

**Interviewee: LeBlanc, Joseph**

**Interview Date: August 8, 2002**

HHA # 00266

Interviewee: Joseph LeBlanc

Interviewer: Steven Wiltz

Interview Date: August 8, 2002

Interview Site: Lafayette, LA

Interview Module & No.: MMS: SW020

Transcriber: Lauren Penney

[Transcriber's note: The majority of the interviewer's backchanneling and "uhs" and "ums" have not been transcribed for the purposes of readability. Audio problems begin about 30 minutes into the interview and are noted.]

Ethnographic preface:

Joseph LeBlanc was born in 1939 and raised in Abbeville, Louisiana; his father was a salesman and died when he was 13 years old. After graduating from high school in 1957, he went to college at Northeastern where he studied pharmacy, then transferred to USL and studied chemistry. He tired of school after two years and enlisted in the Army. In 1962 he went to work for Cardinal Wireline Company in New Iberia; over the next nine years he worked his way up from helper to senior operator. At the request of Union Oil of California (Unocal), he went to work for them in 1970. He retired in 1997. He provides details of his first job offshore, accidents, the relationship between offshore operations and the MMS, and he reflects on working in the industry, his choice to retire, and the impact offshore work has on workers' families.

TRANSCRIPTION

Interviewer initials: [SW]

Interviewee initials: [JL]

SW: Interview with Mister Joseph LeBlanc. It's August eighth, 2002, in his home.

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JL: Alright.

SW: Basically we like to start off with uh, just some background questions. With a name like LeBlanc, I assume you're from around here?

JL: I'm a Cajun, yes.

SW: Definitely from this area. Born in raised in New Iberia?

JL: No, I was born and raised in Abbeville.

SW: Abbeville, okay. What year were you born?

JL: Nineteen thirty-nine.

SW: Same year as my father. [Slight pause] What did your, your mother and father do?

JL: Well uh, my daddy died when I was about 13 and he was a salesman.

SW: He wasn't in the oil industry?

JL: No. No, I don't think the oil industry was around too much in those days [Inaudible, clock chiming]. He was born in 1887. So uh, he was 52 when I was born. And uh, he kind of died, died 'bout 65 years old, uh, heart failure I think. Ah it's just, that's what they told me, but today it could've been anything.

SW: Yeah. You went to high school in Abbeville? You graduate? What year did you graduate?

JL: Fifty-seven.

SW: Fifty-seven. Did you go on to any uh, college after that?

JL: I went to Northeast and USL. I didn't graduate.

SW: What did you study at those places?

JL: I started in pharmacy and then I just switched over to general chemistry while I was at USL.

SW: Yeah, at Northeast they have a pharmacy department.

JL: Yeah. That's where they, they had just started pharmacy school. I decided I didn't want to stand up and [Inaudible] pills the rest of my life. [SW chuckles] Workin' in the summertime in the drug stores got me nauseous. I don't know what it is about them thing. Plastic pills. So uh, then I went to USL and I majored in chemistry, but I didn't graduate. I just got tired of school and went into the service.

SW: Okay. That was uh?

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JL: Fifty-nine.

SW: Army?

JL: Yeah. [Slight pause]

SW: And what happened after that?

JL: Well uh... then I, once I was out of the service I, I came home and debated about what to do. I got married. That finalized what I was gonna do. [SW chuckles] After I got-

SW: What year was that?

JL: I got married uh, '59. But after, she came with me in the Army. And then after I got married uh, after the Army, uh, I got out and I worked-

SW: In four years. Your four years in the Army.

JL: No, that was three.

SW: Three years, okay.

JL: So in sixty... '59, '60, '61. I got out in '61 and I went to work for uh, an insurance company. And about nine months after I was out, I got recalled back into the service. In 1962 or late '61, I, I don't remember the exact thing, but then I went into, back into the Army for about a year and I got out again. And then I went to work for Cardinal Wireline here in New Iberia.

SW: Okay. That was about '62, '63 somewhere in there.

JL: Sixty-two. Late '62.

SW: Your wife was a local girl?

JL: Yeah. Uh-

SW: New Iberia or Abbeville?

JL: Abbeville.

SW: Abbeville, okay. So y'all were lookin' for somethin' in this area so that y'all could stay with family or?

JL: Yeah, when I was in the service I was in Fort Lewis, Washington. [Chuckling] My wife worked for Cummings Chicago Vending Machine as a, uh, she was not a technician, but she worked in office. And uh, they offered me a job up there makin' pretty good money. But uh, it was too far from home, so we decided to come home and really uh, the job opportunities here uh, were very limited except for the oilfield. I mean it was uh, if you wanted to make any kind of decent salary you had to work in the oilfield.

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SW: What other, there was other farm jobs, things like that.

JL: Farm jobs uh, uh, they had like in Abbeville they had a few mill jobs, store jobs. But they was all uh, 40 hour weeks and probably 85 cents an hour. And you could go in the work in the oilfield for little more than that and make uh, probably four times that amount of money, five times sometimes, you know. If you wanted to work.

SW: Yeah. So it was a good opportunity to make some money-

JL: Well I figured I was married and I didn't wanna go back to school, I didn't uh, I didn't think I could go back to school. I didn't think I could make it on the GI Bill, how's that? [SW chuckles] Alright. It was uh, so I didn't wanna go back. And, and I was makin' pretty, I could make pretty good livin' in the oilfield, so you know. It was where I started.

SW: How long did you spend with uh, Cardinal Wireline?

JL: Ten years. Well, now, let's see, I left 'em in late 1970. December of 1970. Nine years.

SW: Nine years. What did you do for that company?

JL: Well I started off as a helper and uh, and I was made an operator and... I guess I was like what you'd call senior operator, top operator when I, when I left.

SW: You just, what, can you describe a little bit of what you did on, on a regular day?

JL: Well, uh, we did-

SW: As an operator.

JL: Okay, uh, let me just tell you this, uh, to work a hundred and, uh, there's a 168 hours in a week, alright. A hundred and twenty hours was a pretty normal week in those days, okay. So, a lot of that was travelin' uh, to get from one location to another. But we would uh, run [Inaudible] pressures, check storm chokes, do some fishing, um... paraffin, sand baling operations. Uh, a typical day might start out at four in the mornin' so you're on any kind of location locally by, well, I'm gonna offshore, 'cause that's what you're interested in.

SW: Well, I'd like-

JL: Let's say I'm goin' out of Morgan City, I'd leave here at four in the mornin', catch a boat at six or two hours, allow two hours to catch that boat. And most of the boats left at four o'clock in the morning 'cause the locations offshore were fairly close, two hour boat ride. And you'd get out there and generally you'd have breakfast, uh, you would eat and then you would discuss something with the production foreman on the pipeline or the boss, whoever it may be. Let me explain to you my first job offshore. That's the one you wanna know about.

SW: You were livin' here in New Iberia at the time, too, when you started-

JL: No, I was still in Abbe-, I had moved to, to New Iberia.

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SW: Oh, so you had-

JL: But I was workin' here.

SW: You had to commute. [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

JL: Well it just, they'd call me at home and I had to go [gets?]. And we alwa-

SW: Out of Morgan City.

JL: Yeah, we always lived here when, the, the office was always here.

SW: I gotcha.

JL: Okay. My first job offshore was for Kerr-McGee out of Morgan City. I'm not sure of the block now, it's been so many years, but it was like Block 20 or Block 18, somewhere 28, I think it was 28. And that would've been out of Morgan City, I'm thinkin', I'm tryin' to think of the area, that was Eugene Island, okay, Block 28. We get out there, we get-, we catch the boat at uh, two in the afternoon on a Sunday, my first offshore job. I'd never worked offshore. I was excited. I went to uh, when we got to Kerr-McGee, man, they asked us, he said, "Look, we're kind of sh-, uh, don't have enough sleeping facilities. Would y'all mind workin' through the night?" Well, it didn't bother me, we worked by the hour, so through the night meant I'd get a little more money, you know. I expected maybe to finish and get some sleep the next day, but then. So we went to work at, we got out there around four, I guess about six o'clock we were on, on the location. On the lift boat uh, in those days it was a cable operated lift boat from uh, somewhere around Delacroix Island they made 'em and I can't think of the man's name that made 'em. I used to know him, but I forgot his name. But the name of the lift boat was The Big Elevator. 'Kay? Now, we went to work on The Big Elevator uh, checkin' storm chokes, which is I'm sure required by the MMS, that was the reason we did it. And we went to different, we worked, that was Sunday night, Monday, Monday night, Tuesday, Tuesday night, without a break. 'Kay?

