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ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Charles Gaubert

COLLECTION: 4700.2101

IDENTIFICATION: Lockport, Louisiana, native. [b ca. 1942]; Holy Savior High School alumnus; Navy veteran, retired salesman from Valentine Paper; resident of Clotilda plantation; father, grandfather; practicing Catholic

INTERVIEWER: Victoria Gore

SERIES: Bayou Lafourche Oral History

INTERVIEW DATE: September 17, 2010

FOCUS DATES: 1940s-1950s [youth]; late 1960s [courtship with wife, navy, beginning of career], professional career [1967-2008]; 2010

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3947

Interview conducted for Coastal Sustainability Studio at LSU; Charles Gaubert, from Lockport, Louisiana, went to Holy Savior Catholic School in Lockport; wife Dee Dee is three years younger, also attended Holy Savior; when Gaubert was a junior she was in eighth grade and he fell in love; made plan to go to Navy for three years, get out of navy when she graduated, and marry; Dee Dee's mother had other ideas [education was important], so both went to college, got degrees, and then got married; Gaubert went to work at Valentine paper, eight miles below bayou from here; Gaubert was fortunate to get job; went to Nicholls State [University] in Thibodaux; during college he worked at law firm; in navy was yeoman, so did a lot of typing; Gaubert could type 100 words/min on a manual typewriter with no mistakes, so "they loved me"; law firm paid seventy-five cents/hour; in summers paid same rate to paint houses; one of law firm's clients was Valentine paper mill; Gaubert's senior year of college they contacted business department to interview students; no one wanted to interview [students wanted work in New Orleans]; Gaubert ended up getting best-paying job of graduating class; started work there in June of 1967; Dee Dee's mom said they couldn't get married until both had degrees and jobs; married September 1967 [have been married forty-three years]; have three girls; oldest daughter [Kathy?] is thirty-nine, Nicholls State grad, lives in Prairieville, Louisiana with three granddaughters; middle daughter [Sally?] went to LSU in Anthropology and played soccer; went to Fort Collins, Colorado, married, and Gaubert "doesn't think she's coming back"; youngest [Seely?] finished in LSU in business in May 2009 [2005?] and moved to London; was working at Regents College, got MBA and stayed for a position in admissions; met husband, another college recruiter, while traveling in Egypt; married and now live in London; Worked for Valentine paper forty-one years, closed down two years ago [2008]; Gaubert was 65 and nine months, which meant he was able to take retirement and full pension plan; was in sales, covered US; living here he could go during

