MMS OFFSHORE GULF OF MEXICO

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Dailey Berard

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Place: Cankton, Louisiana

Interviewer: Jason Theriot

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Bio

Dailey Berard has been involved in the oil and gas industry for 50 years, working for and owning several companies, including most notably Unifab Fabricators (1980-2000). He was born and raised in the Atchafalaya Basin and has seen Louisiana's wetlands decline over the decades. He went to private school at St. Peter's College in New Iberia and graduated from New Iberia High School in 1946. He joined the military and served with the army engineers in occupied Japan. He went to college on the G.I. Bill and graduate in civil engineering from SLI. Tennessee Gas gave him a start in the business in early 1950s. He laid pipelines, designed pipe laying equipment, built companies, modernized the Port of Iberia, and even constructed an Agrifuels Refinery in Iberia Parish. He sold Unifab in 2000 and is retired from the industry. He spends most of his time tending his ranch and writing letters to Washington D.C. on energy/environment issues affecting the Gulf Coast.

Early Career: Berard started off with Tennessee Gas laying and designing pipelines for natural gas. He worked extensively on the famed "Muskrat Line," a pipeline that ran through the marshes of the southeast Louisiana. He moved into offshore industry with Tenneco and later went to work for Houston Contracting Company in the GOM. He designed one of the first pipe-laying derrick barges. He diversified into other areas, opened up Houston Systems--a fabrication company--and in 1980 he opened up Unifab at the Port of Iberia.

Unifab Fabricators: Unifab transformed the Port of Iberia into a thriving support/service center for the offshore oil and gas industry in the GOM. It was a state of art, all electric, fabrication facility which built platforms, rigs, and rolled its own pipe. Berard took his company public from the start which may have helped it survive during the 1980s. In the 1990s, the Iberia Parish Chamber of Commerce recognized Berard for bringing in $1 billion dollars into the local economy through Unifab and the Port of Iberia.

Work force/other issues: Berard is an advocate for environmental protection, particularly with respect to Louisiana's vanishing coastline. He has been recording the rising sea levels since the 1950s and has served as an expert witness in condemnation suits. What is particularly interesting is that Berard, after years of planning, designing, and dredging pipeline canals, has spent the last few decades writing and lecturing about wetland loss and protection. He has seen through his own experiences what damages have resulted from the extraction of oil and gas along the coast line. However, he is very critical of the radical environmentalist, who he feels caused more harm than good. For Berard, the future of the wetlands and offshore industry rests with public and private ability to balance energy needs with environmental sustainability.

Tape 1, Side 1

JT: This is an oral history interview with Dailey Berard in Cankton, Louisiana, at Mr. Berard's ranch. Dailey Berard is from Lafayette, Louisiana. He is the cofounder and former CEO of Unifab at the Port of Iberia and has been in the oilfield fabrication industry for thirty years, currently writes an energy column in the Lafayette *Daily Advertiser*. He is retired and lives in Lafayette.

It is January 13th, 2007, oral history interview with Dailey Berard, tape one, of Jason Theriot, MMS Ship Fab Project.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

DB: In St. Martinville in 1929, went to the convent in St. Martinville till I peed on the Evangeline Oak and the nuns kicked me out and put me in the Brothers' school, St. Peter's School in New Iberia, where I stayed there till about the sixth grade and then we moved closer to New Iberia High School and I finished in 1946 in New Iberia High.

JT: Okay. What was your father's occupation?

DB: My father started out in the Atchafalaya Basin in working for his father on Anesset Berard, clearing right-of-ways for the Atchafalaya levees and what have you, and then he went to work for Shell Oil Company and eventually Texaco, and at age sixty-five he retired from Texaco. He was a foreman.

JT: So there was some extraction going on way back then, huh?

DB: Oh, yes, oh, yes, back in—yes, back in the twenties and thirties, there was drilling going on definitely. Not at the pace that it is today, but we were probably averaging—well, at one time I know it was up to seventy thousand wells a year, and from twelve hundred to two thousand, twenty-two hundred offshore.

JT: So you grew up in this industry.

DB: I grew up in this environment watching my dad. When I was twelve years old, I used to take him to the boat dock so he could catch the boats to go to work and what have you. I did this till I was about sixteen, and then the war years were going on and I was afraid they were going to—I wanted to get in it earlier when I was about twelve or thirteen, but unfortunately I was too young.

But I did sign up when I was sixteen and ended up in Japan, serving under MacArthur in the Army Engineers, gathering up inventory and all of the

munitions that Japanese had laid, left laying around Yokahama, and I did this for a couple of years.

JT: Now, with your father's occupation, would you consider that you guys were middle class? Did you have a decent standard of living?

DB: We had a decent standard of living. We were four brothers. My dad had four sons. But there was no way that he could have put us through college, and that was my concern at sixteen, the G.I. Bill of Rights by going into the military, and all three of my brothers also went into the military. I saw this as an opportunity or I had a very keen mind, and in fact I was far ahead of my class. I was head of the class when I was going to St. Peter's College. Not that I studied hard; I just had a pretty good memory that could remember facts, figures and what have you, and I was artistic. I used to do all kind of things, sell my drawings to other kids who probably went home told their parents they had drawn them.

But anyway, all through high school, I got up at three-thirty every morning, worked in a chicken hatchery and hatched about ten thousand chickens a week for five dollars a week. It was right across from the high school, so I could go to school, and I was a rich boy in high school, five bucks a week.

JT: What was Cajun life like back in the thirties and the forties?

DB: I described that very vividly in *This Cajun Ain't Bashful*, the book I wrote to and donated to the Chamber of Commerce as a fund-raiser. It was exciting for me as a young boy, I'd go through—we were living in the swamps in a camp boat and I could see the deer and I could see the wildlife. Santy Clause couldn't find me over there, so I got very good at taking clay and making figurines and the toys that I wanted and when they were burning trash, I'd throw it in there and it would get fire hard. Then to this day, I still do a lot of this stuff around here.

JT: The Atchafalaya Basin, it's close to your heart?

DB: Very close to my heart. It's a wilderness area, half a million square miles of wilderness that unfortunately is being marred and being taken over by farming and this industry and everything else. I hope that we can save the vast majority of it that's still left.

Eventually, all the homes back then in the thirties were built from the cypress trees that were salvaged in this great swamp, majestic swamp, and then when that slowed down and they leveed off the Atchafalaya Basin and the people that were living in the Basin harvesting these cypress trees had to move back into some of the communities, and a lot of them went to work for he fledgling oil industry.

JT: What did the Cajuns of traditionally being rural agrarian trapping living in the swamps, living in the prairies and the marshes, what did the Cajun people as a whole as a community think about this coming oil industry and the derricks?

DB: I don't think they had much of an opinion. They were content happy people. They worked from dusk till dawn, chopping these down, at time eight foot above the water level on perch boards and what have you, and then they would chain dogs to massive log rafts and take the trees on in. A lot of them fished, and in the evening they just shot their fresh meat, squirrels and what have you, right at that was readily available.

Fisheries, we had a boat dock, I remember, and a boat would come by once a week and buy the fish, and we'd barter with them for groceries and things we need. The only milk we had was Pet milk. There was no fresh milk and what have you. But everybody was content. You'd often see them meet pirogue to pirogue and exchange information and drink cold coffee from their battered cups and what have you.

They took me out of the swamp, I was about five, and put me in that convent, I could speak not one word of English, and I was listening to these foreign tongues that people were talking, the nuns, and they would slap me if I didn't speak, respond in English. I couldn't respond in English because I had no knowledge of English. But I learned within a few months. I got very, very skilled in French and English. As I say, I had a photographic mind.

JT: Those *Américains*.

DB: Yes.

JT: Now what about the *modie Texiens*, those damn Texans that started coming around and drilling holes in our marsh and putting up these structures?

DB: I found this as an enhancement to my opportunities. When I got out of school as civil engineer from SLI, and by the way I did continue my studies till I was thirty-seven, correspondence schools, from LSU, American law and all those kind of things. But I worked for the state as a party chief for about a year for two hundred dollars a month, but I found it kind of boring.

Then Earl Long was the governor, and they took half of my survey party and got them to drive the highway commission in Franklin's cane trucks, and I couldn't be part of that. So along came Tennessee Gas, was building pipelines, and so I availed myself the opportunity, and I went to work for them. It was one exciting thing after the other.

We moved several times, my wife and I. Then I got a part in project engineer on the Brazos River building an aerial crossing, and that was a jump-off point. From then the Muskrat Line, the five hundred and fifty miles of pipeline in

wetlands of south Louisiana built from Mississippi all the way to Sabine. I spent a couple of years designing, surveying, aerial from on-ground surveys. It was freezing in the winter and hot as hell and alligators and everything you can imagine.

But it was very—it clued me into the problems we were having with sea-level rise, because I made some surveys because I was always an expert witness whenever we had condemnation suits. I saw where the sea-levels rise in '55 had risen two to nine inches, and the most prominent place was Eugene Island, nine inches, based on the gauges that they'd put along the Louisiana coast, and it got me to thinking. Of course I didn't put much thought into it, but I should have realized then we had some serious problems coming. I did realize it, but I was in there but trying to convey that message to anyone else.

JT: You were, what, a twenty-five, twenty-six-year-old man at the time?

DB: Oh, probably like twenty, twenty-one. Yes.

JT: Now, I'll imagine that your experience—

DB: No, probably you're right, about twenty-four by the time I reached the wetlands of Louisiana.

JT: When you were running these pipelines, you were actually in there in the communities in the swamps, so I'll imagine that your experience growing up in the Atchafalaya and the ability to speak Cajun to the local people—

DB: Oh, yes, I had no trouble communicating, but I got beat up so bad about speaking French that I kind of wiped it out of my vocabulary and to this day I understand it but I cannot speak the language. I'm almost seventy-eight, and because of lack of use. My grandmother, she only spoke French, so the only way I could communicate was through French. My grandfather was very versatile, he spoke English and French, and he was very educated at the time. I think he had a seven-grade education, but that was a lot of education in that timeframe.

JT: You showed me a photograph of him in the Atchafalaya building the levees.

DB: Right. Clearing the right-of-way to build those Atchafalaya Basins, yes, with his crews and a lot of them were minorities. I could remember all kind of things, arguments and what have you and sometimes some fistfights taking place out there. It got me excited, and as I grew up in the neighborhoods where I lived there were always bullies.

