

HHA # 00378  
Interviewee: Billy Rodgers  
Interviewer: Steven Wiltz  
Interview Date: April 4, 2003  
Interview Site: Lafayette, LA  
Interview Module & No.: SWO46  
Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of "uhs" and "ums", repeated words, and the interviewer's backchanneling have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. I had a difficult time understanding the interviewee at times; he indicated he had a cold and sounded congested.]

Ethnographic preface:

Billy Rogers was born in 1926 in Northeast Texas, near oilfields, but they never found oil on his family's land. He didn't think he would attend college, but after serving in Korea, he attended school using the G.I. Bill, and majored in Engineering. He was hired by Humble Oil and Refining Company (later Exxon), and worked in Texas and Louisiana. He discusses life in Grand Isle and compares the past oil industry to the present-day's.

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TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [BR]

SW: Okay. This is an interview with Mister Billy Rodgers. It's April fourth, 2003, in his home. Like I said before when we were um, talking, I'd like to get a little bit of background on you about where you're from, where you, you mentioned you weren't from here, from Lafayette, where [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

BR: I'm originally from Texas. I can't talk too good. [Clears throat] Maybe it'll clear up. [Slight pause] Northeast, I'm from northeast Texas where they have a lot of oil, big oilfields in the early days of the oil industry. I was not near one of 'em actually, though. [Chuckles] I uh [Pause] you can edit things out can't you?

SW: Yeah.

BR: Is that enough, you want a little more detail where I'm from?

SW: Is that in the Kilgore area or [north of there?]?

BR: Well that is, yeah. Kilgore where they had all the field, oilfields. But I'm northeast of, I'm northwest of... get my directions straight, [I guess I'm?] northwest of Kilgore. And we were too far west, we didn't have any of the oil around there like, you know, like they did in the great east Texas field. [Inaudible].

SW: What year were you born?

BR: Nineteen twenty-six.

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SW: Twenty-six, okay. How did you get involved in the oil industry? What brought you there?

BR: Well, I guess growing up as a kid, you know, the, there was every now and then a, they would come in and drill a wildcat well around, fairly close to us. They were all dry, they never did find anything, but my dad would get his hopes up, you know, when they were drilling, "Man, we're gonna be rich." [Chuckles] That never happened. And, but I [Pause] I'm tryin' to think of things and put 'em in the right order. Growin' up I worked on the farm, my family farm, but I didn't like all the hard hours that you had to put in there, so I didn't really want to stay with that. [Sighing] And then I just kind of, you know, took the easy way to do everything. I just barely made passing grades in school, I didn't, and I didn't plan on going to college, 'cause I didn't think it was possible. My dad, I knew he couldn't send me, pay for, I knew he couldn't pay for it, and I didn't think I was industrious enough to work my way through school. But then had a business partner at one time, this was after I was farming. [It was eight person?] went into a cotton buying business and he had a partnership with this one guy that I thought an awful lot of. And I came back from World War Two, I did not do any fighting, I was in, but I was in Korea during that time. [Clears throat] And I came back and... they, I was talkin' to this Mister Riley that's my dad's business partner and he was sayin', was wantin' to know what I was plannin' to do now. You know, [Inaudible]. And I said, "Well, I'll probably just go back to the dry good store that I worked in some." And I, that was pretty good work, I thought. And I said, "I'll probably end up tryin' to get a job there." He says, "Well let me tell you somethin'. You got the GI Bill. You got a opportunity here to go to college and at the government expense almost, you know." He said, "What did you like in school? What subjects were you good in?" I said, "Math was the only thing that I liked. I liked math." Says, "Okay. Tell you what, you go to college, you take engineering. You study engineering. If you like engineering, you'll do good." Well, I listened to him, and that was about the length of the conversation, but, you know, kind of a casual conversation, but I took it to heart. And followed his idea, you know. When the next semester rolled around, well I was in s-, in college. [Chuckles] And so-

SW: Over there in Texas?