week and knew family was looking after his wife and kids; Valentine was interesting paper mill; started in 1953 as joint venture between Valentine Sugars [next door], and Brown and Root [Houston]; byproduct of sugarcane, bagasse, could be turned into pulp; built plant with idea that they'd go to countries that grew sugarcane and try to build paper mills; every time dignitaries arrived they'd shut sugar mill down and bring employees over to paper mill [to make it look busy], run the paper mill so the visitors could observe it; ironically Valentine never sold a paper mill to another country; Gaubert explains that at first Valentine made newsprint, then with bleach could make fine paper; made tablet- and bond-grade paper until the early 1980s, then the price of natural gas went up [cost of gas tied to production, because they burned gas in sugar mills as fuel]; couldn't afford it; shut down pulp mill, started buying wood pulp [already processed]; were able to make better grades of paper; got into specialty end; beige sheet [?] for blueprint, wallpaper, surgical paper; made food-grade paper [example: Pizza Hut put pizzas on Valentine paper with cardboard below, all the McDonalds fry bags were Valentine paper]; still did offset, bond, and tablet; Valentine Paper lasted until December 2007; had been through six owners and the current owners weren't interested [in continuing], shut down plant; [closure was] sad because it employed a lot of people in area; but a lot of people went home and found better jobs; since then, two local guys [shipyard owner and the son of a former Nicholls president] bought property and are turning it into a biodiesel facility; so some good is still coming out of closure; wife's family [Barker] has lived here [Clotilda Plantation] for generations; Gaubert's family was down bayou eight miles [close to Valentine]; Gaubert's house was shared by great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, Gaubert, two sets of aunts and uncles all lived in house and "never had problem"; now everyone needs own room and bathroom; back then bathrooms were outside; his job every morning to take pochams [pot d'chambre, or chamber pot] and emptying them out; when we built first house they put in five bathrooms "I will never empty that again"; moved with parents to Lockport, everyone knows everyone; Dee Dee's family bought [Clotilda] right after civil war, has been in family ever since; that generation is changing; six brothers and sisters [Dee Dee's mother was one of six, Dee Dee first of her generation to get on the board of the plantation, now her cousins are starting to come, too]; John William [Barker] is the last brother that's alive; not doing too well but he's hanging in there; changing to next generation; Dee Dee's plan is to keep it in family; two of Gaubert's daughters got married here; middle one got married in Colorado; family generally stays around, though generation of Gaubert's daughters has to leave to get good-paying jobs [unless you want to work in oil and gas industry, be a fisherman or farmer]; Gaubert's father, great-grandfather were butcher; in WWII Gaubert's father and uncles saw there were other things they could do; father was a mechanic; Gaubert hired father as maintenance man during strike in paper mill in 1968 and he worked there until he retired; another uncle worked in pulp mill, another in boilers; "thank god we didn't have a rule about nepotism because they never would have found enough people to keep the mill running"; Gaubert's family had a "big house" but was just used for farming and cattle [mostly cattle – family had butcher shop]; didn't have land like Dee Dee's family; Dee Dee and Charles were first to build [on property]; divided up front section so kids could build, like a compound but it's just family that lives here; Gaubert's family didn't have enough land to be divided up, so uncle bought the whole place and rest of family moved to Lockport; Navy, traveling for three years, "opened up my life"; previously had only gone to New Orleans on "two-lane highways" and had never left the state; Navy flew him out to California; Gaubert became a surfer in 1960 [guesses he was the first Cajun to be surfing on west coast]; if it wasn't for wanting to marry Dee Dee he'd have stayed out west;

interviewer asks about transportation; there were gravel roads on both sides of bayou; bayou was also a form of transportation; used to bring mule-pulled barges up and down bayou [to sugar mill]; gradually became shell roads [dredged from Lake Pontchartrain]; finally got blacktop; now Port Fourchon generates a lot of traffic; "big life" has gotten here [to Bayou Lafourche]; Gaubert was sitting in back yard, looked up bayou and could see Burger King sign, and thought, "It will never be the same"; built a bridge at beginning of plantation [property], right where Gaubert lives, which has created traffic, hard to get used to; Gaubert put up with traffic [while traveling] because could always come home and think, "this is nice"; "you can't stop progress"; Dee Dee's family owned yacht and kept it on the bayou; had camp at Grand Isle, only way to get there was by boat; so they would put car on back of yacht; go to Grand Isle; use car on Island to drive around; Dee Dee's grandfather built this house; after finishing Spring Hill College [Mobile, Alabama] was living in New Orleans, across from Notre Dame Seminary or Carrollton Avenue, working as sugar broker; wanted home [had lost parents at early age, and was on his own]; also owned this plantation, passed down from father, so decided to move down here; Gaubert's furniture came from that house, which came from his father's house [history in furnishings]; family was well-educated and knew what had to be done to get ahead; Gaubert's mother's side came from France via Nova Scotia; landed up bayou, closer to Donaldsonville/Napoleonville, gradually made way down bayou; father's side was two brothers, traveled from France directly to here, and stayed; family's house doesn't have house anymore; uncle tore down house to use wood in house that never got built, "never should have been torn down"; house would have still been in good shape; back then people didn't think about holding onto things that would mean a lot later on in life; heritage is important to Dee Dee's family; that's why plantation is still in family; in Gaubert's family, education wasn't important; they quit school so they could work at butcher shop; Dee Dee's family, father said "No, you get a degree"; education became important to Gaubert because he wanted to marry Dee Dee; only cousin to be born and live in the house with all the family [other cousins lived in house behind big house]; no boundaries [they'd roam around]; great-grand and grandparents always willing to take you and talk to you; but had chores [emptying chamber pots from bedrooms]; being only guy the aunts took advantage of Gaubert; aunts made him wash dishes; until today it's his job in the house; had fun growing up; didn't realize they were without a lot of things; one of Gaubert's uncles played guitar and harmonica; all neighborhood would come Friday and Saturday night and had a dance in dining room [moved table out]; play music, dance, and sing; Lockport was five miles away and so the only time they'd go was for Mass; grandfather drove the parochial school bus; every Sunday to go to Mass the family would take school bus and pick up people along the way; Gaubert started going to Catholic school in first grade because never had to worry about getting to school; in sixth grade family moved to Lockport; thought it was "so nice" to have streets he could ride his bike on [previously everything was in woods, grass]; in country would ride horses, play cowboys and Indians in woods; kids today would not think about playing outdoors; oldest daughter was into horses; family would have to drive to New Orleans every Saturday so she could take riding lessons, finally bought her horse, built stable; bayou-side; did that until she finished college; dream that they could move down here and have horses again; fun to play with horses even though they're for work; to use telephone had to go to grocery store two blocks away; that was big deal, everyone would go to grocery store and sit around, listen in to what was going on; Gaubert recalls his first TV; his uncle did maintenance work on radios and when TVs came out he started working on those; family got a 10-12 in TV; big thing was to get magnifying glass to