Dad bought us boxing gloves when I was five, and my brothers and I used to spar around. So when the bullies would start giving us trouble, and some of them were two or three years older than me, I'd light into them. Never lost a fight

in my life. Eventually went to Golden Gloves and never lost a fight as a Golden Glover. Ended up in Japan. In my spare time, I was on a judo team, so I was very physical and it helped me all around.

But no, I was not negative about the Texans coming in because I learned a lot from them. They were far more advanced than we were here in Louisiana, and it helped make the transition to energy, oil, gas and the things that—the resources that the nation needed. As of right now, Louisiana furnishes about 30 percent of the nation's fossil fuels.

JT: Is right off of this coast?

DB: Yes, right.

JT: So if you've gotten your degree and you're now working for Tennessee Gas and putting these pipelines—

DB: And I took the exam and took and became registered in six states.

JT: Now when they're building these pipelines, I'll assume that they're also drag-lining canals?

DB: Oh, yes, definitely, for the big pipelines. The smaller diameter pipelines, we dig some what are called pipe ditches, and we could put barrels on it, push the pipelines to the area. But then they became a hindrance for future development of other pipelines crossing. So the main twenty-four, twenty-six inch, twenty-inch pipelines, we dug what we call flotation canal, six foot deep by forty foot wide, and we'd actually lay the pipe from a barge. When we came to stream crossings, we went ten foot below the projected depth of the utilization of those bayous and what have you. Any obstruction, we took care of it, and then we bulk-headed all the flotation canals, you know, at every intervals of bayous and whatever the laying on the requirements were to keep the flow of water from loss of wetlands.

JT: Now, again, as we had mentioned earlier, man's inability to control Mother Nature. Your great-grandfather probably didn't realize building those levees on the Atchafalaya would have this result.

DB: Yes.

JT: Did you realize in the late forties, early fifties, that digging these canals would have this type of environmental impact fifty years later?

DB: I had some feelings that it would, but the law allowed us to do this. We could build these flotation canals and, look, we got twenty-six thousand miles of

pipelines in our wetlands. It's either that or we wouldn't have—this nation and our state wouldn't have the energy it needed. So we did everything according to code, to book, the requirements, the law and everything else. We didn't short-change anything that took place.

I can remember my grandfather being on the radio talking about the Atchafalaya Basin and how important critically it was for the future of Louisiana and for I know because I took him to the radio station, so he wasn't driving at that time. He was in his seventies. I'd listen to what he was saying.

Like I say, I realized at fifty-five what impacts sea-level rise was having on those wetlands, because I could see it and I could see the disappearance of the muskrats. We had twenty million of them at one time up here and what have you, and the vegetation was disappearing. Not only that, but we got subsidence because the levees that we had built along the Mississippi River and the Atchafalaya cutting off all the siltations that was replenishing the wetlands. Yes, I realized it, but I didn't, I guess, didn't assume it was my responsibility. Who am I, just some young engineer out there, you know.

JT: Do you recall any talks from maybe your supervisor or even a higher level up of, you know, guys, we're digging these holes and we put in these pipelines?

DB: They went by the law, exactly to the codes, requirements and everything else. We never did anything that was outside that was not approved, and then we had to

submit to the Corps of Engineers and all the regulatory bodies and get their approval, all this had been approved. Everything we did was been 100 percent approval.

Now, I realized, you know, we were losing some of our Atchafalaya Basin, and that was my heritage, but what could I do about it except talk about it, and I've given speeches, hundreds of speeches ever since and written thousands of editorials about all the problems we've encountered.

But that's not unlike what I witnessed in Russia, China, the jungles of Africa when I was building pipelines in these areas, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait. There's all kind of environmental problems and impacts and what have you. I noticed one thing, the farmlands in Russia were being done by Chinese because of low wages and harder workers. The vodka-drinking Russians didn't feel like it was their responsibility to do farm work and what have you, so there was a lot of barren land in Russia where the Chinese had everything developing. As a consequence, Chinese is probably going to be one of the leading economies in the world within a short period of time. America is number one, but I think we'll be second before too long.

JT: Let's talk about some of the earlier fabrication companies that you recall that maybe gave you some ideas to go in that line of work, like the McDermotts and a lot of the industries that were in Morgan City that were built up during the war in

the forties with Chicago Bridge and Iron and moving into the five mile offshore. Talk a little bit about some of those earlier entities.

DB: Well, when I started out with Tennessee Gas, once I left the wetlands, we went offshore, had the first big project off of Cameron, and that's when the hurricane hit back in '57 and created all kind of problems. But I was so innovative, I've designed tension laying stingers and stuff for the contractors, on loan out from Tennessee Gas. I was very innovative in developing the technology for laying pipelines without buckling or cracking the concrete coatings and kind of everything that went with it.

So eventually I was approached by several other contractors to go to work for them, and I was area civil engineer for Tennessee Gas domiciled out of Lafayette at the time, and they were offering me something that twice as much as I was making. I think at the time probably I was making like thirteen hundred dollars a month as area civil engineer and they were offering me double and ownership in the company and partnership and everything else. So eventually I went to work at Houston Contracting Company. They were a cross-country pipeline contractor, well known, thirty years in business, but they wanted to get to the offshore business to create some competition for McDermott and some of these other companies, Ingram Industries, that were kind of had a control of the market and charged what they wanted.

JT: And Brown and Root.

DB: And Brown and Root and all of them. So anyway, I put Houston New Orleans together and designed the first pipe-laying derrick barge, two barges, and about five or six years later, they sold it to CITCO, forty million, forty-something million dollars for my little marine company I had put together. I got a million dollars out of the deal, so and worlds of experience, and then I formed another, several other companies too numerous to mention. I got diversified and all kinds of things in backing industry, hotels and you name it, industrial development.

Eventually in 19-, I bought Normandy Industries out and formed Norman Offshore, same thing, and eventually I think my partner, who is Jim Brooks, was the controlling interest in it, he sold it. Then I formed Houston Systems and then I developed Houston Systems into a major fabrication business, and then they sold that company to somebody else.

Now, I formed Unifab in 1980, Universal Fabricators Incorporated, and developed it into a multi-million dollar business over twenty years. Then I bought McDermott's facilities out in the Port of Iberia that adjoined mine. Well, we formed a partnership. I was 51 percent. I was in control. They had 49 percent, because they had operated fifteen years and never made a profit, and immediately I turned it into a profit building deal with a five-year buyout. I would buy them out or they would buy me out.

Well, at the end of five years, I'll thought, well, I'll take the company public and take McDermott out, which I did, and finally, about five years ago, in '72, I said, "Well, I'm having too much fun, it's time for me to get serious and do some of the strenuous things that needed to be done like ranching and my camp and other broad-based investments which keeps me busy, not seven days a week, twelve hours a day, but only six days a week, twelve hours a day." This is the sixth day, so I don't plan on working tomorrow. Tomorrow's Sunday.

JT: Well, you just jumped through about twenty years of your life and but more also importantly to this study, twenty years of the industry down there in the Gulf of Mexico. Let me start off with this—

DB: But it doesn't include all of these foreign countries that I operated in, too, so.

JT: Maybe that will be a discussion for another day.

DB: Right, right.

JT: It all does tie in together. Let me ask you this. That first vessel that you designed for laying pipe, where was that built and who built it?

DB: Well, the first one it was for Brown and Root that I designed, a pipe-laying stinger. What it is, is a ramp, five, six-hundred foot long, it's got flotation canals in it, it hangs off, hooks off the back end of the barge, and assists the pipe into final resting place.

The next one was for Ingram Contractors and then there was a operator out of Morgan City that also designed one for them, and then Ingram. Then I designed the tension that in combination with the pipe-laying stinger where you keep tension on the pipe all the time from the motions of the barges and then they would allow you to move forward and let you weld it back.

JT: If you were designing and you were laying, who was building these pieces of equipment?

DB: I built them myself.

JT: At which yard?

DB: Oh, I mean like Brown and Root built theirs after I designed it for them, and then McDermott built theirs after I designed it for them.

JT: What depths of water were they laying this pipe?

DB: About then was about hundred and fifty, two hundred, fifty to two hundred feet of water, right at—

JT: Right almost at the shelf.

DB: Almost at the shelf, right, yes, the early barges.

When Audrey came through, we had our barges. Well, Brown and Root was—I was still with Tennessee Gas in '57, and as project manager, and Brown and Root had all the barges. We had to move them all to Cameron in the hurricane threat. So we moved them all to Lake Charles. But we had a lot of experiences, bad experiences or wise experience, in finding out what would work, what would not work, and we had crew boats sinking with people on them. Fortunately, they were all saved. We had the barge superintendent threaten that Billy Bastard upstairs to come down and fight like a man. He said, "I'll meet you halfway, I'll rent me a plane," and all kind of crap was going on, you know, there was.

Really the weather reports were dismal at minimum. I mean the shrimpers knew. You could tell the conditions in the Gulf when to come in, and that's mostly what they telltale signs for us were what we needed to do.

JT: So that Audrey, that screwed up a lot of things.

DB: Yes, it killed about five hundred fifty people and it just about wiped out the infrastructure along the coast. I could tell you a lot of sad stories, stories I witnessed, because I went right back with my crew and stuff and tried to set the Red Cross up and help them out and moved all the barges back and trying to get everything organized again to get back as soon as we could following the storm, because we needed to build this Catco system offshore, and it was urgent. A lot of natural gas was going to be processed, so.

JT: Tell me a little bit about this Catco system. What was that exactly?

DB: That was the first major offshore natural gas pipeline gathering system off of Cameron, and it was only about fifty, sixty feet of water, but we were building some twenty-six inch pipelines into Grand Chenier and gathering systems, twenty-inch gathering systems, twelve inch, six-inch pipelines and what have you. It was a whole magnitude of pipelines. We also had to build some gathering platforms out there, fabricate them and install them and everything that went with it. That was really the turning point of major offshore work as far as pipeline-gathering systems were.

JT: When did you envision going into the actual fabrication business for offshore drilling rigs, etc., platforms?

DB: Okay. That was probably the magnitude of it was when I first put Houston Systems together, and then when I formed Unifab in 1980, that's when I went into the major. Before that I was mostly a pipeline contractor.

JT: Okay. What was Houston Systems? What were they?

DB: They were an outfit out of Houston that did a lot of major manufacturing, trying to spread out into the Gulf Coast area, and my partner Jim Brooks wanted to sell Norman. He didn't want to mess with it. It wasn't that big of operation. When he did, then I stayed with Houston System and helped them transition and then decided to—they were losing money in Houston and they wanted to sell Houston Systems, and I got caught in it.

