**MMS OFFSHORE GULF OF MEXICO**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interviewee:** VINCE GUZZETTA

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**Vince Guzzetta**

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Bio

Vince Guzzetta was born in Berwick, Louisiana in 1936, a small town across the Atchafalaya Bay from Morgan City. He started a seafood business in Berwick called Deep South Seafoods with his father Vincent, Sr. after 3 years at Louisiana State University. He was hired to pick shrimp. They also received packaged, processed, and froze imported Mexican shrimp and put them in Deep South's freezers to send them all over the United States. In the mid-1960's, when the oil companies moved to Morgan City in large numbers, Guzzetta and his father converted their seafood business into an oil field service company and renamed it Guzzetta Offshore. In general, they took seismic crews out and carried mud and pipe and other supplies to offshore rigs, in Bahrain and the Middle East, South Africa, Nicaragua, Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and other sites in the Gulf of Mexico. The company dealt with Geophysical, Pennzoil, Texaco, Conoco, and others. A Guzzetta and GSI crew were seized in Somalia causing Mr. Guzzetta to deal with the State Department, Rome and the Somalian government. The Guzzettas also owned Guzzetta Oil (distributorship for Conoco) and owned 7 gas stations in Morgan City area. They phased out of both Guzzetta offshore and oil in 1990.

**Side 1**

JC: This is Jamie Christy and today is July 1, 2004. I am at the home of Mr. Vince Guzzetta. The address is 1401 Bernice in Morgan City, Louisiana. Mr. Guzzetta, could you tell us just a little bit about yourself, where you are from and your parents?

VG: Well, I was born in Berwick, Louisiana, right across the river from here in Morgan City, and the year was 1936. My father was Vince Guzzetta and my mother was Mabel Barrios before she married. I have been living in this area pretty much the whole time of my life except for a period of six years in Colorado in this past decade.

JC: You went to school in Morgan City?

VG: Yes, I went to school in Morgan City. Initially, I went to Berwick. Berwick had nine grades at the time I went to school, so I went to Berwick for those first nine grades. After that, you either had to go to Sacred Heart at the time or Morgan City

High. So, I went to Sacred Heart for my final 3 years and I graduated from Sacred Heart.

JC: What year did you graduate?

VG: I think it was 1956, if I remember right, or 1957. I am not sure. I think it is 1956.

JC: Your father had a boat company? Is that correct? Is that how you first got interested in the oil field?

VG: Well, actually, after graduating from high school, I went to Nicholls in Thibodeaux, Louisiana. It was a two-year college. So, I graduated from Nicholls and I went to LSU where I spent three years at LSU, graduated with a BS in merchandising in 1960 from LSU. And then, I joined my father in his business at that time.

JC: What was the business?

VG: Well, he was primarily into the seafood business. At the time when I got out of college, I went to work with my dad. I was married. I went to work for $45 a

week picking shrimp as a college graduate. Unloading shrimp boats. He originally started in the shrimp boating business and we would process shrimp and ship them all over the country. Cook them. Then, it sort of transferred to the oil industry as the oil industry started to grow in this area.

JC: What was the name of the shrimping company?

VG: The shrimp company was Deep South Seafoods. And we were right on the river right by the bridge that crosses the Atchafalaya River. We were on the Berwick side and we had about a 300-foot waterfront dock there in Berwick where we unloaded shrimp boats, packed shrimp, sent them to different parts of the country. Also, we had some boats that came in from Mexico with Mexican shrimp and they were all processed and packaged and we would unload them and put them in our freezer and ship those maybe nine or ten truck loads at a time all over the United States from Mexican imports. So, that is where we originally started. That is what my dad did. And then, I joined him when I graduated from college.

We really saw the shrimp industry slipping a little bit and the oil industry was sort of taking over in the mid 1960s. And we sort of said, well, let's kind of move along with the tide and we sort of crept into the oil business with boats.

JC: And how did you start out with the oil industry? What did you do in the beginning?