SW: They feed you? [Chuckles]

JL: Oh yeah, they fed us now, but I mean we kept working, okay.

SW: Go eat and then go back to work.

JL: No, g-, yeah. Well they'd send us a lunch.

SW: While you were working.

JL: While we were workin'. So uh, uh, Wednesday Kerr-McGee in those days, I don't know how they do it now, but Kerr-McGee in those days changed crews offshore on Wednesday. So the new boss comes out and we go in for lunch on a Wednesday, it's probably, or no, uh, I take that back. He came to the boat, to The Big Elevator. And he started talkin' to us, seein' what we're doin', how we're doin', okay. And he said uh, "Would y'all mind workin' tonight? We're kind of." So I waited for my operator, which is the boss of my crew to say somethin', he didn't say anything. I looked at him and I told him, I said, "I don't know about him, but I've been up since Sun-,

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Saturday night, I hadn't slept. We've been working and I'm kind of tired." He said, "Oh, I didn't realize that." So they brought us in to the living quarters and there were no, there was no room for us to sleep, for me to sleep in the living quarters. So they put me in the generator house between two generators on an Army cot, okay? [Chuckles] Knowing what I know today, I would've never slept there. But in those days that's...

SW: It's what you did.

JL: Yeah. I mean if you had to sleep on. And many a time I've slept on mud sacks on a [Inaudible] and it would just, just, there's no, there was no place to sleep. Many a time I slept on the back of the, the, the truck [Inaudible]. So-

SW: Were they-

JL: But this was-

SW: Because there was too many people workin' on the rig or, or they didn't have enough space-

JL: Well it was small enough living q-, it's very small living quarters and I imagine they had a few things goin' with different type things goin' on. Uh, you had to eat in shift, they had, I knew they had a sandblasting crew there. Uh... and I don't know what else was goin' on in those days. I know they had quite a few people. Plus the people that actually lived there, the Kerr-McGee employees. So-

SW: They were drilin' at this time or they were setting up to drill?

JL: No, this was on a production platform. Had nothing to do with the rig. There was no rig. There might've been a rig in the field, but it wasn't [Inaudible]. We were workin' on production facilities only. [Slight pause] And that, and we worked our complete week and then we called for relief, which was the normal thing to do, they had another crew in, well they'd send you relief. And then you come back in and you were working 24-hour call. So you looked at the board to see what, what line of order your crew was. And it might be that, okay, I got in at two, well I might have to go to another job at four. That's the way it was. So uh, I got paid from the time I left the shop to the time I got back. Except offshore you got 12 hours a day, unless you worked more.

SW: So-

JL: And you're on a rig. Sometimes on a rig they charged you 24 hours.

SW: Even if you didn't work that 12, which was probably seldom, you got paid for that 12, right?

JL: Yeah, yeah. The minimum 12 hours offshore.

SW: Let's say even if you only worked for eight hours [Inaudible]-

JL: That's right.

SW: [Why wouldn't?] you tell 'em you didn't for only eight hours, you always get more.

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JL: No, no. We u-

SW: You got paid for that time.

JL: Uh, most of the, most of the people, most of the time, unless it was weather that held you up or like very, you couldn't get to your location from offshore, you might be at a central location offshore living quarters and you had a remote location to go to, a little satellite platform. Well the satellite might be, it might be too rough to get there. High winds, high seas. You still drew your 12 hours a day and you stayed there. Uh, generally though s-, in, in the earlier days, back in the early '60s the production people, the production manager or the foreman or whatever he was, would find somethin' for you to do. Like he'd make you go clean his, his uh, wireline box, which was, he might have some spare parts and storm chokes or safety valve. So you kept piddling. And, and besides, when you're offshore in a limited facility, living quarters and you're there for 12 hours, actually in those days television wasn't... you know, I mean, you didn't watch television all day because the reception wasn't great. You might catch one channel. Uh, if they had a TV. If they didn't, sometimes all they had was a few chairs, so not everybody could even sit down. So you, your thing was to either go lay in your bunk, if you had one, it wasn't [hot-sheeted?], or go outside and piddle, do somethin', you know.

SW: Fish.

JL: Well, fish, yeah. When it's that rough, though, [Chuckling] you couldn't fish much, but uh, you would generally walk around the warehouse and just ask a pumper if he needed some help doin' somethin'. You know, just to stay busy. It was just to uh, confining to stay in a limited space.

SW: So there's times when y'all had a lot of stuff to do, but even when you didn't have a lot to do you were tryin' to find something to do because-

JL: Well yeah, I mean-

SW: You'll go crazy.

JL: Yeah, well, it's not go crazy, but um, if you were tired you could, a lot of times you could go in your rack and read, you know. But uh, after you read everything on the, there was just not too much to do there. So uh-

SW: You're working these 12 shifts basically. That was strictly days or nights? [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

JL: No we, we would, unless you was on a rig, you only worked days. Uh, there was an unwritten rule you didn't wireline at night.

SW: Why is that?

JL: Now when I talked wireline right here, I'm talkin' slick line. Not electric line. Big difference. Not loggin' and [Inaudible, clock chiming] this was just slick line. It's probably... I don't know if it's, it's probably it's... I don't know, it wasn't, to me it wasn't that hazardous, but we did a lot of

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uh, things we did back then that we wouldn't, they, they don't do today. I mean, they, you, you had a lot of rigging up, today they have cranes to do that for you, you know. We did it, it was all hands and today it's a lot different, so. We handled a lot more iron, 'course I was young and I was, felt like I could do it, you know, I mean, it didn't hurt me. So, I didn't think it'd hurt, you know. Maybe I suffer with it today, but-

SW: You have all your fingers and everything, so. [Chuckles]

JL: Oh yeah, I mean that's no big deal, you know. So uh, uh, but that's my, really my first day. And uh-

SW: Your first day sounds like it lasted about four days. [Chuckles]

JL: A week, a week, but it was four days like Wednesday, Wednesday afternoon late, before I knocked off, from a Sunday at four o'clock. So-

SW: A long day.

JL: LONG day. It was a LONG day and uh-

SW: So you guys were preparing or producing or making, setting the things up to go to the rig?

JL: No.

SW: So they were-

JL: This is completed wells.

SW: Completed well.

JL: This is like, alright the well's completed and they're selling the gas and the oil from it. Okay? Which goin' into a pipeline or to a tank battery somewhere. That's an actual producing, flowing well. And inside the well is, sometimes like an oil well might make paraffin. And paraffin builds up just like plaque in your veins. Builds up on the walls of the tubing.

SW: Wax.

JL: And this restricts the flow of the oil. So uh-

SW: Because that paraffin is mixed up in the oil, right?

JL: Yeah, it, it-

SW: As it's coming through it cakes on the pipe.

JL: Okay. Co-, as it cools and solidifies a little bit. And it drops out and makes little, it stays on the wall of the tubing. And uh, in those days every well had an allowable, okay. So you couldn't produce a well hard enough to get bottom hole temperature to, to surface, where paraffin



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wouldn't form. So what you do is-

SW: That was the regulation by the state-

JL: Yeah, it was a uh, uh, federal regulation you could only produce so much from each well. And as uh, the... seems to me I can remember almost the day, it was in the '60s I'm almost certain, almost to the day that uh, the regulations came off, you could flow as much as you wanted, as much as you can get out. Uh, I might be, uh, probably was not in a position to really know that, but I can remember when, hearin' 'em say uh, "There's no more allowables on this, on these wells." You know it's like, so uh, that's when oil sh-, oil, not oil shortage, but that's when drilling really picked up in the, in the Gulf. It started in those days.

SW: That was the late '60s?

JL: Yeah, late '60s uh... it was right around the '70s, in the '70s. Maybe '71, '72. It's like, I can remember Movable Offshore, we had a rig in our field in the '70s and he was charging like 3,000 dollars a day for the rig. And I don't remember the exact date, but that, the next day the rig rate went to 12,000, take it or leave it.