So but Unifab was a major fabrication business with offshore platforms, even build stingers for pipe-laying operations and drilling rigs. We built drilling rigs for both land and offshore use and there was—that went on for twenty years.

JT: Before you got to Unifab as you're working for these companies, who do you recall was the labor in the field at that time and where were these people employed from?

DB: Labor was dismal. We always had more work than we could handle, and when I founded Unifab in 1980, that's when the industry had a severe downturn but I was

still getting more work than I could manage with. So I started training and educating people on the after hours to make up the difference. But the biggest problem I ever had the whole time I was in business was qualified workmen, working people.

Somehow or another, Louisiana wasn't doing what it can, so I got on the workforce commission that the governors appointed and I started pushing this at the trade schools, giving speeches, talking to people, and they were—what they were teaching in the trade schools, welding procedures, we were ten years ahead of that, going to automation and everything, all kind of new welding technology and techniques, and they were still burning rods, which is, you know, it was pitiful. There was no communications, no getting together.

So that was a turning point in helping, but it still—a lot of our students are still dropping out in the ninth grade, you know, even to this day, and we rank last in the nation in education. I'm not faulting, I'm sure we're doing what we can, but we lack. In fact, we've got more natural resources than any state in the union and we rank last in just about everything.

JT: Did this industry move way to fast for south Louisiana?

DB: Probably so. Probably for the support people that we needed, yes. It was good, and like the Port of Iberia when I went there, it was a sleepy fishing village and I pushed for a deep-water channel and for years, and it took thirty years. Finally

got a sixteen-foot. Now I think I've read recently where they've approved a twenty-foot channel. We need this, because everything's getting heavier and bigger and going to deeper waters, and if we're going to support it, we can't do it with—when I went there it was ten, about a ten-foot channel to the Gulf, and that kept us, you know, from going into heavily things.

JT: Let's talk about this for a little bit, and then we'll get back into the local scene.

DB: Okay.

JT: In the fifties with everything that you had seen in your lifetime, the federal government finally wins the Supreme Court decision to control the acreage of the Gulf of Mexico and to lease that out to the oil companies.

DB: Right.

JT: Essentially, the government and the Department of the Interior, later on the MMS.

DB: MMS, right.

JT: How did that change things in the mid-fifties and up into the sixties and seventies?

DB: Well, I think the situation was so severe for natural gas in particular and oil that—and I think Louisiana didn't benefit from this because when Earl Long was governor, he wouldn't deal with the federal government, he wouldn't cut deals for, you know, the allotments sharing, the percentage of royalties and what have you. So Louisiana got left out and Mississippi, Alabama, Texas and all these states were enjoying their percentage of royalties. We weren't getting anything, anything within outside the three-mile limit. Within three-mile limit was Louisiana's area of endeavors.

So but Louisiana at that time was—we had the gung-ho attitude, but we didn't have the trained workforce that was needed, and a consequence, a lot of people from Texas and other areas moved into Louisiana and it kind of diversified. But we still—that was the one problem I remember all the years I was in the contracting business, was about fifty years, was that shortage of skilled workmen. When you'd get them skilled, technology would change, we'd automate, and these, you know, they wouldn't grow then. It's a whole new training, constantly training people. They're hard workers. I have no complaints about Louisiana workers. They're hard workers. But when they're used to doing one thing, it's difficult to transition, and the process, you have to do it while you're trying to make money.

JT: How did the offshore leasing, in other words the federal government—

DB: Well, they expanded. It expanded. It didn't help the state of Louisiana, but it expanded all the service companies, the drilling contractors, the fabrication, the pipeline-laying contractors and all the support services, the material suppliers and everything, yes. It was a tremendous boost to Louisiana's economy.

JT: When did we really start seeing the peak of that activity?

DB: I think, like I say, when I founded Unifab in 1980, about '82 there was a downturn in the process, and everybody was trying to hang onto their labor. They didn't want to let them going because they figured it was going to turn around, and we were probably more efficient than most. I studied everything that we did and made sure that we got the maximum effort for the amount of people we had and the amount of work that we were putting out.

At one time, I think it might have been '83 or '84, I did cut back on the overtime. A lot of companies were working 30 percent below cost and keeping their people on the payroll just to be for the turnaround. Finally, in about '85, '86, they started perking up, getting better, and then were again a severe shortage of people. But there was some massive layoffs in '82, '83.

JT: But that peak, that boom that they referred to, which is coming in the late seventies, this is a direct result of ten, twelve years of offshore federal leasing, would you agree.

DB: Right, oh, definitely, definitely.

JT: More rigs are being needed, more drilling?

DB: Right. And the support services off of Louisiana, most of that work was being done off the Louisiana coast, so Morgan City a, I think, eighteen-foot water channel to the Gulf, and McDermott was one of the big biggies over there, and I competed with them in the world market, too. I can tell you some stories, but that's, won't get into that.

But at one time I was in partnership with McDermott when I bought them out in New Iberia and it was a very good relationship, and they were handsomely rewarded from a losing operation. I think I bought their interests out for about thirty million dollars in an IOP public offering.

JT: Was there a feeling of excitement during the late seventies as all of this new infrastructure, all of these new companies, all of this great [unclear]—

DB: Oh, definitely. The Petroleum Club was booming. It had, oh, untold members of—I forgot what the membership was, but like two or three thousand. Then they dropped down about seven hundred thousand right now and there was a lot of people left the area. What happened, the carpet offices got moved and centralized in other places, New Orleans, Houston.

So now the membership of the Petroleum Club, which I've been a member since the seventies, I think it's about 30 percent of it is doctors, lawyers and so, and we're begging the situation, won't other people—anybody wants to join Petroleum Club, you don't have to be a petroleum man.

JT: So what year did this Petroleum Club get started?

DB: I think it was probably around that, around 1970 somewheres around there approximately.

JT: That's right when things were booming.

DB: Yes, right, right.

JT: So I mean—

DB: It was the local businessmen that got together and wanted to put something together.

JT: But it's not just that. It's restaurants, it's.

DB: Oh, the whole thing, right, and as a consequence, Lafayette is—particularly since the hurricane has overgrown its infrastructure. It's a chock point. I mean it's hard to navigate around Lafayette with the tremendous amount of traffic. But as I see it, unless we do something to solve these wetlands, this ranch where you and I are sitting right here is fifty-five foot above sea level.

Well, I bought this ranch thirty-five years ago, with that in mind, that sea-level rise was coming and places where I grew up in New Iberia would be severely impacted and eventually even Lafayette the drainage situation, Vermillion River can just carry so much water out, and the parishes in like Abbeville and other areas where low-lying, and the Port of Iberia is only eight or ten feet above sea level.

So I was looking for higher land that eventually I could—and that's a hundred and sixty-five acres. I bought it and then they leased it for ten years at two hundred dollars an acre and they drilled and did some marginal production. As a consequence, I've always quadrupled my money in land. I was offered a couple of million dollars for this place a year or so ago and it's not for sale. But I don't have five cents in it right now.

JT: Well, you are certainly sitting high and dry.

DB: Oh, yes, fifty-five foot above sea level and it's a beautiful place, and I've built, I've designed my own Atchafalaya Basin, with cypress trees and bass and brim, catfish, every variety, and a lot of my friends come out here and fish.

JT: If I might say, it's a perfect environment for writing and for recording what you see and what you have seen and what's important to you and the changing and the evolving in the.

DB: Besides that, it saves my marriage. You know, I leave home every morning and I come back in the evening.

JT: And she's probably got a good home-cooked meal waiting for you.

DB: Oh, yes. Oh, she's a delightful person. I tell you what, I say that was a godsend when I married her almost fifty-six years ago, February 2nd it will be fifty-six years. I'm seventy-eight, she's seventy-four, she still looks like she's in her sixties. You stack up with my daughters, and it's hard tell who's the mama.

JT: She's also from the Lafayette area?

DB: No, she's from New Iberia. When I came back from the Army, I met her. I was in college at SLI, and she was with some friends of mine. I went and introduced and I danced with her, and I've been dancing with her ever since. She's a great dancer, too.

JT: What's her maiden name, sir?

DB: LeBlanc, Natalie Mary LeBlanc, everybody calls her Putsy.

JT: So the LeBlancs and Berards, all original Acadian names.

DB: From New Iberia.

JT: Well, originally from Nova Scotia, I'll imagine.

DB: Yes, yes, they came down from in this 1770-something, '65 or '70 somewheres in there.

JT: So in a community that's built around those cultures, those characteristics, that heritage of what the people of south Louisiana have been doing for centuries, and suddenly there's this new industry that has taken hold and now people are driving

fast cars and fast boats and wonderful restaurants and life is good and people can afford to send their kids to college, something happens in the early eighties. What is your opinion of what caused the bust in the Gulf of Mexico?

DB: The drop of oil and gas prices. See, when I started building pipelines in 1955, natural gas was like fifteen cents and oil was like two dollars or something a barrel. Eventually, as of last month, it was up to seventy-two dollars a barrel and now it's fifty-two. These drastic up and down, you know, there's a margin of profit you can make if you can get so much dollars.

Now the drilling dropped, it was drilling slump, tremendous drilling slump when the oil prices dropped back in then, and the natural gas prices. Natural gas today's selling for about seven dollars a thousand cubic foot, and fifty-two dollars for oil. Well, if oil were to drop, say, to thirty, thirty-five dollars, you'd have a tremendous downturn again in the industry. You can drill and produce oil for three to four dollars a barrel in these foreign countries, where you can't do that here.

Then we have about a close to a billion barrels of storage in the salt domes of oil to help us in case of an OPEC problems, but it's still not enough. We're using 20 percent of the world's oil supplies, about nineteen, twenty million barrels a day, say it's a hundred million barrels, which will go up to a hundred and fifty million barrels a day. A country like China with one point two billion people, one out of seventy people that drives their car, well, they're only using six and a half

million barrels a day, but that's going to double and China's economy is growing by leaps and bounds. It will be number one shortly, above the United States. They've got skilled, educated, hardworking people over there. In fact, they're doing a lot of work in Russia. Like I say, their farming industry for them. The vodka-drinking Russians don't want to work. But that's the things that creates the severe downturns or the uptakes is the price of oil and gas.

