Corso di Laurea magistrale (ordinamento ex D.M. 270/2004) in Antropologia culturale, etnologia, etnolinguistica

Tesi di Laurea

Beyond the island

Antropologia del rischio in una comunità in bilico tra uragani e petrolio: Grand Isle, Louisiana.

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Be creative.

Belle C. Brandl
For Grand Isle is merely sleeping now – a sleeping beauty – awaiting the enchained kiss of the Prince of Progress who shall wake her from slumber to vibrant, pulsating life.

As yet, comparatively few people know Grand Isle as anything but a name – a dot located on the Gulf of Mexico – a spot where they have been told, the sun beats down relentlessly. But to those who know and love this island for what it island was, and can be – it’s a peaceful haven for weary bodies and jangiea nerves. An island of beauty and contrast. Unmercifully hot on the beach – but cool, quiet and calm beneath the heavy growth of trees and oleanders which canopy the homes of the islanders so completely that almost the habitation can be seen from the stark while road which parallels the eight-mile-long beach.

A place where sun and surf and tropical breeze combine to lull the most turbulent breast. A place where the blue white stars hang so low in their velvet black drapery of night that the first time you see them in this setting you automatically reach up to pluck one down.

It is and island of beauty – an island that will some day be the playground of the South – that will like Cinderella, emerge from her tattered raiment, in beautiful silk and sati in the radiant beauty she was intended to be.

This “sleeping princess”, Grand Isle, has since its first discovery, had as colorful a history as any romanticism could wish (Thompson, 1944: 56).

Fig. 1. Oyster boats1.

Cap. 1

VENTI E PETROLIO

Considerazioni introduttive

1. Cambiare abitudini

Betsy è una signora con più di sessant’anni che ho incontrato a novembre, tardi rispetto al mio arrivo a Grand Isle. Nonostante ciò abbiamo trascorso molto tempo insieme e questo ci ha permesso di condividere molte esperienze personali.

A Betsy piace la bella vita e ci tiene al suo aspetto fisico, per questo motivo, fino a qualche anno fa, andava quotidianamente a camminare sulla spiaggia percorrendo in media quattro miglia in un’ora, definendosi come una compulsive walker. Con l’avanzare dell’età e i problemi alla schiena, in spiaggia va sempre meno. Ma questi non sono gli unici motivi. È una persona cui piace stare tra la gente e da quando la sua amica thailandese se n’è andata, non c’è più nessuno che ogni giorno le sia di compagnia mentre cammina. Era tanta la gioia nei suoi occhi quando scoprì che mi recavo in spiaggia tutte le mattine per fare delle passeggiate e fu dal quel momento che iniziò a chiamarmi per andare insieme a lei a godere del primo sole del mattino.
«Oggi per la prima volta ho trovato un sand dollar sulla spiaggia, dicono porti fortuna, soprattutto se trovato abbastanza intero. È talmente fragile che lo devi tenere in mano delicatamente, non puoi nemmeno metterlo in tasca».  

Mercoledì 21 novembre avevamo camminato per quasi due ore, dalla casa degli uccelli fino allo State Park. Quel giorno gurdando quasi distrattamente per terra sono riuscita a scorgere il mio primo sand dollar, alla mia gioia corrispose la sua delusione poiché non l’aveva visto prima di me. Non sapevo ancora il motivo di tanta ostinazione che scatenavano in lei questi piccoli dollari della sabbia. Non è una conchiglia che salta all’occhio proprio per il colore simile a quello della sabbia e per la sua particolare conformazione estremamente fragile e piatta, eppure a lei solitamente non ne sfuggiva nessuno nonostante la sua vista fosse scarsa. Il pensiero sul perché riuscisse a trovarli tutti si ripresentava ogni qualvolta ci incontravamo sulla spiaggia, e proprio quel giorno decise di raccontarmi il motivo di tanta gioia nel vederli.

Cerca i sand dollars e li trova tutti, sempre. È impressionante come ci riesca perché le manca parecchia vista. Mi racconta che per lei sono come un messaggio dal cielo. Sua figlia usava disegnare le persone con i fiori al posto degli occhi, così per lei – quando trova un sand dollar – è come se sua figlia le dicesse “Ciao mamma, sono vicina a te”. È arrabbiata con quelli della BP perché rompono tutti i sand dollars con le loro auto e i loro rastrelli.  

2 Dal diario di campo, 21 novembre 2012.  
3 Letteralmente tradotto come “Dollaro della sabbia” si riferisce ad un particolare Echinoideo dal corpo piatto e circolare, al centro presenta il disegno di un fiore. È molto diffuso nelle acque oceaniche dell’emisfero nord settentrionale, nelle zone temperate e tropicali.  
4 Dal diario di campo, 03 dicembre 2012.
Lo stesso giorno trovammo i lavoratori di ES&H\(^5\), i quali si recavano sulle zone in cui il mare trasportava a riva i pezzi più grossi di petrolio, essi costituiscono una presenza nuova che si è integrata nello sfondo dell’immagine di Grand Isle. Betsy è una persona socievole, parla con tutti e, dopo aver detto le solite frasi di circostanza e cortesia, non si fece sfuggire l’occasione di esprimere questo irrefrenabile sentimento di ostinata rabbia, rimproverandoli del fatto che fossero responsabili dei suoi ricordi frammentati, la difficoltà nel scorgere i *sand dollars* è imputabile solamente a loro: l’introduzione dei *truck*\(^6\) utilizzati dai lavoratori per recarsi in riva al mare e raccogliere il petrolio calpestano la sua memoria. La stessa settimana mi aveva invitata a pranzo nella sua casa, luogo conosciuto dai *birdwatchers* appassionati per il suo giardino dominato da alberi che ogni anno attirano centinaia di uccelli migratori; mi racconta del suo passato e del matrimonio che le cambiò la vita mentre mi mostrava orgogliosa tutta la sua collezione di conchiglie, in particolare quella dei suoi dollari di sabbia. Era impossibile quantificarli, conservati accuratamente in delle teche di vetro, mi confessa che nemmeno lei ne conosce la cifra esatta ma, anche solo da uno sguardo distratto s’intuiva, con una certa sicurezza, che fossero più di qualche centinaio. Durante il tempo


\(^6\) Letteralmente usato per indicare i camion. Nel gergo comune assume anche il significato di pick-up.
in cui chiacchieravamo, mi soffermavo ad osservare le foto appese, probabilmente di famiglia, quando ad un tratto, con una certa spontaneità, mi indica una foto posta in primo piano rispetto alle altre: rappresentava il ritratto della figlia, un’immagine scattata per l’annuario pochi giorni prima della consegna del diploma, e, con gli occhi lucidi, mi confessa che in essa racchiude molte emozioni poiché è l’ultima immagine che possiede di lei prima che il tornado le rubasse la vita.

Il suo racconto, come altri episodi condivisi delle singole persone, mi hanno aiutata a capire come lo sconvolgimento che si mette in atto in seguito ad un disastro, non sia considerabile solo nei termini ambientali o economici, ma di come rappresenti un fatto estremamente personale che modifica la routine, le abitudini e tutti quei piccoli gesti che si danno per scontati. Per Betsy e gli altri abitanti dell’isola la fuoriuscita di petrolio ha macchiato le loro esistenze, ha tolto un po’ anche del loro respiro, come se la contaminazione fosse arrivata ad insediarsi anche nelle azioni quotidiane, per cui anche il semplice fatto del camminare lungo la spiaggia non ha più lo stesso significato di prima.

2. L’antropologia del rischio

Capita alle volte che un vecchio granaio crolli. Nulla di straordinario. Ogni Zande sa che le termiti ne rodono i sostegni e che anche il legno più duro dopo anni di impiego finisce con l’andare in rovina. Ora il granaio è una sorta di capanno estivo del
casale zande, sotto il quale, nelle ore calde della giornata, ci si va a riparare, a chiacchierare, giocare a “buche” (specie di dama) o svolgere qualche attività artigiana. Quindi, nel momento in cui il granaio crolla, può darsi che ci sia gente seduta sotto di esso e rimanga ferita, poiché la struttura è pesante, composta di travi e di argilla, e può, per di più, essere pieno di eleusine. Perché, allora, proprio quelle particolari persone devono trovarsi sotto quel particolare granaio, nel preciso momento in cui esso crolla? Che dovesse crollare, è facilmente comprensibile; ma perché avrebbe dovuto crollare in quel particolare momento e con quelle particolari persone riparate sotto di esso? […] La stregoneria spiega la coincidenza di questi due avvenimenti (Evans-Pritchard, 2002: 26-27).

La ricerca effettuata da Evans-Pritchard negli anni ’20 costituiva già un’anticipazione degli studi relativi all’antropologia del rischio e dei disastri. Il carattere innovativo dell’autore è l’aver identificato la stregoneria come risposta ad eventi catastrofici di cui conosciamo esattamente la ragione scientifica dell’accaduto, ma che, nonostante questo, risulta incompleta per la comprensione del carattere casuale insito nell’evento stesso, perché «[…] la stregoneria non agisce a caso o senza intento, ma è un attacco pianificato da un uomo contro un altro che odia.» (Evans-Pritchard, 2002: 56). Queste considerazioni ci aiutano a comprendere che analizzare il rischio come una forma di costruzione sociale ci aiuta a capire perché una comunità consideri, come maggiormente rischioso, un evento rispetto ad un altro.

Non sempre si possiede risposte per dare un senso a quello che succede, per questo motivo si sente il bisogno di collocare ciò che accade all’interno di
categorie cognitive native. A questo proposito risulta pertinente quanto sostiene l’antropologa Mary Douglas, ossia che è la società stessa a decidere quali rischi rientrino nella concezione di pericolo e quali invece possono essere tralasciati: è in base alla cultura in cui siamo immersi che percepiamo determinate situazioni come particolarmente minacciose per la nostra esistenza.

Sarebbe assai ingegnoso organizzare i principi della distribuzione del rischio in base a criteri di efficienza in termini di costi – forse persino un grande trionfo della filosofia, ma purtroppo è più probabile che sia una cosa impossibile, perché i costi possono essere utilizzati solo all’interno di uno schema definito di valutazioni, mentre la questione dell’accettabilità del rischio riguarda i principi stessi di valutazione, vale a dire, la cultura (Douglas, 1991: 26).

Concettualizzare il termine rischio consente di poter fare un’analisi che dia particolare rilevanza alle relazioni sociali presenti nella nozione di vulnerabilità sociale. La percezione del rischio rispetto ad un disastro che ha un individuo, è ciò che determina un aumento o una diminuzione della vulnerabilità sociale, la quale è composta, a sua volta, da una serie di fattori antropologici che riguardano la struttura sociale. Possiamo affermare quindi che al verificarsi di un disastro, il danno, talvolta, può essere sorprendentemente differente rispetto ad un altro con pari intensità d’impatto, in quanto il livello di vulnerabilità sociale concorre al suo aumento o alla sua diminuzione. Quello che ci risulta difficile nella lettura di questi eventi è l’oscillazione tra il comportamento
previsto e quello che si verifica, essendo determinato dalla percezione del rischio che abbiamo, esso rappresenta sia un fattore personale e soggettivo, sia un fattore sociale.

La «teoria culturale del rischio» elaborata dall’antropologa Mary Douglas in collaborazione con il politologo Aaron Wildavsky considera il disastro come socialmente costruito che viene determinato dalla percezione sociale dell’evento pericoloso e dalla percezione sociale che esso si verifichi davvero, sono l’organizzazione culturale e l’insieme simbolico che la costituiscono a riconoscere e gestire il rischio, in questo senso si può affermare che esso è culturalmente definito (Douglas e Wildavsky, 1982); accettare questo punto di vista significa ammettere che l’approccio tecnocentrico7, basato sulla visione del rischio come prodotto della razionalità, presenta dei grossi limiti. Abbandonare il realismo ed il costruzionismo per avvicinarsi al realismo critico sostenuto da Mary Douglas8, è il primo passo verso l’antropologia dei disastri e ad una comprensione olistica della società del rischio9, superando quel gap di conoscenze tra comunità di esperti e comunità locali.

7 Questo filone considera l’agente d’impatto come unico elemento importante nel verificarsi di un evento dannoso, considerando il contesto, e tutte le altre variabili, come inutili ai fini della comprensione del disastro.
8 L’approccio realista identifica il rischio come oggettivamente quantificabile, quello costruzionista come un prodotto mentale, mentre il realismo critico sostiene che esistono dei dispositivi sociali che ci fanno percepire il rischio come più pericoloso rispetto ad un altro, in questo senso allora si può sostenere che il rischio è plasmato socialmente.
9 Un altro contributo importante dato dall’autrice è l’introduzione del processo di blaming nello studio dei disastri: un’attribuzione di colpa da parte delle società pre-modernne per mantenere la coesione interna del gruppo, attivando in questo modo dei dispositivi per superare il dolore.
9 Termine coniato da Ulrich Beck per indicare la nuova fase storica e sociale in cui viviamo. Egli sostiene che viviamo nella piena consapevolezza di un paradosso: siamo coscienti del fatto che
In relazione a ciò, il sociologo Ulrich Beck considera la diffusione del rischio come problema principale; egli definisce la società contemporanea come una società del rischio caratterizzata dalla consapevolezza dell’incontrollabilità di eventi catastrofici. Attraverso lo sviluppo di nuove tecnologie l’uomo ha potuto diminuire e contenere i rischi attraverso l’utilizzo di nuovi strumenti, tuttavia ci sono degli effetti imprevedibili e incalcolabili che non riguardano più solo l’ambiente e le persone localmente colpite ma echeggiano nel mondo globale. Per questo motivo, secondo l’autore, le interpretazioni e la coscienza nativa non sono più in grado di dare una risposta abbastanza esauriente al manifestarsi di questi fenomeni estremi, in quanto il rischio viene ascritto dalla civiltà. L’eliminazione dell’*hic et nunc* proposto da Beck, permette di creare un senso di colpa condiviso che astrae il disastro dal contesto reale in cui si colloca nel momento in cui accade. Egli ritiene che si sia innescato un meccanismo secondo il quale la responsabilità non è più solamente di poche persone, ma si suddivide per il numero totale di individui, sottraendo, in tal modo, la colpevolezza e il senso di responsabilità che appartengono alle istituzioni (Beck, 2001). Dal mio punto di vista la sua concezione rispetto a questi eventi presenta dei limiti, in quanto considerare i disastri come globalmente diffusi mi permette di asserire con l’autore riguardo alla creazione di una coscienza collettiva nel rispetto dell’ambiente ma, al contempo, non considera la

un evento catastrofico possa accadere e che lo stesso evento possa essere dato dal risultato dell’attività dell’uomo.
deresponsabilizzazione del comportamento individuale che ne consegue\textsuperscript{10}. Per questo motivo sarebbe necessario reintrodurre il concetto del \textit{qui ed ora} all’interno degli studi sui disastri, integrandolo alla prospettiva proposta da Beck.