SW: Whatever.

JL: Whatever. Said, "If you don't want it, we're gonna back off your location, go somewhere else." So it was, that was just before the '73 oil embargo I know that for sure.

SW: I see that, that's the thing that's stickin' in my mind. Why, why did the federal government have that regulation? Was there a safety reason or were they trying to-

JL: Oh, you mean the allowable?

SW: The allowable, yeah. Were they trying to control it?

JL: Uh... I, I, I'm, I'm thinkin' like uh, not safety, it was uh... just to, I would think so it didn't flood the market, they had to regulate the reserve.

SW: They were tryin'

JL: Remember these offshore leases through the federal government. This is not you and I plottin' over here.

SW: It's more than three miles off the shore.

JL: Yeah, this is, this is the federal government and they tryin' to regulate the oil comin', oh they didn't wanna damage their formations or they didn't wanna, I'm not sure exactly. I would think it's so they didn't flood the market.

SW: Yeah, that's, that's what I'm thinkin'.

JL: You know, they were tryin' to control so that the oil companies, maybe the oil companies did,

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prodded 'em to do this.

SW: But they eventually lifted it and then-

JL: Well I, yeah, because uh, I don't know where we were getting oil from, but you know obviously we had enough. But then... but then we didn't, so we needed to produce more. And then that was one of the reasons. So I can't tell you anything other than that, I, I wasn't in a position to, in those days I was just doin' what I was told.

SW: Right, but you remember when it happened.

JL: Yeah, I can remember that.

SW: How far offshore did you uh, when you worked on these platforms usually?

JL: In the '60s?

SW: Yeah. A good ways?

JL: Uh... well, let me tell you this. I can remember saying one time to myself, probably within 50 miles offshore, about as far as you can go in those days. I can remember saying to myself, "When it gets to the 200s, I'm gonna quit." Block numbers, you know. They just, it's like we worked at 188, I remember two-, 214 was a number uh, for Shell. Two-, and then uh, they had uh, Chevron had one at Ship Shore 294 or 194, I can't remember. They had a couple platforms out there.

SW: And y'all took boats out there at this time?

JL: Sh-, no, you'd fly to, in fact I, I got my first helicopter crash uh, in the '60s, out of Cameron.

SW: You were on the, the, the helicopter that crashed?

JL: Yeah, yeah.

SW: What happened? It hit the, the landing [Inaudible, overlapping speech]-

JL: Well, we, we loaded out of Grand Chenier and uh, it was one of those little G, G-2 models, G-4 maybe, probably a G-2. And it's three passenger, sittin' in a bubble. And they had it tied down overnight and we got there and the mosquitoes were bad, so the pilot got in and cranked up the helicopter.

SW: [To spin?].

JL: And, and put a little [Inaudible] so it would blow the, keep the mosquitoes away. We loaded our bags on, tied it down. Well when he took off, one of the ropes was left tied on. So when we got to the end of the rope we just plowed right into the ground. It kind of like uh... well, we lost everything except the seat we were sittin' on. [Chuckles] It just tore us up.

SW: It jerked you-

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JL: Oh no, he went down like this. Blades-

SW: Did any of you get hurt or uh-

JL: No, nobody got hurt.

SW: It wasn't too high off the platform yet?

JL: No, we were on land. We hadn't, we hadn't even gone offshore. This was, no.

SW: So what, it wasn't high off the ground at that point. You not too high.

JL: No. And then uh, uh [Chuckles] we, we, we hit the, we hit the ground and uh, we were sittin' there and I, you know, we called and, and they sent another helicopter out, pick us up, and brought us offshore. No, nobody was hurt. We didn't go to the hospital, they didn't check us out, they didn't, no, we just, in those days, you didn't wor-, we didn't get hurt. [Chuckles]

SW: Yeah, just-

JL: It wasn't as uh, I don't think anybody ever thought of suing in those days. But today well they'd brought 'em in a helicopter and had 'em checked out for a week at a hospital, make sure there's nothin' wrong with 'em.

SW: Yeah, they certainly would've, wouldn't've of sent him right offshore, back to work.

JL: And we weren't hurt. And I mean just, uh, I can remember doing this. Thinkin' things were flyin' all over the place here. And, and when everything stopped I just looked around. We sittin' there in this seat, no bubble. So uh [Chuckles] it, it's, that was the first one. [Slight pause]

SW: You were involved in more than on helicopter crash?

JL: Well actually that was the only crash, that I would consider a crash. The other two were uh, he run out of gas one time. And the third one really, his fan belt came off, which uh, kind of put us in a hairy situation more than anything 'cause the weather was bad. But that was nothin'.

SW: You made it back.

JL: Yeah. [Other than that?]. [Chuckles]

SW: What's the one word that was runnin' through your mind during that first crash?

JL: I, there was nothin'.

SW: Nothin', just puttin' your arms up.

JL: No, it's like, that didn't bother me. What bothered me was gettin' on that next helicopter.

SW: [Chuckling] Oh yeah.

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JL: [Chuckling] With the same pilot and takin' off. So in, in those days too, I wanna, there were quite a few incidences where uh, they left rope tied, they left ropes tied on, tied our ropes on the helicopter, and they would uh, from an offshore platform start takin' off and get to the end of the rope and fall off the end of the platform, crash, and all. I've seen, I've seen one of those happen, I personally saw it. I saw numerous times where they would leave the tail rotor tied on and crank it up, which burn up the clutch. You know, I mean, or, or did somethin' to the transmission.

SW: Was it carelessness?

JL: So eventually they came up with two scenarios to combat this. One was they had a short-circuit switch that was employed on the rotor [Inaudible] where they would have to plug it in to the back [Audio goes out for about 25 seconds] I think he had internal injuries, not serious, he went back to work. Think they checked him out at hospital, I can't [Audio goes out for about 20 seconds] to go back to the living quarters. The man was putting us on the boat and ev-, it was very rough, at night, and you couldn't see the seas really. All you could see was the boat. Had a big light on the back of his deck. And as he was going, the boat was moving in the seas and, and, I'm saying 20, 25 foot seas. I, it's hard to believe, but, you know, 25 foot seas a big sea. So uh, he put us down in a basket and the basket actually landed on the uh, a handrail of the boat, in the back deck. And it tilted toward the inside as the boat was comin' up, so the net collapsed. Well, the fella that was on the opposite end of the deck from me just stepped off on the boat. When the boat started to drop, the net spun around, I was, the counter balance had spun around, and I was actually on, I went to step off the boat, but the boat fell at the same time I stepped off. And I looked down, it's like, and I had time to think to myself, "Oh no, look what you did now." And I, I fell on the boat, so I broke my ankle and my leg. And it wasn't a bad break, it was a hairline fracture or somethin', put in a cast. No, it never did bother me again, but what bothered me more than that was the swelling. It was like an extremely bad sprain with a little hairline fractures. So uh, that really bothered me. I was in pain. Now we got ba-, road the boat for an hour or whatever it was it took us to get to Eugene Island 188 in that rough sea. And I got off on a net over there and a production foreman asked me if I wanted to ride the boat to town and my leg was hurtin' so bad, I had to get off of that boat. I just, the pounding of the boat was really hurtin' me. So I said no, I'd wait for in the morning. He said he'd fly me in first thing in the morning. The only thing that, I was in, I didn't realize how much pain I was in 'til, oh, probably four, five o'clock in the morning. I didn't sleep that night, I just stayed up. And I was swallowin' aspirins like, probably took more than I should've, I, but anything hurt, it's the only thing they had for pain offshore was that. And uh, I took as many aspirin as I thought I could, almost nauseous from aspirin. The next morning, woke up, and it's so foggy can't see hand in front of your face. So I, he told me, he says, "Man, soon as I can, I'll fly you to town." So the fog lifted somewhere around noon I think probably. And he flew me right into town, I had somebody pick me up, and I came to the hospital in New Iberia. I didn't go to, and uh, when I got to the hospital uh, it took 'em like four hours to see me there. [Chuckling] And I s-

SW: On every, every step of the way.

JL: Every step [Inaudible, overlapping speech]. [Chuckles]

SW: [Chuckling] Just puttin' you off.