JT: I bet you that just decimates—

DB: Yes, in fact, when you've got twenty-two hundred rigs working and then the oil prices drop, then you get down to twelve hundred rigs working. That puts a lot of rigs, you know, idle, and of course back then a lot of rigs moved to the North Sea and got—went overseas in different areas and the contractors moved all their equipment out.

To get them back, they won't come back unless they get a return for their efforts and investment, so it's the world market that impacts what happens in the Gulf of Mexico. So everybody wants lower, lower prices. Well, that puts us in the hands of more imports, too, when we do that. So I'm not for impacting this country and make it dependent on the Middle East were 70 percent of the world oil reserves are.

In fact, don't kid yourself, we're out there in Iraq right now because Iran's the fourth largest oil producer in the world and we need that Iraq oil, and it's

down to a million and a half, two million barrels a day right now. They keep blowing the pipelines up, busting, blowing the refineries, and if we lose the Middle East, there will be some severe consequences. We may be paying five, ten dollars a gallon for gasoline some day. So a win we must do.

Now, I have been writing to the presidents since Eisenhower, and I write to President Bush every couple of weeks and give him my input regarding energy and of course my goal for mari-culture, which I explain to you later. I don't think you want to go into that now. But we cannot lose that war in Iraq, I emphasize that in every letter, because that would make us hostage to oil imports which has already reached an alarming 67 percent.

JT: Energy runs the world.

DB: And we need LNG in a bad way, and that's why we need to keep those platforms active in the Gulf of Mexico.

JT: Let's talk about this. In 1980, you say you formed and created the Unifab.

DB: Right.

JT: Tell me about when this idea came about, tell me about who are some of your partners and how you got involved in creating that company.

DB: Well, I was in partnership with a lot of other deals, land deals in Perry Segura and some other things with Charles Broussard, hotels and what have you, so I didn't need any partner when I formed Unifab. But I invited them to come in as stockholders and kind of diversify or make the banks feel a lot better, too, to borrow. We put up most of the cash and then lines of credit at the bank.

It was out of necessity because Houston Systems had been sold, and I didn't want to go—I was tired of being bought and sold and some of the buying and selling I was doing myself. So I wanted permanency for all the people that were working for me, and I made them all stockholders. All the employees were stockholders in Unifab, and that's what made it so successful.

JT: Is that your goal when you started out?

DB: Oh, yes, when I started.

JT: To go public with it?

DB: Well, that what they had options, you know, most of them would have been hesitant putting money, putting up money not knowing whether the company's going to succeed or not. But they had options and when they saw the company

was a success, then they would exercise their options, but they didn't have to take the financial risk up front.

JT: What type of work did Unifab do specifically?

DB: Mostly fabrication, offshore platforms, drilling rigs, the bigger things, and then the other support things, productions, process equipment that would work. I would even expand and put a rolling mill in and so we'd roll all our own pipe and roll pipe for other people, too. So it was well diversified base of—anything you wanted done, we could do it.

JT: Why did you choose the Port of Iberia?

DB: Because my wife wanted to live here in Lafayette.

JT: All boils down to what the boss wants, huh?

DB: Whatever the boss wants, right. No, it's a—after working all over the world, I was ready to settle down in area, and Cajun country was my—was where I wanted to be.

JT: And you knew you could make an impact.

DB: And I knew I could make an impact and I knew I could make a living, because I'd made a living in and out of Louisiana throughout my working years, so yes.

JT: So where did you get the land to build up your shops?

DB: Well, I bought some other companies, Inland Offshore and some of the smaller companies that weren't doing, faring very well, so I bought their infrastructure that was in place and small office buildings, some shops and what have you. But I really expanded when I got the McDermott facility, was a huge place with a huge, huge shops and so I was able to expand and a nice office that could house everyone that I needed, my staff, which is not all that good because it seems that the staff grows if you've got office space.

JT: Yes. So McDermott had been at the Port of Iberia for a number of years?

DB: Fifteen years, but they wasn't making and never made any money.

JT: Why is that?

DB: I don't know. They were so big and that was just a tag-on place for them, I guess, and they were into bigger stuff, and that little channel, ten, eleven foot of water

out there. I finally, I say, got it to sixteen, then that's when I really started making big bucks profits.

JT: Explain that to me. What we're talking about here is the difference in the size of the vessels and the rigs that you're able to build now that you have a deeper channel. Tell me about that jump from, what was it, twelve foot to sixteen foot?

DB: Yes.

JT: What does that equate to the size of rigs and the amount of business that you can pull in.

DB: It equates to the size of drilling rigs and platforms, you know. We were limited maybe forty or fifty feet of water with that ten, eleven foot of water. But then when we got up there, then we could get up to a hundred foot of water and then to get to twenty, probably do a hundred fifty, two hundred foot of water.

JT: Which is the shelf and you know that beyond that.

DB: Beyond that, right. And the trend is towards deeper drilling all the time.

JT: When you bought the McDermott yard, did you also bring its people?

DB: I acquired the people that were there, if they wanted their jobs, too, you know, a job, yes.

JT: So when Unifab opened its doors, in 1980, do you remember what month?

DB: It was in the summer, as I recall.

JT: About how many employees did you have?

DB: Well, I brought over about a hundred and fifty, a hundred and sixty.

JT: Then how many did you have of your own?

DB: When I retired, we had about eight hundred employees, and we'd have had much more except they weren't available.

JT: Right. You must have seen something as a very intelligent businessman over the years and seeing what's been going on out in the Gulf of Mexico, something must have piqued your interest to want to go and make that investment in that company.

DB: Oh, yes, I had. Well, I was successful. You see, Houston Systems was profitable, but the Houston Systems in Houston was losing money and when they sold the whole company, then I went along in the sale. I saw how I could make money, I mean no question. Just as I founded Unifab, the industry went nosedive. But we still made money and always operated with a profit because all my employees was stockholders in the company.

JT: Right, and when it started rolling off in—

Tape 1, Side 2

DB: Even the Petroleum Club, in the early eighties it started, went to a nosedive and it impacted corporate, division offices were moved to corporate offices out of Lafayette, and like I say, the dip in membership dropped from, say, like twenty-two, twenty-five hundred down to seven hundred. But they could build back up. They are. Intensive efforts are being made to invite the public to belong to the Petroleum Club. It's just a name.

JT: Yes. But the big bad boy on the street would be OPEC—

DB: They control the price of oil, because and yet out of a hundred million barrels of oil, say, rounding off the world's using, they're only producing, controlling

twenty-six, twenty-seven million. They could produce thirty if they want to or produce twenty, but they can check, they can stop, they raise or lower the production, a million, two million barrels and that sends out a signal.

Personally, lower oil prices would hurt America because it would shut out domestic industries of which we can ill afford. So we need to—these companies have to make a profit or they can't stay in business and you're competing against countries that could produce oil for three or four dollars a barrel, you know.

JT: What about the big oil companies, Shell, Exxon, BP, Chevron, Conoco, what role do they play in the Gulf of Mexico in 1980 when Unifab was being formed?

DB: They were my big customers. I did work for all of them. What they needed was they couldn't do their work overseas and get it in a timely manner, and all these places in overseas yards are unionized and they would—where I could have got it out in six months, it might have take them eighteen months, and so they supported it and they wanted competition against the biggest that were in the business.

I always got my fair share because I gave quality workmanship and timely delivery, and I always had fair shake for the companies I dealt with. I wasn't trying to skin them or gouge them in any form or fashion.

JT: Were you guys at the time still up riding on that little peak in 1980, were your working forty hours a week or what was the—

DB: Oh, no, we most of the time we were working fifty, sixty hours if the employees wanted, and most of them wanted the overtime. No, we had more work than we could say grace over.

Now, we did cut back to forty hours, I think, in ’82, ’83, when it really bottomed out and got bad, but I didn’t lay anyone off and I may even have cut some wages with the concurrence of the employees. I said we can either cut the wages temporarily, and it was temporarily, only three or four months and we were back up again, or we can simply have to reduce the workforce, and everybody agreed.

JT: Besides the fluctuation of the industry, do you see the success of that company mainly from giving stockholder control to its employees?

DB: No, I think the motivation was I work harder than anybody else and I set the standards and what they require to run a business, and they saw my efforts were continuous and I was always there. Had problems, I had so much experience I could if they ever ran into design problems, something, I could quickly solve these things. I couldn’t do everything, but I could motivate, I could overview bids and tell just by the tonnage involved and stuff and the man hours equate, you know, and save them a lot of trouble because I had that fifty years’ experience in that. After I retired, I don’t think they fared too well.

JT: But also, and probably more importantly, and it's in it for the workers, you know, a welder wants to go somewhere where he feels comfortable.

DB: Oh, definitely.

JT: Management is taking care of him.

DB: Management is working.

JT: Right. Having some ownership in the company.

DB: Right.

JT: I'm sure that all of those equated to a successful—

DB: Right, oh, definitely. I've always been a great believer, because that's what inspired me to do more than my fair share of work with any company or any people I worked for, because they made me a part of the game. They gave me ownership in the company. They didn't give it to me. They gave me the option to exercise, which I did because I knew we were going to succeed.

JT: 1980s. Let's take a look at who are the people who are cutting, fitting, burning rods and running the cranes in your yard. Those people, who are those people ten years later in the 1990s? Are they from the same areas?

DB: I think most of them. Like I say, I retired five years ago, and I think a lot of the guys that followed me through the years in different companies, most of them have reached retirement age so it's a whole new ballgame. I probably don't know a lot of the employees that are working for my former companies because, like I say, I'm almost seventy-eight so my employees if they were ten years younger than me, they'd be sixty-eight so.

JT: But the labor pool, was it mostly local Cajuns from this area?

DB: Oh, yes, oh, yes, definitely. Oh, yes, from all around the communities, yes, it was all local labor.

JT: Where were they getting trained?

DB: It wasn't somebody living in Houston working over here, because they'd have to hire, you know, get an apartment or move their families down. When they were working for Unifab, they were living in the area.

JT: Where had they been trained in order to come and be a welder.

DB: Oh, it's various companies. Like when I went in fabrication business 1980 when I had pipe-laying operations Houston, New Orleans, some of the guys are going to say, "well, you guys, you're kind of up in age doing this kind of age. Yeah, well, you're still working," so I put a few of them to work, yes.

JT: Tell me about some of the technical schools that they had in the eighties. I mean I'm sure along with everything else that is peaking up into the eighties that you had to have some kind of schools out there training young men, eighteen, nineteen years old.