In accordo con quanto sostiene Bruna De Marchi, bisognerebbe considerare una \textit{specializzazione contestuale}, abbandonando il monopolio dei saperi appartenente alle discipline scientifiche (De Marchi, Pellizzoni, Ungaro, 2001). Non si può parlare nei termini assoluti di atteggiamento razionale che si basa su un calcolo di costi e benefici, l’individuo non dev’essere considerato come un elemento ascritto dal contesto in cui vive, egli, al contrario, ne è fortemente immerso e incorporato poiché costruisce delle relazioni con i luoghi in cui abita.

I disastri sono fenomeni sociali osservabili nel tempo e nello spazio delle loro attività sociali quotidiane come risultato di un impatto effettivo o di una percezione di minaccia a causa dell’apparire relativamente improvviso di agenti naturali e/o tecnologici che non possono essere controllati direttamente e completamente dalla conoscenza sociale esistente (De Marchi, Ellena, & Cattarinussi, 1987: 675)\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{10} Secondo il punto di vista di Beck se si pensa al caso internazionale della BP, tutti gli individui sarebbero da considerarsi responsabili in quanto consumatori di petrolio e, allo stesso tempo, tutti dovrebbero avere una coscienza critica riguardo al problema, nonostante ciò i consumi di petrolio non sono diminuiti perché le abitudini a livello individuale non sono cambiate. In questo senso la responsabilità diventa collettiva: attivisti e organizzazioni si sono messi in moto per fare chiarezza sulle trivellazioni, sulle modalità di lavoro delle compagnie petrolifere, etc. in quanto si è sviluppata una coscienza critica ma i comportamenti che noi assumiamo dipendono non solo dai nostri principi, ma anche dal contesto culturale, storico ed economico in cui si è inseriti.

\textsuperscript{11} La definizione si riferisce alla voce «Disastro» redatta da Quarantelli e Wenger.
Timing. Il senso del tempo costituisce uno degli elementi principali del disastro, spesso si tende a considerare solo la temporalità data dal manifestarsi dell’evento stesso, trascurando tutto quel processo antecedente rappresentato da un accumulo delle tensioni che ha portato al disastro stesso, questo ci permette di concettualizzarlo come un elemento fisico che è stato plasmato socialmente. Considerare tutte le variabili antropologiche e fisiche permette una comprensione più ampia dell’intero evento, tralasciando quelle dicotomie che da tempo si perpetuano all’interno delle discipline umanistiche e delle scienze considerate come forti.

3. Resilienza e persistenza

Di fronte alle fluttuazioni ambientali, un ecosistema può avere la capacità di tornare rapidamente, terminata la perturbazione, alle condizioni di equilibrio («persistenza»: stabilità di stato). Oppure, può assorbire la perturbazione mediante un adattamento flessibile, che configura una nuova condizione di equilibrio («resilienza»: stabilità di organizzazione con variabilità di stato). La resilienza è un adattamento ad un ambiente mutevole e le risposte adattive mettono l’ecosistema in grado di reagire anche a fluttuazioni eccezionali; è la stabilità degli ecosistemi asciutti, ottenuta mediante meccanismi morfo-fisiologici: apparentemente vulnerabili, in quanto di fronte ad uno stress modificano il proprio aspetto (l’erba della savana si secca in stagione asciutta), oppure proprio per questo stabiili anche di fronte a stress pesanti (dopo un’acuta siccità, una pioggia fa rigermogliare la savana) (Faggi, 2007: 82-83).
Secondo l’autore Pierpaolo Faggi un ecosistema non si può definire categoricamente persistente o resiliente, poiché esso presenta entrambe le caratteristiche proponendo maggiormente una delle due.

Il concetto di resilienza è entrato da qualche tempo anche nell’ambito delle scienze sociali, indicando la capacità dell’uomo di affrontare le difficoltà e superarle. Particolare importanza viene riscontrata nello studio del dolore, analizzando quella capacità di superare situazioni traumatiche attraverso la ricerca di risposte all’interno dei valori nel nostro sistema culturale di significati. Tuttavia, ciò che si è dimenticato è stato includere anche la persistenza all’interno di questa concezione. Come negli ecosistemi, le società non conoscono estremi puri, per questo motivo bisogna individuare entrambe le sfaccettature all’interno dei gruppi sociali che si intende osservare. A partire da questo concetto ho deciso di riconsiderare l’analisi dei disastri all’interno della mia ricerca, integrandola attraverso l’utilizzo dei termini resilienza e persistenza per cercare di comprendere se l’ambiente costituisce un fattore determinante nella propensione delle persone di Grand Isle a superare o meno uno stress derivante sia dallo sconvolgimento naturale sia da quello tecnologico. Cercare di capire quali strategie – laddove presenti – siano state messe in atto dalla comunità locale permette di comprendere da un ulteriore punto di vista in che modo sono state ridotte le conseguenze negative che sono derivate dal disastro, e che ruolo ha giocato la comunità scientifica all’interno
dei due eventi, ovvero l’uragano Katrina e l’esplosione della piattaforma nel Golfo del Messico.


Potenzialità del territorio e strategie per ridurre i possibili danni sono strettamente connesse, e nel sud Louisiana lo sono in maniera controversa. La sua ricchezza pone le persone in una posizione ambigua, per cui l’amore verso il luogo che abitano è anche verso la trasformazione della materia in risorsa.

«Guarda che bella visuale c’è da qui. Eccetto per quelle piattaforme. Non sono belle, ma ci portano un sacco di soldi»

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12 Dal diario di campo, 12 ottobre 2012.
4. Il campo

La mia permanenza negli Stati Uniti è durata novanta giorni, il tempo massimo concesso agli stranieri con visto turistico. Durante questo periodo trascorso nell’isola ho alloggiato presso una delle stanze messe a disposizione dal pastore della First Baptist Church, dove sono potuta entrare in contatto con una piccola parte della comunità grazie alle diverse attività promosse dai credenti – quali il doposcuola, la distribuzione del cibo – verso quella fascia della popolazione con difficoltà economiche, questo mi ha permesso di osservare un diverso tipo di fede che coinvolge e penetra pienamente la vita dell’individuo; inoltre mi ha dato la possibilità di capire se la presenza religiosa fosse un aspetto importante oppure da considerarsi, al contrario, una parte della loro vita trascurabile.

Per quanto riguarda la mia metodologia di lavoro ho cercato di instaurare dei legami che non fossero meramente finalizzati a scopi di ricerca antropologica, cercando di evitare l’oggettivazione dell’individuo, per questo motivo ho intervistato quelle persone con cui avevo raggiunto un maggiore confidenza, abbandonando volutamente l’idea del campione d’indagine e iniziando ad accendere il registratore dopo quasi un mese e mezzo del mio arrivo nell’isola: il dispiegarsi delle loro vite attraverso i racconti legati al disagio dei disastri costituiva il fulcro della mia indagine. Per questo motivo ritengo opportuno specificare che alcune informazioni derivano da colloqui.

13 Nell’isola si contano tre diverse chiese: una Cattolica, una Metodista e una Battista.
avvenuti in modo del tutto informale di cui non possiedo registrazioni ma
solamente degli appunti trascritti sottoforma di note di campo che riporterò, in
quanto ritengo siano delle fonti pertinenti ed essenziali ai fini della mia tesi.

Le ragioni della complessità determinate dall’uso del registratore
aumentarono nel momento in cui mi sono dovuta interfacciare con gli obiettivi
della ricerca definiti principalmente dal riuscire a ridurre le distanze iniziali che
c’erano tra me e loro spiegando che la mia metodologia si basava su un lavoro
qualitativo che vedeva l’incontro delle loro esistenze con la mia persona,
entrare in contatto con loro in quanto individui portatori di cultura e di
esperienze avrebbero accresciuto reciprocamente le nostre conoscenze
attraverso l’incontro di saperi; ma tra i problemi che mi ritrovavo ad
affrontare c’era la difficoltà data dalla mia presenza in un luogo che per me
rappresentava il campo, mentre per loro costituisce la propria casa.

Questo ostacolo era dovuto a diverse ragioni: innanzitutto al fatto che io
stessa ho incontrato delle problematicità nell’accettare il ruolo che stavo
ricoprendo in qualità di studentessa che svolge una ricerca sul campo; in
secondo luogo perché i diversi giornalisti che si sono occupati di questa
tematica in precedenza hanno rafforzato quest’idea dell’estranee come
invasore, il cui obiettivo è quello di riuscire ad avere l’esclusiva riguardo ad un
evento che continua ad avere dell’incredibile per chi ancora oggi non riesce a
rendersene conto nonostante il mutevole cambiare dei giorni da quel 20 aprile
2010.
All’interno del testo ho volutamente inserito le interviste trasritte in lingua originale, in forma integrale nell’appendice per mantenere il più fedele possibile i dati raccolti per far trasparire la coerenza tra fonte ed elaborato finale.

5. Finzione etnografica\textsuperscript{14}

Il mio lavoro sul campo è partito dall’idea di analizzare la percezione del rischio in seguito al disastro petrolifero conosciuto come \textit{BP oil spill}, da parte dei residenti di Grand Isle, in Louisiana. Durante la mia permanenza ho potuto individuare alcuni livelli in cui le persone interessate si sono riposizionate creando diversi significati intorno a sé e agli altri: il primo consiste nella prima forma di contatto instaurata con le persone dell’isola (telefonate, e-mail, etc.), il secondo riguarda l’ingresso nel campo, mentre il terzo s’identifica nell’intervista con il registratore. Sono tre momenti in cui da un lato, ho cercato di dare un senso al mio lavoro in base alle relazioni che ho costruito con gli altri, mentre dall’altro loro hanno cercato di collocarmi in un sistema di significati che potesse essere socialmente accettato.

\textsuperscript{14} Il titolo fa riferimento al concetto di \textit{finzioni etnografiche} elaborato da James Clifford con il quale egli intende indicare tutte quelle variabili che danno forma all’etnografia, implicando la selezione alcuni fattori rispetto ad altri in base alle nostre preferenze. \textsc{James Clifford, George E. Marcus}, a cura di, \textit{Scrivere le culture. Poetiche e politiche dell’etnografia}. Meltemi, Roma, 2006, pp. 31, 32. Ed. or. 1986.
Ai fini della comprensione del mio elaborato, ritengo opportuno sottolineare e riportare alla luce le controversie date dall’uso del registratore. Per quanto mi è stato possibile ho registrato il più possibile le conversazioni spontanee e i colloqui fissati con le persone, ma non posso nascondere il disagio che creava l’apparecchio, prima di tutto verso me stessa e, in alcuni casi, anche verso gli altri. I comportamenti che ha innescato erano principalmente di due tipi: alcune persone si sono rifiutate di parlare in presenza del registratore per paura potessero sorgere problemi a livello legale, altre, invece, erano fiere di portare all’attenzione nuovamente i problemi dell’isola attraverso la loro testimonianza. Ho potuto notare che il grado di confidenza presente tra l’intervistato, il registratore e me stessa, per quanto fosse più o meno accentuato, generava una sorta di comportamento che potrei definire come costruito. Questo pensiero mi ha portato a riflettere sul concetto di finzione che ruota attorno ai rapporti personali che si vengono a creare nel condurre un lavoro di ricerca etnografica. Vivere nell’isola mi ha permesso di riflettere sulla complessità delle relazioni, citando Pirandello, c’è sempre un grado di finzione nei rapporti umani, e l’essere inseriti in un contesto che non conosciamo ci fa capire come questo sia un fattore universale e non riducibile all’esperienza etnografica.

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Secondo l’autore la realtà è un costrutto soggettivo individuale che porta sostanzialmente a concepire il soggetto stesso come mutevole, per questo la sua visione del mondo sarà diversa tante volte quante avviene il suo mutamento interiore in relazione alle situazioni in cui si trova.
I rapporti che si creano sul campo scaturiscono sempre da un nostro obiettivo, avente uno scopo ben preciso e per quanto si riesca a mantenere una relazione professionalmente distaccata, si deve considerare che le nostre fonti sono persone e in quanto tali sono portatrici di storie ed esperienze che arricchiranno la nostra visione del mondo. Per questo motivo eviterò di usare il termine *informatore*, privilegiando la parola *persona*.

Benché non ci sia stata una richiesta esplicita da parte degli intervistati di rimanere nell’anonimato, ho deciso di cambiare i loro nomi reali con dei nomi immaginari per rispettare l’etica e la privacy, dato il carattere estremamente personale del contenuto delle interviste, per questo motivo non c’è alcun riferimento voluto ad altre persone.

6. Perché Grand Isle

A dover raccontare il perché di questa scelta non è semplice. Non perché ci siano sotto delle motivazioni profonde, e nemmeno delle ragioni inspiegabilmente contorte. Tutt’altro. Il mio interesse verso la Louisiana, e in particolare Grand Isle, è sorto quasi per caso. La decisione si basa principalmente sull’interesse personale verso l’antropologia del rischio e dei disastri, in quanto ho sempre considerato la tematica come aspetto di maggior
rilevanza rispetto alla destinazione.\textsuperscript{16} Non avendo un luogo particolarmente a me caro e nemmeno un’idea ben precisa sul dove andare, ho dovuto basarmi su dei criteri di scelta molto pragmatici. Innanzitutto uno dei grossi limiti che mi trovavo ad affrontare era il problema linguistico: l’unica lingua con cui sentivo di avere una certa padronanza ed essere in grado di poter sostenere delle conversazioni era l’inglese, questo ha rappresentato la ragione principale che mi ha portata a restringere le mie zone d’interesse. Dopo diversi ripensamenti mi sono ritrovata a considerare il disastro petrolifero della \textit{British Petroleum}\textsuperscript{17}: era un argomento abbastanza recente da poter affrontare e che ho avuto la possibilità di seguire con una certa attenzione sin da quel 20 aprile 2010. Operando una ricerca in internet ero riuscita a trovare una bibliografia immensa riguardante l’accaduto, scoprendo che una delle zone più colpite era questa piccola isola barriera che si affacciava sul Golfo del Messico: un luogo isolato e circoscritto con degli aspetti interessanti da poter approfondire in un arco di tempo che fosse compreso in tre mesi di permanenza.

La casualità mi ha messa in contatto con un mondo che conoscevo solo parzialmente, aiutandomi ad assumere la consapevolezza che si può trovare più di quel che ci si aspetta, nonostante l’interesse iniziale non sia così forte da farci sentire sicuri di pensare che quella che abbiamo fatto sia stata la scelta giusta.


\textsuperscript{17} Nel corso della tesi userò l’acronimo BP (British Petroleum) entrato nel gergo comune per indicare questo specifico disastro.
per il nostro percorso. Benché non conoscessi molto il luogo, l’attenzione verso di esso è cresciuta man mano che la ricerca stava prendendo forma. Questo disinteresse iniziale mi ha consentito di arrivare sul campo senza quella presunzione, che spesso si tende ad avere, di sapere tutto riguardo al posto in cui avrei trascorso tre mesi, mantenendo sempre viva quella curiosità di conoscere e scoprire sempre aspetti nuovi riguardo al territorio e alle persone. Tuttavia credo ci siano sempre degli elementi che chiave che attirano la nostra attenzione, determinando in maniera significativa le scelte che saremo portati a fare.