JL: That's, that's how it was. [Slight pause] But I, I can't think of any other, but they [handled

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you, an accident?] uh... I can remember a few that uh, serious, probably in the '60s. The oil tows would tie up to the platform and, I wasn't working for the company, but I was on the platform working. And uh, this oil tow pulled up to a Shell platform. And the deckhand was working on the back deck, somehow or another on the tug. And the rope was caught around the gun wheel on the back. And the tug, and the sea was bouncing up and down, not, fairly rough, but not. And as he dropped, the rope was in a bind around the gun wheel, and when he, it dropped, it popped up over the top, and the tension in the rope straightened it out real quick. Much like you do with a rubber band, like this. And it hit that deckhand on the head. Well, we didn't, we didn't know anything until uh, the, the... tugboat captain called up to the, on the speakers upstairs. He told him, he said his deckhand was hurt. So, and he explained to him what happened. So then we said, "Well, we can fly him to town. We need to get him into the net." So we dropped the net overboard and since we were workin' on the plat-, there was like three of us, four of us on the platform. We helped him get the net ready, we was gonna help him, we called for the helicopter to come. We took the crane with the basket, net, and we put it over the side, put it on the back deck of that little tug, which was, it's not equipped to handle a lot of net, but it, they had room on there. But it was kind of rough. And the boat skipper was evidently was by himself, because he's the only one I saw. And he tried to put the man in the net. And it was rough and the net was startin' to hang up, so the operator, after the man was, had him in the net, the operator tried to get it up real quick. Well, the net caught on somethin' on the back of the boat, an [old bit?] or probably a [part of a step?], and it kind of like flipped it a little bit. And the man fell out of the net onto the back deck. So we got on the phone, says, "It's pretty rough, I don't know if we can get him up." He said, "Well," [this is what his comment was?] [Inaudible]. Uh, "Is he alright?" He said, "Well, if he wasn't dead before, he's dead now." He said, "I put him on a table in the kitchen, I'm goin' to town with him." So he [went?] oil tied, the oil barge tied up, unhooked it and went to town. Now I'm assuming the skipper was by himself, he might've had another man on there, but maybe not. I don't remember seein' another. So that's, things, and oh, and then '60, '70, no, I'm tryin', you wanna stay in the '60s?

SW: No, just, the whole thing. [Chuckles] However many times you worked offshore and just whatever, whatever happened to you.

JL: There was a, you know, that's ,that's one accident. But the oil companies always responded favorably, I mean, immediately to an accident. As best they could. I mean, they-

SW: That's the point, yeah.

JL: Sometimes, you know, you... I can r-, well, I can remember uh, as far as Bay [Marschean?] which I think quite a few people lost their lives. Major fire for Shell. I wasn't at Bay Marschean, but I was at West Delta workin' close to New Orleans with Shell. And radios are piped on the platform so you can hear it. And uh, they had a blowout caused by a wireline, okay. The wireline man thought he closed the valve, but, and I, we found all this out later, I'm not sure. I don't wanna get into specifics, it's been settled in court I'm sure by now, but uh, what, what I think happened, what, what I heard happened, they were, they were tryin' to get some work done and there was a rig on the platform along with some producing wells. And they were wirelining under the rig for slick line. Tryin' to bale some plastic. In those days uh, uh, they used to come with a plastic coating on the tubing [that was?] one thing for paraffin, for corrosion, for whatever. And as you work inside with your tools and wireline, slickline uh, we used to believe that you would scrape some of that off. It would come off in long streamers, you know, take a little and it would

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strip off. Well, they had been baling this stuff, from what I understand, or they did somethin', there was a lot of [littles/those?]. And they bringin' it up and, and a big ball of it followed 'em up into the treat. Well he shut the valve, he thought he shut the valve, and he broke his, bled his lubricator up, broke it off. And went to talk to the company man about what he was getting, the samples that he got from, from the trip downhole. And while he was talkin' to the company man the ball of restriction or whatever it was that failed to allow him to close the gate on the valve fully turned loose and then the well flowed through the gate, I mean it was open. Wasn't closed all the way. And then, this is a natural gas well I think, or if it wasn't, there was a lot of gas in it. There's an awful lot of machinery around a rig. A lot of uh, ignition sources. And this is the conversation as it o-, as I heard it on the radio, it said, he said, "We have a problem," and he was talkin' to Shell in New Orleans the way I gathered it from, I'm-

SW: Yeah.

JL: He was talkin' to the office in New Orleans. Now I don't know if it was rig pusher or if it was a company production man or what. And he says, "We have a problem." And then they start explainin' to him, he said, "Blowin' out." And then he says, "Uh oh, it just caught on fire, gotta go." And that's the last thing I heard. Then the Shell man tried to contact the rig several times. And then we got some interference from another radio station on a Shell communication. I mean, it was Shell uh, station because it was on that frequency. And it was some kid cuttin' up. I don't know what it was. And I can remember that Shell man sayin', "If I find out who you are or where you are, you're goin' to jail son." So-

SW: Some ham operator or-

JL: No, no this was somebody on a Shell platform just cuttin' up. Now, in the face of that a lot of times transmitting and receiving are two different things. So you could transmit a lot farther than you can receive. So he might not have known of this situation, okay. And we call that wa-, he walked on all the traffic in that area. So I, you know, I don't wanna fault-

SW: But at the situation that the guy was tryin' to get in touch with the rig when [Inaudible, overlapping speech] fire.

JL: Yeah, and he was interfering.

SW: Yeah, so he was obviously angry at this man.

JL: Oh yeah he was. And, and that, and that's the only thing I can see 'cause I, I don't think anybody would be like that if they knew something like, but we knew it was a serious situation where we were.

SW: Just somebody else told me all those frequencies were out there, you pretty much listen to everybody in the Gulf. You can pick up everybody if you had the radio frequency you could listen in. [Inaudible, overlapping speech]

JL: Oh yeah. Well, I mean, you know, it's like uh, okay, yeah, you could but uh, your radio was tuned to the frequency allowed for that company, you know.

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SW: Okay. And so each company had a frequency?

JL: Yeah, each company has their own. And then uh, it's probably lax, it's not as, as rigid as the military, but it's, it's... it's no, in other words, you wanna get somethin', ask the fella somethin', ask him, you just don't say uh, the call sign twice and get it back and you're askin' this and log everything. Uh, they used to log everything when they first went out, you log everything in.

SW: Too much work.

JL: It's, it's like you and I talkin' here, we use the radio to talk. I'm in a bind, I need to know somethin', uh, I'll talk to you like you and I are talkin'. I don't come back, you know, come back [Inaudible]. It's not the same, it's, it uh, it's a tool, it's not communication [to watch?]. I don't know how other to say that. Uh, what else?

SW: When uh, you said you worked for them for about nine years, what did you do after you left?

JL: Well, I used to, when, while I was workin' for Cardinal the company I retired with, uh, I went to work for them. They wanted me, they, I'd do all their work. And they had some high pressure wells, very high pressure wells. And for some reason they liked me to work for 'em. I, I was uh, I like to think that I had enough pizzazz [Chuckling] to buffalo 'em thinkin' I was the best. But really I, I knew a lot of the fellas that worked there, were from Abbeville, and I think uh, they liked me, I could talk to 'em. And uh, I did the job. So, you know, I did most of their wor-, I did a lot of their work. Not that much, but a lot of it. As much as I could take. And uh, they asked me to go to work for 'em. They wanted me to go to work for 'em. So for two years I, I thought about it. You know, I, we were makin' pretty good money in those days. Uh, I'd make about six or eight thousand dollars more than for another man. But I was workin' a lot more, you know. And uh, but uh, they furnished me my own vehicle, you know, I had to use, I could use it. I mean, they paid for my gas.

SW: This is still Cardinal Wireline?

JL: Yeah. And I had a Chr-, a Christmas bonus which was pretty good bonus. I would get like 4,000 dollars a year for Christmas, 3,000, 4,000, I don't remember, it was a good bonus. But like when you went on vacation, you had a 50 dollar a week bonus for every week you worked over 40 hours. Over 50 hours. They give you 50 dollars. Well, that's 50 weeks a year if you didn't go on vaca-, 'cause if you didn't leave the state when you went on vacation, they'd call you to go back to work. [SW chuckles] So you had to get out. I mean, when you had your day, when you got a day off, you went. So we, it very seldom we had under 50 hours a week. So when you went on vacation, that's twenty-five hundred bucks. You know? Which was, that, that's not bad. Uh, in those days, hey [Chuckles] fifteen, sixteen thousand dollars a year was a good job. I mean, so the thing I, I had to worry about when they wanted, is like do I wanna take a reduction in salary to go to work for these people or do I not? But I, I after lookin' at it for a couple years, you know, gettin' everything in my finances straight where I could go to work for 'em.