DB: Yes, but they were ten years behind on the technology, most of them. The trade schools were ten years behind. They were burning rods and we had already quit that years ago, to give you an example, you know. You had to automate. To build the state of the art, you had to automate as fast as you could, could afford to. You couldn't burn rods anymore, and that's what all the vo-tech schools were teaching. I went over there and brought it to everybody's attention, "My god, we're ten years behind in this training." Automatic cutting equipment and welding equip—automatic welding, I mean, it wasn't no longer burnings rods. But the vo-tech schools needed to upgrade and get the automated equipment in, and as I say, I spent several years going around talking.

JT: Did you see any success in your efforts?

DB: Oh, definitely, yes, there was a—but there was gradual improvement, I mean, a whole new line of thinking, a whole new technology and everything else, so, you know, that doesn't just transition overnight. You do it in business, but not in the private public sector.

JT: Well, let's talk about at the peak of the downhill in '85 or '86, you explained to me a little bit earlier, what were some of the techniques, the business strategies that you had to use in order to keep your business afloat when the bust happened?

DB: Well, of course, the overtime became a big factor, I put in time and a half for hours, so if I wouldn't get as much money for the work, then we'd cut our cost, whatever we could. It's some shopping closer than probably what purchasing department would normally do, you know. You get conditioned to doing business and not check around on pricing and what have you. So you started looking and tightening the best everywhere you can, but I never did lay off anybody. I was always looking for more people.

Now other companies probably wasn't that efficient. A lot of them were dropping by the wayside, and hundreds of companies fell by the wayside and that goes suppliers, drilling contractors. Drilling contractors in particular. They were

stacking those rigs and moving them overseas, one way, one thing or another. That's when I started looking at overseas work at the same time simultaneously.

JT: What about the 1990s? What did that new decade bring for the Gulf of Mexico and fabrication?

DB: Well, it was tremendous improvement as far as the needs. Right now I think everybody's staying pretty busy.

JT: We've talked about this earlier. There is a trend every four to eight years, you're going to see some changes in the energy industry.

DB: Oh, definitely. It's in every facet of life.

JT: Let's talk about that.

DB: I mean you look at the stores and stuff like that, they fall by the waysides. The Walmarts come in and the smaller—

JT: But what impact do various incoming and outgoing presidential administrations have in their energy policy? Walk me through maybe some of your experience with like—

DB: We better not get into that.

JT: Let's talk about Nixon first.

DB: All right.

JT: With his, what was it, Project Independence?

DB: Yes. Well, I think our biggest flaw, let's start with Carter. In 1977, Jimmy Carter figured that we were running out of oil and gas so we shouldn't concentrate on drilling anymore. So he formed Department of Energy with twenty thousand employees and a budget of ten billion dollars. I'm all for alternative sources of energy and stuff, but we're going to be dependent on oil and gas for the main source of our energy for the next forty, fifty years, even if we transition to ethanol and what have you, and that's one of the reasons I got into ethanol business, because of his marred vision about oil and gas was no longer going to be used, we'd need to.

So they gave, Department of Energy gave out, incentives, 90 percent loan guarantees to form, to produce ethanol. So I spent ten years of my life while I was in the fabrication business looking over the situation, and I saw the opportunity in New Iberia to use molasses to convert into ethanol and get the

farmers to plant sorghum. It would have helped about twenty-five thousand farmers if I put agrifuels together, which would produce thirty-four million barrels or gallons of oil a year or ten thousand, hundred thousand gallons a day.

I was reluctant trusting the Louisiana government. First they had, federal government had, six cents a gallon, state had eight cents. It wasn't enough to make it viable, so they increased it to sixteen cents a gallon, and it was all approved. Made many trips to Washington, Department of Energy, and they classed my project as number one in the nation because I wasn't using fuel to produce fuel. I was going to use the bag gas to fire the boiler, so I wasn't going to use natural gas or oil or anything else. The fiber from the waste.

So we agreed. We built it. Harbor International was the ones that got the contract. Unifab was a subcontractor. We built the plant and the day I start operating, Buddy Romer was governor and he shut, cut the incentives that made it nonprofitable. I got with the Department of Energy, I said, "Let's operate it for thirty days, at least, and prove the technology is what we think it is, you know, fire the boilers, and maybe might see some daylight." Nope, nonprofitable, shut it down.

So anyway, in the process I had Edgington Oil out of California was going to buy all the ethanol and distribute it, you know, as an additive for the gasoline to various oil companies. But they said for them to get involved, they had to spend twenty million dollars of facilities to handle the ethanol, and to do that they'd have to have control of the project.

I was already seeing the waves that were taking place, you know, in Baton Rouge. I said fine, so we cut a deal, put them in control, and I was a minority partner. The day we started operating, cut the incentives, shut the plant down. Year later I offered them twenty-five million because I could operate instead of $107 million I could operate profitably without the tax incentives at twenty-five million.

They said, no, we want a hundred and seven, a year later, fifteen million. They said, no, we want the full amount. So the next year, they dismantled the whole plant, sold it to a Nebraska firm for three million dollars. Taxpayers took that on the chin. I won't go into all the lawsuits that took place, but I came out Mr. Clean on that one.

JT: Well, let me ask you this question. Why would Buddy Romer, who I will assume that you had been in contact with on a continuous basis, allow this to happen

DB: They pushed the ethanol down here, made it viable for us to do. Don't know. I think he was misinformed. I think maybe some of the oil companies had their own additives and they didn't want to have to compete with ethanol or what have you. Don't know why. I confronted him at the City Club oneday at noon. I was going there for lunch. He walked out. I said, "Buddy, governor, do know what you did," and I explained to him.

He said, "Well, Dailey, I didn't realize that."

I said, "You didn't realize that a half a billion dollars? It was three other plants, ethanol plants, that were going to use corn in the state, and you shut four plants down after you give them incentive. You gave us all the incentive to build these things."

"I didn't realize."

JT: How many people would that one facility have employed?

DB: Well, of course, there was probably five, six hundred building the plant and then I think it would have been about a hundred and thirty, forty, fifty operating the plant.

JT: Let's back up. If that was in '85 or what have you—

DB: '80.

JT: That's in 1980, that's twenty-five years ago.

DB: Yes. That's what I was—

JT: How much of that alternative fuel would have been on the market in twenty-five years?

DB: Well, of course, it was profitable deal from the get-go, a hundred thousand gallons a day and then we had plans to expand the plant as sorghum increases, we got the farmers to plant sorghum, increase the amount of—that was based on what was being produced at the time. Billions of dollars it would have been to the state of Louisiana.

JT: Not only that, but for the farmers.

DB: For the farmers, yes, oh, now they fighting to get twenty, twenty-one cents a pound for their sugar. This would have been an incentive for the farmers to double their capacity, and they would have been—everybody would have benefited from it.

JT: Would have changed—.

DB: The whole thing would have changed as far as it would have been a major industry for Louisiana.

JT: It sounds like Buddy Romer got a little visit from some of the big oil companies.

DB: It could be. I don't know that for a fact. But I just suspect for him to make a decision like that to just one day, the day we started operating, he cut the tax incentives. Or it might have been some disgruntled senators or representatives, state senators or representatives who didn't get a piece of the action, and there was no piece of the action to give to anybody, not anything that I'm involved with.

JT: That's something else.

DB: But they cut their own farmers' throats when they did that.

JT: Well, let's talk about this: continental shelf.

DB: Okay.

JT: How much oil is still down in that area, and gas?

DB: Oil, I'd say at least three, four billion barrels. That could be from the infrastructure that's in place if we stop removing it. Like I told you earlier on, there's 5.7 trillion barrels of oil worldwide, and we've only used one trillion worldwide, so there's 4.7 trillion left to be got, and there's a tremendous amount of oil in the Gulf of Mexico to be drilled and brought in.

Natural gas, we have a tremendous amount of natural gas out there. The gas is deeper than the oil, but it's the price determines that. If you start to having price fluctuation, you're going to have a reluctance of anybody because some of those projects you started today might be seven, ten years before one of these big undertakings takes places and the profit dollars start coming in because you have to not only improve the whole area, you have to do a lot of drilling, then you got to spend hundreds of million dollars building the platforms and everything else.

So it's based on the price of oil and gas today but what's going to be seven years from now, and that's a momentous decision for a company to make. If you have all this up and down, you know, it just throws every thinking, why not go foreign and you can produce oil for three or four dollars a barrel.

JT: Are you familiar with what occurred at the beginning of President Reagan's administration, as we go back to federal policy once again, with Robert Gramling n his book, what he refers to as this area-wide leasing in the Gulf of Mexico, which would have been something different. Are you familiar with that and how that affected.

DB: Well, I think Reagan probably go down in annals of history as one of our great presidents because he was open, he was free markets, free trade, and all of these things that this country needs to do. We cannot isolate ourselves. We have to

trade with other nations. He believed in the private sector, you know, don't penalize them because they making money, one thing or another.

Like right now, they want to start raising taxes on the top echelon, the top 2 percent, makes a million dollars or more, or half a million a year. You cannot penalize success and give to people who won't assert themselves. I came from bottom rung of the ladder in that Atchafalaya Basin, and through my initiatives, I was able to get an education with this help of the G.I. Bill of Rights and work like hell every year of my life because I wanted something better for me and my family. We all have that same opportunity. Some of us less opportunity, but I can't see where anybody had any less opportunity than I have.

I mean you just have to assert yourself, and this great nation wasn't built on people that make money, and you can't penalize people that make money just to give to people that won't take the initiative to do something with their lives. Now I realize there are problems in some families, there's burdens, there's divorces, and all these things that happen, and I can sympathize with that and give help. But able-bodied person, there's no excuse for him not, right now is particular. You can make eighteen, nineteen dollars, twenty dollars an hour welding, and up. That's big wages.

Why would you want to work for minimum wages at 5.25 or even if they escalated to seven something? That's not an existence wages. But the jobs are there and with a little training, I mean you don't have to have but—you don't

even have to be a high school graduate to be able to get a trade and work. Then when you get on a job, grow, grow, learn as you go.

JT: One thing that has amazed me now that I am involved in my surroundings and I'm more aware of what's been going on here in the last ten years that I've been away, particularly with the oil and gas industry that I've told you before I grew up in.

DB: Yes.

JT: But coming down Highway 90 every billboard is somebody begging someone to come and work.

DB: Oh, definitely. Read the newspapers. Everybody's—I mean everybody's crying for help, and we've got people sitting on their butts, won't do nothing. They want the government take care of them, and if the government—if they do as well receiving support from the government as they do working, well, why should they work?