fit over screen to make it look larger than it was; all of us could sit in room and watch TV; now we have 55" flat screen, HD TV; hangout as kids? in Lockport; had place called No Way's [?] Drive-In; people on skates to take order; that was place where we all went to smoke cigarettes; at fourteen Gaubert had to get job cutting grass; he worked for piano teacher where Dee Dee took lessons and coordinated lawn schedule with her lesson time; Gaubert had job at the local drugstore delivering drugs; knew everyone around town; at fifteen got driver's license; father would occasionally let him use his old Chevrolet; Dee Dee would visit drug store when he was working; she knew Gaubert would be a salesman because he didn't give up [courting her]; Gaubert remembers there was a dance hall on the bayou side; next town [Raceland] had a dance hall, but was a real treat to get up there; required finding a ride with someone who had car, whose parents didn't mind him driving a carload; Clifton Tomasi [?], lives in Baton Rouge was his ride; had fifty-year high school reunion at the big house; house had a swimming pool, so every [end of year?] class picnic came to go swimming; [Clifton's] father worked in oil industry overseas, sent money home; community had drive-in [movie theater]; everyone would hide in trunk, and pile out once inside [to save on admission]; altar boy from fourth grade to high school graduation; got to go to all the funerals and all the weddings; got to leave school [for funerals]; funeral home was in Raceland, and Gaubert remembers it was a big deal to drive with Father to get body and bring it back to church; makes a joke about perks of the job [all the wine you could drink, all the host you could eat]; church had Mass every day and three masses on Sundays; needed altar boys to serve; Gaubert would serve during Mass that Dee Dee's family attended; funerals had girls' choir from school [Dee Dee was in choir]; Gaubert was determined that she would like him at some point or time; in Navy would write her every other day and maybe got eight letters in return [her grandmother and great aunt would write to Gaubert to keep him abreast]; got out of school for funerals, weddings on weekends; still see people he'd wed today; interviewer asks if church was a social thing, too; Gaubert says yes: you were baptized, made first communion, confession, got married, buried [in church]; Dee Dee's mother and two of their children got married in church; three generations of women wore same wedding dress; a lot of tradition; church is important part of community; growing up pretty much everyone was Catholic [one Baptist church but it was very small]; today you have all denominations, not just Catholic anymore; people moving into area [working in oil and gas] from places like Texas; Catholic still the biggest [congregation has about 1800 families]; Gaubert still goes every Sunday; Catholic school no longer has high school grades because of budget cuts; after middle school his girls had to go to Thibodaux for Catholic school there; important to get Catholic generation; Edie White in Thibodaux; interviewer asks if Gaubert played on bayou as a kid; this was part of Mississippi, levee had built up naturally; used to go swimming [parents' didn't want them to]; cut grass, dump a few buckets of water on grass so it got slick and muddy; ride on tin from roof [as sled] into bayou; "we were sledding and couldn't stop" [used as excuse]; his kids didn't play in bayou; found out there were a lot of snakes and alligators; growing up didn't see or know they were there, over years started seeing more and more; pool here for swimming; Dee Dee didn't go swimming, would go water skiing; Gaubert would water ski in Lockport; bigger group of kids, including some with family boat; almost impossible to live in an area like here [Bayou Lafourche] and not have a boat; water all around and fishing was important; yachts were rare; today there's a billionaire [Gary Chouest, Edison Chouest Offshore] living in Galliano, getting ready to buy the Hornets [basketball team in New Orleans]; his family was in oyster business, had oyster boats and switched to oil and gas industry; gradually grew, today they have five shipyards [one in Tampa, others around