Nell’idea comune l’isola richiama alla mente concetti quali l’isolamento e il senso del remoto a causa della sua conformazione fisica e della sua precisa collocazione geografica: entrambi aspetti che ritornano spesso anche nell’immaginario collettivo rispetto alla figura classica dell’antropologo, nonostante le diverse specializzazioni che si sono create negli ultimi decenni.

Fig. 2. Morti simboliche a Grand Isle in seguito al disastro.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} Dal gruppo Facebook \textit{We love Grand Isle, Louisiana}: \texttt{<https://facebook.com/groups/11197861898/>}. Data ultima consultazione: 20.03.2013.
Le morti, non solo fisiche, raccolte in quest’immagine rientrano tra i fattori che mi hanno spinta a Grand Isle perché credo rappresenti chiaramente ciò che la comunità sente di aver perso per sempre a causa della BP; perciò ho ritenuto fosse stato interessante cercare di capire come le persone hanno vissuto queste morti interiori e fino a che punto sono state delle perdite simboliche. Il ritratto delle croci fa riflettere sulle diverse mancanze che uno si ritrova ad affrontare quando il disastro si verifica come un evento inatteso, costituendo la parte di un processo che non riusciamo a definire in termini di spazio, ma soprattutto del tempo. Per queste ragioni la fotografia si definisce come elemento imprescindibile nella raffigurazione dell’immaginario di Grand Isle, luogo in cui si sente ancora la presenza di un cimitero della quotidianità che vive tra gli abitanti.

5. Gli obiettivi della ricerca

La ricerca sul campo è cominciata ancor prima del mio arrivo sul campo. Ho iniziato ad analizzare l’utilizzo dei social network da parte della comunità di Grand Isle per capirne il ruolo in caso di disastro ambientale sulla base del suo utilizzo giornaliero. Avvalersi di queste nuove forme di comunicazione ha costituito un importante strumento ai fini della mia ricerca antropologica. Alcuni dati derivano proprio da quest’analisi compiuta all’interno dei gruppi.
Facebook We love Grand Isle, Louisiana e Friends of Grand Isle, composti sia da residenti sia da persone che hanno la casa vacanza o che nutrono un sentimento profondo verso quest’isola. Il mio punto di vista si basa sulla considerazione di questo canale di comunicazione come alternativo rispetto al mainstream dei media classici, valutando la diffusione delle notizie in tempo reale senza dover passare per le vie considerate come ufficiali (giornali, emittenti radio, etc.). Grazie a questo mezzo, l’accesso e la creazione di informazioni sono consentiti a tutti. Tuttavia esso non basta a spiegare che cosa accade ogni giorno nel luogo che uno considera la sua casa. Benché internet venga considerato un mezzo libero e interattivo, ci sono delle precise strategie di comunicazione che vengono usate per attirare dei potenziali lettori, in maniera consapevole o meno, creando nell’utente-letore particolari stati emotivi; per questo motivo ho cercato di analizzare il concetto di sharing nel contesto specifico della mia ricerca, per cercare di capire se la condivisione di informazioni, sentimenti e stati d’animo attraverso questo gruppo virtuale, possa aver aumentato o diminuito la resilienza e la vulnerabilità sociale.

A questa prima forma di ingresso sul campo è seguita la ricerca etnografica definita come «classica». Lo studio iniziale del luogo mi ha aiutato a comprenderlo sotto i diversi profili storici e geografici, approfondendo quegli aspetti di modificazione del territorio che avvengono ogni anno sia da parte di eventi naturali – in particolare gli uragani e le tempeste tropicali che ogni anno si riversano nell’isola e ne modificano profondamente la morfologia; sia da
parte degli uomini – quali l’attività di pesca intensiva che vede ogni anno un aumento turistico durante l’estate, le attività di estrazione petrolifera e la raffineria presente nell’isola.

Quest’analisi preliminare mi ha permesso di capire il rapporto che gli abitanti hanno con lo spazio in cui sono immersi, oltre che a chiarificare quell’aspetto che riguarda la loro percezione del pericolo in relazione al disastro della fuoriuscita di petrolio avvenuto nel 2010, meglio conosciuto come *BP disaster*, che ancora oggi continua ad avere delle conseguenze per gli abitanti presenti sulle coste del Golfo del Messico: oltre ad averne modificato l’ecosistema, ha causato danni fisici ed economici, non solo per i suoi dipendenti e per i pescatori, ma anche per tutta la comunità di Grand Isle. A questo si aggiunge l’utilizzo, da parte della compagnia, dell’utilizzo di circa 1.8 milioni di galloni (approssimativamente 7 milioni di litri) di solventi chimici, tra cui il *Corexit* vietato in alcuni Stati per la sua pericolosità, in quanto – come spiegherò nel terzo capitolo – può causare gravi malattie respiratorie. Queste sostanze frantumano il petrolio depositandolo sottoforma di piccole particelle nel fondo del mare; ciò rappresenta un tentativo per cercare di nascondere la parte visibile del problema, la superficie delle cose. Le conseguenze causate dall’utilizzo dei solventi sono state trascurate, ancora oggi c’è un continuo ritornare a riva delle *tar* più o meno grandi che ogni giorno i dipendenti dell’
ES&H raccolgono\textsuperscript{19}, si suppone anche che la fauna marina, assumendo involontariamente i residui del petrolio, possa subire delle mutazioni genetiche. Assaf Abdelghani, professore di Environmental Health Sciences alla Tulane University di New Orleans, è un esperto di effetti a corto e lungo termine causati dall’inquinamento sulla salute umana e degli animali marini. Egli sostiene che «Decreased dissolved oxygen in the water could cause hypoxia, or severe lack of oxygen, suffocating fish and other marine animals»\textsuperscript{20}.

Partire dall’opinione degli esperti è stato un modo per capire che importanza avessero tutte queste informazioni per gli abitanti di Grand Isle, per questo motivo le interviste e i colloqui – formali ed informali – che sono avvenuti con loro hanno assunto una particolare rilevanza metodologica per la costruzione di una tesi che andasse oltre alla semplice raccolta dei dati, ciò che riguarda l’uomo comincia dal racconto delle esperienze, le quali danno un senso ai numeri vuoti ed impersonali che il disastro porta con sé.

6. Analisi commentata dei capitoli

Questa tesi è il risultato di un lavoro di ricerca sul campo nell’ambito specifico della percezione del rischio in relazione al disastro della \textit{British Petroleum} avvenuto tre anni fa nel Golfo del Messico.

\textsuperscript{19} Essendo un’azienda che opera per conto della \textit{British Petroleum} non sono tenuti ad informare le persone sul materiale che raccolgono lungo la spiaggia.

Prima di arrivare sul campo avevo contattato alcuni ricercatori e docenti che si erano occupati della Louisiana sotto diverse prospettive di analisi, tra i loro consigli ne ricordavo uno in particolare nel quale la ricercatrice sosteneva che non avrei potuto studiare questo argomento senza prendere in considerazione la devastazione causata dall’uragano Katrina. Le motivazioni di queste affermazioni mi sfuggivano, ma non riuscivo a tralasciare queste preziose parole e, per comprendere il motivo dell’inscindibilità nello studio dei due eventi, ho dovuto attendere il mio arrivo in Louisiana: dal primo all’ultimo giorno di permanenza Katrina è stata la presenza maggiore – visibile ed invisibile – che ho sentito quand’ero lì. Nei discorsi, nei luoghi, nei cibi, nelle bevande, etc., il sud Louisiana è stato modificato dall’uragano che si è insediato in ogni piccolo gesto quotidiano. Il territorio ed i suoi abitanti, ben preparati a questo tipo di eventi, sono stati segnati profondamente dai disagi inaspettati causati da Katrina, ed è stata proprio questa diversa concezione degli uragani che essa ha scaturito a motivare la scelta di dedicare un capitolo che avesse lei come protagonista principale all’interno della quotidianità della vita degli abitanti di Grand Isle, partendo dalla descrizione del contesto storico fino ad arrivare ad un approfondimento relativo agli uragani e a Katrina.

Il secondo capitolo si concentrerà, invece, sull’esplosione della piattaforma nel Golfo del Messico, partendo da un’analisi complessiva sul ruolo del petrolio all’interno della comunità per arrivare a descrivere l’evento fisico e le conseguenze che hanno sconvolto la vita degli isolani. Particolare rilevanza
assumeranno i dati raccolti sul campo durante la mia permanenza, e quelli riscontrati in internet attraverso una comunicazione del disastro fatta dai residenti all’interno dei social media parallelamente alle fonti ufficiali accusate di controllo delle informazioni. Prenderò in considerazione, inoltre, tutte le problematiche emerse attraverso l’analisi del territorio e dai colloqui avuti con gli abitanti, cercando di dare una lettura critica e d’insieme riguardo a questa controversa isola barriera.

Il tentativo è quello di porre a confronto due disastri profondamente diversi che colpiscono una stessa comunità, è interessante affrontare i diversi approcci di risposta e le reazioni di difesa e superamento che si attivano nel superare un disastro dai saperi incorporati (Katrina) e uno del tutto repentino e inaspettato (esplosione petrolifera).
Cap. 2

KATRINA HURRICANE

Ho ritenuto indispensabile tracciare un profilo storico su questa comunità per delineare gli aspetti sociali e geografici, elementi fondamentali per la comprensione degli uragani.

1. La terra promessa


Nel 1604 Pierre Dugua de Mons e Samuel de Champlain approdarono per la prima volta nelle terre canadesi dell’allora Nuova Francia, nell’Île St. Croix:

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si trattava di un’isola strategica in quanto disponeva di acqua potabile (all’epoca difficile da ottenere). I francesi stabilirono la capitale inizialmente a Port Royal, la quale divenne un importante centro per le attività degli Acadiani: questo nome identificava i primi coloni francesi provenienti dalla Francia occidentale, in particolare dalle province del nord della Bretagna, Normandia e Picardy, essi vissero nelle vecchie terre dell’Acadia² per un centinaio di anni prima che la Louisiana fosse colonizzata. Questo insediamento rappresentò la prima colonia francese e il secondo stanziamento europeo nel Nuovo Mondo.

Tuttavia i francesi non furono gli unici ad aver guardato con particolare attenzione alle nuove terre del nord: nel 1621, Giacomo I – Re di Scozia, decise di assegnare il territorio ai coloni scozzesi, cambiando il nome in Nuova Scozia per rendere onore al suo Paese d’origine. Francesi e britannici inviarono uomini per potersi assicurare il dominio delle loro regioni, tra il 1604 e il 1713 l’Acadia passò da un dominio all’altro per ben sette volte fino alla conquista definitiva da parte degli inglesi (Griffiths, 2005). Solo con la firma del Trattato di Utrecht³ gli acadiani conobbero un periodo di tregua, durante il quale gli fu

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² Zona dell’America settentrionale che si affaccia nell’Oceano Atlantico, essa è formata dalla Nuova Scozia, dal Nuovo Brunswick, dall’Isola del Principe Edoardo e da una parte del Québec. L’origine del nome è ancora incerta: potrebbe derivare dall’esploratore Giovanni da Verrazzano che la usò nel 1524 paragonando il Nuovo Mondo all’antica regione di abbondanza della Greca, l’Arcadia; ma potrebbe anche essere legata alla lingua Mi’kmaq (nativi americani) i quali chiamavano i luoghi campestri con i termini algatig o larcadie.

³ Il Trattato di Utrecht servì a porre fine alla guerra di successione spagnola iniziata nel 1701, esso quindi raccoglie alcuni trattati di pace firmati ad Utrecht nel 1713. All’interno di questo, inoltre venne sancita la cessione alla Gran Bretagna dei territori della Compagnia della Baia di Hudson, comprendenti la Terra di Rupert, la Terranova e l’Acadia.
concesso di lasciare la colonia in ogni momento nell’arco dell’anno seguente. Tuttavia i britannici, desiderosi conquistatori, gli impedirono di andarsene in quel momento e per i successivi quarant’anni seguenti. Gli acadiani furono tenuti lì con la forza, con l’obiettivo di civilizzare i ‘selvaggi’ e rendere la colonia un importante punto di successo per il commercio internazionale: essi erano dei docili contadini sottomessi alla legge dei loro oppressori. Gli inglesi temevano una possibile rivolta da parte dei coloni francesi, fu per questo motivo che gli fecero firmare un giuramento di fedeltà verso la corona britannica, aumentando le persecuzioni nei confronti dei dissidenti. Nel 1744 la Francia tenta nuovamente di riconquistare il suo vecchio territorio, ma gli acadiani decidono di non rompere il patto stabilito con gli inglesi facendo perdere nuovamente i francesi.

Il 28 luglio 1755, i britannici decisero che era arrivato il momento di espellere gli acadiani dalla Nuova Scozia, il loro compito di trasformare la terra pioniera in un importante luogo commerciale era terminato, così fu stabilita un’espulsione di massa in poco meno di un mese. Il 19 agosto dello stesso anno sotto gli ordini dell’ufficiale dell’esercito John Winslow, uomini e donne con più di dieci anni d’età, una domenica mattina vennero riuniti nella chiesa, trasformata per l’occasione in un campo base da 313 soldati. Lentamente gli acadiani iniziarono a capire quali sarebbero state le sorti del loro destino: venivano condotti lontano dalle proprie terre, sparpagliati lungo la lunga costa.
Atlantica o riportati nel vecchio continente, fu così che iniziò il *Grand Dérangement*.

Con i loro villaggi che bruciavano alle loro spalle e le spiagge affollate da compagni e amici disperati, gli acadiani della prima deportazione si dipingono come la triste parte di un quadro che rappresenta l’epoca della colonizzazione. Migliaia di esiliati furono divisi in base al sesso e spediti in piccole barche affollate con l’obiettivo di ricondurli nelle loro terre native. Le famiglie vennero separate e non si riunirono mai più. La grande deportazione durò per circa undici anni, portando all’allontanamento più di 8000 acadiani, la metà di loro morì in mare a causa del vaiolo e di altre epidemie. I sopravvissuti che rimasero nel Nuovo Mondo furono disseminati lungo le coste delle colonie britanniche (Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Georgia, le Caroline, Connecticut, New York e Maryland). Dopo aver incontrato diverse difficoltà negli insediamenti in cui furono spediti (in Virginia e North Carolina furono respinti dalla popolazione locale), decisero di dirigersi verso sud per cercare il sostegno degli abitanti francesi: fu così che arrivarono in Louisiana, dove vennero accolti a braccia aperte dalla popolazione.

I primi acadiani arrivarono nel 1756 e, l’allora governatore della Louisiana, Baron de Kerlerec decise di conferirgli terre e sementi per potersi stabilire lì,

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lasciando libera scelta del luogo in cui avrebbero voluto stanziarsi. In seguito al Trattato di Parigi\(^5\) del 1763 il numero degli esiliati che cercava rifugio in Louisiana aumentò notevolmente. Dopo il 1764 agli acadiani fu concesso di tornare nella Nuova Scozia, tuttavia non potevano riunirsi più di un certo numero di persone nella stessa zona e le terre da coltivare si erano esaurite.

