

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Roger Baccigalopi

COLLECTION: 4700.2360

IDENTIFICATION: Cameron Parish resident, turtle hunter, hurricane survivor

INTERVIEWER: Logan Broussard

SERIES: Louisiana Sea Grant Coastal Change Oral Histories Project

INTERVIEW DATE: October 30, 2012

FOCUS DATES: 1957, 1958, 1960s, 1970s, 2005

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4285

Roger Dean Baccigalopi was born in Creole on November the 29, 1958; growing up in Cameron Parish was a fun time for the kids; when he was little, they had cattle and calves to play with and chickens to catch; he duck-hunted behind the house in the back pasture; he has noticed how the change in the marsh has led to a decrease in the ducks; his granddad would plant cornfields and they would handpick corn in the fall and pick beans in the summertime; whenever he was out of school, he had to work; some of the fun stuff included turtle hunting; when Baccigalopi was in the first grade, he could hardly speak any English, because they had to speak French to his grandpa and great grandpa; once he got to school, he got away from the French and never got back into it; his dad was a lifetime carpenter; he built houses and still today builds cabinets; his mom had been a nurse at South Cameron Hospital and now works at a nursing home north of Lake Charles; Baccigalopi always helped his dad doing carpenter work; there was a lot of oil field business; jobs were easy to get back then; everybody had a job anytime of the year; Baccigalopi remembers a lot of freedom to do anything he wanted when he was a child; could ride a bike anywhere without being worried about cars, because there was not much traffic; everybody was friends and/or worked with everybody else, people did not hate on each other; Creole was paved; Little Chenier had mostly shell roads; they built the Little Chenier Road when he was a kid; Baccigalopi grew up trapping since he was 11 or 12 years old; that is how he made his money for school clothes since his parents did not make much money; once the storms hit, he got away from the duck hunting because there is not really a place to go hunting any more without spending too much money; he trapped nutria, muskrat, coon, and mink; have to go find the nutria; explains trapping them; then the animal is shot, skinned, dried out, and brought to the fur buyer; when you're a kid, you're proud to have that money; When he was a teenager Baccigalopi's enjoyed playing sports at South Cameron, including wrestling and football; he wasn't one that wanted to just go out all the time; Baccigalopi had about 80 seniors in his class; Baccigalopi has noticed a huge difference in climate from then to now; explains how he knows it's hotter now; Baccigalopi's family evacuated many times in the past due to storms; they would always come back and nothing happened; Baccigalopi starts to choke up when talking about

Hurricane Rita changing everyone's life down there; He estimates 95% of the people in lower Cameron Parish lost their homes; it was hard to get started again; you work all your life and then you lose it all in one time; just because you collect insurance doesn't mean you can do what you want when you come back; they brought back in another trailer so that FEMA didn't interfere but Ike took it three years later; he couldn't get insurance on it; now he and his family live in three separate campers: he and his wife in one and his two kids in two separate campers; his kids basically have to live on their own and he can't buy them everything they need; he talks more about how his family was supposed to get support from the government and from Road Home; due to the difficulty of living in Cameron Parish, his family is going to move away as soon as his daughter finishes school; they can't afford to live there anymore; he feels that the local government is hurting them, because they've helped some that didn't need assistance but haven't helped him; he grew up and lived his entire life in Cameron Parish and worked for the Cameron Telephone Company for 33 years; he stayed because of his job, but got laid off in February; his wife is working; his son is working and can take care of himself; Baccigalopi can't provide for his daughter; he can't afford to build a house in Cameron based on FEMA regulations; with his telephone company job, he knows a lot of people in Cameron Parish; as such, he knows who got assistance and who didn't and he sees a disparity in the distribution of money; talks at length about Cameron changing and says a lot of people are leaving and not coming back; Baccigalopi talks about a river that used to come out of Grand Chenier in front of Rutherford Beach, by the Gulf; across that was Hackberry Beach; with all the storms, that part of the river was closed off; a new river was dredged from the Mermentau Bridge straight south out of Grand Chenier; there used to be a big line of trees at Hackberry Beach; about 1/2 mile of beach has washed out, causing a drop-off into the Gulf; sand has built up on Rutherford Beach, but the beach is washing further back; there used to be camps there, but the water is right in front of where the camps and houses used to be; the coastline has eroded a lot on the Gulf; there are a lot of dry spells and a lot of poor drainage areas; in East Creole, it took five weeks for the water to go down; a lot of levees are built around East Creole so the water has nowhere to go; the marshes are nothing compared to when he was growing up; they have dried up so much; it is easier to walk across them now; back when he was a kid, the marshes were so boggy, if you got stuck, you had to pull on something to get out; there used to be cattle in the marshes, but very few people raise them now; since the hurricane, a lot of the marsh has become overgrown with bullwhips and cattails; you cannot drive a boat there anymore because the storm piled up mud everywhere; it is hard to get through canals to catch fish; he doesn't fish out there anymore; Baccigalopi was told that many years ago a fire took place on Miami Corporation land that burned the whole marsh; he thinks that's when they named it The Big Burns; there are coyotes running around that you can hear but there's not as much food for them; they used to have a lot of nutria and muskrat out in the marsh, but storms washed away or killed many of them.; if you went to a ridge where all the debris was piled up, there was a lot of dead wildlife; Baccigalopi does not really see a future for Cameron Parish; for him there is not going to be a future; all he can see that may stay in the area is the oil industry along the river; not many people are getting back into the cattle business; people cut hay where cattle used to be kept; the oil spill hit the oil industry hard and shut down a lot of surrounding businesses; Baccigalopi sees more of the younger generation not staying once they get out of school; there are really no jobs or businesses here; his kids are tired of evacuating; people are tired of evacuating and cannot afford to build up off the ground, per FEMA regulations; he does not see it growing; Baccigalopi says his advice for a young Cameron resident is to go to school, get a good education, but he does not seem him building here; he tells

Broussard to find the best job possible and it will probably be somewhere else; if another Hurricane Rita comes, even the houses up off the ground can get destroyed; Baccigalopi is not taking another chance like that; his kids are tired of hurricanes; back when he was a kid, evacuating was a game, and your house was still there when you returned; he did not go through the same experiences with hurricanes, as did his kids; when Hurricane Audrey came in 1957, the year before he was born, it was just a bunch of wind and water; he never imagined a hurricane until he came back after Rita; his voice breaks as he talks about how it tears family apart; he is tired of moving out of them; back when he was growing up, the duck-hunting limit was ten ducks and they would cook it all in one meal; explains how to raise and butcher turtles; one good thing is the decrease in snakes since the hurricane; he used to hunt deer in Grand Lake and Big Lake; Now he hunts deer a lot in Alabama; that is his future destination; his son may stay down in Cameron; Baccigalopi says his heart cannot handle it anymore; he is drained out emotionally and physically; it is the hurricane that killed him along with not getting the help from the government.

TAPES: 1 (T4285)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 33 minutes

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OTHER MATERIALS: Video clip from interview; Interviewer essay

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