Louisiana]; leases boats out to government and scientific organizations and build icebreakers [ironic]; grew and grew; right up bayou from here, another local family, Bollingers, father started out with little propeller shop; started building boats for oil and gas; discovered he could bid out boats for the Coast Guard; today just about every boat for the Coast Guard has been built here; multi-millionaires; lot of yachts now; money from Lockport down [to coast], people who made it in fishing and oil and gas industry; they have shipyards; interviewer asks about neighborhoods in Gaubert's youth; everyone was spread out; but split up tract of land; bayou side to forty arpents canal [which was for irrigation]; houses up and down bayou: that happened in 50-60-70s; for a long time just one big house; next house 1/2 mile down; would get together on weekends for music and meals; as family grew you found room; really started to break up during WWII; veterans thought "I really don't have to stay here"; in Gaubert's case, he had never been away until he joined the navy; discovered he likes to travel, got a job traveling the US; very fortunate; so many friends in paper industry had to live in big cities, move around; he never had to move; he was only person in paper industry that stayed with same company; important where he lives, that will dictate job; this area is important to him; now his aunts and uncles, parents, are deceased; two aunts are still living; Gaubert visits them in Lockport; like Dee Dee and her relatives; uncle and two aunts still here; all the cousins [our generation]; our kid's kids are disconnected; still trying to get them to know all their cousins; Dee Dee's mother gave land to all grandkids, in hopes they'd come and build [at Clotilda]; Gaubert thinks it is important to keep kids together; family and faith are important in life; helps you get through times good and bad; support group that you can go to; family is very important; has three granddaughters visiting for the weekend; he doesn't let a week go by without seeing them [will go to Prairieville if necessary]; back then no age barrier, kids were not afraid of old people; today a lot of kids are afraid of old people because they're not around as often; grandparents would play with kids; Dee Dee's mother moved in with Gaubert; girls grew up around her; eighty and eight didn't matter; shows when you get out in the real world; makes a difference when he's traveling; treated them the same [peers, old or young]; didn't have to sell product hard; personal relationship was the biggest part of it because "paper's paper"; Gaubert was close with customers; families came down, clients got to know his girls; in retirement he keeps in touch with some; close-knit family atmosphere went into business; sees it in daughters; biggest compliment was from middle daughter; after she had met friend's parents and they complimented Sally's way of interacting with kids; Gaubert thinks it stems from growing up in a house full of people [learn to communicate and love everybody]; Gaubert learned respect for elders: yes sir, yes ma'am; very polite to them; never remembers mom or dad telling him he had to say it, he just did; other families that came, always "Mister Tom, Mister Charles"; have gotten away from that today [no "mister"]; our generation doesn't want to grow old; members of his family made it into their 80s; he doesn't think he's old, almost an attempt to get to level of young people, and you feel young; cousins on both sides, majority still live in this area; Dee Dee's last family reunion had 300 families; photographer had to get to highway to get shot of whole family; fortunate that a lot of his family is still here; guy that marries girl really gets more into her family; he did that; traveling so much that he wanted to stay home; in process of getting pictures together of great-grandfather, wife [whole families]; had some 8mm film turned into disc; aunts and uncles enjoyed seeing pictures; Dee Dee made duplicates so everyone will have a set of pictures; trying to get better family history; sorry they haven't done that sooner; get-together on bayou-side; waterskiing in bayou, cookouts, picnics; Gaubert rarely went to New Orleans; today everyone is so mobile, "in a