«[…] They reborn in Louisiana, and they will perform marvels if they are given a little assistance. Thus, at a time when least expected, this country will flourish» (Ramsey, 1957: 14).

Finalmente gli erranti esiliati trovarono un luogo in cui abitare nel mezzo di un grande Stato per la maggior parte inesplorato e tra gli insediamenti dei nativi americani, divenendo dei pionieri di una nuova terra per la seconda volta. Qui trovarono altri europei figli della nobiltà francese, commercianti e piccoli funzionari che furono ben felici di accogliere i loro vecchi connazionali divenuti ormai esperti coltivatori e pescatori. Decisero, infatti, di stabilirsi nelle baie per coltivare il riso e la canna da zucchero, lungo le paludi per cacciare gli alligatori, e nelle zone costiere dove trovarono un mare incredibilmente ricco (specialmente di granchi, ostriche e gamberi).

La storia della Grande Deportazione vive ancora oggi nella memoria degli acadiani e solo nel 2003 la Corona Britannica ha affermato che le deportazioni non andavano effettuate in quel modo, tuttavia non è ancora stata riconosciuta l’illegalità delle azioni commesse durante quegli anni.

\(^5\) Conosciuto anche come Pace di Parigi, sanciva la fine della Guerra dei sette anni che coinvolse gli stati europei e le rispettive colonie.
2. Il nuovo Eden

Il Mississippi venne scoperto nel 1541 da De Soto⁶, ma solo un centinaio d’anni dopo l’esploratore francese Cavelier de La Salle partì dalla regione dei Grandi Laghi e discese il fiume fino ad arrivare al suo delta nel Golfo del Messico. Il 9 aprile del 1682 conquistò tutto il territorio lungo le rive del fiume al quale scelse il nome di *Louisiane* in onore del re Luigi XIV di Francia. Il Re Sole considerava la conquista come un inutile sforzo, nonostante ciò decise di tenerla al solo scopo di poter contrastare l’imperialismo inglese attraverso la costruzione delle fortificazioni lungo le sponde del Mississippi. Nel 1697 Pierre Le Moyne d’Iberville venne spedito oltreoceano per colonizzare la Lousiana, purtroppo la sua vita fu breve e della sua grande impresa riuscì solo a fondare la città di Biloxi, oggi appartenente allo stato del Mississippi. New Orleans venne fondata dal fratello Sieur de Bienville nel 1718.

I colonizzatori si stanziarono lungo il Mississippi sulle colline di Baton Rouge, nel delta chiamato Pointe Coupée, vicino alla congiunzione dei fiumi Mississippi, Red River e Atchafalaya. Il sud della Louisiana non era che un luogo selvaggio diviso da una rete di canali, baie, fiumi, laghi, torrenti e *bayous*⁷. Tutte le popolazioni nella prima Louisiana si fermarono lungo i corsi d’acqua, in quanto era l’unico mezzo di trasporto possibile e garantiva un sicuro sostentamento alimentare, facilitando le coltivazioni.

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⁶ Navigatore e conquistatore spagnolo.
⁷ Con il termine *bayous* si indica il flusso di un fiume che scorre in un altro corpo d’acqua. Questo scorrere lento dell’acqua preserva e bilancia il fiume e il lago o il fiume e la baia.
Con la fondazione della “Compagnia delle Indie” da parte di John Law, la Louisiana divenne il nuovo Eden: considerato uno dei luoghi più ricchi del Nuovo Mondo venne sfruttato da francesi, svizzeri e tedeschi; per questo motivo l’effetto che ne conseguì fu chiamato *Mississippi Bubble* dove enormi fortune si alternavano a consistenti perdite.

La presenza europea era costituita dalla nobiltà, abbastanza ricca da poter comprare intere piantagioni e schiavi per dare inizio a un nuovo commercio, e dai Gesuiti che si erano insediati nelle colonie per salvare le anime degli schiavi peccatori. La gente che viveva lungo le strade di Parigi fu spedita, assieme agli schiavi della Guinea, oltreoceano come forza lavoro per i campi di cotone, indaco e canna da zucchero. I più forti sopravvissero mentre i più deboli morirono (Saxon, 1989: 51-53). L’era delle piantagioni conobbe il suo periodo di maggiore intensità dal XVIII secolo fino all’inizio della Guerra Civile: con la liberazione degli schiavi e la distruzione delle terre la Louisiana passò dall’essere uno degli Stati più ricchi del nord America a uno dei più poveri. In seguito ci fu solo una seconda fioritura che si basò sul recupero delle vecchie piantagioni, ma la lenta migrazione verso nord degli schiavi pose fine a questo secondo periodo nel giro di dieci anni e la Louisiana ritornò nel periodo buio che pensava d’aver abbandonato.

La terza fase di splendore che conobbe la Louisiana arrivò con la scoperta di una nuova ricchezza presente nel sottosuolo di cui tratterà nel capitolo successivo.
Con il termine Cajun (‘ka:-j@n) s’intende un discendente Franco-Canadese nato o semplicemente cresciuto tra le paludi del sud Louisiana. Il termine iniziò a diffondersi nel Diciannovesimo secolo, quando gli acadiani arrivarono nelle nuove terre. La parola deriva da un’incorretta pronuncia del francese les Acadiens, facendo cadere il suono della lettera “A” le ‘Cadiens. Successivamente, con l’arrivo degli americani di origine inglese, la parola ‘Cadiens si modificò nuovamente a causa della difficoltà nel mantenere il corretto accento francese, fu così che nacque la parola Cajun. L’autrice del

libro *Cajun on the bayous*, riporta che durante gli anni Cinquanta il termine Cajun aveva perso il suo significato razziale, assumendo delle connotazioni sociali che identificano una cultura appartenente alla classe bassa e poco istruita.

The city dweller refers to his country cousin as “a simple Cajun”. The country farmer refers to a neighbor as a “down-the-bayou Cajun” and even the swamper speaks of “dem damn Cajuns in de back” – by which he means the water dwellers in deep interior swamp country. Occasionally a flippant sophisticate refers to himself as a Cajun, but when a stranger speaks of him in the same way the stranger must smile, and smile broadly (Ramsey, 1957: 15-16).

La regione Cajun è definita dalla sua stessa gente: il cibo, la musica e il loro linguaggio la rendono un posto unico rispetto al resto degli Stati Uniti. Le barriere geografiche e la mancanza di infrastrutture che collegassero il Sud Louisiana ai loro connazionali, hanno sviluppato un senso d’indipendenza e autosufficienza da parte dei loro abitanti. Nonostante ciò la loro fama si è diffusa al di là dei confini: la loro abilità innata nel passare il tempo libero è ben nota. La *joie de vivre* è un vero e proprio stile di vita, mentre cucinano, bevono o suonano, questo loro carattere di leggera felicità è spesso rimarcato ed è ciò che li differenzia in maniera evidente dai vicini del nord, oltre alle diverse fedi religiose.\(^{10}\)

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\(^{10}\) Nell’area del Sud Louisiana, infatti, la Chiesa Cattolica predomina rispetto a quella Protestante, dove invece è preponderante nel nord dello Stato.
È questo forse il principale motivo per il quale le bayous diventano uno dei luoghi d'eccellenza per una fuga dal lavoro e dal denaro.

L’isolamento del Sud Louisiana ha permesso alla cultura Cajun di svilupparsi in maniera quasi virale in tutta la zona, assorbendo, con il loro particolare stile di vita, anche gli altri gruppi etnici presenti. Solamente all’inizio del XX secolo i confini iniziarono ad aprirsi grazie alle ferrovie, la radio e l’automobile.

Parallelamente a un’apertura verso l’esterno, la cultura Cajun iniziò a subire dei cambiamenti. Nel 1916 fu introdotto l’obbligo dell’istruzione pubblica e quando i primi ragazzi iniziarono ad andare a scuola si ritrovarono a dover confrontarsi con una politica che gli proibiva di parlare la lingua francese. Questa depravazione ebbe come conseguenza il quasi totale sradicamento del French Cajun. Tuttavia il primo grande precursore del cambiamento fu la scoperta dell’oro nero a Jennings nel 1901, ma bisognerà attendere i primi anni Cinquanta con il boom del petrolio in mare aperto per vedere in atto le grandi trasformazioni nella Louisiana del sud. I Cajun dovettero confrontarsi con migliaia di nuove persone che arrivavano da ogni angolo degli Stati Uniti i quali li fecero sentire in una posizione di inferiorità; il termine Cajun iniziò ad assumere il significato, quasi disprezziativo, di biasimo, gli acadiani cominciarono a vergognarsi delle loro radici e della loro stessa cultura (Ramsey, 1957).
Il numero delle persone Cajun presenti oggi è incerto e varia dai due ai cinque milioni distribuiti lungo la costa del Golfo del Messico, dalla Louisiana al Texas. Non c’è altro luogo negli Stati Uniti in cui un gruppo etnico sia riuscito a resistere alla scomparsa delle sue radici e contemporaneamente a diffondere la propria cultura agli altri, per questo oggi è frequente trovare persone Cajun con cognomi inglesi, tedeschi, spagnoli, etc. Ci sono voluti molti anni per ritrovare una propria dignità, ma finalmente negli ultimi anni hanno riacquisito completamente la fierezza del loro essere Cajun. Questo processo è stato favorito anche dai folcloristi dei primi anni Sessanta, i quali hanno dato vita al Development of French in Louisiana e alla Cajun French Music Association grazie a loro il ricco patrimonio culturale non è andato perduto e costituisce un nuovo motivo d’orgoglio.

La Louisiana oggi è un luogo di meltin’ pot culturale dove i Cajun convivono con i nativi Chitimacha, Creoli discendenti dei primi francesi e spagnoli, Vietnamiti e rifugiati da Santo Domingo.

4. I Cajun a Grand Isle

All these lands are flat and subject to overflow, with no trees except myrtles [low, bushy wax myrtles] and are full of drift logs that come down the Mississippi. These storms and current cause to be beached. They are only encountered on the shores, or some beaches of oyster shells about two feet high. Therefore the navigation is very
hazardous in the months of August, September, and October, in which storms are frequent from the southeast and east-southeast which inundate them.... A more thorough examination was not possible, because of the land being very low and devoid of timber, except that from the front of Larga Island [Grand Isle] to that of Timbalie, where a chain of small oaks will be found. The rest is of pajonales [tall grass] ...Between Chica Island [Chenière Caminada] and Larga Island there is another very narrow bar with five feet. There are two houses on these islands, which are kept only for hunting and fishing, which abounds. (Ramsey, 1957: 18-19)

Le prime testimonianze riguardanti la storia degli abitanti pionieri di Grand Isle risalgono al 1780 quando ci furono degli atti di compravendita da parte degli spagnoli ai francesi, la completa cessione delle terre terminò nell’arco di sei anni. Il governatore di Spagna Don Berardo de Galvez cedette i 120 acri a est dell’isola a Jacque Rigaud di Bordeaux; successivamente la parte ovest fu venduta a Joseph Caillet e Charles Dufresne, mentre i 340 acri centrali del governatore Don Estevan Miro furono dati a François Anfrey di Normandia. Con l’inizio del Diciannovesimo secolo l’isola era fiorente e produttiva grazie alle coltivazioni introdotte dai francesi, fornendo prova al governo degli Stati Uniti del loro diritto di proprietà sulle terre11 (Evans, Stielow e Swanson, 1979).

Nonostante la lunga stagione della crescita e dell’abbondanza offrissero pesce e raccolti consistenti, la vita in questa zona isolata di frontiera non era per niente facile: si impiegava un giorno per arrivare al villaggio più vicino e la popolazione ancora inesperta si dovette confrontare con la fitta vegetazione dei

11 Gli Stati Uniti comprarono la Luisiana nel 1803.
terreni paludosi che cresceva lungo il lato della baia, dov'erano presenti rettili velenosi e zanzare. Bere acqua potabile era possibile solo attraverso la raccolta dell’acqua piovana in grandi secchi o cisterne. Inoltre c’era il costante pericolo delle tempeste tropicali e degli uragani e già allora si presentava il problema dell’erosione della terra. La navigazione nelle acque mutevoli di Barataria Bay per i primi abitanti costituiva un rischio, in quanto non possedevano le conoscenze per poter affrontare i pericoli dell’ignoto. Ma c’era uno strano equilibrio che permetteva all’isola una felice convivenza tra la natura e la popolazione. La foresta di querce proteggeva gli uomini dalle tempeste e dal caldo sole, inoltre fungeva da elemento di confine per la gente di mare che spesso perdeva l’orientamento in questa vasta regione di paludi d’acqua salata.
A questo si aggiungeva l’immensa quantità di ostriche facilmente reperibili e trasportabili offrendo la possibilità di sviluppare un’economia che avrebbe consentito all’isola un rapido sviluppo. Così l’abbondanza della natura si riversava nei mercati di New Orleans.

Come ogni luogo di conquista che si rispetti anche Grand Isle fu soggetto di narrazioni leggendarie. Benché gli archivi testimonino le concessioni terriere dagli spagnoli ai francesi a partire dal 1780, la storia orale racconta che il primo esploratore ad arrivare nell’isola fu Jacques Rigaud. Egli si trasferì nell’isola con la moglie Marie Durand, dalla quale ebbe due figli, François e Thérèse, dando inizio alla prima generazione di abitanti a Grand Isle. Si costruì una piccola casa di mattoni e decise di dedicarsi all’agricoltura e all’allevamento
grazie all’aiuto dei suoi sei schiavi. Molti dei suoi discendenti affermarono che Jacques avesse anche un trabacco da pesca con il quale trasportava i beni dall’isola a New Orleans. Durante i suoi anni di vita si dice che fungesse da leader non ufficiale per gli abitanti dell’isola. Rigaud scrisse il suo testamento nel 1811 e probabilmente morì poco dopo, lasciando la terra in successione ai suoi due figli. La moglie si risposò con Pierre Coulon dal quale ebbe altri tre eredi. Quand’anche la moglie Marie Durand morì la famiglia dei Coulon entrò in possesso di tutte le proprietà, diventando così una delle più importanti e influenti famiglie dell’isola (Evans, Stielow & Swanson, 1979).

La tranquillità che regnava a Grand Isle nel Diciottesimo secolo, fu interrotta agli inizi dell’Ottocento dall’arrivo di Jean Lafitte con la sua compagnia di pirati fuorilegge partiti dalla Francia. Lo scopo della sua spedizione era quello di riscattare New Orleans e i suoi territori di dominazione spagnola, per questo motivo i racconti e le leggende presentano caratteristiche ambivalenti che spaziano da narrazioni sulla sua pericolosità alla sua bontà nell’aver portato rifornimenti di cibo per tutti. Costruì un forte a Grand Terre di cui divenne capo, a 65 miglia a ovest del delta del Mississippi grazie all’aiuto degli indiani, prendendo il controllo delle zone circostanti. Reclutò dei corsari anche tra gli abitanti di Grand Isle, nel suo diario, infatti, si annoverano anche
i nomi di François Rigaud e Chighizola\textsuperscript{12}, i quali parteciparono alla Battaglia di New Orleans del 1815\textsuperscript{13} (Gonzalez, 1981).