VG: Well, in 1964, we decided we were going to try to build the boat. Prior to this, there was a lot of . . . oil companies were hiring wooden boats, shrimp boats. I guess, in the 1960s and the late 1950s, they were hiring anything they could find. They would hire these boats to go offshore and check on their oil rigs or bring people offshore. They were using shrimp boats and anything they could find. Shrimp boats were actually being rented to the oil companies. They would take all of their shrimp gear off and the shrimpers would do better renting their boat to the oil companies, so they would do that – they would de-rig as a shrimp boat and rig up as an oil boat. One of the original companies in the Gulf was Kerr McGee Oil Company out of Oklahoma. Kerr McGee did a lot of the pioneering in the offshore oil industry here out of Morgan City. That is how we got interested. We said, well, let's try to build a boat. We were close to this company in Houston at the time, Stewart and Stevenson, and we knew one of the guys over there. They were building boats. We worked with Stewart and Stevenson, got financing on a 125-foot boat that was built in Houston. In 1965, it was ready to go and we were in the boat business, I guess.

JC: Was that your first boat?

VG: That was the first one, yes. We just wanted to take a trial and see if we could . . . it was just a gamble because I think that first boat was like $285,000. That was a lot of money. Gee, I think we put $5,000 down and Stewart and Stevenson financed the rest and that is how we really got started with the boat business.

JC: So, they financed you to build this boat?

VG: They financed it. So, that is how we got kicked off. We originally were interested in the geophysical end of the oil industry and that is how this boat . . . the planning on it was to work for a company called Geophysical Service, Incorporated, which is a subsidiary of Texas Instruments. And that was our first client. GSI. They would do geophysical work and seismograph work and we would like shoot dynamite off of the boat. The first days of geophysical work, they would load boats with dynamite and shoot different sites offshore to try to find the oil.

JC: Did you go out with the boat on those trips?

VG: Basically, no. I would take care of the administrative part of the boats. They would go out sometimes two weeks, three weeks, and I was not going to go out that long. I would rather stay on the shore and talk through my radio and get things done like that.

JC: So, you hired a captain for the boat?

VG: Yes, we had captains. A lot of the old shrimpers, in fact . . . at that time, you could find some good captains from some of the shrimp boats that used to work and at the beginning, there was no need for Coast Guard licenses or all kinds of new regulations that were not in effect at the time and you almost . . . you know, you can go pick up somebody to work fairly easily . . . we got this first boat called Midnight Sun. I named it the *Midnight Sun* because GSI and Texas Instruments, they wanted to work in Alaska. They wanted to work in Alaska, so we said, well, we will name it the *Midnight Sun* since we are going up there in the Alaskan waters. So, we named it that but we never did go with it to Alaska at the time. Instead of going to Alaska, we went to, I think, Nicaragua or Columbia, Panama, Venezuela – all over in that area.

JC: And what were you doing in those countries?

VG: GSI, the seismic company, would contract with some of the oil companies, US oil companies, and some of the companies in the South American area to go, they call it "shoot" different locations. Whenever they would go shoot a particular site, they would send a shock wave down, a sound wave down, it will come back, they will read it and see if they have oil. That is the first thing you have to do. You have to get some kind of basis for drilling and they would have to get the data to show that there was some type of oil down there before they would start drilling. So, this is what we were doing before the drilling would start.

JC: So, your first jobs were not here in the Gulf?

VG: No. We might have worked, I think a few months sort of what they called orientation and practice work to make sure everything was working and we probably worked in the Gulf for about three or four months to get everything organized and functional. After that, we took this first boat and we went all over with it. I mean, I could name the countries we went all over – to Africa, the Middle East. Eventually, we went into the Middle East, Bahrain. We went through Taiwan, Singapore. We went around the world with it, in fact. South

Africa. We went to South Africa which is one of the nicest places I have ever been and we spent a lot of time in Cape Town, worked off South Africa a long time. But that is the tale of this first boat. Then, that seemed to be doing good so we built another one. After that, I think, the *Midnight Star*, which we worked here in the Gulf. The first company I think we worked for was Conoco. We worked for Texaco, Pennzoil, all these oil companies right here out in the Gulf and out of Morgan City and out of Galveston a lot. Just all along the coast. Out of our home port here, most of it is where we would work.

JC: Was it more or less a crew boat, would you say?

VG: No, this is like 185 foot . . . it was a supply boat. The second boat was a 185 footer and it would haul supplies out to the rigs. It did not fool with passengers or anything like that. They would haul like mud and pipe and different supplies or whatever the rigs would need. They would come in, load up, bring fuel out the rigs, water. Water was a big commodity – you need to get fresh water offshore. So, that is what we were doing with this second boat, the *Midnight Star*, which I think we built in 1969. I think it was 1969. So, that got us started. We had two boats.

JC: Do you remember particular jobs or particular trips that the boats went on?

