

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Brenda Dardar Robichaux **COLLECTION:** 4700.2100

IDENTIFICATION: Unincorporated Golden Meadow, Louisiana, native [b. 1958]; Raceland, Louisiana, resident; Houma Indian; former principal chief of United Houma Indian Tribe; Catholic

INTERVIEWER: David Hayward

SERIES: Bayou Lafourche Oral History

INTERVIEW DATE: November 11, 2010

FOCUS DATES: 1950s-1960s [childhood]; 2010

ABSTRACT:

Tape 3946

[Before interview starts] showing alligator gar crafts made of scales; interview conducted in Raceland, Louisiana, as part of LSU's Coastal Sustainability Studio; Brenda Dardar Robichaux [b. 1958], grew up below the corporation limits of Golden Meadow, Louisiana [Indians were not allowed to live within corporation limits]; church and old Indian settlement school with grades K-7 [no high school available]; father's generation has seventh-grade education; uncertified teachers "anyone brave enough" to teach the "sabians" [? derogatory term for bayou Indians]; school closed with civil rights movement in mid-1960s but Robichaux would visit it with family; community was nurturing, loving home environment; most people [including father] were fisherman [many still today]; trawlers, trappers, oystermen, follow the seasons; mom worked in shrimp factory and then at tribal center; gardens for fresh fruit and vegetables; dad would bring in fresh oyster, shrimp, crab; didn't buy a lot in grocery store; if you looked at poverty guidelines Robichaux probably grew up "poor" but never considered herself that because her needs were met and she ate well; Bayou Lafourche has changed dramatically, "it's frightening"; travel down the bayou from Raceland "makes me sad" [explains directions: up, down, across bayou]; don't see thriving community that was once there, community is in distress; there are less homes and some are "barely hanging on"; more industry; concentrated effort to make sure [community] stayed poor and uneducated so they could be manipulated and [others] could take land; did research for recent speaking engagement [graduation of Indian high school students in Lafourche Parish] and found record of a judge saying that with education Indians will see "how we're taking advantage of them"; Robichaux told students "don't let people take advantage of us"; now down bayou are a lot of industry-related businesses were there were once homes; people were approached by outsiders [oil and gas, large landowners], and told "we want to drill on your property, put an 'X' here;" that X was giving away land; grandfather [Ernest Dardar?] was a "traiteur" [Cajun medicine man or healer], people visited from all walks of life; worked for a man his entire life, thought he was buying property and the home on property; when he died

Robichaux's mother [Houma Indian from New Orleans, more education] approached landowner about rights, wanted to make sure property went to his son, landowner laughed in her face, called her "one of those educated Indians"; deed said grandfather could live there until the day of his death, and he only owned what was on top of the property [house]; years later people that inherited the property made Robichaux's parents start paying rent; stories continue like that; house is still there, but others weren't as fortunate and had to move; lots of mobile homes to house [oil] workers; Houma land right inside Leon Theriot Floodgates; anything beyond that is susceptible to flooding; Indian settlement is dry and so there's value to that property; [break in interview; unidentified man interjects to discuss his fondness for scanner with optical character recognition]; school boat would pick up kids across bayou, bring them to settlement school, in later years there was a smaller boat that would pick up children for school; gathering places for community, had own grocery store, Indian chapel and bar/dance hall; before her time but Robichaux heard stories: Friday and Saturday building was dance hall, Sunday morning it was church; Robichaux grew up one or two blocks from chapel; walked to church every Sunday; Indians sit on one side, white people on another; Indians weren't allowed to go up bayou, but Golden Meadow residents could come down to the Indian church [and they did]; Robichaux married and moved away but people were still sitting that way; chapel closed, turned into housing for offshore workers with bunk beds; life was really simple; fishing vessels meant a lot; weekends family traveled on dad's boat [trawl boat with cabin], anchor in a lake somewhere; bring a few friends along, dive, go swimming; catch enough shrimp to boil on deck; boat was "our gathering place"; sometimes bring smaller boat for waterskiing; didn't take family vacation because "means" weren't there; Sunday afternoons drive in car to Leeville, Louisiana; harvest chadron [thistle] growing along road; tall thing with pickers, would drive with vinegar, salt, cane knife; kind of like celery; spot one, stop car, cut it, salt and vinegar, eat it, keep going; simple life but fun; later family go to Gulfport for weekend; dad would bail at last minute; teased him that first love was his boat, second was mom, kids were third; grandfather was doctor; on boat all day, he came home late afternoon to house full of people waiting; never got paid because it was a trade [things from garden, seafood]; it was a calling; no physicians in area, no post office; interviewer asks how has bayou changed; more industry where dad lives; across bayou oak trees are dying because of saltwater intrusion, which is really taking toll in communities; husband travels to Lady of the Sea [General] Hospital [Cut Off, Louisiana] to do surgery every Wednesday morning; he'll call a couple times a month and tell Robichaux tides are higher than the road; if not for seawall water would be on highway; we are "barely protected", so vulnerable; Houma Indians were not allowed into corporation limits of Golden Meadow; Robichaux tells story of dad going with his employer, an oysterman, into a barbershop in Golden Meadow and being denied service; not allowed in certain movie theaters, grocery stores in Golden Meadow, which meant you had to be self-sustaining below corporation line; other places in lower Lafourche and Terrebonne Parish were the same; tribal citizens in Plaquemine, St. Mary, Jefferson, St. Bernard [Parishes]; same discrimination and struggles across bayous; New Orleans was more accepting, "pockets" of community in St. Bernard and Jefferson since mid-1930s; moved for educational opportunities; Robichaux was raised Catholic, strong Catholic influence in community; attended chapel every Sunday, did communion and confirmation; grandfather [nickname: Nanez?] used Catholic prayers in his healing; Robichaux has oral history tapes of some of his prayers; often it included "Our Father" and "Hail Mary"; if you travel down different bayous, whatever church opened school would have strong community [ex. in Dulac, Louisiana, strong Methodist church]; Robichaux started school in mid 1960s, attended regular public school

[first year of integration?]; tough transition from all-Indian school to white students only [no Vietnamese, Hispanic, African-American]; grew up in very basic home: living room, kitchen, three bedrooms, one bath; built by community because original home burned down; Robichaux remembers when family got their first bathroom [previously had two-seat outhouse]; chickens and geese in backyard; house dad grew up in had mud-and-moss [bousillage] walls in back, one [room?] didn't have floor; palmetto roof and cypress boards; house faced bayou, but Robichaux says family didn't sleep with feet facing water; bed could face any other direction, but [old saying about how] current of the bayou could take you away; no problems with alligators; grandfather lived in an addition to house [kitchen and bedroom]; Robichaux remembers going on walks with him in vegetable garden, the old-fashioned mints on his kitchen table; he would call her "le petit sanguige de papa" [?]; Robichaux was youngest grandkid, still at the house and spoiled; a year ago mom and dad celebrated birthdays, fiftieth wedding anniversary; house full of people sharing stories; parents can't remember living for an extended period of time "just them", always an aunt or cousin that needed a place to stay; three bedrooms were always filled; this house [in Raceland?] has adopted this method as well; a blessing a curse sometimes; used same area for home, farm, and storage; interviewer asks Robichaux for her definition of love; "home means love".

TAPES: 1 (T3946)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 29 minutes

PAGES INDEX: 4 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: None

RESTRICTIONS: None