BR: Yeah, that was in Texas. I went to Tyler Junior College two years and then I went to Texas A and M and finished up gettin' my degree in civil engineering at Texas A and M. And [Pause] after I got out of college I, you know, interviewed several companies and one of 'em happened to be Humble Oil and Refining Company, which later was changed to several different names and now it's Ex-, Exxon and, well, it was Exxon, now it's Exxon-Mobil. [Chuckles] And they're good company. They're a very, very good company. They had a lot of good benefit plans for their employees. And so I interviewed about four, five companies when I got out, I graduated, and Exxon was the one I chose. I think I got four offers out of three, five interviews and I chose Exxon and worked around east Texas and surveying some out of the Tyler office and into the Houston, worked awhile in Houston, 'bout three or four years, and that part of, that work there was connected with offshore activities. It, more of the floating type, you know, barges and tugs and drill-, drilling tenders, and uh, we did several designs. And I built several cargo barges and then finally I came to Grand Isle and, well I was transferred to New Orleans first. You know, and I was down in Grand Isle. And I stayed at Grand Isle a long time, enjoyed it. It was so, right, you're right on the water, so convenient and go out and fish and it was good fishing, you could always catch a lot of fish around there. And so I enjoyed that and I enjoyed the work. I did lots of different kinds of work. I guess the one that I enjoyed the most was working with the derrick barge. We had a derrick barge that we built. In fact, we helped design the [bid?] package when I was in Houston, I was involved in that. Later on went to New Or-, to Grand Isle and worked with that derrick barge, scheduling the work for it and uh... and that was fun. That was, you know, at the time the thing was built, it was the, oh, it was the largest thing around, 250 tons lifting capacity on the crane. And now they've got some s-, 8,000 ton cranes, you know. Oh it's hard to [Chuckling] imagine how big some of those things are, but they're humongous. Anyway, I stayed several years there and I enjoyed that work. And uh, it involved the erection of the offshore platforms that had been fabricated and floated out on barge and then we launched the jacket and pushed it over into the water, you know. And we tied onto the jacket and rided it and started driving piling through the jacket legs. And finally set the deck on top of it. And uh, it was just enjoyable work to go out and see that uh, all got taken place. I didn't go out too much, I was mainly in my office. But I did go out once in awhile.

SW: You guys were preparing those rigs to be sent offshore or these were the barges that were staying inshore?

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BR: Now I didn't understand the question.

SW: You guys were preparing those rigs that were being sent out offshore? Makin' 'em up and-

BR: Well okay-

SW: And building them more or less or?

BR: Yeah, yeah. Well, let me try to get nomenclature straight. What I said when somebody says to me "rig," that means a drilling rig. My, lot of people will say "rigs," say rig when they are talking about a platform. A steel jacket that has steel pipe driven in it for piling and then when it gets so far it's cut off and the production deck, the deck which includes production equipment, is then lifted and set on top of that foundation. Now, you got the platform up here, now the drilling rig comes on top of that. Uh, I might have some pictures around here.

SW: [Inaudible].

BR: Could show you. Might work out somethin'... oh, well we'll talk about that later.

SW: Okay, sure.

BR: I'm [Slight pause] but the, then see, then the drilling rig could be removed after it drilled all the wells, it could be removed and used again another location.

SW: And the platform remains in the spot for production.

BR: Right. That is right. [Pause] You know, the, I retired in '86, 1986, so I've been retired now s-, about 17, goin' on 17 years, and the things that they are doing today, and especially in the deepwater, in the 5,000 foot water depth, more and deeper than that, uh, they're able to go out and a different concept, different kind of platform. It's just one big pipe, one big caisson that's 120 feet in diameter and about seven or eight hundred feet long. And it's floated out to location and then by flooding certain part of it [it's righted?] and then they anchor, they've got anchors that they've set out [in array?] prior to the arrival of this caisson. And the caisson comes up to there, the boats will bring the cables in and hook it up to the caisson and that caisson is anchored right there, it's got about 16 anchors in all directions. And that, it floats right there. It never does touch bottom. See the parts that's upright seven, eight hundred feet long. But you're in 5,000 feet of water, so it's not even touching the bottom by a long ways, over 4,000 feet. This depends, you know, some deepers than that [Inaudible], I have a few slides I know they're still on my computer. This particular big structure I was talkin' about in 5,000 feet of water, [you can see some of it?].