SW: For, for who?

JL: Unocal.

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SW: Unocal, okay.

JL: Yeah.

SW: That was early '70s then?

JL: Seventy, 1970, yeah. So uh, I started and uh, I, I think I went to work for 'em eighty-five hundred dollars a year. That's what I started at. And uh, I got two raises the first year.

SW: Standard of living raise, raises?

JL: Yeah, well, a promotion raise and a, and a two promotion raises and a... company raise.

SW: A living, living increase raise.

JL: Yeah, yeah. Okay. So uh, I caught up quite a, but when I liked about Union, with Unocal more than Cardinal was the long-term benefits, retirement benefits, which I, I don't regret for a minute. And, and I, it wasn't long before my salary caught up. And I had time off. Seven-and-seven. I had seven whole days off.

SW: So you were still, you're still workin' offshore at this point?

JL: Yeah, I, I worked offshore all my life. You know, a few land jobs, but [Slight pause] my, my job with Unocal was in the offshore area. And uh, with Cardinal I did some land work and offshore.

SW: Workin' all the time.

JL: Workin' all the time.

SW: It sounds to me, though, uh, Unocal was a better situation, although you're not necessarily sayin' that Cardinal was terrible.

JL: [Slight hesitation] No. C-, let me see, uh, because of Cardinal I, when I went to work for Unocal I was more familiar with all phases of the oil industry than most of the peop-, than, than the people, the, the regular pumpers at Unocal. And uh, I could relate to rig jobs, I could relate to what's happening on different operations, you know. And about three or four years down the line I, I can't remember like... I think it was like fifth, fourth year. They uh, made a production foreman out of me. Which is... pretty fast. You know, I mean, I was satisfied. I guess I buffaloed 'em enough. You know, [Inaudible], so. But uh, they put me in construction and well work. Kind of like a combination that was production and well work. And then uh, I wasn't too good in construction, I had to learn a lot, but you had a lot of people that you worked with in construction, the crews, that were very knowledgeable in those days, hard working individuals that uh, for instance uh, welders offshore didn't use a level a lot of times. And uh, it might amaze you [Chuckling] that everything come out, but the best level in the world was the horizon. And they just, okay, that's how it is. So, you know, they, a lot of the experienced people did a lot of things, you know. And that's changed quite a bit. Now, we used to just go in there and make repairs. Today you don't do that, but-



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SW: Fill out a form-

JL: Oh yeah.

SW: Talk to the company guy.

JL: Yeah. And-

SW: Yeah, different atmosphere.

JL: Pipe that we used is still being used today, and wells that we used 40 years ago are still being used today. I mean, we know, we did a lot of things that are still good today, we just didn't have the paperwork on uh... the training's a lot better, the safety systems are a lot better, uh, a lot more schooling.

SW: Part of that comes, too, from the uh, the liability factor.

JL: Yeah, but also, now, and this is where the MMS, I'm gonna give a "A" rating. Uh, they had, they did, some of the MMS things they did was very good for the oilfield, very good. Good for the worker, good for the, good for the, the oilfield in general. Because uh, in, in the long run it saved money, it saved lives, and it made everybody aware of what could happen more than anything. You know it's uh, we always had the safety system, uh, some form of a safety system. But we became aware of the importance of it, I think, more because of the MMS. We always knew it was important, but it, it just, it's hard to explain. Their inspectors comes out there and, at first it was a farce as far as I was concerned. Their inspectors were, weren't knowledgeable. They didn't take the job as serious as they do today. I'll be honest with you. They [Chuckles] it was a joke. But as, as they grew and we grew into the j-, into the situations, uh, it became evident that we needed to shape up and they needed to shape up. And I think they both did. I think, it's a, it's a good thing. There's a lot of paperwork involved, a lot of, lot of paperwork, but, but everybody... you know, it's just, I don't know if, the only way to check things is with paperwork.

SW: Yeah. That's the government [Inaudible].

JL: It's, one of my suggestions one time was, "Hell, we'll flood the government with paperwork." Everybody laughs, you can't flood the government with paperwork, they'll just hire more people and you'll have more work. [Chuckles] Well and then uh, but that's, they did back down from a little few things, because we used to have the, the [furs?], I think it was furs, years ago, fur-, furs, yeah, oh it was ridiculous. [Chuckles] We just a little bit too much, they couldn't even handle it, so [SW chuckles] they backed off of that. But, I mean, the, the inspections and the amount of inspections is alright. And uh, you have problems with uh... I don't know how to explain this. You have problems with the MMS when they come out and sometime they act belligerent. You know, "Be careful, I'm the boss," you know. And then our attitude was, "Because of us you have a job too, remember." So, "If you shut me down, where are you gonna work?" So it has to work, we have to work together. So, but the younger ones would come out uh... I've had some that came out and they uh, you know, they wanna throw you in jail. "Rah rah," you know. [Inaudible].

SW: They have a chip on their shoulder.

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JL: Well, I wouldn't say a chip on their shoulder, they just wanna uh, uh, abuse authority maybe. You know, they uh, it's because they try, it's a power struggle I guess of who's gonna be, who's the boss. And the Coast Guard is, 17 year old kid comes out there and he's got a regulation in front of him said, "That uh, fire extinguisher has to be in that generator house." So your answer to him was, "We put it on the outside, 'cause the generator house, it's just barely big enough for the generator. If you put it inside and there's a fire, you can't get to it." "Well," he says, "I'm gonna have to write you up unless that, it's in there."

SW: Yeah. Following to the letter.

JL: I mean, that's right, I mean, there's no, no, it's commonsense tell you, "Okay, you've got one. And it's sittin' right there outside the door of the generator. And you can f-, grab it just as easy as if it in-, maybe better." But this fella will tell you, you know, and I've had that, that's a particular incident happen to me. It's kind of like, "Okay, you want it in the generator house, we'll throw it in the generator house. There. Now, is that satis-," yeah, it satisfied him, so okay. Soon as he leaves we put it back out where we can get it. But uh, uh, they've gotten a lot tougher on oil spills. When were in uh, uh, want to get into that some I think probably.

SW: Sure.

JL: In the '60s we were very, I would say we were lax in, in the oil overboard. Now I'm not sayin' we did any damage and I'm not sayin' anybody did, but it, the, the [trace?] has gradually increased throughout the years so that some of the things they, really I, now I guess the ecologists have reasons for it, but uh, we talkin' literally droppin' oil overboard in amounts that do not exceed what an outboard motor puts out with a two-cycle engine, okay. And uh, if it, if it makes a sheen on the water, you're in violation. Uh-

SW: You couldn't wash anything off the platform or-

JL: Oh no, no no, that's, that's stopped. And, and all the water on the platform actually is gathered up once again and sent through your pro-, process facilities and cleaned and then put overboard. And there, that's, that's sampled on a daily basis or whatever basis the, I don't remember exactly what we were doing, but uh, it's sampled and then it's reportable every month. The quantity of water you put overboard, parts per million, and then there's an allowable on that. And if you exceed that, well, then you have to write letters to this and, oh, it got bad. So things like, let me tell you somethin', when they said you couldn't put garbage overboard, now we's talkin' about food waste, we're not talkin' about paper or anything else, because all of that went, we used to burn our garbage offshore. Burn it, incinerate it. Well they stopped that, we had to send it all to town. But then they stopped us from throwing, scrapin' your dinner plate overboard. You had to grind it up to one inch or less. And you couldn't do that inside the three mile limit period or the 12 mile limit. You could not sp-, put anything in the water, food waste, nothin'. So we were pa-, up in our closer in locations. We would actually pack the food in boxes, big cardboard boxes with plastic liners and put 'em on the boats, send it to town. [Laughing] Well, do you know what food waste looks like after it's been sittin' in hot sun on the dock for that long? Pure, it's pure explosive. I mean, just explodes. [Chuckling] It's all. So we, I, they devised a way to incorporate it into the sewage system, which is another thing we had to maintain offshore. Sewage system. That it would, we called it the muffin monster. It was an adapter on the sewer system that would take the food waste and put it in with the sewage and let the sewage treatment

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facilities handle it and produce nothin' but water going overboard. Drinkable water. So uh, then you gotta remember a lot of times there were just two people on a platform. You might be 100 miles offshore, two people on a platform. If somethin' happens it's up to you or your buddy to take care of that problem. Now everything from your toilet facilities to your lighting has to be taken care of. That means that the generator goes down, if you can't turn the generator on you're without lights or heat, cool, fuel, uh, you know. And, and if uh, anything went wrong with your electricity, half your systems won't work, you gotta, you know. Cold weather was the biggest factor that affected us offshore. It's, uh, more problems than on land because lot of the piping was exposed, piping.

