

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Larry Williams

COLLECTION: 4700.2139

IDENTIFICATION: Golden Meadow, Louisiana, native [born 1947]; Larose, Louisiana, resident; Vietnam veteran [1966-68, US Army]; retired Texaco employee; Catholic; Cajun-French speaker; father of three

INTERVIEWER: Kayla Duplechain, Andrew Cosse

SERIES: Bayou Lafourche Oral History Project

INTERVIEW DATE: October 25, 2010

FOCUS DATES: 1950s [childhood]; 1960s [Vietnam war]; 2010

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3931

Part of Coastal Sustainability Studio at LSU; Williams is a 64-year-old Vietnam veteran and retired Texaco employee; interview conducted in Larose, Louisiana; grew up in Golden Meadow; great childhood; parents “taught me the right way. Hunting, trapping, fishing”; worked in oil field as adult; activities as kid: hunting, fishing, trapping, a lot of sports: baseball, basketball, “too small to play football”; close-knit community, “everybody knew everybody”; all families were close; transportation: had to walk to school [fan sound]; very few cars; had to ride a bus or walk [forty-five minutes]; gathering places: recreation centers or school; rec center had different types of sports and things to do, games; important figures were parents, respected them; life was different here than other places; when Williams went to school parents spoke French; grandmother taught Williams French; forbidden to speak French at school, would call parents; grandmother didn’t care, she knew nothing else; English was Williams’s first language but he had accent, which was noticed when he went to Nicholls [State University, two semesters]; family is a priority; Williams has three daughters, they know to do right; bayou has more resources now; growing up the doctors made house calls; Bayou Lafourche: wouldn’t want to live anywhere else because of close-knit family; it was “all about the family” when he was growing up; get together at night to cook and feed everyone; bayou is made of a bunch of small towns; Larose, Golden Meadow, Cut Off and Galliano between; up is Lockport; down is Leeville and Grand Isle; interviewer asks about changes; Williams mentions computers [laughs]; before “we had to do everything by hand”, speak with someone face-to-face, now it’s just getting on the phone; less personal; interviewer asks about living above/below Golden Meadow; Williams says there is always the threat of flooding; but the levee system protects [above Golden Meadow]; Williams remembers flooding in high school, gym was all buckled up and full of mud; school hired kids to clean it up; pulled flooring out, washed mud; were without gym “for the longest time” [gym back following school year]; religion means a lot; teaches you morals; teach kids to be honest, that there’s a God and he’s there for you; parents and local church taught Williams

faith; had to go every Sunday “that was a definite”; most of community was at church; walked to church [maybe half hour] with a few friends; memories of religion: morals stay with you; taught to respect people; “if I wanted to do wrong, I would see my mother or father’s face, and I knew not to do it”; [being a] Vietnam War vet is important to Williams; some of songs of Vietnam era mean a lot; “Born to be American” [?] Toby Keith songs; Williams has American pride, pride for anything about the flag; Interviewer asks about jobs; on Sundays Williams would stop on way back from church; lived in shrimp trawling community; if fishermen came back with a lot of shrimp would sound a siren; people in community would go to shrimp shed to “break heads”; three-gallon buckets, fill it with heads and get ten cents/bucket [laughs]; mostly older women would spend day breaking heads; we just wanted ten cents for candy; father was oil field man; killed in explosion in oil field; Williams followed in his footsteps; at Nicholls, found out “education wasn’t for me”; knew he could make money in oil fields so he quit school, stayed thirty-one years and retired; not scared because father raised him to work; father showed him how to work in yard; after school they’d set traps for muskrat; skin and dry and sell for extra money; after Williams came back from army he was promised a job because when father got killed Texaco promised his mother a job; she didn’t want to sue them if they hired Williams; people didn’t jump into suing [then] because it was family; people he worked with were all close; dishonor to sue [now they’ll sue over anything]; drafted at [eighteen] when he quit college; [fan noise]; in military two years, 1966-68; came back from Vietnam, got married, had six months left [in service] was shipped to Fort Lee, Virginia; bought a van and took off with everything he owned [and new wife?]; Williams’s wife was his high school sweetheart; she’s four years younger, “we hit it off good”; have been married forty-two years; major industries: oil and fishing; works hand in hand; when fishing season is finished, fisherman go work in oil field, always contractors to hire them; Williams was strictly oil; everyone supported each other, the whole community; oil spill didn’t affect Williams [retired]; but son-in-law does work for oil companies; moratorium “hit a lot of people bad”; Williams not sure how long it will be before it gets back on track; state closed water so no one could fish; afraid of pollution, more political than anything else; lived here all his life and “we’ve had spills before”; “not of this magnitude but...” people kept fishing; Williams thinks it’s political [they lifted moratorium close to elections]; Williams has lived in home since 1979; faces street [not bayou]; love the whole area; knows everything around here; Williams is an outdoorsman, “can bring you anywhere you want to go on the water, in the marsh”; lives near family; go to store and you’ll see someone related to you; Williams’s home is a social place; watches LSU games, hosts tailgate parties, cooks; Saints; baseball too; “I like baseball more than anything else”; Williams’s three daughters come with their husbands; cook steaks or fry fish; one daughter lives down street; a few not far from here; home means everything; a lot of hard work has been put into it; not just me, wife too; she’s worked “as long as I can remember” to “give our daughters what they needed growing up”; wife is still working; one daughter went to Delgado [New Orleans] on a basketball scholarship but didn’t stay; one was offered scholarship to play basketball at Florida State but she wanted to get married so she didn’t go; and one that went to school to be a nurse, now is an registered nurse at the emergency of the local hospital; they’re good workers and they are doing very well; audio engineer is from Port Sulphur, can relate to shrimping; family worked for Freeport Sulphur; Williams: “I don’t want to go anywhere else” [than bayou]; played third base in baseball [music interruption/phone call] [break]; interviewer’s great-grandparents spoke French in Lake Charles; Williams was told not to speak French; “they thought we were less of people, I guess”; when he speaks French in Mississippi, they think we’re talking about them; people are still trying to teach

French in school but “it’s not going to fly”; it’s a dying language; [fan noise]; speaks “not real” French, it’s Cajun French; some words are the same, and other words mean different things but say same way [ex: “chon” (?) means pasture over here, there it’s a place to put corn]; used Latin [not French] in church; now in English though some Catholic prayers still in Latin; Williams was altar boy and had to learn prayers in Latin; today kids are watching TV, playing video games while “we used to be outside playing football”; [concern about] the way kids are growing up today; crime is a little more now, but area is still not bad because everyone knows each other; since the oil spill a lot of contractors took anyone “off the streets to take BP money”; in Grand Isle Williams saw dope deals at night, “we got out of there”; five hundred people on the beach doing nothing; waste of money; oil spill easiest way to clean up was to burn it; Williams discusses problems about burning off oil [territorial fight between DEQ (Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality) and EPA (national Environmental Protection Agency), land vs. air interests]; power struggle “got to show their might so they can collect their check”; Williams likes the woods more than marsh, “more peaceful”; [interviewer likes camping]; “most gratifying thing for me is a turkey hunt”; good time of the year, all of the colorful birds come out, bird songs, “the woods wake up”; daughters hunted with him.

TAPES: 1 (T3931)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 33 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interviewer questions, interviewer index; six-minute audio excerpt on DVD

RESTRICTIONS: “Yes” line is checked but no restrictions noted