SW: How does it stay in place then if it's not touchin' the bottom?

BR: The buoyancy holds it up. The anchor cables are hooked to it and probably about 16 cables, so that's, what is that about 22 and a half degrees? Somethin' like that. The cable is big enough that it holds, all the cables working together hold it in place. The weight, anchors pulling down. The buoyancy is pushing up. So there's a balance between buoyancy and the weight of the structure and the weight of everything's up here. It's hard to describe, but I'll show you these slides. It'll help you understand it a whole lot better. [Chuckles]

SW: It sounds pretty impressive, yeah.

BR: And, yeah, see all this is new technology. Technology had to be developed for this kind of structure. We, you know, at the time I was working I thought, and we were, we were right on the edge of technology in depth. We started out buildin' platforms a certain way. As we got deeper water, we had to change and had to go to different ways. And we had some new technology developing all the time. But this uh, the caisson is far beyond anything I ever imagined when I was working.

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SW: They're runnin' out of oil in the shallow areas, so they've gotta keep going deeper, right.

BR: That's right. I'm sure, well, there's, there may be some that they haven't found, but, in the shallow they have exhausted supply pretty well in the shallow water. And there's some, lot of fields out there in deep, deep water. It'd be so expensive to produce, but [they?] keep tryin'.

SW: Yeah, well eventually when there's, that's the only place they can get the oil, I guess they'll have to, right?  
[Chuckles]

BR: Yeah, yeah. I, [Inaudible] I don't know if I ever said it, it made me want to go back to the construction when I saw this monstrous caisson I call it [Inaudible] it's a deepwater, floating vessel or something, they've got a name for it. [Chuckles] But [Slight pause] it's a, it was an interesting business. We had, lo-, enjoyed it a lot. I'd advise anyone that's interested in construction or civil engineering to get into this phase of civil engineering 'cause it's a great business to be in.

SW: When you were at Grand Isle, you stayed there for awhile you said.

BR: Uh hm.

SW: You work mo-, mostly in the office though?

BR: Yeah.

SW: Can you tell me a bit about your typical work schedule and what you did on a typical day out there at Grand Isle?

BR: We-, okay. We usually had some construction crews doing some type of work around different locations and uh, our job was to plan what they were gonna do next, you know, and see that they had the materials they needed for that job. Have to order some steel, [get?] some pipe or [plays?] or uh, structural members. Just whatever the job called for we would order that. And then, and, you know, have it ready for them. Prepare some drawings sometimes to show what [how?] we wanted this [new little?] item to fit on the platform somewhere, you know. Might be a, we had mooring buoys and uh, in the deepwater platforms, but in the shallow water platforms we had dolphins right next to the platform. The boat can come up and lay up against this dolphin and a lot of times we had rubber bumpers on this side, so it wouldn't tear up the boat too badly. And those things would be, need to be replaced occasionally. So they go out and put those on. And there was other kind of work that we had to do. And so we needed to plan what they were gonna do, get to, order the materials that they would need, prepare your drawings that they might need, and just, there was, there's always a 1,000 jobs [Chuckling] to do. Some little things that it doesn't, you know, you don't take, it doesn't take too long to do it, but then you got so many of 'em sometimes that y-, [have you?] all day and then some. You know, sometimes you, and you hardly ever get caught up, there's always somethin' else to do when you finish this. Now there's somethin' else. And when, on a pretty good size projects we had to prepare cost estimates on what that project would cost to erect that we're fabricating. And [Clears throat] and then we would, most of the time we'd have to submit what we called "AFE," it's Authority For Expenditure. Just a way of manage, management had to control the expenditure of the department. [That way back then?]. You know, they'd have to get approval of upper management to, for large projects. Real small things we could handle, you know. But-

SW: Large projects might, had a lot of expenses or something that they wanted to keep track of.

BR: Yeah. Right.

SW: And you guys built, or fabricates, Humble was a fabrication outfit I guess is what you'd say or is, would you call it a fabrication outfit?