SW: Yeah. [And you're on water?].

JL: We're not geared for it like they are in Alaska. Alaska they flow in that kind of weather, but they're geared for it, we're not. Uh, geared for it I mean. So a fella on a platform got to be very...

SW: Self-sufficient.

JL: Yeah. Uh, you learned a little bit about everything. You weren't a mechanic, but you didn't mind tearing [Chuckling] engine apart see if you could get it running if you needed it. You know, it's uh, you learned a lot about diesel engines. You know, I thought I was well-versed in a lot of things. And uh, but later on in life I come to find out that the farm boys were the ones that you really liked to hire, because they were familiar with machinery, they knew how to work with their hands, they weren't afraid to tackle a problem. But uh, most of your farm boys could handle the job a lot better than your regular, even uh, I wanna say we had quite a few teachers that worked for us, and uh... a lot of 'em probably, if you could, if they'd write my reports I'd appreciate it. But to do my work, the farm boys would do the work, you know, I mean.

[END OF CD 1, TO CD 2]

JL: -graduates and the first thing they were thinkin' about was not this job, they wanted to know how far up the ladder they could go and how fast. And... there was only so many positions available and experience played as much a part probably in that type of job as, as any kind of ed-, other education. No, you had, we taught everybody what we needed to do. I was taught everything. Uh, I, just little commonsense is what you needed. We used to do all the gas calculations. And we did a lot of gas calculatin'. We started w-, when I started work we used slide rules. You know, we didn't have computers. Uh, the, what we call the office man or the man that did the, all the office work, which everybody had to rotate 'cause nobody really liked to stay in the office, it was too confining. But the office man had the only calculator and it was uh, I don't remember the name of it, but it was probably one of those uh... it's about a yard wide, had about 40 rows of keys and you punched in your numbers and y-, and it did calculate. CHCK-CHCK-CHCK-CHCK. And, and so this was the big thing and it cost maybe 1,000 dollars to repair this thing. You know, you could do it with a side rule, but this was somethin' else.

SW: New technology.

JL: The company wanted, okay. So uh, I can remember 1,000 dollars and those little pocket calculators were comin' out. And they were like 100 dollars. When it cost 1,000 dollars to repair, this little pocket calculator was 100. But we had to have permission from the California or the

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Houston office to order a calculator. They wouldn't allow 'em. [Slight pause] Probably to keep 'em out of, you know, I don't know why, but control cost one thing. This was one thing I, you know, just, hey wait a minute. It's costin' me 1,000 dollar, I can buy one for 1,000 or 100 dollars. And now they come out where they, you can get 'em for two ninety-eight in any store. I don't know if they have all the equations you need on 'em, but you can get 'em. Oh we didn't use anything but, no logarithms or anything like that I don't think. It was strictly uh, calculate, I'm tryin' to think. We used square root that's about it. That's about the only thing [you usually had?]. And it depended on the type of charts you were trying to [read?].

SW: How many years did you work, you retired with Unocal?

JL: Yeah. I worked for 'em 25 years.

SW: From 1970-

JL: Seventy to '97.

SW: Seventy to '97.

JL: Ninety-, yeah.

SW: So obviously they took care of you if you stayed with the company that long.

JL: I, I'm very pleased with 'em. I, you know, uh, they allowed me to retire early. And then, I took a ben-, I took uh... what I want to say? I took uh, advantage of all the opportunities they gave me for my retirement, [whenever?] I could buy stock. They gave me stock uh, I mean that's part of my 401K, uh, I, I utilized all the benefits I could with 'em. And uh, I just decided, well [a lot of those guys?] can retire two years before that. And uh, I don't know why I stayed on another two years. I thought, you know, and then uh, they didn't want me to run the company, so I said, "Okay, I'll go." [Chuckles] They didn't wanna do it like I did, like I wanted to do it.

SW: Time to move, time to move on, huh?

JL: Well, le-, uh, let me put it to you this way. I was in a position where I was as high as I could go. I was in a position that sometimes I would think was above my head. You know, it's like uh, I'm, I'm too old, I don't wanna start into learning new things now uh, I get a little tired of the paperwork, I'm more of a hands-on guy, you know, just... so I looked at my retirement and I said, "Hey, you know, it's, I can make it." [Chuckles] "I don't need to work." And we like to travel. The biggest thing being my mother and father both died when they were 65, 66, all from heart trouble. I had already had one heart attack workin', while I was workin'. And I had a little balloon operation while I was workin'. So I decided that if there was any stress in the job, I could eliminate that part of it. And uh, I always wanted, you know, I don't need, I enjoy my lifestyle, I'm not very extravagant. Uh, I do what I want to do, we travel a lot. And uh, I had made some pretty good investments while I was working. So uh, you know, things panned out for me. Like these people today that, you know, seeing their 401Ks or their 201Ks as they like to say, but uh, I'm just fortunate. I'm fortunate I went to work for Union, I'm fortunate that I was in the right place at the right time, that they thought I could do a job, I, I thought I could do it, I thought I could do it, I did it, what I thought I could. Uh, I didn't, I really didn't need a degree for what I

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was doin' and I don't think anybody does. Uh, but they, you need a little commonsense and you need to be taught some of these-

SW: [Things, yeah?].

JL: Things that uh, you don't need a gr-, a degree to be taught some of the things, but you do need a little smart with you. You uh, you need to be able to figure things out and use a little math, not much. Uh, you need to be business wise, but they send you to all these schools, too.

SW: Yeah, send you-

JL: I mean I went to business schools and I went to uh, um, studied a little, I, I didn't actually, didn't get into reservoir, but working close with the geophysicists and the geologists you pick up a lot. You know, you learn a lot. You uh...I, I thought I understood the program very well and all that. The only thing I didn't agree with was some of the business decisions they made, but [Slight pause] bigger minds are at work than me.

SW: Well, any-

JL: And sometimes th-, one day I'm gonna tell you I told you so, too. [Both laugh]

SW: It was just time to move on, the industry changed. I mean, it's just uh, time for you to get out I guess.

JL: Well yeah, now, you know, you get uh, like I said, I had had one heart attack uh, I don't think it was from stress because I felt like when I retired in, in the position I was, in the area I was familiar with, that nobody else could've done the job better than me. Because I'd [Chuckling] been there all my life almost, in that particular area. I knew it, I grew up with it, you know, 20, 25 years I watched it change, so I was familiar with everything. And my only thing was uh, if they wanted to move me to a different area or add somethin' to my job. And then I said, "No," uh, it's kind of like didn't, didn't [know it?]. But uh... you know, you need a little, I, I think you need a little chemistry. You need a little of this, you need, but you can learn that. You don't have to get a degree in it. I mean, it's not like uh, you can be taught things. Now, uh, a lot of things you have to learn and it takes a long time. A lot of the engineers I worked with, most of the engineers I worked with, they go through a training period of almost two years when they come out. Before they're an engineer. They have to go through all these and, and to learn these things. And I'm sure when they're a young engineer, when they go on an engineering status instead of a training status that they're learning just like everybody else. We all learn everyday, there's somethin' new goin' on. Uh... it's just rules and regulations, like the MMS's, you have to know a lot of things. Uh, be familiar with 'em. It just takes time. But you, you just have to do. So and uh, it's a lot of technical stuff. It's more technical today than it was when I first started. A lot more technical.

SW: Yeah. Computers and things like that.