JT: Let's talk about this. Why are we at this level right now where rates are triple, there's so much of a demand and a shortage for labor? We'll get into that shortage also. But—

DB: Because we're failing in our educational system in Louisiana, more so than any other state. We on the bottom rung of the ladder when it comes to education. Now I've been on the university board of trustees for twenty years. I'm not faulting the university. We have seven hundred professors, fifteen, sixteen thousand students over there, and I'm sure we—our standards are equal to at least about a third rung of the ladder on a nationwide basis.

JT: At UL you mean?

DB: Yes, yes. But our high schools are not measuring up, and a lot of our students that reach the ninth grade and they drop out. I mean that's the dropout point right there. Somehow or another—you know, I used to go talk to the high school students and tell them, "Go to college. If you can't go to college, we have jobs for you. Go to the vo-tech schools. Get a trade. We've got jobs. Everybody's begging for people to come out there, and you can earn fifteen to twenty dollars an hour, you know." But I don't know if we making that effort anymore. I did it for years, you know, just going to talk to the seniors. I don't know if we getting the message across or what, but you're right. Everywhere you look, "help wanted," "help wanted."

JT: We're at a threshold now where obviously the price of oil is going up and that threshold is increasing.

DB: If people not working, they rob, stealing and killing.

JT: Yes. Now that has got to—this expanding has got to have something to do also the energy policies of the federal government, don't you agree? What have you seen from, let's say Carter and Reagan to now Clinton and Bush, how have those policies changed and impacted?

DB: Well, I'm not a fan of Clinton, but the economy did well when he was in there and he left us with some problems. Bush, I think he cut the taxes and that increased the volume of jobs and it increased the profitability of companies and what have you, and the gross domestic project or the deficit is down about a third. If we raise those taxes, I see a spiraling downturn again. So we can't afford that.

We've got to have the incentives for people to take risk and create jobs and produce the products. We're competing against countries like China where people work over there for three or four dollars a day, you know, compared to, and they're better trained and better educated than many of our people over here.

No, I think America has got to automate even more, and that requires better trained and qualified people. We can't compete against these Third World

nations that have cheap labor rates, because they can—like I say, three or four dollars an hour, they can out-produce us. We have to automate more so.

JT: Now, what about energy policy, particularly with the Gulf of Mexico?

DB: Energy policy, Bush signed the energy policy which opens up eight million acres for drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, the southwest part of the Gulf. I think that's a big plus. That's the first big sign. There's a lot of other things I'd like to see him do, and he's probably tired of hearing from me telling him what he ought to do. But I think that's a big plus.

But out national economic security is in jeopardy. There was no choice, and yet we got environmental extremists that don't want any drilling anywhere's in this nation, and as a consequence, 90 percent of the continental United States is off-limits to drilling. That's pitiful. And we need that. We need that natural gas. I think it's been approved but that will take ten years to get that gas here. We're going to be dependent on Canada to give us 15, 20 percent of our natural gas. We need to bring LNG in from all these other nations, liquefied natural gas. We got to have facilities to store it, we have to convert it, we have to have ports to bring it in in specialized ships, double hulled and everything else to develop. All this.

But you've got to have trust in what's going to happen in this world when you're a businessman and you talk about investing billions of dollars. There's been over fifty billion dollars invested in the Gulf of Mexico by the oil companies

in leases alone in thirty-something years, the last thirty years. But we don't know what the game plan is. We don't know what the rules are going to be.

Just like those offshore platforms. If production ceases for a year, MMS requires they be removed. Now, all the invertebrates, all of the life, ten to thirty thousand fish live in and around these platforms, billions of microorganisms that are protected by law, but if they're on the platforms, it don't count. They can destroy the platform and remove it. I mean it's conflicting laws that's taking place out there all the time.

As a businessman and you're putting money on the line, you've got to know what the rules are and that they won't change on you. Just like my agri-fuels plant, ten years of my life, hundred and seventy million dollar investment and they change the rule the day I start operating. State of Louisiana, traitors.

JT: Those rules are constantly changing.

DB: By why did they offer the incentives? I mean, you know, they offered the incentives for ten years for me to take the political risk just like everybody else took the risk, then pull the rug out from under you.

JT: Well, it seems that also as you mentioned before that the deep, deep water off of the shelf—

DB: That's where we're going. That's where the big finds are in the future.

JT: That's what's going to might save us.

DB: But you got to bring it on it. You got to bring it into shore. That infrastructure's in place, but it won't be long if we don't do something about saving those wetlands.

JT: How is that—

DB: And the fisheries. We lose all our fishery habitats where they're reproducing in our wetlands and that will wipe out tremendous amount of fishing offshore. We overfishing now as it is.

JT: So in your twenty years at Unifab, you guys dealt mostly with shelf activity?

DB: Right, right.

JT: Building platforms for the shelf.

DB: Right.

JT: Now that I understand that you're out of that industry, you're out of the field, so to speak, no longer own the company—

DB: Got too old.

JT: But as this is going into deeper water, how is that going to transform companies like Unifab?

DB: All the support equipment has to be built, you know. We may not—Unifab may not be able to build a big deep-water platforms, but they might be able to build the decks that go on those jackets. They might roll the pilings that go inside the jacket legs that have to be fabricated. They might roll all the components for the jacket legs to be automated, welded together at a deep-water facility. There's a lot of things going, but all of the production equipment and process equipment, all that has to be built, and those companies like Unifab can do that.

JT: In a facility like the Port of Iberia?

DB: Companies, yes, are going to go, yes, if you get twenty foot of water, that will double the enhancement of the Port of Iberia. New Iberia needs that port. Acadian needs that port. The fishing industry needs that port. And the oil industry, everybody needs that port because there's a pool of labor there that

won't travel to New Orleans or somewheres else. They're domiciled there. They want to stay there. And the biggest problem is a pool of labor. So if you bring the facilities to that Port of Iberia, the channel, then that pool of labor will continue growing in that, the children of these parents that are working now will probably follow in their footsteps.

JT: Could you see something occur at the Port of Iberia equivalent to like a seaport at Port Fouchon?

DB: No, I don't think so, because I think what's—the vulnerability to the wetlands would be a big problem, and the negative attitude of environmental extremists would not allow it. They are not fighting the twenty-foot channel because they know that's the backbone for Unifab's—at least stabilizing Unifab, I mean if you lose that port.

When I came there, there was nothing there, I mean. There was nothing there, couple little fabrication shops. It was a sleeping fishing village, what it was. I raised so much hell for thirty years that it grew. Not just me but other people saw the opportunity.

JT: Who are some of the other companies that—not only competitors of yours but colleagues that were down there in the eighties?

DB: There's about four thousand people. Most of my colleagues are gone, the ones that my age. You know, they're dead or retired. But there's about four thousand people that work out of that Port of Iberia, last count I had, and dozens of businesses. I'm not—I've been gone over five years now, so I don't—I haven't kept up with it other than Corps of Engineers keeps me informed on all the plans for it because so they want my input, and I think the twenty-foot channel has been approved now.

JT: That's great.

DB: Wheres the money and when they going to do it, I don't know.

JT: So it's not like you've got a deep hole like in Morgan City or you've got a natural seaport like Fouchon or you've got refinery capabilities in Baton Rouge and Lake Charles. It's kind of in there in between and it is vulnerable and it is limited, but yet it still has room for growth.

DB: Growth, labor pool. I mean you got—Acadian you got a quarter million people domiciled between Lafayette, or more, probably a hell of a lot more. For every job you create at the Port of Iberia, you create two to three in supportive roles. It's a multiple effect. Every dollar you produce at the Port of Iberia rolls over five

to seven times, so it's a multiplying effect. That's how important that Port of Iberia is to Acadian. Not just the four thousand jobs there, because there's probably twelve thousand other jobs that are co-dependent o the Port of Iberia.

JT: That's right, hospitals, car dealerships, restaurants.

DB: Everything, the whole works.

JT: You are correct. So where are we today? Well, I tell you what, let's back it up to before the storms. Where were we in early 2005 as far as production, labor pool industry in the Gulf of Mexico with respects coming through the Port of Iberia?

DB: Oh, like I say, I've been gone, so I haven't kept up with the details at Port of Iberia, but I'll tell you one thing. If we don't provide the facilities, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama will and you'll see a major transition. Probably the reason that you still here is because of the hopes that we'll have some deep-water facility or deeper-water facility to the Port of Iberia, and that goes for Morgan City and that goes for Houma and all these other places there.

JT: Where was the fabrication industry in 2004 and 2005?

DB: It was still parceled out to the different ones, Morgan City, New Iberia, Delcambre, Abbeville, Lake Charles.

JT: As a whole, the industry—

DB: Now, Lake Charles I had bought a business out over there, and they had forty foot of water over there from the Gulf to the facility in Lake Charles. But that's when I retired, and I don't know what they did with it.

JT: But in general, because if I'm not mistaken, there was a downturn around '98, '99, and then it picks back up. So where is the industry, the rig-building industry, and even the shipbuilding because you've got to have marine transportation?

DB: '97 to '98, 1997 to 19-, in that two-year period, we lost sixty thousand jobs, and we're going to lose a hundred and fifty thousand more if we don't quit destroying those platforms offshore over the next couple of decades.

JT: Tell me about that. That seems to be your most biggest concern.

DB: It is. I've been working on it for several years. We have four thousand platforms offshore, and every year if it ceases production for a year, Mineral Management Services, MMS, requires the platform to be removed. So we're removing an

average of a hundred and fifty platforms a year at the cost of three hundred million to four hundred million dollars taking them out because of regulation rules and what have you. Each one of those platforms houses ten to thirty thousand fish. The bits of microorganisms that grow on the, invertebrates and everything could be cures for cancer and everything else, because that's where life formed in the sea. So we have all the solutions to whatever medical problems we have on those platforms, plus other things.

Secondly, you could raise fish from these platforms. You can hang pens from them. We could produce two hundred and fifty thousand jobs and produce revenues of ten billion a year from those platforms. They're worth about fourteen billion. Japan has been doing this for thirty years. They've built—spent ten billion dollars building platforms, not for oil production, just for fish production. All of—we could have wind wave generators operating over there, solar hydrogen. We could, if we leave that twenty-six miles of pipeline infrastructure in place, we could store LNG. We could use some of them to get all the climate problems we're creating from our refineries, and we have chemical plants and everything else. Some of those stuff could be piped back and reinjected into those formations.