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BR: No. [Chuckling] No. The fabrication angle is just a necessity. Humble Oil, now Exxon, is a oil producing, oil and gas producing company [Inaudible] and also we have a refining division. So we, they sometimes break it up into upstream and downstream. Upstream considers exploration, and drilling, and gettin' it ready to produce, and maybe even uh, producing. But downstream we'd have to transport that all, pipeline to some refinery, and there it would be refined in the components that they wanted, and then sold as chemicals or as gasoline, lubricating oil, all the products you get at the service station. So they go from one end to the other. They cover the whole spectrum of the business. Now the fabrication is just somethin' that we do to be able to go out there and drill that well. The plat-, it's important, it's not, don't mean it's not important, it is. A- [Clears throat] and some, several platforms, well I'll say some platforms have been destroyed by hurricane. So we need to put that platform in there, make it strong enough to withstand hurricane and yet don't have three times the strength that you need. It's, it has to be, and it has to be designed properly and then we bid it out to various contractor, various fabricators. They fabricate the land-, we call it "land phase," everything on land. We fabricate the jacket, the deck section, and the cais-, the piling that go in the jacket legs to, [Inaudible] mud line [where?] depending on the soil condition, you might have to give it two, three hundred, 400 feet, maybe more in the mud. [Inaudible] if it's not very good soil. But once we get it all fabricated and ready to go offshore, then we get bids from erection contractors and uh, so that they, usually the low bid, low bidder gets the job, and we schedule the work and he gets, he takes care of everything that [Inaudible] all the piling out there, get the jackets loaded up, and get the deck section loaded up. This is all done maybe at Morgan City, McDermott or Brown and Root used to be in the business. Brown and Root doesn't do much, I don't think, anymore. I've been out of it 17 years and I, lot of things have happened. [Chuckles]

SW: Lot of changes.

BR: Since, you know, [Inaudible] time.

SW: Were you working in the office eight to five, Monday through Friday, or did you work weekends or did you follow that, I know that off-, those offshore guys have seven and seven and 14 and 14, and things like that, did you guys have to match up to their schedule or-

BR: No we, basically we had a five and two schedule in the office. We would work, you know, five days and then have Saturday and Sunday off. Except we would have a limited crew, I s-, work the weekend. We had a weekend schedule. So when I first started we would uh... I think we would work, I don't think I ever worked every weekend straight through. We'd work one weekend and off the next. And then as things got a little better, years later, all of us would work one and off two weeks. And then we'd work one and off three. It gradually got better and better, where uh, I don't know now, but the best I remember was maybe about once a month we'd have weekend duty. And we'd be in the office [Inaudible, overlapping speech].

SW: Rotated amongst each other and, with all the employees.

BR: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

SW: Alright.

BR: We'd have some engineers on duty, maybe geologist, things that we needed everyday that, the personnel we needed everyday.

SW: And did you have a family at this time?

BR: Yes. Yes, I sure did. We had two beautiful children uh, when we moved to Grand Isle. And, a boy and a girl, so uh, the, Exxon campsite on Grand Isle, where they had all the employee houses that just looked just alike. And there was no entertainment, you know. You had to make your own entertainment, so they played a lot of Bridge. The women played Bridge occasionally during the day. And then, and on the weekends we'd bring the husbands into it,

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you know, we'd play Bridge. And, or we'd have shrimp boils, crawfish boils. We made our own entertainment. And it was like one big family there with Exxon. One big family. If you, if you, when we went to the store we didn't say "store," we'd say, "Up the bayou." You goin' up the bayou. We were at the end of the line, you know. "Goin' up the bayou. Yeah, gotta go buy me some shoes." Well, and the, then you get home and you don't like the shoes. So you call around and somebody's goin' up the bayou the next day, say, "Hey, would you take this pair of shoes up there and get me credit for it, 'cause I don't wanna dress this," [Inaudible] there were always people goin' and just, and they'd always help you out, take stuff for ya, buy somethin' for you [Chuckling] and bring it back. You know, it was a big, big happy family. [Chuckles]

SW: Well how big was the camp itself?