JL: Well uh, just before I left uh, I happened to get into computers as a hobby YEARS ago. Before computers was computers. I'd, I'd write a little basics, okay. So when we started bringin' computers offshore and I called in the kids, but I mean the people offshore uh, they had never seen a computer. A lot of 'em didn't even, never even touched a computer. So we had some

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programs that uh, I took it upon myself to write a little program so that when they, they put their production in, all they had to do was like hit the enter key and the cursor key. There was only two keys. They'd [go to legend?] and then I say, "You wanna change an office [plate?] on your computer program? Hit enter and it say, okay, what office plate?" You know, okay. And then it would calculate the program. And that got 'em used to usin' a computer. And then after awhile I, now, by the time I left most of 'em could, they'd gotten, they got interested in computers, they, they have 'em at their homes, they're not afraid of 'em, can do it, you know. They didn't need that menu anymore to, to get around in a program. So uh, and I can remember comin' home at night and they'd call me from offshore and say, "It's not working. Somethin's not." From home I could tie into their computer and work on it for 'em and, and do whatever I needed to do to get 'em uh, lot of times they'd play with the computer and they'd wipe out a program and it wouldn't work anymore. That mouse is tricky. If you drag somethin' where it doesn't belong.

SW: Yeah, exactly. [Chuckles]

JL: [Chuckles] That uh, a couple times, yeah, I had to fly offshore, take care of it for 'em. But I mean, you know, it's, I wanted them, and I'd bring 'em in and uh, we would give 'em classes in all the computer programs that we used. I mean, we would give 'em, in the Lafayette office they'd come in on their days off and we'd [pay?] for their programs. Eight hours a day. So, I mean, there was benefits to, you don't get that anywhere else. You just don't get that kind of benefit other than workin' for a major oil company and the government, you know. [Slight pause] Uh, okay, uh, I'm 'bout rattled all out from rattle right now, what else-

SW: [Chuckles] That's good stuff. It's good. If you don't know, we've, we've sort of taken it from your beginning to your retirement there.

JL: Yeah.

SW: Can we go back over those years and maybe fill in some holes in a few spots?

JL: Okay.

SW: I just had a few uh, direct questions. Uh, when you were on the rigs offshore, or on the platforms, uh, living conditions, you said sometimes you didn't have a place to sleep-

JL: In the early, in the early days uh, yeah. Uh, living conditions were sparse to say the least.

SW: It got better as-

JL: Oh yeah, as it uh, as it got along. Uh, some marginal properties that we had, we had, we didn't have living quarters. We called them uh, uh, I'm tryin' to think of a name we would give 'em. Like "shelters." [SW chuckles] You know, you get caught on that platform, it's a place to sleep.

SW: That's it.

JL: It, it's, it's not where you normally would stay. We don't plan on stayin' there. But uh, in your area you might be workin' 100 miles from your living quarter. You fly over there. Well the

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weather in the Gulf could pick up and you could get fogged in, soaked in, or, or, and you might be stuck on that plat-, so you have to have some kind of, you know, put 'couple bunks in there, maybe three, two of you would, for the pumpers and the pilot. And a little kitchen with sparse uh, most of the time you had uh, we called a little care package in the helicopter carried with 'em, 'cause you never knew [where you would set down?].

SW: Yeah, that was my other question. Food. How was it, how as the food?

JL: Food was pretty good. [Inaudible].

SW: Even early days when-

JL: Oh yeah, in the early days, you know, uh, uh, sometimes uh, it depends on the company, but most of the time you had pretty good food. I mean, we'd get good wholesome meals as far as I was concerned. Uh, a lot of places you went there was no catering, so you'd cook for yourself. When you got in at night. But most of the time when you cooked for yourself, we had steaks. You know, it's easy to grill, it doesn't take too long. And uh, you act-, I actually to this day steaks is not my favorite food because we ate so many of 'em in those days that you just put it on the grill and-

SW: You're not the first person to tell me that that I've interviewed. [Chuckles]

JL: You know, really I'm, I'd rather have a [Chuckling] home-cooked meal than a steak. Now [Inaudible] I've seen myself eat baloney sandwiches for a week.

SW: Yeah. I've heard more than once somebody tell me that they burned out on steak. [Chuckles]

JL: Yeah, it, it, that's the truth.

SW: And sandwiches and potatoes and everything.

JL: Yeah, it's somethin' easy to fix, you know. We, if you gotta, if I was on a platform when I was workin' out there, I might make a gumbo one day. Big gumbo. And then we'd eat gumbo, you know, and couscous at night. And I used to like my couscous at night when I, you know, just a couple of us there that'd make a pot of couscous. Just, just, I don't know if you know what that is.

SW: Yeah.

JL: You do?

SW: Yeah. I'm from, I'm from this area.

JL: Okay. But that's, so, the hardest thing about workin' offshore is not for me, or it's not for you or people workin' offshore, it's for the families.

SW: That, that was another question I'm getting to. Uh, how was workin' seven-and-sevens, sometimes bein' gone for days, how was it for you? You-

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JL: Seven-and-seven not too bad, at least you knew when you were comin' home. Except for bad weather, you were always home, you returned on the same day and left on that day. It was very good work. The family, the, the wife had to uh, be very strong woman because she actually was by herself for seven days, did everything. And invariably the dishwasher or the washing machine or the dryer or one of the children got sick the night before you went offshore. I mean this was almost standard procedure. [Both chuckle] It was, ha, and you felt sorry for your wife, but you soon forgot about her when you was out there, 'cause I mean you was, uh, for instance, one of the better things, we uh, after Hurricane, it wasn't Hurricane [Eunice?], we didn't have lights in New Iberia for 10 days.

SW: Yeah, Andrew I think it was.

JL: Well before Andrew.

SW: Oh okay.

JL: Before, I'm thinkin'. We didn't have lights for 10 days. Well what happened right after Andrew it, there was really no damage to my house or my family. So we went to work. And our policy was, "If you have damage, you take care of your damage, and then you come to work as soon as you can, 'cause we need to get our production back on offshore." So we went back offshore. We turned on the air condition offshore, it, you know, we had air conditioning, we had everything. Back here they didn't even have lights [Chuckling] you know. So you felt a little guilty, you know.

SW: But you, but you wanted to be out there, though. [Chuckles]

JL: You know, that was my job, I mean, okay. So, but that's, that's what I'm sayin' the wives and the families have to go through. You're not here for a lot of things that you might miss. Uh, Unocal was very good to me. Uh, it just happened that while I was workin' seven-and-seven, and while I work-, in the oilfield I never worked on Christmas day, I was always off.

SW: Just happened like that.

JL: It just happened.

SW: That's good.

JL: Uh, it just so happened that as I was working seven-and-seven, the first few years I worked seven-and-seven I uh, was on the crew that was off for Christmas. When the crew that I was on was gonna be working for Christmas, I was promoted to another job and I switched crews. [SW chuckles] So I was off again. And it, and it really, you know, it just worked out great. I, I never was off for Christmas.

SW: Well that's good.

JL: You know.

SW: 'Cause I know a lot of people who end up-



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JL: Yeah. And now we, and, and we'd take, we'd rationalize by sayin', "Christmas is just a day. You can have Christmas when you come in or before you leave." It's just, and most of 'em do, you know. Now, uh-

SW: Just make the adjustment.

JL: In the early days, some of the management would turn a blind eye toward some of the crew comin' in Christmas Eve and then comin' in at Christmas night.

SW: So they'd swap up.

JL: Yeah. It's like you let half the crew go in at night and the other half goes in the morning.

SW: Even though you weren't supposed to.

JL: No.

SW: The managers kind of-

JL: And, and it was kind of like, "What we don't know, what you don't tell us, we're not gonna question."

SW: Maybe that was better. They figured they'd keep you happy.