We'd get less than 50 percent oil and gas from these platforms when they quit operating. We could go back, reenter with new technology in future years and probably get more than we've ever produced from these platforms. But they have to stay in place if we remove them.

JT: That's the key.

DB: Not only that, the artificial coral reefs for—it's just a barren ocean bottom out there without that. Couple with that, it would generate revenues for us to save our wetlands. We need to spend about fourteen billion dollars in the next thirty years to stabilize the wetlands for all of the problems we created in leveeing off and sedimentation and sea-level rise worldwide. What they do anywhere's in Russia, something, impacts the sea-level rise worldwide, and it's come up higher along the Louisiana coast anywhere's else.

JT: So why that rule? Why that regulation that if it ceases to be producing structure, you've got to remove it?

DB: You've got to remove it.

JT: Does that mean remove it and move it to a new location or bring them back inland?

DB: No, no, bring them back inland.

JT: Well, then you're losing—

DB: We could also put artificial reefs out there, designated areas we buoyed off for protection against hazards, and create some artificial reefs. The reason the oil companies want to leave them out there because they subject to the liability and you'd have to man it, you know, with lighting and everything else, foghorns and so. The law requires they remove it, they remove it. They'd gladly leave them out there. They'd save themselves ten billion dollars if they—

JT: What is left on the sea floor once the platforms are moved inland.

DB: Nothing. They go fifteen foot below the mud line below, cut the pilings and everything else, the steel pilings, and remove it.

But there's multiple uses for these platforms. That's what I find so stupid. And once all that's gone and our wetlands no longer exist, what's Louisiana got left?

JT: Are we removing more and more platforms every year?

DB: We're removing a hundred and fifty, average three hundred and four hundred million a year.

JT: Are we producing enough new platforms to keep it—

DB: Right, no, well, yes, sort of. We're depending on the price of oil and gas, we're producing—we could produce almost what we taking out. But all those use, all those existing platforms have multiple use.

JT: So you're all for keeping it there, maybe not permanently, but keep it there for ten, twenty years.

DB: If there was a rule, people would invest because they're doing it in Japan, Holland, other places. They're building the platforms just for fish production. They have hydraulic pens they submerge and the current's flowing offshore, you don't have a pollution problems, what have you. Then all the fisheries or some fingerlings are raised onshore and the foods brought out there and pen-fed fish, tremendous boost for the economy. Ten billion a year revenue you could produce and put two hundred and fifty thousand people to work.

JT: That's something else.

DB: It's stupid.

JT: Yes.

DB: But I guess our politicians, just it's too complicated. It's so simple for me, but it's too complicated for them, because I keep them well abreast. I write to them every two weeks and give them all the particulars and details and what could do to, and not only that, it's key to saving those wetlands. Without that, Louisiana won't have anything left.

JT: You've been retired for about five or six years?

DB: Yes.

JT: You retired in 2000, is that about right, sir?

DB: I guess, yes, probably.

JT: Where was Unifab when you retired and maybe what was some of the reasons, other than your wife wanting you to spend more time with her? What were some of the other reasons why you decided to get out of the business?

DB: I was too old. I was worn out. I had been working fifty-two years.

JT: Where had you taken Unifab from 1980 to 2000?

DB: I took it to where they had eight hundred employees and in good shape.

JT: Still building rigs?

DB: Yes.

JT: What about internationally?

DB: In fact, after I left, after I retired, one of the major oil companies BP called me and said, "We got a fifty million dollar job for you to do, but I understand you're not there anymore."

I said, "No, I'm finally worn out. I retired. But give them the job."

"No, if you're not there, we're not," and they went somewheres else.

JT: I'll be. What about internationally? How has Unifab been successful in the international market?

DB: I don't know. You know, when I retired, that was five years ago, I—

JT: Okay. So since then, have they taken the business to other parts of the world?

DB: I don't think so. I don't think they had the ability to do it.

JT: So Unifab itself, the entity, the home base, let's say the Port of Iberia, have you—did you ever expand to other ports of south Louisiana with yards or it was just strictly the one in—

DB: No, I had Lake Charles. I had a yard in Lake Charles, a deep-water facility over there, and primarily the Port of Iberia. But before that, I had other business yards, different other places, New Orleans.

JT: What was different about the yard in Lake Charles as far as—

DB: Forty-foot channel.

JT: So you could build bigger stuff?

DB: Or you could build unlimited, is what you could.

JT: Did that stick with you for up till your retirement?

DB: Well, I had just put—I had just acquired the property when I—shortly after I retired, but that's what I was getting it, so we could expand into the bigger markets.

JT: Do you know if it's still?

DB: I think they sold it. I'm not sure.

JT: How many employees?

DB: Over there? I don't know. We had a couple of hundred when I left. We were just starting to build here, just built a big shop and just getting it going.

But you know, after two years, seven days a week, and there's so many other things I enjoy doing and mostly camaraderie with my family and this ranch and my camp, and you know, it's just—and recording history, what's happening.

JT: Louisiana is a very fortunate and blessed state because of not only its wonderful resources but people that we have here, but unfortunately we are still held up by Mother Nature. When the two big storms crushed through here in 2005—

DB: And who's to say we're not going to get another one next year or the year after?

JT: Let's hope we're not going to get another one. Let's talk about what, finally, after years of dormant major hurricane activity, what did those two big storms in 2005 do to the industry in the Gulf of Mexico?

DB: I think it flooded Unifab's offices, where our shops and everything else, I mean. Some of the employees, you know, I talk to once a while say they had some severe damages. But it's resilient, the industry. The most devastating was Audrey in '57, and it was five hundred and fifty people drowned and the infrastructure was all destroyed, but we rebuilt and we built a Catco system. We didn't slow down at all in getting that going. We just moved the barges to safety and pulled them back a week later and back in operation.

The same way with drilling rigs, a lot of structure, most of their hardware, you know, their staircases and stairwells and everything, usually those hurricanes come through, they wipe that out, and that creates a lot of job for the small shops to build. Then the derrick barges have to go out there and install them, and some of these derrick barges cost a hundred thousand dollars a day to operate, depending on where. There was quite a bit of platforms that were damaged during Katrina, and that probably created a hell of a lot of work.

JT: Let's talk about that, the vulnerability of the older structures that have been there for twenty-plus years. Yes, it's a good idea for what you've explained to me. I think it's a good idea for the marine activity, but what about essentially leaving an old piece of equipment there vulnerable to a storm? I mean who's the liability with there?

DB: Well, you see, the oil company's going to remove them. The law says within a year, you have to remove them. They'll gladly give it to you or me if we want them, but we'd be responsible for the liability of those structures. If there was a law set up that you could produce fish from these platforms, but right now you can't. You can't invest in one of them platforms. They've got to go. The law requires they be removed. So you have an influx. I mean you can't do anything one way or another, and there's fourteen billion dollars' worth of platforms out there that could create ten billion dollars' worth of revenue a year, two hundred fifty thousand jobs. Just think, you think of the boats it would put to work that would be servicing these fishery platform, I mean harvesting the fish, the food supply and everything else that goes with it.

JT: Well, right now, I spent—I interviewed a gentleman who's in the boat building business on the southeastern side, and they can't build boats fast enough.

DB: I know.

JT: There's a year wait or sometime two-year wait. People are now going to other countries to build boats because there's such a high demand for vessels, particularly as we're going deeper, bigger vessels.

DB: But if we had mari-culture in place, I could see two thousand boats immediately would be needed.

JT: Who would build them?

DB: Well, they'd get built. I don't know. You could build boats in New Iberia. You just set up for it.

JT: Yes. Breaux Bay Craft and the Breaux Brothers are doing very well for themselves with the one-fifty classes.

DB: But with twenty foot of water, you can build deep-water boats. We have so much and such misunderstanding and the people in control, they just can't understand and visualize the greatness of this state and what could be. I visualized that in 1950 when I went to work for the highway department, saw the corruption that was taking place, Earl Long, governor, highway superintendent using my labor, my survey crews, to drive his cane trucks at state expense, and I wouldn't be a part of that. I've never been a part of anything dishonest.

Even in the business I'm in, there's a lot of corruption, a lot of dishonesty, but I don't lie, steal and cheat and so that's the respect I got from the industry. They want to do—when quality workmanship, time, the delivery, they'll get it from me and no under-the-table deals.

JT: Well, unfortunately, politics runs a lot of things and you inherited a culture of politics that's—

DB: I didn't join that culture though. I never lowered my standards. I wasn't liked by the politicians and that could be why my agri-fuels project failed, maybe because of dislike of me because I wouldn't play games.

JT: Do you think it's going to have to take a big change in politics also?

DB: Oh, definitely, definitely. You've got to change the culture of the politics. I mean everybody's changed the rules. Oil companies cleaned up their mess. It used to be horrible back in the seventies, but they strive for honesty at all levels, but there's a lot of hanky-panky going on. But they knew if they were doing business with me, there would be no hanky-panky going on.

JT: Deep-water gulf, we're going there, we're there now.

DB: Yes.

JT: What's the next step for that process? What do we need to develop?

Tape 2, Side 1

JT: This is oral history interview with Dailey Berard on January 13th, 2007, tape two, by Jason Theriot, MMS Ship Fab Project.

[Tape recorder turned off.]

JT: So deep water in Lake Charles could be a possibility as far as—

DB: Yes, with forty foot of water, you could do some bigger project, but not the real deep-water stuff. They'll have to be built overseas and hauled over here.

JT: China or Singapore or Korea?

DB: North Sea facilities are set up. You're talking about things that take from, say, from seven to ten years, you know, from the inception to final installation, and a lot of drilling to be done in the whole area to prove the reserves are there. I don't know of anything in Louisiana that could handle that big deep, deep-water stuff.

JT: You've seen it in fifty years, you've seen this industry change, fluctuate, grow.

DB: Right.

JT: Let's talk about some of the positive things just for a little bit. What are some of the big positives that you've seen come out of the Gulf of Mexico?

DB: All the technology that's spread worldwide was initiated here in the Gulf of Mexico, the offshore platforms, the production, the process, the drilling technology and everything, all here and they expand to the North Sea and different areas of the world and they still—United States companies are in the Middle East right now providing all the technology and things that need for these people to be able to produce their oil and gas that they're doing now. We innovators here and particularly here in Louisiana, we are the pioneers of world oil and gas industry. The world oil and gas industry has grown, but Louisiana has not grown.