VG: A particular trip? They would come in and out constantly. It would just be pretty much a routine . . . when you are supplying an oil rig, it is pretty much routine trips. They would go out and sometimes the weather was bad. We had, like all the other boat operators, a lot of times where we would have to get alongside the rigs in bad weather and sometimes we damaged the boat. Eventually, you have to get it dried out and repair all of the steel damage that you had when hitting the rig . . . you'd go offshore and the weather is bad. A lot of the companies, you either did what they said or they would run you off, so we would get out there and try to do the best we could without damaging the boat. Some of it gets pretty hazardous. Some of the trips were pretty hazardous, with the hurricanes out here and different other types of weather problems.

JC: So, do you think they understood when the weather was bad here or were they just kind of they wanted what they wanted when they wanted it?

VG: Yes, they wanted it. They wanted their material and you had to go. I mean, if it gets out there and if it is too rough, you stay tied up alongside, maybe anchor out a little ways from the rigs and wait for the weather to calm down but sometimes,

some of the seas would get like 18, 20 foot seas. It is pretty hard to unload a boat with things just rocking all over the decks. These were some of the first boats. Like today, the boats are much more sophisticated, much more regulations to come into effect now. It is a different ballgame today.

JC: So then, you said you did not need licenses and all. Could you just get a boat and just start renting it to the oil companies if you wanted to?

VG: At the time, yes. The oil business in the 1970s, it was great. You could rent anything you had. It did not have to be fancy. The oil companies would rent anything. You build it, they would rent it. These were good days in the oil . . . right around in this area, the 1970s, was great. I mean, they were just going crazy drilling for oil offshore here. The seismic work was good, which we liked seismic. We liked the seismic end of it. Because the seismic business, your boat would not get torn up. The drilling rigs, they want you to go and tie up and you would get beat up and knock holes in your boat and all that stuff. But in seismic work, you are carrying like about 18 seismic personnel, scientists and people that are educated, they do not want to go out there in bad weather. There is a little more of a calm operation. They eat good. The food is always top notch. They have good cooks. It is a well-kept operation when you are fooling with the

seismic business, and that is why we liked it. We liked the seismic work better.

JC: Did you do seismic exclusively for GSI or did you do it for different companies?

VG: No, we worked also . . . we had another boat come out that was called the *Midnight Coast*. I think it was our third boat, the *Midnight Coast*, and we worked for a company called Petty Ray Geophysical. They were on the Southwest Freeway in Houston. They are owned by a company called Western Geophysical now, I think, if I am not mistaken. And they were a pretty big company, too. We worked for them. We went all over the world with them also. Worked out of here a lot. We worked here but if they got a job to go to Nigeria or whatever, well, they would go. They would get the job and they would take off. They might be here to get a better job over in Nigeria or East Africa. They would take off and go because business was booming, especially in the 1970s. It really was.

JC: Was that the best time you would say?

VG: Oh, yes. The 1970s . . . everybody in the oil industry had a lot of fun in the 1970s. It was good days, good times. Everybody was working. Jobs were all

over the place. It was just a productive time and sort of, everybody was getting a foothold into the oil industry. I guess after the 1970s, in the late 1970s, things were going so good, the government decided we needed more regulations. So, it kind of slowed down into the 1980s and sort of regulated the oil industry into sort of slowing down a little bit and catching its breath, I guess. Of course, no new refineries have been built in the last 25 years because of the environmentalists. That is why we are having a problem with oil right now. We do not have any new refineries. We do not have any modern refineries being built in the last 25 years because the regulations are so strict and a company . . . it is not productive to build a refinery. So, that is why we have got to go get our oil and stuff from the Middle East or from Venezuela or where they can build refineries. That is why I said the 1970s, that was it. That was the key to all of the business. Everybody down here had fun. It was really fun in the oil industry in those days.

JC: How was it fun?

VG: It was because things were going so well. You know, everybody had work, the money was good. You were making good wages. The boat personnel were making good wages. The boat companies were making good wages. The oil companies were doing well. It was sort of smooth operations. It just slowed

down right . . . about 1980, it started getting really tight. Of course, you had new regulations coming in. New Coast Guard regulations. Inspection regulations. American Bureau of Shipping Regulations. Environmental laws. It just got tougher and tighter and it was not the fun it was in the 1970s. It got really restrictive, like it is today. It is really restrictive but, you know, it has some good points to happen with all of the new restrictions, and it has some bad points.

JC: What do you think are the good points?

