when the other couple sold out to us, we uh, kind of considered retiring down there, but uh, well we had kids here and no we have grandkids and great-grandkids, doctors, lawyers, accountants, uh, everybody that we have done business with is here, so there's no question about it, this is home for us. And uh, you know, it's a great place to live, great place to raise a family. I feel a little bit bad every time one of my kids decides to move away, you know. [Slight pause]

RC: What, was there a noticeable distinction between the offshore and onshore oil?

EC: Oh sure, yeah. Like, as I said, it's either, it's big business and bigger business is what, just as, like sandlot and major league, you know. Uh, a lot of the service companies, people that you will talk to, they sell to onshore and they sell to offshore. Engineers and geologists tend to separate the two. They either work one or the other, mostly. Uh, a lot of people just, a lot of working hands, working people don't want to go offshore. They just, they don't like uh, bein' away from the sight of the land, or they don't like to get, tend to be seasick, or they don't like the hazards involved, or they don't like bein', workin' the shift and bein' away from home for seven days at a time or 14, whatever. Uh, that seems to divide the people a lot. From investment standpoint, people invested in drilling deals, particularly the kind of work I've been involved in, the people that I've talked to, people who have invested with me, and people I've invested with, it's all been onshore things. And uh, came very close one time uh, I was uh, haven't told you all of our tenure

here in Lafayette, but at one time my son, Mike, and I uh, and another friend started a little exploration company. We were called C and B Exploration Company. And uh, we had some backing by some local people and some out of town people, as far as furnishing up overhead, they would then participate in the fruits of our labors, so to speak. And this uh, was just before the industry kind of crashed, the price of oil fell from 35 dollars down to nine dollars. Uh, but anyway, we found those people [in oil?] and uh, had a little bit of success, but while that was an ongoing company, a friend of mind in Houston who uh, was president of a substantial company that was doin' some offshore work. They were very active in offshore. He called me and told me that they had uh, purchased a bunch of leases, they were gettin' ready to buy leases on the federal lease sale. They had amassed somethin' like 20 million dollars that they were goin' to expose. They didn't, when they bid on leases they don't know how many they're gonna get, so they don't know how much of their 20 million they're gonna spend, but they were gonna [expose?] 20 million dollars. And uh, they had done all the seismic work and [delineated?] these prospects. And uh, he said that he had 10 percent of this deal that he could let us have at no cost other than just make our exposure with them. We could participate to the extent of 10 percent if we uh, could expose two millions dollars. And we would buy some prospects out there, or try to. Uh, we were a little independent onshore company, but we talked it over among ourselves, Mike and the other partner and I, and decided to talk to some of the investors about it. We did and uh, one of the investors said uh, that he could get this money together, that we should do it, you know. And we'd do it in our name, but he would get the money together. So uh, I called my friend in Houston and made that verbal commitment to him that we would go in the offshore business with him to the extent of 10 percent of that exposure. Uh, the day before the sale was to be made our investor um, for some reason, backed out. We were not accustomed to that kind, you know, you, a lot of business deals were made on handshake deals. And uh, so I had to call my friend and said, "Look, we can't take the two million, but I'll, what I'll do, everything that we can among ourselves here in the office get together, we will expose that with you, but it's not gonna be two million." And I said, "This man has backed out on us." And he said, "Don't worry about it, don't worry about it." He said, "We can cover it and there's no pain." So that was the one time that we came close to getting into the offshore bus-, and it's too bad we didn't, because it turned out to be a very profitable thing. Uh, but uh, uh, it was, I guess, it [kind of?] was a turning point for me in how I do business. I don't make big business deals on verbal commitments [Chuckles] any more.

RC: Right. Right.

EC: And that's a shame, because that's what the business was built on, really the whole industry was that way.

RC: That's interesting. But what would you say is the, was the most difficult part about the business?

EC: What's the most difficult part about the oil business?

RC: Yeah. [Pause]

EC: The most difficult part for me… uh, dealing with uh… with people who don't understand the risk. That, nothin's difficult about the business really. Findin' oil's not easy, not, it's, there're experts at it and there're people who drill a lot of dry holes. But business is fun, the work is fun, and you do your best. I, it's not a, it's not what you call a difficult job. But uh, one thing that I've always found hard to understand or hard to grasp in that average person, non-oil person doesn't realize the risk involved. They think that the big oil companies just go out and drill wells whenever they want a little more oil, you know. And uh, and everybody just [Inaudible] [he knows there's oil on his back 40?], you know. And they don't [Inaudible] oil company is gonna come there and drill. And but so many people that, people that you know are intelligent, you rub shoulders with often, and yet they don't realize when you drill a hole it may be a dry hole. [Chuckles] Um, uh, it's hard to, hard really to see that that's such a ha-, difficult thing to understand. People talk about our "undiscovered reserves." People say we have billions and billions of barrels of undiscovered reserves. How does anybody know what we've got that's undiscovered, you know? [RC chuckles] Uh, it just uh-

RC: Yeah. I understand what you're saying.

EC: So that's uh, that's a strange part of the business that I haven't gotten accustomed to and I've been in it all my life. [Both chuckle]

RC: Well how did you weather the '80s? [Pause]

EC: Uh, you've seen people out the water with the water up to right there?

RC: Uh huh.

EC: I had it up to right there. [RC chuckles] It never got to there. [Both laugh] Uh, I had borrowed some money and purchased some properties and the oil price was about 33 dollars a barrel at the time I bought the properties and committed myself to making uh, substantial payments on that loan. And uh, unfortunately, had committed a lot of private assets to back up that loan. When the price fell, I just had to sell off a lot of personal property to uh, to keep from forfeiting on that loan. Um, I never have missed a payment on it, but by the time it was uh, all over with, I was essentially uh… I was in kind of bad shape. But uh, in my neighborhood I could stand on my front porch and see seven homes that were uh, gonna be sold at [sheriff] sale or a for sale of some kind. And uh, I just was lucky I never had to put that sign on my door. But we came out of it. It uh, but I, it was a very tough thing. [Pause] And there were a lot of people that I feel so sorry for, just went completely broke. Thank goodness, the good things are a friend of mine, who's name I won't call, had uh, similar pro-, problems. He wound up over extendin' himself uh, remodeled his home, probably put a quarter of million dollars into remodeling what had been originally a 30,000 dollar house, you know, or something of the sort. [RC chuckles] And uh, and went completely broke. But uh, had to move out of town. And moved in with his kids, in apartments, and that kind of thing. And uh, but came by my house a few days ago and drivin' a new Lincoln and retired and got it made now as a result of big discovery he made. So, you know, some people come people come back, some don't.

[END OF RECORDING]