Grand Isle venne trasformata da tranquilla e timida a sfacciata irrequieta e la sua bellezza naturale fu coperta da battaglie sanguinolente. La spiaggia non era più il luogo dove andare a rilassarsi godendo della vista che il Golfo offriva, ella venne cosparsa di bottini e relitti di navi sfortunate che furono distrutte dai pirati. Gli alberi che prima riparavano dal sole cocente ora fungevano da camuffamento e nascondiglio per i contrabbandieri. La sua bellezza era stata macchiata dai pericoli e dalle morti, così il governo statunitense decise di prendere delle misure: nel 1814 venne liberata dalla pirateria, tornando ad essere l’isola calma e lenta dove potersi sedere in riva al mare.

Grand Isle si è arricchita di leggende e aneddoti. Parte del suo fascino è costituito dai suoi abitanti stravaganti, la maggior parte dei quali sono diretti discendenti di Lafitte e della sua banda di contrabbandieri. È quindi un po’ sorprendente trovare questi nativi così profondamente religiosi, ma, al ricordo delle origini e della storia che conobbe i pescatori pacifici cambiati dai pirati e dalle sue turbolente circostanze, non è difficile capire il suo veloce ritorno all’amore per la pesca.

\textsuperscript{12} Louis Chighizola era un genovese che divenne popolare con la leggenda “Nez Coupé” riguardante il suo naso, ovvero “l’uomo con il naso tagliato nella battaglia in mare”. Nel 1818 comprò delle terre a Grand Isle dove decise d’insediarsi con la famiglia, diventando il capostipite di un’importante discendenza.

\textsuperscript{13} Battaglia intrapresa dagli inglesi contro gli statunitensi, i quali trovarono l’appoggio di Lafitte.
L’isola poté dormire tranquilla fino al 1893 quando una tempesta causò la prima grande devastazione. Fortunatamente le querce le donarono una naturale protezione consentendole di soffrire meno rispetto alle zone vicine come Grand Terre e Cheniere Caminada; le testimonianze riportano che non morì nessun bianco, solo sette schiavi africani non sopravvissero, si narra a causa della loro sprovvedutezza a non ripararsi velocemente sotto le grandi querce. Tuttavia dopo Lafitte e la tempesta, l’isola fu meglio conosciuta con il nome di Dangerous Woman (Ditto, 1980).

5. Gli uragani

In qualsiasi luogo l’uomo abbia deciso di stanziarsi ha dovuto apprendere delle conoscenze per imparare a convivere con la natura e i suoi pericoli.

Ogni luogo degli Stati Uniti è soggetto alle forze ostili della natura che minacciano la vita dell’uomo: le persone che vivono nel Midwest devono affrontare il Tornado Alley\textsuperscript{14}, chi abita in California convive con i terremoti, e chi vive nel Golfo del Messico attende ogni anno l’arrivo di qualche uragano.

La natura è la prima forza incontrollabile con cui l’uomo si debba confrontare.

\textsuperscript{14} Con questo termine ci si riferisce alla zona centrale degli Stati Uniti che ogni anno viene colpita da violenti tornado.
Negli ultimi anni, grazie allo sviluppo delle moderne tecnologie, la scienza riesce a prevedere o avvertire il verificarsi di un evento naturale con potenziale distruttivo. Nel caso degli uragani, in seguito alla Seconda Guerra Mondiale, numerose pattuglie formate da specialisti del settore, hanno sorvolato regolarmente i cieli del Golfo, registrando i movimenti e le caratteristiche relative alla formazione e allo sviluppo degli uragani. Infatti, a partire dal 1944, il *National Hurricane Research Project* ha approfondito gli studi migliorando i sistemi di allertamento, oggi grazie ad esso i satelliti ci informano, attraverso le fotografie, sulle condizioni meteorologiche di ogni angolo della Terra.

Quando la tempesta si forma, spesso corre verso nord, verso la costa Atlantica. Si ferma e comincia a girare lentamente, cambiando frequentemente direzione. Nella stagione che va da giugno a novembre circa, i residenti della Louisiana, in particolare quelli della parrocchia di *Lafourche*\(^\text{15}\), diventano irrequieti osservando le depressioni atmosferiche che crescono una dopo l’altra a migliaia di miglia lontano. Gli abitanti sono perennemente sintonizzati sui canali dei notiziari meteo per seguire le evoluzioni delle tempeste, e ognuno di loro è a suo modo un piccolo esperto che ha sviluppato una certa attitudine verso le previsioni del tempo. Si cerca di capire se le nuvole si muoveranno verso ovest fino a raggiungere il Messico, oppure a nord est portando la tempesta in Louisiana.

\(^{15}\) Parrocchia che comprende la baia e la costa ad ovest del Mississippi, è particolarmente colpita dagli uragani e geograficamente comprende anche Grand Isle.
La tempesta viene classificata come uragano quando il vento raggiunge la velocità di 65 miglia orarie. Sessantacinque è il numero che tutti conoscono, quello che innesca nelle persone dei comportamenti che s’identificano come preparazione all’evento e meccanismi di difesa: controllo delle batterie per le torce elettriche, radio portatile alla mano, chiusura delle taniche del gas, rifornimento dei cibi di prima necessità – latte, pane, acqua – preparazione del legno compensato, messo da parte durante tutto l’anno per ogni evenienza. Tutto quello che resta da fare è rimanere seduti a guardare e ascoltare le previsioni e le allerte che provengono dalla Civil Defense.


6. Katrina e la fallacia ingegneristica

Historically, scarcity of safe and affordable housing in New Orleans has corresponded with the topography of its deltaic site. The colonial city was built on the banks of the natural levee of the Mississippi River. Areas further away from the river were referred to as “back-a-town” and were originally associated with the “never-never-land between back swamp and natural levee” (Lewis 2003: 35–36). These backatown neighborhoods were built on lower-lying land susceptible to flooding. The
topography took on racial as well as socioeconomic significance as freed slaves, migrants, and later Southern and Eastern European immigrants denied other housing options found homes there (Breunlin and Regis, 2006: 749).

Il 23 agosto del 2005 sopra il cielo delle Bahamas la depressione tropicale\textsuperscript{16} inizia a prendere sempre più forza, il vento s’intensifica superando le 65 miglia orarie e la tempesta tropicale viene classificata come uragano di Categoria 1. Attraversa la Florida cautamente, le strade vengono allagate, ma, fortunatamente, i morti sono pochi. Nel giro di pochi giorni inizia ad aumentare la propria intensità, rientra così dapprima nella Categoria 3\textsuperscript{17} fino a raggiungere velocemente il livello maggiore (vedi Figura 5).

\textsuperscript{16} Area di bassa pressione caratterizzata da nuvole e piogge, si forma dove l’acqua calda incontra i venti provenienti da diverse direzioni. L’eccessivo riscaldamento del mare, unito all’assenza di vento, consente la convezione dell’aria, la quale salendo si raffredda e produce condensazione. Il moto rotatorio viene poi dato dalla forza di Coriolis. In questo primo stadio il vento non supera i 70km/h.

\textsuperscript{17} Secondo la classificazione internazionale degli uragani che calcola la gravità dell’evento in base ai danni materiali, un uragano di categoria 3 provoca lievi danneggiamenti alle abitazioni, erode il suolo costiero e l’allagamento può rientrare fino a 8 miglia.
Fig. 5. Classificazione degli uragani in base all’intensità del vento.\textsuperscript{18}

Lunedì 29 agosto l’uragano raggiunge la costa della Louisiana e New Orleans prima del sorgere del sole. Nonostante le forti raffiche di vento della velocità di 205 km/h, Katrina torna ad essere di Categoria 3 scagliandosi prepotentemente sulla città. Non si sa esattamente quanto alta fosse l’onda al

momento dell’impatto, gli unici dati registrati sono quelli relativi alla marea di 4,3 metri a Plaquemine Parish e all’onda di 3 metri a Grand Isle. Il giorno successivo le precipitazioni intense hanno fatto cadere fino a 250 mm di pioggia nella parte ad est dello Stato, aumentando in modo consistente il livello del lago Pontchartrain fino a causare il cedimento della diga con un conseguente inondazione aumentata dal cedimento degli argini naturali che proteggon New Orleans e la vicina Saint Bernard Parish.

È l’uragano delle cifre, dei record e delle memorie. Nella classifica degli uragani rientra tra i primi cinque più gravi per il numero dei morti e dei danni economici, si classifica come sesto uragano atlantico per l’intensità ed è “solamente” il terzo ad aver raggiunto le coste degli Stati Uniti. Oltre 1800 i morti, di cui quasi 1600 in Louisiana, New Orleans venne allagata per circa l’80% della sua superficie fino a 20 piedi di profondità in alcune zone, 81 miliardi di dollari per danneggiamenti alle proprietà, si stima che, in totale, l’impatto sull’economia in Louisiana e Mississippi superi i 150 miliardi di dollari, guadagnandosi il titolo di uragano più costoso nella storia degli Stati Uniti.19 Per questi motivi il nome Katrina è stato tolto dalla lista usata per chiamare gli uragani.20

20 Dal 1953 gli Stati Uniti hanno introdotto un sistema di nomenclatura degli uragani diverso dal precedente che prevedeva l’attribuzione di un nome in base al Santo festeggiato nel giorno in cui si verificava l’evento. Oggi sono usati ventuno nomi propri per gli uragani Atlantic, maschili e femminili, più facili da pronunciare e da ricordare. L’ordine seguito è quello alfabetico, ad esclusione delle lettere che possono creare confusione come: Q, U, X, Y, Z. Le liste si ripetono ogni sei anni e quando un uragano causa danni gravi entrando a far parte della storia dei disastri,
New Orleans è una città che sorge al di sotto del livello delle acque e da anni i suoi abitanti hanno messo in atto delle strategie per proteggersi dalle alluvioni che ogni anno seguono all’arrivo degli uragani. Ciò che venne fatto per evitare l’allagamento della città fu la costruzione di argini artificiali per evitare che il Mississippi e il lago Pontchartrain esondassero, inoltre si creò un meccanismo di pompaggio dell’acqua che l’avrebbe immessa nei canali e trasportata fino al lago. Ma New Orleans è stata tradita dal suo stesso sistema di prevenzione: cinquantatre i punti in cui si sono formate delle brecce sugli argini dei canali di scolo, in questo modo l’acqua che doveva andare nel lago veniva continuamente pompata nei canali riversandola nuovamente nella città. Ciò che ha fatto saltare i floodwalls\textsuperscript{21} creati dagli ingegneri dell’esercito americano è dovuto a molteplici fattori: innanzitutto non erano stati posizionati ad una profondità adeguata, l’acqua si è infiltrata da sotto per questo i muri si sono divelti; le giunture degli argini, anch’esse in cemento armato, non hanno retto, creando delle brecce; infine i materiali usati per la costruzione dei floodwalls non erano in gradi di resistere a pressioni di questo tipo.

\footnote{il nome viene eliminato dalle liste e la World Meteorological Association lo sostituisce con uno nuovo, nel caso di Katrina alla lettera K oggi corrisponde Katia. NATIONAL HURRICANE CENTER <http://nhc.noaa.gov/aboutnames_history.shtml>, data ultima consultazione: 26.03.2013.}

\footnote{Termine con cui si indicano i muri di cemento armato creati per fermare eventuali inondazioni.}
Come si può notare dall’immagine qui sopra, nel caso dell’ Industrial Canal le palancole non hanno tenuto la pressione che si era sviluppata sul fondo dei canali e non era stata prevista un’armatura degli argini per prevenire l’erosione che sarebbe conseguita alla tracimazione, inoltre non si era considerato il materiale debole presente nel sottosuolo (sabbia, torba ed argilla), questo schema si può riportare anche ad altri canali dove il cedimento degli argini è avvenuto in maniera simile. Già con l’uragano Betsy nel 1965 il sistema di

canali artificiali che venne creato per collegare il porto di New Orleans al Golfo del Messico presentò dei grossi limiti, specialmente nella Ninth Ward. Come scrivono le autrici

The ward’s lower sections have been victimized repeatedly by flooding” (Colten 2005:154). There are two main reasons for this repeated flooding. The first is simply topography: The land set back from the natural levee is many feet below sea level (Campanella 2006a). More problematically, a series of manmade canals that connect the Port of New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico converge in the neighborhood. In the 1920s, the Ninth Ward was split in two when the Port built the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal, commonly known in the city as the Industrial Canal, to accommodate ocean-going vessels between the river and Lake Pontchartrain. In the 1960s, the Industrial Canal was linked to a large shipping canal, the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, through the Intracoastal Waterway. For years, “MR-GO” has been denounced as a “hurricane superhighway,” which funnels storm surges cutting through the swamplands of Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes into the New Orleans area. The critique was demonstrated to be true when the Industrial Canal levees were breached during Hurricane Betsy in 1965 and again during Katrina in 2005 (Breunlin and Regis, 2006: 749).

I sistemi di prevenzione messi in atto dall’Army Corps of Engineers23 si sono rivelati inutili, e così, davanti all’inerzia della tecnologia, si è assistito al cedimento degli argini artificiali che ha innescato anche un crollo della fiducia

23 Corpo dell’esercito statunitense composto da civili e soldati, i quali operano nell’ambito dell’ingegneria in tutto il mondo. Il loro obiettivo si concentra sul rafforzamento della sicurezza, attraverso la costruzione e la manutenzione di infrastrutture, in tutti gli Stati Uniti.
verso le istituzioni. La rivelazione della fallacia ingegneristica si è riversata sulla vita dei cittadini di New Orleans.

7. Katrina nei racconti

Non si può non parlare di Katrina, chi l'ha vissuta la racconta come una big mess. Nei viaggi che facevo in auto con Sabrina lungo la strada che collega l'isola a New Orleans mi soffermavo a guardare gli alberi mezzi morti che stavano ricrescendo pian piano dopo sette anni. Nel sud Louisiana e, in special modo a Grand Isle, la vegetazione cambia, il paesaggio muta principalmente a causa degli uragani. Gli abitanti dell'isola mi raccontano con gioia che Katrina ha persino donato una nuova spiaggia, visibile prima di attraversare il ponte che collega l'isola all'ultimo lembo di marsh. Le chiedo se lo Stato paga per i danni subiti dall'uragano e mi dice che alla gente che ha un Checking account vengono dati 1.000 dollari da parte dello Stato federale, per poter vivere durante l'evacuazione in quanto le banche vengono bloccate.