VG: The good points are I think the safety is a big factor, even though I personally think that they overdo the regulations and make the prices of a lot of products go up. Some of the regulations are really good and some of them are, in my opinion, ridiculous and, you know, make everything hard for everybody. But basically, safety is a big consideration in the new regulations.

JC: What kind of safety precautions did the companies take in the early days, if any?

VG: It was no different from running shrimp boats in the early days. You know, shrimp boats go out and do what they are wanting to do. You made your own decisions. In the early days of the oil industry, they would go out, and the rigs, the

same thing. The rigs. The boats. They would decide on a spot what was the best thing to do. Now, you have to think, am I going to get put in jail if I do this? You have to work with the regulations now, the Coast Guard regulations.

JC: You hear a lot about . . . were there accidents? Do you remember anybody getting hurt on your boats or do you remember hearing about people getting hurt?

VG: Well, yes. In the early days, there was a boat called *The Diversity* here out of Morgan City. It belonged to Victor Guarisco's company, Twenty Grand, at the time.

JC: Was that the name of his company?

VG: The company was Twenty Grand Marine. It is based right here in Morgan City, the Guarisco's over here own Twenty Grand. Vic Guarisco, Pete Guarisco, Lou Guarisco. They had a boat by the name of *The Diversity* that turned over. Five people drowned in. A friend of mine, his dad was the captain of the boat. His name was Joe Mafouz. Joe Mafouz was the captain of *The Diversity*. He went down with it. That was probably the worst local accident I can think of.

JC: Do you know what happened to the boat, why it went down?

VG: It capsized in bad weather. It capsized somewhere off of Vermilion Bay south of Abbeville. I think when it capsized, everybody got trapped in the boat. They finally got the boat. That was the worst thing, I think, that I can remember in the history over here.

JC: Did you have any accidents?

VG: Yes, I had a boat working for GSI that caught on fire. Nobody got killed on it or anything like that. The boat had a pretty bad fire and a couple of boats. The fire monitors help put it out. In fact, that was our first boat, the *Midnight Sun*, that we first built. It caught on fire. But we rebuilt it. It was gutted pretty much. We rebuilt it in Houston and put it back to work out for us.

JC: How did the fire start? Was it from the explosives on the boat?

VG: Actually, geophysical work involved a big cable that they dragged behind the boat for sometimes two miles. The cable has a fluid in the inside of it that is flammable, a cleaning solvent. Somehow, some sparks sparked and it got on fire

or something, started burning and they could not stop it. All of the people aboard were . . . in fact, there was a newer boat that was really close to them, a National Oceanographic Association boat, NOAA. Have you heard of them?

JC: Yes.

VG: Well, they were right close by and they rescued everybody off of the boat, and got the fire out actually. But that was the only thing I can think of that we had a bad situation.

JC: Did the companies take care if there was an accident or if something happened to your boat or your boat was damaged, did the companies take care of that?

VG: We took care of it. Well, it all depended on the contract. Whatever you had stipulated in the contract was what you followed. If they caused it, well then their insurance would probably take care of the problem. If it was a boat problem, well then, we would have to take care of it ourselves.

JC: Were your boats insured back in those days?

VG: Oh, yes.

JC: From the very beginning?

VG: You had to have insurance, yes. It was not expensive in the early days. Insurance was not expensive. It was pretty reasonable. Today, it is extremely expensive. But we always had insurance. You had to have liability insurance because the oil companies would require that you have . . . to have to name and waive them on your insurance policy and have the coverages that you ask for.

JC: So, when the crews would come on, those were all like GSI employees, none of your people?

VG: No, we would run the boat. We would like have a captain, an engineer to take care of the engine. We would have two Abs, able seamen, the deck hands, a cook. We would probably furnish a cook. We probably had like six men. The seismic crews would probably have more like . . . it could go anywhere from 15 to 20 people. So, we might have sometimes as much as 30 people on a boat. And we would have that many bunks. Most of our boats would have that many bunks to take care of about 30 people.

JC: The guys on your crews, were they from around here? Were they local people?

VG: Most of them would be local people right here out of Morgan City. I tried to keep a lot of local people. As the license requirements by the Coast Guard got tougher, you would have to go out and search other areas for license personnel. A lot of these local people over here, the Cajuns, they do not really care about licenses. They could probably run a boat better than these big high license people.

I used to go as far as Miami. I tried to find people in Florida. You would get these captains that had unlimited licenses. They could run ships but they did not know how to run these boats. I would rather have one of these local Cajuns running a boat than half of these licensed captains who cannot really turn a boat around. These local people over here, they could make boats walk! In the lingo of boat . . . they could make it go sideways. Some of these big captains with the big licenses, they could not do it. But we were forced, like everybody, to go out and look for licensed personnel because of the Coast Guard regulations.