BR: I believe I remember that we had 122 houses. One hundred twenty-two, one twenty-three. A bunch, somethin' like that. And actually it was kind of divided up into three sections. And the, we started with what we call the "po' boy section." Poor boy. [Chuckles] That was just rank and file employees that did everything. Young employees. Now the next section they call the "company side." The Exxon. If you were at a certain supervisory level you qualified for one of those homes. And then we had another group that was primarily for the, I think, for the helicopter pilots and mechanics. But after a few years you'd f-, you'd have a empty house over here and somebody comin' in and no other house, well he'd get that house. And they, we would move 'em back and forth, you know. They would, in other words we'd use whatever house was available. You could, except for the po' boy, except for the company side. Well there's, you know, you didn't ha-, just so you were there, there wasn't much qualification required. Well, anyway that worked out pretty good. And we [Pause] we sold a few of those as we gradually changed our operation and moved all of our people ou-, off of the island. And now you can, if you recog-, know what you're lookin' for, you can drive down the island, on the island and you can see the company houses scattered around. Moved 'em down there and made camps out of 'em. And they're good, sturdy house even, the hurricane can get 'em sometimes, but.

SW: What, I wanted to ask you about hurricanes, but first, you said you had the po' boy section and the company section. You had to qualify for the housing, were the houses in one section better than the other? Was that an incentive to try to be able to get into that area? [Chuckles]

BR: No, the houses were really about the same quality. The bi-, the difference was that in the poor boy side, I think this started with Exxon a long time ago, at a district office they would have a campsite. And that was really kind of called the po' boy's camp, you know. Uh... the difference at Grande Isle, on the poor boy's side you bought the house and you made monthly payments. And you were getting equity into it. But in the company side, you rented those. You just rented the house and utilities practically free, though we paid some minimum amount. We had our own gas, we had some gas that we would, came from offshore that we would separate, get the gas out for our use. And they, and we had electricity and we had water. We had to barge the water in and had big storage tank there. We would have, we had a tug and barge goin' all the time. Continuously go up the bayou [Chuckles] get filled up, come back, pump it back in there, head back. And-

SW: Up and down the bayou.

BR: Sometimes more than once. Yeah.

SW: Well it sounds almost like then if they were buyin' the home and putting equity in it that it was almost more beneficial to be in the po' boy section. [Both chuckle] This is when you left you could sell it.

BR: Yeah.

SW: Did the company cut you guys a break on a your rent or anything because-

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BR: Yeah, it was pretty economical rent. I think it was, way back there I think it was 10 dollars a room. They usually, the smallest house was for a pumper. It was a four-room house. So it cost him 40 dollars. Then a five-room and a six-room. Fifty, 60 dollars.

SW: A month, yeah.

BR: A month. That, you know, I'm talkin' about 40 years ago. [Chuckles] And, but, big difference. And I don't know what it'd be today, but they don't have any of that, all those houses are completely gone. And [Pause] there's very little personnel at the, at Grand Isle. [Clears throat] [Got?]-

SW: How 'bout, so it was almost like you guys were your own little town, your own little community right there. What about schooling for the kids and whatnot? They had a school there?

BR: They did. They had a school, public school. [Slight pause] But I guess when we start movin' in with that big influx of children, maybe they didn't have room to take care of 'em adequately. I don't know all early happenings that led to this, but eventually Exxon furnished b-, school buses. They furnished school buses to take the children up the bayou [Chuckles] to at least the first one was probably about 40 miles, 40, 45 miles to Golden Meadow. And then there was a elementary school, lower elementary. Then they went on up a little farther when they got in the upper elementary, and then finally went up to Galliano High School, by Galliano. Close to Galliano but Lafourche, South Lafourche High School. [Pause]

SW: So that's [Inaudible]. What about medical facilities if anybody had any problems? I mean, was there a hospital or infirmary or something like that?