Mi racconta che nessuno era preparato ad un evento del genere e che molta gente, abituata a non evacuare, anche quella volta decise incoscientemente di non farlo; questo era dovuto al fatto che nemmeno il sindaco aveva un piano preciso da seguire in quanto l'intensità dell'uragano prevista non era così allarmante. I problemi più grandi sorsero i giorni dopo l'uragano, quando la
gente rimasta in città iniziò ad impazzire: alcune persone rifugiatesi nel Superdome persero completamente il controllo delle loro azioni

[...]"non lo so perché, voglio dire...sei lì come tutti gli altri per salvarti, sei vivo, devi solo cercare di sopravvivere perché devi commettere violenze?". "È come se ci fosse stata una guerra?". "Oh sì, sì se lo è stato! Gente armata che sparava, rubava...nei casi di emergenza succede, ma cosa te ne fai di un televisore LCD enorme sopra le tue spalle?". Follia. E la polizia era corrotta, anche la polizia sparava, a caso. Era un problema già esistente la corruzione nei confronti della polizia, con Katrina è stato un problema che è diventato visibile a tutti. Qui è come se l'acqua facesse emergere i sotterranei, le cose fatte dietro l'angolo dove nessuno sembra non ti possa notare. Ma galleggiano, i problemi galleggiano sulla superficie negli stati d'emergenza. L'acqua esausta rigetta la sporcizia e la riporta a riva, te la restituisce come una sorta di contraddono melmoso che ha perso tutto il suo valore, sempre se un vero valore ce l'aveva.24

Ciò che è successo con Katrina non è stato solo un disastro ma un profondo ripensamento dell’esistenza degli individui in quanto cittadini della Louisiana con una conseguente sfiducia verso le istituzioni e la comunità scientifica, rendendo visibile quello che prima si cercava di nascondere o si preferiva non vedere affatto. L’inaspettabile susseguirsi egli eventi ha costituito una fonte d’orgoglio per chi l’uragano l’ha superato, chi l’ha vissuto in prima persona ed è riuscito a sopravvivere. Accanto ad esso però si è sviluppata anche una consapevole vergogna di fronte al crollo dei floodwalls e alla perdita del controllo da parte delle istituzioni stesse generando il caos nella città.

24 Dalla trascrizione di un colloquio informale avuto con Sabrina il giorno 22 Ottobre 2012.
In ogni racconto Katrina c’era. Lei era sempre presente nelle conversazioni, anche le più banali. Non le potevo sfuggire nemmeno nei bar e nei negozi perché veniva commemorata anche nelle salse più piccanti e i cocktail più forti, come una sorta di prova di coraggio per esorcizzare il dramma e i dolori passati a causa sua. Ecco allora che la forza di Katrina diventa l’immagine di un feticcio che ironizza sul passato, da non intendersi nel senso marxista del termine, bensì focalizzandosi sul significato simbolico che viene ad assumere in relazione alla salsa piccante e alla bevanda alcolica: due prodotti originari della Louisiana che hanno subìto una trasformazione dopo l’evento del 2005 attraverso un’operazione di marketing. Dare un assaggio agli altri dell’uragano attraverso la commercializzazione di beni locali modificati, per dare prova agli altri di quello che si è vissuto, rimarcando nuovamente quest’incredibile prova di coraggio che si sono ritrovati ad affrontare.

Compass25 stava denunciando l’escalation criminale che si era verificata nel Superdome. «C’erano dei bambini, lì. Sono stati violentati dei bambini» disse in lacrime. E il sindaco Nagin: «In pratica per tre giorni abbiamo avuto le scorte razionate, una lotta continua, la gente... Ecco perché secondo me si è ridotta a un livello quasi animale, perché mancavano le risorse. Erano in trappola. Non so se siete pronti a vedere ciò che vedrete. Lì c’è gente rimasta chiusa in quello stramaledetto Superdome per cinque giorni, a guardare cadaveri, delinquenti che ammazzavano e stupravano. È quella la tragedia. C’era gente che tentava di darci i figli piccoli perché non morissero. (Eggers, 2011: 167)

25 L’autore fa riferimento a Edwin P. Compass, egli fu a capo della polizia durante l’uragano Katrina e venne accusato di corruzione e disorganizzazione nel gestire la situazione in città. Il 27 settembre del 2005 si dimise dal suo incarico senza dare alcuna spiegazione
L’autore nel libro riporta i fatti accaduti durante l’arco di tempo durante il quale la città si è preparata all’arrivo dell’uragano e quando l’ha affrontato. In particolare in questa breve citazione fa riferimento ai fatti accaduti il 7 settembre del 2005, quando le persone rimaste in città si erano rifugiate all’interno del Superdome, uno dei luoghi principali di raccolta per chi non ha la possibilità di abbandonare New Orleans per qualche giorno o più.

Racconti, interviste, testimonianze, parlano di un caos smisurato che si generò lungo le strade e all’interno dello stadio. Un’anarchia fuori controllo che le stesse istituzioni non erano in grado di gestire, a causa del loro inadempimento e dell’imprevedibilità delle conseguenze. Più passavano i giorni e più la gente era fuori controllo, il cibo scarseggiava, non ci si poteva muovere perché l’acqua lo impediva. L’acqua soffocava i pensieri e le speranze di chi non ha potuto o non ha voluto andarsene.

Since the beginning of the city’s history, poor and working-class black New Orleanians have been forced to live in ecologically and economically marginal land. In these areas, property values remained low, schools were segregated and then abandoned by the majority of white citizens, and job opportunities remained limited. In the last decades of the 20th century, Louisiana had the highest per capita incarceration rate in the nation and was continually listed among the states with the highest rankings in measurements of poverty, unemployment, crime, and diabetes. It

26 Ubicato nel Central Business District, il Mercedes-Benz Superdome è lo stadio di New Orleans famoso per essere la “casa” degli Saints, una delle squadre di football americano più forti degli Stati Uniti.
also ranks among the lowest in literacy, insurance coverage, and public funding of the arts and education. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina can be viewed as part of a much larger pattern of structural violence affecting lower-income residents of the majority black city, a disaster of longue durée. (Breunlin and Regis, 2006: 746)

Ci sono due luoghi a NOLA\textsuperscript{27} che, secondo i locali, non si possono frequentare: il Tremé Quarter e la zona adiacente alla stazione dei treni Amtrack. Il motivo per cui non si poteva attraversare la North Rampart Street, punto d’inizio del quartiere Faubourg Treme, è dovuto al fatto che storicamente era il luogo in cui avveniva la compra vendita degli schiavi nella Congo Square, storicamente conosciuta come Place des Negres. Oggi conosciuto come il luogo dove si commemora l’artista Louis Armstrong, ha mantenuto il carattere di quartiere popolare dove vive la maggior parte degli afroamericani e dei creoli, che tutt’ora non sono ben visti dagli altri abitanti. Quello che mi sfuggiva era perché non si potesse andare in piena autonomia alla stazione dei treni, al di là delle possibili risposte scontate che mi davo, non riuscivo a trovare un nesso logico a tanto timore, finché non mi sono ritrovata a leggere dei libri e degli articoli proprio su Katrina. Era esattamente in quella zona che vennero edificati dei luoghi di reclusione temporanee. Vennero chiamati i detenuti del penitenziario i Angola\textsuperscript{28} per costruire delle prigioni provvisorie dove sarebbero state messe dentro indistintamente tutte quelle persone che avrebbero

\textsuperscript{27} Acronimo usato per riferirsi alla città di New Orleans.

\textsuperscript{28} Prigione di massima sicurezza che conta oltre cinquemila detenuti ed è annoverata tra le peggiori degli Stati Uniti. La Louisiana prevede delle pene severe da scontare in carcere anche per reati minori, per questo motivo dagli anni Novanta sono state incrementate notevolmente ed oggi è lo Stato con il tasso d’incarcerazione più alto.
commesso sia reati gravi che minori. All’interno di esse c’è finito anche Zeitoun, personaggio di un libro autobiografico che racconta la terribile esperienza di chi la casa non l’ha voluta lasciare, perché dopo anni e anni di lavoro per costruirsi una casa, un’attività e integrarsi con i vicini (in quanto di origini siriane), è difficile decidere di dover abbandonare tutto in mano al caso, aspettando che il tempo sistemi le cose. Durante l’allagamento della città trascorse il tempo nella sua canoa a portare il cibo avanzato che trovava nelle case vuote agli animali e alle persone in difficoltà, fino al momento in cui anch’egli è stato recluso per ragioni ancora oggi sconosciute.

Migliaia di reclusi dell’Orleans Parish Prison, per esempio, compresi quelli detenuti per reati minori come ubriachezza molesta e taccheggio, erano stati tenuti per tre giorni sul cavalcavia di Broad Street. Li si era visti alla televisione, un mare di uomini vestiti di arancione seduti su una carreggiata lercia, in mezzo a feci e spazzatura, circondati da guardie armate di fucili automatici.

Quando finalmente erano arrivati gli autobus, i prigionieri erano stati portati all’Elayn Hunt. Anziché sistemarli dentro il carcere, li avevano messi nello stadio del complesso, e li erano rimasti per altri giorni, all’aperto, senza alcun riparo. Migliaia di detenuti, con condanne che andavano dall’omicidio allo stupro, alla guida in stato d’ebrrezza e ai furtarelli, buttati tutti insieme sul prato dello stadio.


L’unica fonte d’acqua erano due piccoli tubi che spuntavano dal prato. Bisognava attendere il proprio turno, e poi bere dalle mani. Quanto al cibo, i secondini

Secondo lo psicologo David Kipnis nel suo libro The Powerholders chiarisce come il potere possa corrompere psicologicamente e moralmente le persone. Infatti, se un individuo detiene molto potere nei confronti di altre persone, questo tende a considerarli come degli esseri inferiori privi di dignità, ponendo se stesso al di sopra dei comuni canoni morali. (Kipnis, 1976)

Siamo abituati a considerare le persone che ricoprono ruoli istituzionali come aventi il dovere di proteggerci e il diritto a tutelarci anche attraverso atti punitivi conformi alle leggi dello Stato. Spesso, in casi d’emergenza, si verifica uno smarrimento che coinvolge anche la sfera individuale creando confusione sul ruolo sociale che ci si attende e quello che invece si attua, per questo motivo si verificano episodi di coercizione sociale, destabilizzando le persone sul concetto stesso di potere. Gli stupri, le violenze e poi la repressione estrema sono atteggiamenti scaturiti da una condizione di scarsità delle risorse e dalla mancanza di un riferimento istituzionale in grado di gestire l’imprevedibilità della situazione che si era creata. Come scrive l’autore James C. Scott «È dunque possibile che, in determinate condizioni, anche la pesante subordinazione non volontaria possa essere fatta apparire giusta e legittima» (Scott, 2006: 116).
Le persone che evacuarono seguivano ansiosamente le notizie via radio e televisione, cercando di capire che cosa stesse succedendo nella loro città. Purtroppo le notizie diffuse dai giornalisti furono contraddittorie e fin da subito non godettero di credibilità, per loro il tempo d’attesa per ritornare a casa stava diventando psicologicamente insostenibile.

Like 80 percent of New Orleans residents, we evacuated the city before the hurricane and spent the next week huddled around televisions, squinting to identify the New Orleans neighborhoods that were being shown from aerial video footage taken from helicopters. Many of us hoped to see an image of our streets, homes, and neighborhoods. The complexity of the landscape became a surreal blur of motion and water. Early reports indicated that “Ward Nine” had taken the hardest hit. Later, the term was revised to the vernacular, “Ninth Ward,” which then became a metaphor for any flooded downtown neighborhood. On CNN, we saw images taken from the city’s Seventh and Eighth Wards, among other neighborhoods, and all were consistently referred to as the Ninth Ward. [...] For displaced New Orleans residents desperately watching television and seeking information, the disaster of the hurricane and the flood was overtopped by the mediated disaster, as we watched and listened to our city being objectified and distorted by journalists, armed with Google Digital Earth, live satellite feeds, and little local knowledge about the people, places, and communities that make New Orleans home. (Breunlin and Regis, 2006)

Ci vollero settimane perché la situazione si stabilizzasse nella città. Dovettero aspettare che l’acqua se ne fosse andata per andare a vedere come si erano trasformate le loro homes. Ci volle ancora più tempo per iniziare a ricostruire le proprie vite all’interno della città. Molte persone, dopo...
l'evacuazione, decisero di non tornare e si trasferirono nella capitale Baton Rouge. Così oggi New Orleans porta ancora i segni di quella profonda devastazione che ha dovuto affrontare, inerme davanti alla pressione dell'acqua che si faceva spazio tra gli argini deboli.

«Quella sera c’era silenzio. Zeitoun non sentì vento, né voci, né sirene. Solo il suono di una città che come lui respirava, stanca dopo la lotta, felice che fosse finita.» (Eggers, 2011: 81)

8. Crescere con gli uragani

We always tried to get back after a storm because we could always… we could always do without electricity, we could always do without natural gas. I remember when I was a little girl we had a butane tank so… You didn’t have natural gas then, but… I mean we may do it, we were used to living without light. That’s just the way it was down here.\textsuperscript{30}

Parlare di Grand Isle è parlare, inevitabilmente, degli uragani. Questi fenomeni per noi definibili come eventi eccezionali, per loro costituiscono degli eventi meteorologici a cui ci si deve preparare adeguatamente. Da giugno a novembre, gli abitanti del Golfo del Messico si sintonizzano nei notiziari locali,

\textsuperscript{30} Dall’intervista con Lois del 26 novembre 2012.
attivano il sistema di allerta nei computer e nei cellulari, e attendono. Attendono il momento in cui una tempesta più forte delle precedenti si abbatterà sull’isola per poter evacuare o per chiudersi in casa con le scorte di cibo, le batterie di riserva e una buona radio. Nonostante le dovute accortezze la forza del vento e dell’acqua possono essere talmente forti da portar via e danneggiare tutte quelle cose che non si è riusciti a difendere. Ma che cosa si mette veramente in salvo quando arriva un uragano? Quali sono gli oggetti che vogliamo tenere con noi? Più volte ho provato ad immaginare cosa porterei con me nel caso mi ritrovassi in una situazione simile. Al di là delle fotografie, non riuscivo a focalizzare da un lato l’importanza dell’essenziale, mentre dall’altro capire fino a che punto gli oggetti materiali erano rivestiti di una consapevole futilità. Durante un’intervista con A. ho avuto la possibilità di chiederle quali sono le cose che ci si porta con sé nel momento in cui devi abbandonare la tua casa, e lei con il suo modo pacato e tranquillo mi ha risposto senza alcuna esitazione nel pensare:

Ann: Well, you bring everything that is important to you, like if you have pictures, I bring my computer, all your papers like your marriage license, birth certificates… driver’s license, whatever… money, you have to bring money… jewelry or anything like that, that is important to you, anything you think that you don’t want to live the rest of your life without. Something… something you inherited from your mother, something… you wanna take that. Then if you have to end up staying in a shelter or something, then… you might be robbed. You know, so… But I have plenty of friends I can stay with, there’s never a problem, my friends and family, there’s never problem with me having a place to stay, but it’s just… I have an old car, and I run the risk of
having a car trouble going wherever it is that I’m going. One thing you don’t wanna
have is you don’t wanna be stuck on the side of the road with a dead car when there’s
a hurricane coming, and... then there’s... you know, if you get a hotel, which
occasionally I have to get a hotel room for one reason or another, you’d better have a
place to stay.31

Bisogna essere preparati a portare con sé le cose di cui sai non potresti
vivere il resto della tua vita senza di esse. Ricordi legati alla famiglia e agli
amici che ti aiutino ad affrontare la partenza ed il ritorno, e per sentirsi meno
soli senza l’elettricità. La gente a Grand Isle ha sviluppato un approccio
diverso ai beni materiali e all’importanza nell’ apparire ad un livello sociale
elevato. I primi giorni, mentre mi spostavo all’interno dell’isola per capire
com’erano vissuti gli spazi, notavo che il disordine riscontrato all’interno delle
case, si rifletteva anche all’esterno, nel giardino retrostante alla casa.
Inizialmente pensavo che questo fosse dovuto al fatto di essere membri di una
comunità di pescatori e quindi fosse un po’ insito nella loro quotidianità questa
incuranza verso i propri spazi abitativi, ma era un ragionamento che
funzionava solamente verso il loro modo di vestire e di presentarsi agli altri.
Vivere con loro per tre mesi mi ha permesso di capire che, a volte, l’essenziale è
anche la totalità dell’esistenza. «La gente qui vive in maniera semplice, ed ho
iniziato a farlo anch’io perché ci sono gli uragani. Non ha senso comprarsi cose
costose se poi puoi perderle, così riduci tutto all’essenziale dando valore a ciò

31 Dall’intervista con Ann condotta il 29 Ottobre 2012.
che tieni veramente.»

Abitare i luoghi degli uragani implica l’aver appreso un sistema dei valori e degli affetti particolare, in quanto si sviluppa una consapevolezza riguardo alla fugacità della vita abbandonando quell’inconsapevole fatalismo.