JC: When did those regulations get . . .

VG: They trickled in a little at a time. You know, it just got every year, a new one. I would say in the 1970s, in the late 1970s when things were really good, they were so good that the government had to come up with something new to slow it down. That is about the mid 1970s, I think, that the licensing regulations came into effect.

JC: Do you remember any of the names of the captains or the crews, the guys that worked for you?

VG: Sure. I had a lot of . . . I guess, my first captain was a guy from Amelia - he is still living – named Victor Gaudet. His brother, Hemberly Gaudet, were my two early captains. They worked for me 25 years each. They were my best captains. They both got licenses. They both got licenses when they were acquired. I had another captain from Patterson – his name was Ernest Blanco. He worked for me about 25 years. I did have a lot of people that worked 20-25 years, stayed with me the whole time that we were operating boats.

I had an engineer, we were working on the East Coast with one of my boats doing seismic work with GSI, I think, and I picked up a guy from Boston . . . well, from New Bedford, Massachusetts, a Massachusetts guy. He worked for me . . . I hired

him up there in Massachusetts and he worked for me about 20 years, too. He was an engineer. We had a lot of fun with him. Of course, he had this Massachusetts accent where "cahrs" and "Bahstan" and we really enjoyed him. He was one of our most trusted people, I guess. We eventually sold the boat that he was on when we got out of the business and we sold him with the boat. He just would not get off the boat! In his room, he had about 700 or 800 tapes. He would collected VCRs and VHS tapes and he had a complete library of tapes in his room. So, we had to sell him with the boat because he did not want to get out of his room.

JC: He and his tapes!

VG: He stayed with the tapes. His name was Ed Jackson. Gee, sometimes I have got to go through some of the old people records. I remember a lot of the guys that worked for us.

JC: You changed the name of the company when you became associated with the oil field obviously. What was the name?

VG: Well, the boat company was under the name of Guzzetta Offshore. The shrimp

company that we originally started I told you was Deep South Seafoods. We just got out of the seafood business.

JC: Entirely?

VG: Entirely, yes. Well, in Berwick, we were affiliated with Conoco and we were a Conoco distributor. We would fuel up boats, fuel up boats for other companies.

End of Side 1

Side 2

JC: We were talking about your boats and you said you had seven. I asked you why Midnight?

VG: Midnight. The first boat was the *Midnight Sun*. Most of the boat companies would always follow one pattern in naming their boats, like *Twenty Grand* here in Morgan City. They would name them after the parishes of Louisiana. They had like *Avoyelles*, *Tangipahoa*, and different things like that. They would use parishes. Some companies, like Tidewater was probably the biggest and they would always be like the *North Tide*, the *South Tide*, the *East Tide*, the *West Tide*. So, we wanted to do the same thing and use a pattern. And since the first boat was the *Midnight Sun*, we either had to use Sun or Midnight. We just decided to use Midnight instead of Sun. So, we could follow that same pattern for each boat. And then, you would know what boat company was operating that boat because you would know by the name what boat company it was. You would attribute the name of the boat to the company and sort of make a connection.

One thing I might mention or you mentioned about catastrophes . . . I was telling you about a fire earlier. We had a boat, the *Midnight Sun*, our first boat. It was in

Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, and it was going to go to South Africa. And it took off along the coast of East Africa and it was a typhoon of some sort that hit about halfway of the trip and they were around the coast of Somalia. I do not know if Somalia, if you have kept up with all of the political things with Somalia . . . they got pushed into the coast about 2 miles into the limits and they got seized by the Somali government. Somalia seized . . . they had a crew of 18 geophysical service people and my crew of five. They seized the boat and put everybody in, well, it was not jail but more like a hotel, I guess, but they would not let them out. They kept them under surveillance. They accused them of being spies, American spies. In fact, I got an article by Robert Novak. He was writing for the New York Times, I guess, at the time. I had the article there, I will show you later. It says something about spy ship, American spy ship seized in Somalia. So, this is one of the reasons I went to Rome to try to solve that problem with one of the Texas Instruments people. They stayed there 45 days in Somalia. I made a trip down to Somalia and I will tell you what, that was one of the scariest trips I have ever made. The State Department was scared to death. I had one State Department guy with me. I went to Washington, talked to the State Department to try to get some help. They were scared to death to say anything. They did not want me to say anything because it was being run by 25 Communist generals at the time. So, I went to Somalia and I went to this town called Mogadishu where