BR: When we first went there, no, there was not. We h-, there was a doctor that came from Golden Meadow on Thursday. So if you had, needed to get sick, you needed to get sick on Thursday. [Chuckles] 'Cause that's when he would be there. And that's, for a long time that's all we had was that. And then we finally got a doctor to come and live on the island and stay there. And he was a great guy. Did a lot of helpful, lot of people with uh, he contacted cancer and died at a real early age. And now I think there are some doctors there. It's improved quite a bit from when we first went there. Yeah. They, [have?] a pipeline for instance, a pipeline comin' down the highway was transporting fresh water, they don't have to send the barges. Well, in the summertime if they get real short they might fire 'em up and let them, let the g-, barge or tug go get some more water, but they do have pipeline that comes in there. And keeps the reservoir full. So it's, everything's better than it was, 'course there's not [Chuckling] many people down there now, employees. And the island itself, well, it has a few little businesses and grocery store and, two or three grocery stores. Uh... motels, fishing camps, lot of people like to come down there and use that for their base to go out and go fishing. It's a real. [Slight pause]

SW: When you guys got transferred down there, that was the thing you did. Exxon or Humble at the time told you, "This is the place for you guys to live," so I guess that.

BR: That's right.

SW: It just seems very neat to me. You had your own little oil-related community down there. Everybody kind of knew each other and you guys were like a big family you said. [Chuckles]

BR: Yeah, that's right. It really was and they just, even today after we've been gone from there about 25 years, you know, we made some lifetime friends right there. And when they come through, you know, they stop and holler at us and we're glad to see 'em always and uh... they just several relations like that, you know. It's just everybody just knew, everybody was in the same boat and they knew they needed to help each other out if we could. And so this family-like closeness developed and it was just uh, oh I [Inaudible], I really, I wouldn't take anything for that experience, those experiences one after another down there with other members.

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SW: And how long were you down there in the Grand Isle camp?

BR: Well I think I was there about 18 years.

SW: So you, your children spent their formative years growin' up there?

BR: Yes. Yes. They went through all, went through uh, lower elementary on up through high school, at South Lafourche High. [Bussed?] I think South Lafourche... was... I'm thinkin' it was open my [Speaking slowly] son was a senior. I think. So.

SW: This was 1950s, 1960s?

BR: Yeah.

SW: About uh...

BR: Yeah.

SW: Yeah, you'd come back from Korea and finished up your school, I believe.

BR: Uh hm, yeah.

SW: And so-

BR: I graduated college in '53 as a, but this is quite a bit later.

SW: Yeah.

BR: Uh, I left there in '77. So if you subtract 18 from 77. [Calculating out loud]

SW: [You guys had?] 18 years you said.

BR: Yeah. See [SW chuckles] yeah, that'll-

SW: Your goin' back in the past.

BR: Uh hm. [Chuckles] Well, I'm, you know, when you get old, you take all kinds of medicine and I'm, some of it makes you kind of groggy.

SW: Groggy, yeah.

BR: And-

SW: I'm just trying to get a feel for the, what time period we're dealing with.

BR: Yeah.

SW: But that, that's pretty interesting. How did, how'd your children react to that? Do they uh, they have reminiscing stories about the time growin' up on the camp?



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BR: Yeah. Yeah. Most of 'em are very good stories that they can remember. You know, they had their friends and they kind of looked out for each other. Uh, things are just flashin' through my mind [SW chuckles] you know, I can't tell you all of 'em. But I was tryin' to think of somethin'. [Pause]

SW: Maybe there's a story about a hurricane? I wanted to ask about that. You guys were about as far south as you can be without being in the water. [Chuckles]

BR: Yeah, we had to evacuate several times. I think one year we evacuated five times.

SW: Whew.

BR: And that's somethin', usually we didn't have to evacuate any. [Clears throat] Uh... the children didn't realize the seriousness of the hurricane and they usually, it was just a big party to them. You know, the, you had kids, they just go to town and just get, check in the motel, and order room service, and go jump in the pool, and, you know, it's a vacation for them. [Chuckling] But then, but we realized that when we went back after the storm we may not have a house standing down there. And uh, so it wasn't so much fun for us. But, yeah, we, there's lots of stories, you know, I've thought one time that I would sit down and start writin' all the stories that I knew, try to get them all the stories, get other people to write stories. We have here, we have a annual reunion from the Exxon uh, campsite, or Exxon employees at E-, uh, Exxon Grand Isle employees. We're havin' it the twenty-sixth of this month here in Lafayette.

SW: Wow.