L’ambiente in cui sono inseriti e le loro radici storiche hanno favorito uno stile di vita caratteristico della cultura Cajun: la joie de vivre, vivere la vita con leggerezza senza porsi troppi dubbi e pensieri. Questa loro spensieratezza contagiosa è un atteggiamento che si ripercuote in tutte le sfere della quotidianità Cajun e ciò può essere fonte di facili pregiudizi da parte delle persone che provengono da altri luoghi degli Stati Uniti. «However, Cajuns sometimes express anxiety over this aspect of their identity, worrying that outsiders may interpret Cajun joie de vivre as an indication of laziness and/or hedonism – as indeed some outsiders have done, both in the past and in the present.» (Gutierrez, 1983: 31-32)

Diversamente da quanto sostiene l’autrice, questo loro modo di fare non è indice di pigrizia o edonismo, in quanto porre la propria condizione di serenità e benessere all’apice della scala dei valori diventa quasi una forma di giustificazione al fatto che un comportamento, seppur sbagliato, non può essere del tutto recriminato. Il loro atteggiamento nei confronti della vita e degli eventi nasce da questo bisogno di trovare sempre la forza per riuscire a convivere con gli uragani, per impacchettare la propria vita in pochi ricordi e

32 Dall’intervista con Mary il 29 novembre 2012.
vedere la propria home\textsuperscript{33} distrutta in pochi istanti. La joie de vivre diventa allora un meccanismo di superamento del dramma tanto condannato dai Cajun.

La gente qui è abituata a ricostruire le proprie vite e ad aiutarsi vicendevolmente. Il fatto è che la gente qui è preparata per gli uragani, non come la gente del nord\textsuperscript{34}. Qui sanno esattamente cosa fare, come organizzarsi prima dell’arrivo, quando evacuare e quando tornare e poi da lì si ricomincia a ricostruire, c’è un tempo nell’uragano che loro hanno imparato vivendo per anni qui, hanno una conoscenza incorporata di esso […] Molti mi chiedono perché dovrei vivere in un posto dove ogni volta devi evacuare e corri dei rischi, beh non è l’unico posto unsafe, ci sono posti con i terremoti, con i tornado… non c’è un vero posto sicuro al mondo, e decidi di starci perché lo senti come la tua casa nonostante tutto e perché Dio ha scelto che io fossi qui.\textsuperscript{35}

Nascere e crescere in un luogo è abitarlo, considerandolo nel suo senso più ampio di habitus: questa sorta di conoscenza culturale appresa insconsapevolmente avendo vissuto gran parte della propria vita in un posto preciso, un concetto già introdotto da Aristotele con la parola greca hexis, poi tradotta col termine latino habitus. Il filosofo introduce l’idea che esista una

\textsuperscript{33} Mi riferisco qui al concetto di home nel senso più ampio del termine, comprendendo non solo l’edificio fisico della casa, ma l’ambiente in cui la comunità è inserita e con cui ha stabilito un legame affettivo e di appartenenza.

\textsuperscript{34} Joey si riferisce all’uragano Sandy che ha devastato New York ed il New Jersey il 29 Ottobre 2012, nonostante fosse classificato come post-ciclone tropicale ha causato gravi danni lungo la costa nord Atlantica.

\textsuperscript{35} Dalla trascrizione di un’intervista con J. senza registratore effettuata il giorno 28 novembre 2012.
nuova forma di sapere, ovvero il sapere pratico, grazie al quale si apprende con il proprio corpo e si modifica il mondo attraverso esso, assicurando che s’impara con la pratica, in questo modo le conoscenze vengono incorporate e allo stesso tempo tramandate, il sapere incorporato è ciò che orienta le percezioni e i desideri degli individui. «Il comportamento etico si costituisce quindi a partire da azioni pratiche a cui “conferiamo un certo valore” e sulla base delle quali costruiamo i “corrispettivi atteggiamenti fondamentali permanenti”». (Krais, Gebauer, 2009: 27) Secondo Pierre Bourdieu questa memoria incorporata è la base dell’habitus, l’individuo, essendo culturalmente inserito in una comunità, appartenere ad essa ma allo stesso tempo si muove in essa attraverso il proprio corpo e grazie a queste conoscenze egli organizza il suo modo di stare al mondo. Nel momento stesso in cui egli apprende facendo esperienza col proprio corpo, afferma il suo essere parte di una determinata società. (Bourdieu, 2003) In questo senso il Laissez les bons temps rouler diventa la manifestazione  


37 Letteralmente “lascia che i bei momenti scorrono”. È una tipica espressione Cajun che fa riferimento a questo loro modo di vivere la vita con spensieratezza, facendo esperienza dei dolori passati ma andando oltre ad essi. Risulta significativo il loro entusiasmo nel voler festeggiare in qualsiasi occasione attraverso il travestimento, assumere un’altra identità è come se fosse un modo per esorcizzare la loro condizione di inferiorità rispetto agli Stati del nord e i drammi che conseguono agli uragani.
Ci sono delle radici storiche legate a lunghi anni di colonialismo francese che spiegano il perché dell’alta percentuale di persone di religione cattolica a Grand Isle (circa il 90%). Tuttavia il testo di Guitierrez aiuta a comprendere le ragioni per cui – nonostante la comparsa di altre forme di religiosità – il cattolicesimo ha continuato ad affermarsi nel corso degli anni. Questa forma di credo religioso a differenza dei Battisti, una delle principali Chiese negli Stati Uniti, non discrimina il loro comportamento nell’affrontare la quotidianità attraverso il divertimento. Chi ostacola questa loro forma di felicità viene isolato dal resto della comunità Cajun.
9. Quattordici piedi da terra

Vivere nell’isola significa avere incorporato delle nozioni e delle strategie di risposta riguardo agli uragani, facendo rientrare fenomeno straordinario all’interno delle categorie cognitive native come un evento ordinario per rendere accettabile il rischio che esso comporta. In questo modo si attivano dei meccanismi di difesa, prevenzione e ricostruzione a breve e lungo termine.

**Ann:** I grew up… I was born when the hurricane Flossy hit. And so… I’m just glad my mum didn’t name me Flossy! I’m glad… I’ve just never been afraid of bad weather.\(^{30}\)

**Sabrina:** with the weather, of course we… every time we get a storm we get banged and crashed around. People here are very resilient, they love the island, they’re always going to come back, generally. If they leave it’s just because of health reasons, or they’re just getting too old and really handle going up and down the stairs, you know, living up in the air like we do… on the raised houses. Primarily the weather… everybody kinda… it’s not… it’s hard, but the hurricane season’s… you know, I mean about half a year you worry about it, it’s only once in a while you get a really bad storm that creates us the problems, but people as I said are very resilient. They love the island, they love being here, so they come back in, fix it up, and start all over. So… And most of the time it’s just a clean up and fix up\(^{39}\)

L’uragano è un fenomeno incorporato che viene visto come un evento che fortifica le loro esistenze, autodefinirsi resilienti è indice di una grande

\(^{30}\) Dall’intervista con Ann del 29 Ottobre 2012.
\(^{39}\) Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 Novembre 2012.
consapevolezza riguardo alle proprie conoscenze riguardo ad esso; per questo motivo il non essere riusciti a limitare i danni di Katrina li ha, da un lato, resi più vulnerabili, in quanto le conoscenze degli esperti hanno tradito la loro fiducia, mentre dall’altro ha rafforzato quest’idea riguardante la loro capacità di resistere anche a fenomeni di tale intensità. Come mi disse S. durante l’intervista, tutti avevano predetto la tempesta del secolo, ma non c’erano gli strumenti necessari per poterla gestire.

**Sabrina:** Yeah, yeah! But it’s doesn’t like flood five feet up! Or twelve feet, so that’s the difference. This was one... that was the... the... the hundred-year storm that everybody has been predicting forever and ever. Well, it hit, and no matter how much you say: “We’ going to be prepared, we’re gonna do this, we’re gonna do that”, it’s still very, very hard to... to... be prepared for that. It’s just more than what the services could handle at that time. It’s no secret that the mayor of the town was ill prepared for this, he really... I don’t think he realized, as did any... no one else did... the extent of the damage. They just didn’t have the emergency services available to handle everything. And there were people who... you know, who are always gonna exploit the situation and take advantage of it, and... most of those... people who... do that kind of thing, took advantage of it! But after the National Guard got there, it got it straightened out, it got much better.40

In questo senso il fatto di essere riusciti a sopravvivere, nonostante tutti gli ostacoli e gli scandali, è diventato motivo d’orgoglio. Imparare a leggere i venti e le nuvole significa conoscere il proprio territorio ed aver appreso delle

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40 Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 Novembre 2012.
tecniche per potersi sentire al sicuro anche all’arrivo di forti tempeste. «[…]
most of the houses are elevated now. Most people have… they don’t keep
anything really important downstairs, I mean, that you gotta replace. Most of
the time everybody evacuates, a few people stay. The police, the firemen, they
stay».  

A Grand Isle le moderne tecniche di costruzione si sono integrate ai saperi
locali, l’edificazione delle abitazioni, infatti, si basa sulla conoscenza storica
secondo la quale in questo territorio e nelle zone costiere si è da sempre
applicata la costruzione rialzata proprio per le caratteristiche geo-morfologiche
e climatiche dell’area prevalentemente umida e paludosa. Nel 1936
l’antropologo Fred B. Kniffen identificò cinque tipi di case comunemente
diffuse nel sud Louisiana: il cottage creolo, il bungalow, le case dei cacciatori,
dei trapper\(^{42}\) e dei pescatori di ostriche (vedi fig. 7). Tutti e cinque i tipi di
costruzioni sono ancora oggi visibili nella zona di Lafourche benché siano stati
combinati i vari stili.

\(^{41}\) Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 Novembre 2012.
\(^{42}\) Con il termine trapper s’intendono i cacciatori e gli esploratori la cui principale attività di
sostentamento era la caccia tramite trappole. La casa del ‘cacciatore’ era fondamentalmente una
costruzione temporanea nella palude, usata in un solo periodo dell’anno, infatti la loro
costruzione è semplice e fatta con materiali reperiti nel luogo.
Fig. 7. Tipiche abitazioni presenti nel sud Louisiana durante l’epoca coloniale (Ditto, 1980: 12).

Con l’andare degli anni le tipologie di case si sono mescolate, in particolare modo quella dei trapper e dei pescatori di ostriche le quali presentano un rialzamento dal suolo; le caratteristiche comuni a tutte le tipologie di case presenti nel territorio sono: il primo piano elevato da terra, tetti e pareti costruiti con legno di cipresso e l’utilizzo della tecnica del bousillage per la muratura (Ditto, 1980: 11-12). Lo sviluppo delle abitazioni è andato via via

43 Il bousillage è una tecnica utilizzata dai coloni francesi in Louisiana tra il XVIII e XIX secolo, non avendo a disposizione lo stesso materiale, essi modificarono il metodo di edificazione colombage basato sull’impiego di pietra o terra mista a paglia che all’epoca era noto in Francia. Il bousillage è un composto di argilla e muschio macerato che veniva impiegato come legante ed isolante all’interno dei pannelli in legno.
modificandosi, si è integrato attraverso il sapere degli esperti creando delle condizioni di edificabilità da rispettare per garantire una certa sicurezza ai cittadini in caso di condizioni meteorologiche avverse. Chi si occupa oggi della creazione e del rispetto delle norme è la Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), assorbita dall’agenzia del dipartimento degli Stati Uniti Homeland Security, venne istituita nel 1978 dall’allora presidente Jimmy Carter con lo scopo di prevenire, rispondere e gestire situazioni di emergenza. Hanno suddiviso i territori statunitensi in undici regioni per poter operare in maniera approfondita e capillare: la Louisiana rientra nella regione numero sei, dov’è responsabile di programmi di prevenzione dei disastri allo scopo di ridurre danni a cose e persone attraverso un’assicurazione per le alluvioni a prezzi accessibili a tutti, il divieto di costruire in zone a rischio e il rispetto delle norme per l’elevazione delle case. FEMA è lo stesso acronimo che molte persone hanno conosciuto in seguito al fallimento nella gestione del disastro di Katrina.

For years emergency management professionals have been warning that FEMA’s preparedness has eroded. Many believe this erosion is a result of the separation of the preparedness function from FEMA, the drain of long-term professional staff along with their institutional knowledge and expertise, and the inadequate readiness of FEMA’s national emergency response teams. The combination of these staffing,

44 The United States Department of Homeland Security è un dipartimento del governo federale degli Stati Uniti avente lo scopo di proteggere tutti i suoi territori da pericoli di natura terroristica, incidenti manmade e disastri naturali, nacque in seguito agli attacchi dell’11 settembre per aumentare la sicurezza nell’intero Paese.
training, and organizational structures made FEMA’s inadequate performance in the face of a disaster the size of Katrina all but inevitable.46

FEMA è anche il nome con cui le persone hanno instaurato un rapporto di ostile fiducia, attraverso il quale esprimono la loro gratitudine per il supporto che ricevono, tuttavia il modo in cui operano nel territorio si trasforma in un approccio tecno-centrico attraverso imposizioni calate dall’alto che si modificano ad ogni nuovo uragano, generando confusione e sfiducia nei confronti della loro credibilità. A Grand Isle il mutuo aiuto nelle situazioni d’emergenza è un atteggiamento incorporato: gli abitanti sanno come comportarsi perciò i legami sociali in queste occasioni rafforzano la coesione interna della società. I membri del consiglio comunale hanno istituzionalizzato questo supporto reciproco attraverso l’aiuto di figure professionali presenti nell’isola.