they had this Black Hawk Down incident. I was in Mogadishu. We flew down from Mogadishu to a town in Somalia called Kismaayo which is about 100 miles down. It is on the coast. And our boat was tied up at a pier. It goes out about one mile into the Indian Ocean that the U.S. Corps of Engineers built for them. That was the only boat tied up at this huge, fantastic pier over in Kismaayo, Somalia. And, of course, I was down there with the State Department guy and a guy from Geophysical Service. The State Department guy was mainly there to keep us from saying anything or causing trouble with these people. They were really scared that we were involved with this. So, we did not do any good down there in Somalia. They would not talk to us about releasing them. These guys were down there with me. We had spaghetti every day because they are black people but they all speak Italian in Somalia. That is their language. They had close ties to Italy. So, me and this guy from GSI went to Rome and the Somalian connection through the ambassador in Rome actually got our boat out. He helped. He threw a little weight down to the people in Somalia and got them to release our boat. None of the people were hurt. They were all in good shape. They sailed on out of there after 45 days of being in prison in Somalia.

JC: They had been treated all right?

VG: They were treated okay. They were not tortured or anything like that. They were fed. Like I say, every day was spaghetti. They ate spaghetti every day. That is the only thing they were complaining about. They said, 'Every day, they fed us spaghetti.' But that was, I guess, the most intriguing event of going down to Somalia and seeing how those people live down there, to go to a place like that and see . . . I mean, you look at the side of a hill and there are like 500 people living under cardboard lean-to's and people going down the street on skateboards because they do not have any legs. It was just a terrible place. I would not want to go there again. I really would not. That was the most interesting incident I think . . . it was not interesting at the time, it was terrible, but it was the most intriguing event in running for the oil companies and geophysical companies.

JC: Your father was working with the company as well, right?

VG: Yes, my dad was pretty active, you know. I will tell you what – I graduated, I went to college and had all these degrees and all but he only went to third grade and he would outguess me most of the time. He was a good business man, a good hard-nosed business man and he made good decisions. He outguessed me a lot of times with his third grade education, I will tell you.

JC: Could he pilot the boats?

VG: No, all he would do is he would holler at them and fuss at them to make sure that they run it right, don't hit nothing, don't damage the boat. If they did, he would really raise a ruckus. He would watch that. When they docked boats and things like that, they had to do it right because he would be hollering at them. He would keep them in line.

JC: You are named after him.

VG: Yes. I am actually a junior but we do not actually have the same name. His middle name, I think, was Joseph. Mine is Anthony. So, we are really a junior but always did have junior on my birth certificate.

JC: And he was born in Berwick as well?

VG: He was born in 1911 in Berwick, yes.

JC: And his parents were first generation American?

VG: His parents, Joseph Guzzetta and Salvina, they were both born in Italy. Joseph Guzzetta came over, I am not sure if it is 1907, 1906 . . . came over by himself from Italy on a boat, checked in at Staten Island where all of the immigrants would come in, and he came down here, opened a shoe shop, had a few gallons of olive oil, from what Nina [Guzetta] told me. He came down with three or four gallons of olive oil and started a business. Started fixing shoes. And then he sent for his wife. She came over here a few years later and they started the shoe fixing business and that was basically it. He was a shoemaker his whole life.

JC: Do you know why they chose Louisiana?

VG: No, I do not know exactly why they decided to come here. I think he had one brother that went to Argentina and why he came to Louisiana, I do not know. He came in to New York but why he came to Louisiana, I never did find out. Nina probably would have known something, my Uncle Nina. He is gone now.

JC: So, your father had a nickname, didn't he?

VG: Baby. Baby Guzzetta. They named him that because he was a pretty good baseball player. They had a team in Berwick and they kind of nicknamed him

after Babe Ruth a little bit, called him Babe Guzzetta. That is how he first started. And pretty soon, it was baby. Changed it from Babe to Baby.

JC: So, he was not a boat captain or a sailor?

VG: No. He owned a couple of shrimp boats. We had some shrimp boats at the time we were in the seafood business. We did have some shrimp boats, but he never went out shrimping or anything like that, or operated any oil boats. He was just basically keeping them all in line. That was his job. He liked to do it, too.

JC: What about Guzzetta Oil? Was there not a company named Guzzetta Oil?

