

**T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection**

**ABSTRACT**

**INTERVIEWEE NAME:** Madison Bonsall

**COLLECTION:** 4700.2359

**IDENTIFICATION:** Cameron Parish resident, South Cameron High School student, cattle farmer

**INTERVIEWER:** Brendan Boudreaux

**SERIES:** Louisiana Sea Grant Coastal Change Oral Histories Project

**INTERVIEW DATE:** October 17, 2012

**FOCUS DATES:** 1997, 2005, 2008

**ABSTRACT:**

**Tape 4284**

Interviewee's name is Madison Lexis Bonsall; born on March 24, 1997 in Lake Charles, Louisiana; Bonsall says when she was little Cameron Parish had not been hit by Rita yet; she was always outside and always with her extended family; they'd work cows every weekend and go to her uncle's house to eat, cut up, and have fun; she used to ride horses, play football, softball, and do gymnastics; Bonsall was born in Lake Charles but has lived in Grand Chenier ever since she came home from the hospital; has lived in Grand Chenier for 13 years, but was displaced by Rita for two years in Sulphur and is now back in Grand Chenier; family has lived in Cameron Parish for probably 100 or 200 years; Bonsall's mom works at South Cameron High School as a teacher; dad works offshore on an oil rig as an operator; Bonsall and her parents speak English but her grandparents and great-grandparents speak French; Bonsall says growing up in Cameron Parish was awesome; they always had fun and always had something to do, no matter what time of year; playing outside, hunting, or fishing; Bonsall hunts, fishes, plays sports, and works cows, though not as often as before Rita; a lot of people sold their cattle; she is a sophomore at South Cameron High School; Bonsall would always go to her great grandmother's house who would cook every night; her family grew a lot of their groceries; they'd butcher their own cows, made their own sausage, and always had a big garden; would buy canned food, chicken, pork chops, bread, and milk from Lake Charles and Walmart; a lot of times they would shop at Brown's in Cameron, but that's not there anymore; they didn't buy very much because they would raise it or grow it themselves; but they don't do it anymore; Bonsall says that Cameron Parish had a whole lot more trees when she was a child; the Gulf was far out, but it's very close now; used to be a 20-minute drive to get to Rutherford Beach, but now you don't have to drive very far; a lot of trees and marsh grass have died since Hurricanes Rita and Ike; there used to be a lot of Roseau cane, but not anymore; Bonsall said the ridges haven't changed much; marsh is closer to the ridges than it used to be and it's just mud because of salt water intrusion and erosion; a lot of live oak trees died; there used to be a lot more maple, pecan, orange, and fig trees; Bonsall says most of the houses were older and probably built in the 1950s or 1940s; people lived in the houses they grew up in and built their own; houses were simple but had really

big kitchens; there used to be a lot of businesses, including Browns in Cameron, [Roy Baileys?] Construction in East Cameron, hair salons, hardware stores, Canik's feed store, and a lot of restaurants, a lot of construction and oil companies had offices down there; Crane Brothers did a lot of work with the oil industry; they're not as big as they used to be; Bonsall says the community has not changed a whole lot; it's just gotten closer; Bonsall is pretty sure climate has gotten a lot hotter since she was a child; they've had colder winters and drier summers than when she was younger; get more hurricane scares than when she was younger; Bonsall has noticed less rain in the summer and wetter and colder winters; in a drought often in the summer, which is hard on hay and produce; the winters have gotten colder in the last three years; Bonsall talks about the hurricane scare with Lilly just before Rita; after a few dry years, Ike came along and wiped them out again; ever since Ike, they've had a storm threat every hurricane season; Bonsall does not think they get as much rain as in the past during the summer; they get a whole lot more rain during the winter than they used to get; Bonsall doesn't wish her hurricane experiences on anybody; Bonsall has experienced Rita and Ike; Rita destroyed everything; Ike was bad, but was not near as bad as Rita; for Rita, Bonsall was eight years old when they evacuated, on a Tuesday, her daddy, Paw Paw, she, and her brother loaded up all the horse and farm equipment and brought it to around Basile; they brought the horses to Iowa; the cattle were already in their summer pasture in Iowa; explains packing everything up to spend the storm in Texas; on September 26, her mom's birthday, they found out they didn't have a house anymore; the water picked it up, shifted it, and dropped it back down; their kitchen was gone; it tore half the house off; only the chimney was left of her Paw Paw's house; they stayed in Sulphur with her mom's family for three weeks after Rita before they could get in Cameron Parish and see their house; Bonsall describes her living situation after losing house; says community was unrecognizable after the storm; it looked like a war zone.

**TAPES:** 1 (T4284)

**TOTAL PLAYING TIME:** 20 minutes

**# PAGES TRANSCRIPT / INDEX:** Transcript 12 pages / Index 4 pages

**OTHER MATERIALS:** Interviewer Essay

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