JL: Yeah. Now this, this was a good thing. Uh, nobody complained. But just like everything else, it became, it became abused and uh, they let us come in on Wednesday night instead of Thursday mornin'. Well Wednesday night turned into Wednesday at four o'clock. Turned into two o'clock. Turned into noon. Turned into 10 o'clock in the mornin', and that's when management kind of like started into, "Wait a minute now," okay. So uh, but not all the oil companies were like that. Just, just so happened Unocal was very family-oriented to that, I thought. For instance, one of the hurricanes I had to go offshore on Unocal, see, our policy was if you're workin' offshore, if you don't have any damage to report as soon as the, the hurricane, you can, you can get over there, okay. Well I had to go. There was no damage to my house, I didn't have electricity. But Unocal hired a crew, they couldn't bring all the contractors back offshore right away because we had to make sure everything was safe. Some-, sometimes you get offshore and, offshore and uh, fences were down, [railing?] was missing, stairs were gone, uh, the living quarters might have had a roof leaking, or, uh, they had, you had to make sure everything was right before you get everybody. So they would ta-, they would hire a crew and a generator, big generator, and they would call you up, they'd call up, they'd call up the families of the Unocal people and say, "Do you have any damage that we can take care of for you? Your husband's offshore, we're goin' to look at you." They'd come over there and they would plug in and run your refrigerator, run your, your freezer, turn on the lights, let you do your washing, you know, and then they would unplug from you house, go to the next one. They, if you had any yard work to do or uh, you know, uh, branches or, or damage maybe, you know, they'd help, they'd put it back together, temporarily help you out. Or even if you didn't go back offshore and you had a lot of damage, they might come around [Inaudible] opportunity. But they would come around and say like you got holes in your roof, well they'd have the crew kind of help you patch it, you know, fix it up for you so that you could go back to work. Go, you could go back. And, and I don't know another company did that. I

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know Unocal did it.

SW: I haven't heard that.

JL: You know, and I'll tell you what, I, I, I always thought they were, you know, that was very nice of them to do that. And, and I really enjoyed it. That's one of the reasons I, I thought Unocal was more family-oriented than a lot of the others. But we had a lot of local managers too.

SW: That helps, huh?

JL: Yeah. [Pause]

SW: Well we've only got a couple more minutes left on this tape. So-

JL: I know I talk too much.

SW: Either we can, no, that's fine, I like it. [Chuckles] Either we can cover these couple things real quick, or if you think you have a lot more information I can come back on another day.

JL: All I have is anecdotes. I, I really [Chuckling] I'm not, there, you know, I'm not. Ask your questions real quick.

SW: Okay. Uh, blacks and women offshore. You ever see any?

JL: Sure. Had one woman that was pregnant.

SW: When was that?

JL: Oh, uh... probably 'bout six years before I retired.

SW: In the '90s based on-

JL: Yeah. She was pregnant and we weren't sure whether we were gonna have to supply a babysittin' service or not. So uh, uh, it, it, uh, she was workin' for me and uh, this went all the way to California. Uh, unfortunately or fortunately for me, or us or however you wanna put it, she, she had a miscarriage, so that didn't come around. Blacks, um, have no problem with blacks. Some of the best people I know workin' offshore were black.

SW: Did you see 'em in the early days or more, in the more recent days?

JL: Uh, in the '70s.

SW: The '70s-

JL: I saw a couple in the '60s, but uh, most of 'em were very conscientious workers. Uh, we've had some that uh, got in on a minority-basis only and that's, that's the only way they got in. And, and uh, [Inaudible, audio breaks in and out]. You know, if they thought we had to give it to 'em, they didn't pan out, but a lot of 'em really, really were good, good workers.

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SW: And, and the blacks and women, how did the men that were already workin' out there, was there any conflict or anything?

JL: No, no. I don't, I don't-

SW: [Any problems?]

JL: No, uh uh. They, they blended in well. Uh, I think uh, everybody tried to make 'em feel at home, you know. Uh... I, I don't, I never noticed any prejudice. Uh, not toward race or creed or color or anything. Prejudice toward work.

SW: Yeah, that's what I hear.

JL: That's the big thing. Don't, don't let me do all the work, you know. That's the only thing that uh... [Inaudible] there was some, and that's not only for blacks, it [handled?] whites. I don't care if you were red, green, or what, you couldn't do your work, you, you didn't sit well with everybody.

SW: If you were lazy and didn't carry your, your share of the load, other people would get mad at you.

JL: That's right.

SW: That makes sense.

JL: That's right.

SW: The, the oil industry, I know you know does this. [Gestures]

JL: Yeah.

SW: Did that ever affect your job? Did you ever a, uh, run the risk of, of losing your job because-

JL: I, I never thought about it. It, it never entered my mind. It's uh, uh, I remember when the stock market tumbled somewhere in the '80s. The only thing I said was, "Oh, that's good. I'm buying." That's what I thought. I never was, I never felt my job was threatened, uh, even when I retired I didn't feel my job was threatened. Uh, I think, in fact Unocal is my company, the company I worked for. I don't think it ever laid a fella off 'til the, 'til the '90s. They had never laid anybody off that I can remember. Uh [Chuckles] they may, they gave some redeployment packages a couple times in the '90s um, and I, I guess that was business decisions, you know, but you can see the properties weren't there anymore and we were always really uh, uh, understaffed I would say. And we maintained that. Sometimes the government might of, mighta stepped in and made you hire a little bit more than you should've, but, you know. [Slight pause] That was handled. And they have been, since I've retired, I think they had one more, one more lay off. So.

SW: Just one more question, this is an opinion question. What did the oil industry, oil and gas industry do for south Louisiana in your mind?

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JL: Gave a lot of kids a lotta, a lot of jobs. You know, good payin' jobs. Uh, i-, if, if I go and finish college and got a degree, nine chances out of 10 I wouldn't've stayed in Louisiana. [Slight pause] The, the, that's what I'm thinkin'. Uh-

SW: You think people who wanted to stay here had the opportunity to have a job and stay here?

JL: Before the oilfield? No-

SW: During the oilfield.

JL: During the oilfield, yeah. Well, I mean, let me tell you somethin'. I know what school teachers make, okay. I know what I made. And they ain't a school superintendent made what I made, how's that? So-

SW: Not only jobs, but good payin' jobs.

JL: Good payin' jobs. And, and good people to work for, you know. Just, it's a different, you have to be willing to work, you know, now I'm not sayin' I worked a 40 hour week, but I was always available. A lot of times, uh, I'd work more hours than it was necessary. You know, than I was required to. But that's because I know I was makin' good money and, hey, that's the way [it work?]. I've seen lot of the other young engineers come in there and on their training period work weekends, nights, holidays to learn the business. And you have to do that. I mean, it's competitive industry and it's a competitive field. You gonna go somewhere, you gonna have to stay with it. So, no, I don't, and I think it's helped Louisiana. It's, a lot of taxes came from them people, came from the salary people, came from the people that worked. Uh, you can look in New Iberia and see what happened when, when things go down. I can remember a time you couldn't pull up to a red light in New Iberia, you didn't see four [rows of cars?] at the red light, goin' from each direction. Now Otis is no more, I mean everything's consolidated, it's Halliburton. They're down. I mean, you know, the, the, the economy's down. It, it probably, I, I can only imagine what it would be like if it was like it was in the seven-, late '70s. Right now if New Iberia was like that, gee, you know. I thought they was never any end to the, the oil industry in those days. [SW chuckles] I mean, you just didn't think it would end. Everybody was, I mean, everybody in the oilfield had a company car. Everybody. Nobody, you know. They, that's, that's a lotta, it's an incentive right there. Good payin' jobs. Hell, we start a fella off on one, offshore probably around forty-five, fifty thousand dollars a year, seven-and-seven. Now you tell me, you know. No wonder the teachers would come to work for us, you know. [SW chuckles] So. It, it's, you know, and that's, that's base, that's pretty much base. He can make overtime work, you know. And [Inaudible] and then it's only seven-and-seven. And he gets seven days off. So, it's, and, and I think they need technical people out there, they need people with, oh I think teachers helped us out. They, they come in there and they, they did some good. We trained them and they trained us a little bit, you know. Uh, professional typing. It did good. And it is good to have a mix, get a little bit of everything. But it's o-, [only right?] when you see a teacher. Oh, them poor teachers only make like sixteen, seventeen thousand a year comin' out there and almost triplin' their salary. And workin' half the time. Oh we had 'em comin' in from Oklahoma and north Louisiana like you wouldn't believe. So. Uh, and they were very good in the office and, and a lot of people didn't like to work in the office, it was just too, and they liked to work in the office. And they were good at it. I never had any problem with teacher workin' in the office. Man, they do good work. Paperwork was good and pay's-

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