VG: That was our fuel company. It was a different corporation from the boat company. For accounting reasons and liability reasons, we had different corporations. So, Guzzetta Oil Company was a Conoco distributor and we took on Conoco distributorship over here and we had some Conoco service stations that we operated, probably about six or seven service stations that we operated.

JC: In this area? In the Morgan City area?

VG: Yes, in Morgan City, we had about seven stations here in the Morgan City area. All the Conoco stations. We had one in Patterson, I think two in Morgan City or three, one in Amelia and one further down towards Homer. We had, I think, 7 altogether.

JC: So, Guzzetta Oil then was the company that fueled the boats?

VG: That is right. They would fuel the boats. We had barge and diesel fuel. Most of the boats operated on diesel fuel. We would barge in our fuel from Lake Charles, the Conoco refinery in Lake Charles, barge it over here and distribute to the boats to go offshore.

JC: You always hear about there was a lot of money flowing back in those days and the service companies would take the oil field people out or buy them gifts. Did you have any experience or knowledge of things like that?

VG: That was the going thing in the 1970s. I mean, everybody would take clients out to go eat and party at night and things like that. We had certain customers . . . most of our clients were like . . . like I say, the geophysical companies and we very seldom had very much contact with them where I would see people going

out and eating and all but it was a lot of partying and taking people out to go eat. People used to give their customers cases of whiskey and gee, that all came to a screeching halt probably in 1980. All the oil companies got tight. They did not want you to give anything to any of the employees. I think it is a good thing. It kind of cleaned the business up a lot.

JC: Do you think that . . . I mean, I have even heard of things like cars being given as gifts.

VG: Really? I do not know. I would imagine it probably could have happened. There were some big contracts, some of the big companies like McDermott . . . we had big companies building platforms over here. That would be really . . . I never heard anything like that. But I guess it could have happened.

JC: How long did the company operate?

VG: Well, we operated until about 1990. By 1990, we sold the last boats. Actually, when my dad died . . . he died in about 1990 . . . we sort of phased the business out. The business was not that good anymore, we wanted to get out of the oil company because of the environmental restrictions. When the underground tank

thing that everybody was concerned about, underground tanks, so we had about 20 underground tanks. I had to take out a service the proper way. I really had enough of the environmental regulations. I wanted to get out of anything environmental. I don't want to have anything to do with anything where I had to worry about an environmental situation. So, we were in the gasoline business. That was rough. All of the businesses we were in were extremely controlled by environmental regulations and I had enough of it. I did not want to wake up one morning and find out we spilled . . . one time, we spilled like one quart of diesel fuel, accidentally dropped in a river and it cost us $1,700. I said, "Well, that is enough." The fine was $1,700, and we cleaned it up at that. One quart of diesel. Now, in the old days, like in the 1960s, I mean, people used to spill thousands and thousands of gallons of diesel fuel overboard. They would clean their barges out, throw it overboard. This was bad. All of that has changed. They changed it to where you cannot even spill a few drops of something, make a big sheen on the water and you get fined. I finally said, I had enough of that. I do not want to be waking up and finding out we dropped something overboard and the Coast Guard is going to fine you and all that stuff. In about 1990, I decided to shut it all down.

JC: Your father had passed away at that time?

VG: Yes, he had passed away. I have two sisters and a brother and we were all working together. It was time, I think, to dissipate the whole operation and sort of go our own ways, each individual.

JC: So, it was a family company then? Your brothers and sisters worked there as well?

VG: My sisters worked over there at the office, yes, and my brother. We all worked at one time or another, we were involved there. But my sisters, they moved to Colorado and they sort of got out of it. They like let me sort of take care of everything for them and whatever. They wanted to go to Colorado and live in beautiful Colorado. That was about 1990 and that is when we shut everything . . . pretty well started closing everything down. So, I guess that is about the whole scope of our operation from about 1965 to 1990, about 35 years.

JC: You lived in this area most of your life and obviously, you have worked closely with the oil industry but you've also seen it . . . Just in general, what do you think the industry brought to you or to Morgan City?

VG: I think it was a good thing. I think the oil industry is a good industry. All the oil

companies mean well. They get downplayed. They get trodded upon by just about everybody, but they do very good things for the country. They are responsible. I think they brought a lot to this area. Morgan City is limited and we are losing out to places like Fourchon. Have you heard of Fourchon? They are taking everything over there. We just did not . . .

JC: Do you mean in the way of ports?