BR: This is our nineteenth, nineteenth or seventeenth. [Slight pause] And I think we're gonna have a real good turnout this year. [Pause] It looks like the motel, hotel reservations are goin' like pancakes. And so, somethin' else I wanted to tell you about it. Oh, I remember one little, one time this lady had just moved to the island and they [from?] Alabama or Mississippi, I'm not sure. But anyway, her husband was on duty and he had to work, that is he had to go with some of these big, big boats and the crew ship to the dock and drive the cars out on the deck and they put all bunch of cars, company vehicles on the, and took the boat inland, way inland, around New Orleans or someplace where they, you know, be a little better protected. Well she ended up having to drive the family car out. And she was kind of nervous and shook and she didn't understand just what the procedure was. She wasn't told much, he was gone and she just had to do the best. Well, she'd always heard 'em say, "Be sure and wear your lifejacket when this situation comes up. Just be sure you wear your lifejacket." She wore that lifejacket for about 80 miles up the bayou [Chuckling] you know. The, you didn't need the lifejacket in the car.

SW: Yeah, while she was drivin' the car she was wearing her lifejacket.

BR: [Chuckling] Yeah, she had, yeah. [SW chuckles]

SW: I guess she was really fearful, though, I guess, I mean.

BR: Yeah, yeah.

SW: That thing, the hurricane's comin'.

BR: Yeah. [Pause]

SW: What about, were you ever concerned about job security in the oilfield because of its fluctuating nature? Did you ever have any problems where you thought you might not have a job?

BR: Well, yeah, there were some, at, you know [Clears throat] Exxon through the years has had times when they would reduce their staff. And more in the la-, and more recently than they used to. They used to if they hired somebody and he was capable to do what they ask him to do, well he had a job for life. But in recent years when

Interviewee: Rodgers, Billy

Interview Date: April 4, 2003

they, the oil economy is up and down and so it's just the uh... what's the word I'm tryin' to think of? The economy, the economy's up and down. And they uh, came out with at several different times, with early retirement package. And so we reduced the staff that way. And in fact when I retired, I took one of the early p-, retirement packages. I was only, I think I was fifty... no, I must've been 59. And I was thinkin' about workin' 'til I was 65. And they came up with this package. It would give me three additional years right then. Think it was 69 plus... what am I sayin'? But I [Pause] anyway [Chuckling] I took one of those early retirement packages. Usually you had to have so much service. You had to be, you know, getting close to retirement. And I was, I was uh, 59 and a half when I retired. And added three more years to it. That's the 59 and a half, that's the number I was tryin' to say.

SW: Okay.

BR: [Clears throat] And, so a lot, you know, a lot of people retired like that. And sometimes they retire a person and then they call 'em back and let 'em work awhile as a consultant. And that happens occasionally if they, a few people are doin' that right now.

SW: Did you do anything like that?

BR: Not for Exxon. I did a couple of years consulting for Phillips Petroleum here. Mainly it was some platform abandonments that [we?] pumped all the oil out when they removed the structure, take it to the bank. Or if it was in deep enough water and big enough structure, we, and we'd get proper approval from State of Louisiana or Texas, whichever one, you know, whichever k-, state controlled that offshore water. And we'd get approval, we would donate this platform for an artificial reef. And to do that we just cut the legs off and push it over and let it fall. And it, the fish, see the little all kind of fish and marine mammals and [Chuckles] things attach to the steel, oysters. All kinds of things that attach to the steel and then some other, then starts the feeding chain, you know, on up to all the different kinds and sizes of fish. They hang around those platforms.

SW: I've heard about this. They seem to gravitate towards the structure.

BR: Yes. And we leave 'em there when we can. I worked two years for Phillips doin' that kind of planning, bidding the work out. And not only that, we had some smaller jobs, but that was the main thing that [Clears throat] got this hoarseness [Inaudible] a couple of days ago. Wish it wasn't. [Clears throat]

SW: Well uh, I don't mean to make it any harder on you. I, I'm really pretty much finished with questions as far as I'm concerned if you'd like stop we can do that.

BR: Yeah. Okay.

SW: [Says that they can always do a follow-up interview if BR would like; notes that the stuff BR said about the Exxon camp was really interesting]

BR: Now you see, I've been gone from there about 25 years I think. And this reunion is comin' up. We're stopped already? We're off the?

SW: I'll stop it right now.

[END OF RECORDING]