drive-through mentality”; it’s hard to get everyone to sit down together for a meal; Gaubert’s family didn’t go anywhere when he was growing up; Gaubert wishes he could have played sports and had parents seen him play; saw every event with kids, and now granddaughter; once was traveling for work in Los Angeles, daughter had a gymnastics meet in Monroe, so he flew back via Monroe; thanks to Dee Dee who has been in genealogy, belongs to Lafourche Heritage Society [Dee Dee an officer on board]; lots of records that go way back; has aunt in Thibodaux that works in archives, translates French records into English, so they are able to confirm word of mouth with written records; Dee Dee has records for the plantation; two owner prior had act of sale [and gave her a copy]; Gaubert’s generation is getting more interested in this; getting it documented; Dee Dee’s mother’s wedding 16mm film transferred onto disc; pictures of Catholic Mass; archbishop came down from New Orleans to marry mother [had lived across street]; verbal history very important; paternal grandmother passed away in mid-nineties; she spoke French, would try to speak English [broken]; Gaubert understood most of what she was saying in French [though she spoke faster than he could understand]; tells story about going to visit her in hospital; she said she would have loved to flown on airplane [Gaubert has tons of miles on Delta, regrets that he couldn’t help her, he could have made that dream come true]; learned you can’t take things for granted; on Gaubert’s mother’s side everyone was closer than on father’s side [started seeing them in Lockport]; enjoys visiting with cousins from mother’s side, some were in his class [one in Houston, one in Raceland]; discusses email and scanning; cousin’s father was jeweler and he had store in Lockport, bought sea plane in 1949; every day he flew to work; she found pictures of him flying; photos of Bollinger shipyard when it was still just a propeller shop; get together uncle playing guitar; previous generations didn’t think of it being important; everyone in family was still around; owned everything together, that started to change; his generation started to acquire more things; we need to know “who’s who”; many in parents’ generation didn’t have wills; [a lot of talking to relatives, checking records]; Gaubert learned how to do title searches while working at law firm; attorneys knew every family member, easy to track down who had what; they were educated; difference between how Dee Dee and Gaubert kept records; goes back to education; important you spend time working on farm; see today with Vietnamese, Hispanic [everyone contributes, gets them into college]; grandfather didn’t talk that much about their family; father and uncles never wanted to talk about experience in WWII; father in both Pacific and Atlantic theaters; found pictures and understood; mechanic by trade, worked in motor pool, had all the ambulances; would drive; what he saw he didn’t want to talk about; those generations talking was not that important; grandmother was embarrassed she didn’t speak English well so didn’t talk a lot, kept to simple things; when he got involved with Dee Dee’s family; have everything in order; still have all his papers, expense reports; peace of mind, know it’s there; that’s how it was in Dee Dee’s family; filed properly with clerk’s office; on mother’s side all they spoke was French; thought they could get stuff over him, slowly learned but didn’t let parents know he understood; really great being in that atmosphere; got to point that “you’re stupid if you can just speak French” [mindset], not bilingual; that was frowned upon, grandmother embarrassed; father told story that he would get hit by nuns at school to speak English and not French; why couldn’t you have both of them?; more languages you know, the better off you are; daughter’s husband is recruiter for Kings College and speaks five languages; daughter says “why didn’t you make me speak French”; middle daughter speaks more French; [speaking French] he can understand relatives; fortunate to have language growing up; his girls regret they didn’t get more involved; most families spoke French on bayou; when he was

delivering drugs Gaubert knew every family; had to remind girls to go see grandma and grandpa; maybe on weekends would see parents; started to see that change; education was important; went away for school, got a degree and don't come back here; three daughters, "none of them are here"; so many new families in area; have tendency to stick with people they're working with, everyone has niches; three grandkids, wherever they go [for college] he'll be there; his generation "you go to them"; back then a mile was far; people don't even watch TV together; Gaubert doesn't like it, but how do you stop it?; church is not a big part of the community anymore; sees more old people than young people at Mass; glad to still have parochial school [in community]; that helps keep family together; "hard to take" difference between churchgoers and others; growing up it was a mortal sin if you didn't go to church, so you made sure you did it; when traveling first thing he figures out is location of local church; his girls tell him they go to church, but Gaubert has feeling they don't go every Sunday; education may be a factor; Gaubert never questioned what he was told to do, but daughter in anthropology doesn't take anything for granted, wants proof; daughter believes in God but doesn't need to go into building; father says she needs interaction with others [at church]; home means a "place when I walk in, I get hugs and kisses and three words: I love you"; still have that get it with girls, Dee Dee; "we always do that."

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