VG: In the way of port, in the way of business. People are going to Fourchon. They are going to Cameron. They are going to different ports other than Morgan City today. We were one of the major ports early on. But it is a lot easier to work out of Fourchon or Cameron or Intercoastal City, Galveston, Freeport, Texas, Venice – every place is a little more accessible than Morgan City now. I think the area is not going to get any better than we are now. I think this is the best we can get.

JC: Why do you think Morgan City lost out on that to these other places?

VG: Well, they never did dredge the channel deep enough, for one thing. It is not deep enough to get any big equipment through or big rigs and all that they wanted, and other places I mentioned like Fourchon and so forth, they are right on the Gulf.

Fourchon, you are right on the Gulf there. Five minutes and you are offshore. Here, we have 18 miles to go down this river, a rough river that winds and you have got to know . . . the bottom mud banks. It is a little harder to come in Morgan City. I think people just got easier locations to work out of. So, Morgan City definitely has disadvantages. As much as I would rather have people here, they are not going to come back. But the oil companies, they helped this area out. They got it started. Now, they are in other areas but I think the oil companies should get a little more public support than get constant criticism for being an oil company – you are a mean corporation. It is not like that. We really ought to let them operate their business a little bit more efficiently and a little more easier than we do with the regulations. It is good. Some regulations are good but just like I was talking about refineries, we have not built a new refinery in the United States in 25 years or more. That is why we depend on oil from Iraq and Saudi Arabia and all these people that hate us, because we are not letting the oil companies do so things which they do responsibly. They are all very responsible people. But they have to make money. They cannot open a refinery with so many regulations that the cost is prohibitive to operate a refinery. So, this is my view of it. I think the environmental regulations are good to a certain point but they listen to the environmentalists. Everything the environmentalists say, they believe it, and not everything is true. Some of the things are really good but some of them overstep

the good of the country, and I think that is why you have not seen anything happen as far as our dependence on foreign oil getting any better. That is just my personal view.

JC: You mentioned that the oil companies are often attacked. Why do you think they are attacked? You said they were down played.

VG: Well, because the environmentalists attack them all the time. Constantly. You can take an environmental group of four people and get on CNN and say, 'Well, we are the National Environmental Council of America,' and you only have four people in this organization, and CNN will put you on because you are an environmental group. Four people. And they say, 'Oh, the oil companies do this. The oil companies pollute. The oil companies steal. They make the price of gas high. The fumes are killing people,' and CNN will put all that on there. People say, 'Golly! These oil companies are really bad,' but it is only small groups of environmentalists that sort of create a bad image of oil companies.

They are fighting right now . . . I noticed a lot of ads about BP and a couple of other companies. Kerr McGee is doing a lot of good ads trying to make a good image, but I think they are responsible and they ought to be given a little bit more

credit for what they are doing but they are not going to get it. They are not going to get it.

JC: Well, is there anything else that you would like to add?

VG: No. Do you have any other questions? Anything that goes down your line of thought?

JC: One other question that I had . . . I know you know we are talking about the 1960s and the 1970s. Did you have many blacks or women working for your company or in the area?

VG: Oh, yes. There were never many black sailors or offshore people. I do not know – they never did get into the boat field. But we did have some blacks working for us on the boats. Not many but if we could find them, we would hire them. Women, no. I cannot say . . . that was sort of a touchy situation to put a woman on a boat . . . the problem more likely, to me, was like if the wives knew there was a woman on the boat and they go offshore for three weeks, they would get all concerned about it – more of a jealousy type situation. Women would cause the jealousy. They actually caused a woman not being on a boat because of the

jealousy element. That is my personal view, that is all.

JC: So, were there some every once in a while?

VG: There were some every now and then, yes. I am not sure but it seems like we had a couple of women cooks. There were never any women captains or anything like that. If there were, we would have hired them if they were qualified. But like at the service stations and all, it was almost all women. One time, I think, Guzzetta Oil Company, out of maybe 50 employees, probably I was the only man working, I think. We might have had like 45 out of 50 were all women.

JC: Really?

VG: Oh, yes.

JC: And that was Guzzetta Oil?

VG: Guzzetta Oil, yes. But on the boat companies, it was not a prevalent thing that you would see on any boat company, really. Some of the big companies like Tidewater, they probably had to put women on for . . . having like 2,000

employees, you had to do something to show that you hired women. But there is nothing wrong with it as far as I am concerned. I think it is a good thing.

JC: O.K.

VG: Do you think you got enough?

JC: Yes.

**THE END**