JT: That's quite a legacy. If you think about it on one hand—

DB: It's pitiful.

JT: We're all proud—

DB: We got six thousand miles of waterways and they're all too narrow and shallow. By deepening and widening and controlling with controlling structures, we could expand Louisiana and probably help the wetlands.

JT: Is sustaining the wetlands a key to the next fifty years?

DB: Definitely, definitely, we have—Louisiana is finished if we don't stabilize those wetlands. Not only for the oil and gas industry, but for our fisheries also. Lose those wetlands, the nurseries are gone. Now what does that mean to all the fishermen that we have? We—70 percent, 90 percent of our game fish are gone in our oceans right now, and over 50 percent of our edible fish are gone. We're declining out there, that's why it's so important for us to set up these pen structures on those offshore platforms to start producing fish.

JT: So that somebody in New York can have a nice red snapper also.

DB: We import the vast majority of our fisheries from other areas of the world.

JT: Shrimp, crabs, oysters.

DB: And ornaments and everything else. But the main thing is it's Louisiana's heritage, fishing, oil and gas. Everything we've developed and grew has spread in other parts of the world, and we're letting ours go to hell, disappearing.

JT: What's your overnight solution to the problem?

DB: Overnight solution is we need to appropriate fourteen billion dollars immediately. Now, we don't even have millions, and the best we can hope for is twenty million a year for the next ten years. We need to stabilize the wetlands. We need to stop the wanton destruction, removal of those offshore platforms and turn them into revenue-producing assets. If we don't save our wetlands, we lose our fisheries. We lose our fisheries, we lose the Gulf of Mexico fisheries, because as I say 90 percent owned.

The key to it, and the federal government has to realize, because they're getting 30 percent of their energy from Louisiana, wetlands is the key for oil and fisheries both. Fourteen billion dollars, revenue of ten billion dollars just for fisheries, not counting the revenue you're getting from the oil and gas industry. Wetlands is the key to, not just Louisiana, the United States, saving it. Now we're not—we haven't started anything yet. We've been talking about it. I've been talking about it fifty years.

JT: And you've seen the writing on the wall.

DB: A long time ago, yes. I was testifying as expert witness in court, condemnation suits. They were blaming the oil companies for the destruction of the wetlands, and I showed them that we operating by all the regulations and everything else and where we dug a pipeline canal, it was bulk-headed. In fact, I innovated using concrete bulkheads from, we were using creosote structures, which would have to be replaced in twenty, thirty years. I innovated the panel piling, and that spread all over. In fact, its business got set up in Houma producing the concrete components to bulkhead.

We met all the regulations, but it wasn't that. It was sea-level rise and subsidence, because the pipeline canals were controlled and the dirt was on each side of it, so it wasn't letting the deterioration take place from sea-level rise in the canal in the bulkhead.

JT: How big does the public perception and its ability to elect move its overriding understanding of the industry? How important is that and what can we do to bring more awareness to the public about what's going on?

DB: Four, five years, I've given speeches to associations, businesses, I've written about it, and I certainly have communicated with our politicians every two weeks.

JT: Are you getting a response from us?

DB: Oh, yes, acknowledgement, yes, appreciate your information you keep sending me, stuff like that. But I'm not getting the acknowledgement I got from Clinton because I needled him in my letters, you know, he had to respond. But getting the message out, everybody's a hundred percent for it today when they hear about it. You seem like you think that's what we should do. But when you leave here, it ends.

JT: At the end of the day, we're just one person.

DB: I've got this broad-based knowledge. I've done it. I've seen the physical. I've built it. I've installed it. I've laid the pipelines. I've done all of these things, and I see a tremendous industry just in the fisheries would be ten billion a year. That's big bucks.

JT: They're paying triple rates right now for crew boats and work boats to go in the Gulf of Mexico.

DB: I don't doubt it.

JT: It's a big, big, big, big business, a lot of people making a lot of money right now.

DB: We've got everything more than any other state, but we're not doing anything with, and we're destroying what we have, removing it. We made some—well, I don't know that we've made mistakes when we leveed off the Mississippi and the Atchafalaya and all that because we wouldn't be domiciled anywhere's because the flood of '29 wiped out New Iberia and all them towns, you know. So we wouldn't be living there. We wouldn't be prospering. We wouldn't have ranches or farmers and everything else. So we had to do it. But you can divert some of that water back into the wetlands and whatever it takes.

JT: Does the oil companies have enough money to do that?

DB: Oil companies have met the regulations to the T, exactly what's required of it. No, they don't have the money to—and they'll just go overseas and do that. That's where most of them were drilling anyway. You want to chase the rest of them out, just penalize them some more and they're not going to stay here.

JT: So, again, we're relying on the federal government to help us come up with solutions.

DB: When the federal government's getting all—using our infrastructure, our facilities, our state and being giving us a damn dime until recently. Bush

approved an energy package, which is going to give us twenty million a year for the next ten years, not a pot to pee in.

JT: Let me ask you this. What are they seeing as that twenty million dollars a year going toward?

DB: Just for wetland restoration.

JT: So we're talking about what, specifically?

DB: Well, we need to spend fourteen billion dollars the next thirty years to get a foothold in stabilizing those wetlands. What you going to do with twenty million?

JT: Are we talking about barrier reefs or are we talking about planting marsh grass?

DB: No, we're talking about—no, you plant marsh grass, you got to restore the sedimentation to it.

JT: How they going to do that?

DB: Oh, that's easy. They can divert water from the Mississippi and the Atchafalaya back to—

JT: Is that what they're looking at?

DB: Oh, yes, that's part, yes. Then we've got to do something about artificial heating of the atmosphere and that—we, not just us, the world, whole world's got to look at that problem. That's causing sea-level rise. We've got to calm the sea-level rise and subsidence in Louisiana.

Why worse than any other country in the world, because we're having subsidence. They're having sea-level rise only. The combination of both is killing wetlands. We lost two thousand square miles and we're losing fifty square miles a year right now, and it's going to get worse.

Now, doing something about heating of the atmosphere is going to take a part every country on this world is going to have to be participating. Can you imagine what an undertaking that would be? So sea-level rise is going to continue, artificial heating of the atmosphere. The only way we can counter is subsidence. We've got to rebuild those wetlands and it's key to offshore, oil and gas production, it's key to our fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and in our wetlands.

JT: What do you see, in other words, how long will this ride as far as the price of oil, the triple rates that they're getting in the Gulf of Mexico, the fabrication, the

shipbuilding, the tremendous labor shortage, how long is this going to keep up currently right now in your opinion, sir?

DB: Unless we do something about our training of people, educating of people, which we rank last in the nation, I see it continuing.

JT: So it's just going to be a continuous growth in the infrastructure.

DB: In some select industries, like offshore boats. If we go into mari-culture, we're going to need two thousand more boats to operate those mari-culture platforms.

JT: Do you think that there'll be another bust in the future?

DB: No, I don't think so because we're going to need 50 percent more oil and gas in the next twenty-five years than we are now and we're falling behind all the time.

JT: So essentially the problem has kind of planned itself out and everybody's in demand?

DB: Yes.

JT: China, India, Russia.

DB: Yes. Now OPEC's going to get every buck that they can out of the thing, but they going to try and hurt the United States so we shut down our domestic drilling. They drop the price, we quit drilling. Oil companies going to go do their drilling in other countries, and our support services take it on the chin.

JT: Mr. Dailey Berard, it's really been a pleasure talking to you.

DB: Oh, it's been a pleasure talking to you. I finally found somebody that understands what I'm talking about.

JT: One last question.

DB: Sure.

JT: When it's all said and done with and the historians such as myself are writing about this in the future and they're writing about pioneers like Dailey Berard, what are some of the things that you're going to want generations of Berards down the road to remember about your contributions to this industry?

DB: They won't have to remember if they can read and write. I chronicle everything that goes on in my life, have been for way back, just like *This Cajun Ain't*

Bashful, I wrote that in six weeks from memory and notes of different things. I'm not out to publish anything. I've got six or seven manuscripts right now that take me through the day, and my correspondence with public officials ties it all in. I have a little library full of information. There's no way—I'm not sure my kids even know what all the things that I do. They're not interested. They're highly educated and they're motivated by the things that they enjoy doing. They know I do a lot of writing. I don't burden them with all this writing.

But I just feel like if my grandfather would have written down what he experienced back in the twenties, how much I would appreciate that today, to be able to actually read what he felt, what he was doing and everything else, and my dad for the same thing, for just seeing the transition. They all had limited education and they were so busy earning a living they didn't have time and luxury of writing. I do it because I enjoy it.

I have files that's published, I've talked in every major city, I've talked on Wall Street, I've talked—I even when I was in Russia, I spoke to the Academy of Scientists, and I was telling them about the greatness of the free enterprise system. They say, "Well, how can we get that going over here?"

I said, "Well, you got it going out there on the streets."

"What?"

"The black market."

"Oh, we'd lose control."

I said, "You'd lose control, and you want a free market." You've got to lose control if you want a free market. You've got to manage.

JT: That's right.

DB: That guy, he couldn't figure it out, how can we lose control?

JT: The communist mentality.

DB: Oh, yes, yes. I've enjoyed it, though. I've met a lot of memorable people. Even the unions, at one time I ran them out of Acadian. They tried to unionize my company, then other companies. I beat them ninety-five to five. They've destroyed this country. At one time, we had 40 percent unionization. We only have 8 percent now in the dynamic south and less than 13, 14 percent nationwide. They've outpriced themselves in the market. They've put themselves out of in competition. That's why all the major automobile manufacturers and things, they can't compete because of union labor. And it's the most corrupt organization—I won't get into that.

JT: Well, let's—

DB: I've still got a chapter on that in that book.

JT: We'll reference that chapter for the understanding about the union folks. So without an oil industry, without oil being discovered, without the fabrication—

DB: I'm going to move to Mississippi. No, I want to stay here and fight to the bitter end. I don't know how much time I have left. My dad died at eighty-one because he was lung cancer. He had been smoking since he was six. I don't smoke. But I can do a lot of good in the next four or five years, and I aim to do it, everything that I can, to help this state and help this country.

JT: Well, we really appreciate you doing some good with us today and filling us in and with your knowledge and your history of the industry, and I really appreciate it.

DB: If there's any doubts, everything's written if you need it.

JT: I'll say thank you.

DB: All right. Right. What you want me to sign over here?

[End of interview]

[edited by Jason Theriot, 1 May 2007]