Sara: And like when happens the hurricanes you respond like a council member?

Lois: Yes. Actually what we do, we get together along with the civil defense director, we get with the Fire Department, the first responder, we also get with the parish, then the parish comes in and helps us, then we make a decision, whether we should evacuate or stay. And then, on the return-home side, we try to get everybody home as quickly as possible, because we have people who have a low income and cannot afford to stay in a hotel thirteen or fourteen days. If we can get our people home, our people can do without lights, As long as we’ve got running water we’re ok.

We can cook outside... I love to do it anyway! We can make do, we’re pretty resilient here, we can survive.

But FEMA has put so many rules and regulations on these buildings that is almost impossible for a young couple to get started. Really, it really is and FEMA changes its mind like we change our underwear. You know, they’re constantly changing their minds about things and there’s people that live in Michigan and Illinois that take decisions for down here. [...] The more money we get from the government, the more they’re gonna tell us how to live.47

I requisiti stabiliti dall’agenzia di gestione del rischio per la costruzione di una casa o la modificazione di una struttura già esistente nei luoghi colpiti da uragani, variano da zona a zona. Le tecniche che vengono utilizzate considerano anche la tipologia di edificio su cui intervenire, ecco allora che troveremo: elevazione a partire dall’estensione delle fondamenta già esistenti vedi fig. 8, numero 1), elevazione della casa sulla parte superiore del sottotetto rialzando il piano terra (vedi fig. 8, numero 3), elevazione tramite abbandono del piano terra – dove consentito (vedi fig. 8, numero 4), elevazione su fondamenta aperte grazie all’utilizzo della tecnica di costruzione simile alla palafitta (vedi fig. 8, numero 2).

47 Dall’intervista con Lois del 26 novembre 2012.
Inoltre, sono state costruiti degli argini che separano la spiaggia dalla zona abitata con lo scopo di bloccare le onde generate dagli uragani: questo sistema funziona, ma presenta dei grossi limiti nel momento in cui l’altezza delle onde è superiore a quella degli argini (cosa che si è già verificata), in quanto l’acqua, una volta varcata questa soglia, non avendo un sistema di canali di scolo, rimane intrappolata nell’isola per giorni a causa anche della conformità paludosa del sottosuolo.

Nonostante tutti sappiano come ci si debba comportare all’arrivo di un uragano

Everybody knows what the hurricane drill is. You know, you empty your refrigerator… and you leave. You know, it’s that simple! So it’s not a… it’s not a complicated thing for us, ’cos we are accustomed to it, you know. [parla del cane]. So basically… the… the… the people here are pretty resilient, they know how to handle

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that, you know, and they know that coming back they’ll have some damage, so they’re prepared to fix it. You know, clean up and fix up.  

La decisione di inserire il FEMA nella gestione delle emergenze ha de-istituzionalizzato il ruolo dei membri del Consiglio e tolto il potere alle persone stesse, le quali devono rispondere alle decisioni di questo organo federale. Da diverse interviste, in particolar modo quella con L., emerge la disapprovazione a dover rispettare le imposizioni poste dal FEMA, il quale ha avviato un processo di delegittimazione a livello locale creando divisioni interne alla comunità nel rispetto di queste regole; così la disgregazione che nasce in conseguenza a tali decisioni può aumentare la vulnerabilità all’interno della società.

10. Geografie frammentate

«And go to visit the family up the road or whatever and... you know... after you’ve left your paradise island you don’t want to go too far, and you go and stay a couple of days, then you come back.»

Ad ottobre, mentre ero sul campo a condurre la mia ricerca, si iniziò a diffondere la voce di un possibile uragano che avrebbe raggiunto le coste della

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49 Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
50 Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
Louisiana, ma per fortuna (o purtroppo) i venti raggiunsero la parte nord degli Stati Uniti, e i notiziari locali non fecero che parlare del pericolo Sandy per giorni e giorni, si temeva che potesse scontrarsi con una tempesta di ghiaccio che stava scendendo dal nord.

Inizialmente si era preoccupati per i connazionali del New Jersey – in quanto non hanno nessun tipo di preparazione per poter affrontare l’evento – ma quando il sindaco di New York Andrew Cuomo dichiarò che «Hurricane Katrina, in many ways, was not as impactful as Hurricane Sandy, believe it or not»51, gli abitanti del sud Louisiana si sentirono profondamente offesi, affermare che Sandy era peggio di Katrina significava, ancora una volta, metterli in secondo piano, perpetuando l’ideologia tra vinti e vincitori in seguito alla Guerra di Secessione Americana che ancora oggi rimarca la discrepanza di potere tra nord e sud.

Sabrina: I think… I think because we go through it every once in a while, and we’re generally kinda mentally prepared for, we know what’s gonna happen, we know what’s gonna… basically what’s gonna look like when you come back…

Sara: So it’s like normal for you.

Sabrina: It’s almost like normal, I mean, it’s not fun to do it, but it’s not like the storm that just passed up in New York, in that area. Those folks had never gone

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51 THE VILLAGE VOICE BLOG
through that. They’ve never had that much damage before. So they’re, quite understandably, very stressed out.\textsuperscript{52}

L’esperienza incorporata delle conoscenze per affrontare quel tipo di evento poneva i reduci di Katrina in una condizione di superiorità, in quanto si tratta di competenze specifiche che hanno acquisito nell’arco di un lungo tempo convivendo con fenomeni di tale intensità, perciò aver dato maggiore rilevanza a Sandy è stato come delegittimare il loro dolore, riportando alla memoria un passato che sconfina nel presente delle loro esistenze. Si sentirono abbandonati dai loro connazionali ma godettero della diffusione internazionale delle notizie. A questo proposito il sociologo Ulrich Beck introduce il concetto di seconda modernità\textsuperscript{53}, partendo da una riflessione che prende in considerazione il passato dei primi anni del Novecento, quando – con la Rivoluzione Industriale – si guardava con ottimismo al progresso: la redistribuzione della modernità avrebbe permesso a tutti di godere dei suoi benefici. Tuttavia sul finire degli anni Cinquanta ci si rese conto che esisteva un limite strutturale alla ricchezza che si poteva produrre, lo sviluppo delle tecnologie mise gli individui di fronte all’unico bene interclassista: il rischio. La modernizzazione ha ridisegnato il profilo della società trasformandola da feudale a industriale

\textsuperscript{52} Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.

\textsuperscript{53} Con questo termine Beck si riferisce alla nuova fase storica e sociale che stiamo vivendo, ovvero la società del rischio, la quale è caratterizzata da una consapevolezza individuale secondo cui siamo ben coscienti possano accadere eventi catastrofici incontrollabili dati dalle attività dell’uomo ma che non sappiamo gestire e calcolare gli effetti, in quanto si ripercuotono a livello globale per un arco di tempo indefinito.
sino ad arrivare a quella del rischio, la quale affonda le sue radici nell’incertezza: è la stessa tecnologia a creare nuovi rischi nell’era della post-modernità i quali si presentano come incontrollabili e diffusi a livello globale (Beck, 2000). L’intervento degli individui sulla realtà ha raggiunto un livello pervasivo tale da portare con sé effetti radicali il cui impatto è imprevedibile su scala spaziale e temporale, perciò questo pone il problema della responsabilità soprattutto sul piano del tempo. Il dominio sulla natura proposto da una visione utopistica della tecnologia si scontra con il verificarsi di eventi catastrofici in cui si manifestano i limiti del progresso, ma sono proprio questi processi irreversibili che porteranno l’uomo fondare un’idea di etica basata sulla responsabilità per risolvere i problemi dati dalla società post-moderna (Jonas, 1990).

Al fiorire della diffusione tecnologica è cresciuta di pari passo anche quella dei mezzi di comunicazione, attraverso i quali vengono emesse le notizie dei disastri su larga scala, permettendo di condividere i sentimenti di disagio dovuti alle conseguenze dell’evento. Accanto all’utilizzo di questi nuovi strumenti come opportunità per gli individui di condividere e produrre conoscenza, si è creato un meccanismo di blog e forum grazie ai quali si può rimanere costantemente informati, nel caso specifico della Louisiana è possibile avere informazioni riguardo alle condizioni meteo e ai futuri risvolti delle tempeste in tempo reale, attraverso dei collegamenti al sistema nazionale di allerta: computer portatili ed i più recenti tablet e smartphone consentono di
avvisare i proprietari attraverso l’utilizzo delle applicazioni messe a disposizione dalla Croce Rossa Internazionale.\textsuperscript{54} L’importanza del ruolo giocato da internet è emerso con l’arrivo dell’uragano Katrina, le persone provenienti da tutti gli Stati Uniti hanno potuto organizzarsi per portare aiuti grazie alla condivisione delle informazioni sui blogs e forum da parte degli abitanti colpiti dal disastro; inoltre gli studi sui sopravvissuti hanno dimostrato che i messaggi di testo inviati con telefoni cellulari e l’accesso ad internet hanno costituito delle fonti cruciali di informazione durante quell’arco di tempo che s’identifica nella post-evacuazione. La sociologa Jeannette Sutton introduce al sistema di organizzazione delle persone nel ricercare ed offrire aiuto, assistenza, protezione etc., sostenendo che il disastro è

\begin{quote}
a unifying force that creates emotional solidarity and mutual helpfulness among those affected by it. Researchers describe the emergence of “altruistic communities” in response to disruptions as common, where people routinely assist fellow community members, often going to great lengths to organize and provide help \cite{1,13}. This individual expression of mutual caring and aid to those in need represents an outward expression of community concern (Sutton, 2008: 2). 
\end{quote}

Il sistema di connessione in tempo reale tramite internet permette alle comunità geografiche distrutte da un evento catastrofico, di ricomporsi

\textsuperscript{54} \textsc{Red Cross}: \texttt{<http://redcross.org/mobile-apps/hurricane-app>}. Data ultima consultazione: 09.04.2013.
aumentando la solidità interna al gruppo e, al contempo, espandersi a livello globale. Tuttavia, da un lato, può risultare rischioso questo eccessivo accesso alle informazioni, in quanto l’effetto della ridondanza potrebbe amplificare il comportamento delle persone verso una minimizzazione o massimizzazione del rischio; essere in qualche modo attivi nei blogs, forum o social network ci rende anche produttori di interpretazioni e significati rispetto ad un determinato argomento, il che implica assumere un ruolo che riflette una posizione vicina all’autorità delle informazioni che condividiamo con la comunità virtuale. Essere inseriti nelle comunità virtuali ci rende autori ed interpreti allo stesso tempo, il professore Axel Bruns definisce questo creare e condividere informazioni nello stesso momento in cui si attua il gesto, con la parola produsage fondendo insieme la creazione e la diffusione collaborativa in un unico concetto eliminando quel paradigma interno alla nozione di utente virtuale che lo conducono alla creazione di contenuti nati dalla collaborazione con altri user (Bruns, 2008).

Nonostante la condivisione attraverso l’utilizzo dei nuovi mezzi consenta di rimanere in contatto con la propria comunità, lo sradicamento delle persone che avviene attraverso la migrazione forzata, costituisce parte del processo del disastro. La migrazione è sempre stata parte una strategia di sopravvivenza per gli individui che si ritrovano ad affrontare un disastro, tuttavia sebbene i moderni sistemi di allerta abbiano migliorato la preparazione nell’evacuare dalla zona a rischio, la tendenza negli ultimi anni è quella di un aumento della
mortalità e delle perdite economiche in maniera disomogenea. Lo sradicamento non rappresenta solo la conseguenza di una lontananza fisica dalla propria casa, ma è anche una componente individuale e sociale particolarmente visibile nel processo di ricostruzione.55

Accanto alle comunità frammentate dall’evacuazione, c’è chi, nonostante tutto, decide di restare perché il luogo più sicuro in cui possa trovarsi è la propria casa, perché se dovesse succedere qualcosa vuole trascorrere gli ultimi istanti nella sua casa con la sua famiglia e i suoi affetti: «We played a lot of card games, we played a lot of board games, which we normally don’t have time to do, and she took a t-shirt, cut it up and made a “cast away” shirt out of it… which was really cute. She looked like she was on some deserted island or something like that, hahaha!»56 Chiudersi in casa aspettando che passi la tempesta diventa un momento unico di convivialità, un’occasione per stare con i propri familiari, o semplicemente per prendersi del tempo e fermarsi a pensare sulla propria vita mentre si cerca di difendere la propria casa dalle raffiche di vento e dalle onde violente. Chi resta racconta cosa succede, crea un network di contatti con gli evacuati e con i soccorritori per descrivere il trascorrere del tempo, e sono proprio loro a mantenere un collegamento tra i gruppi dislocati nelle geografie lontane da Grand Isle, mantenendo una rete sociale che resiste alle intemperie.

56 Dall’intervista con Ann del 29 Ottobre 2013.
Il tempo e la memoria sono due concetti che spesso ritroviamo raffigurati o descritti in molte opere di varia natura, essi sono l’espressione di uno dei pensieri principali dell’uomo riguardo alla propria esistenza. Uno dei dipinti più famosi che ci riporta a queste tematiche è La persistenza della memoria di Salvador Dalì, il quale rappresenta la percezione del tempo nata in seguito ad visione onirica. Dalì s’inserisce in quella corrente artistica definita Surrealista, la quale si crea attorno alla rottura e al rifiuto della struttura logica di pensiero; verso il finire dell’Ottocento e i primi anni del Novecento si sviluppa.

Fig. 9. Salvador Dalì. La persistenza della memoria. Museum of Modern Art, 1931.
la consapevolezza di un io molteplice e fragile che non può più essere definito in maniera univoca. La riflessione di quegli anni mina l’idea dell’io cartesiano e di una realtà oggettiva, mettendo in crisi la relazione che intercorre tra chi osserva e la realtà osservata; era in atto un cambiamento della società che partiva da un ripensamento totale dell’individuo in relazione al mondo esterno, la realtà inizia a porsi in un rapporto di dipendenza diretta con chi la percepisce e la comprende come tale, innescando una crisi delle certezze. In questa revisione del pensiero inizia a farsi strada l’idea freudiana dell’inconscio, la quale assume un ruolo importante nella sfera dell’individuo, ma, essendo una parte della sua vita interiore, non ne ha piena coscienza per cui non può avere né consapevolezza né conoscenza. L’inconscio, tuttavia, riesce a manifestarsi attraverso alcune azioni che l’uomo compie senza il filtro della ragione: improvvisi ricordi che si era cercato di richiamare alla memoria, atti abitudinari, perdite di oggetti o dimenticanze etc. Il sogno diventa allora il principale strumento attraverso il quale l’inconscio si manifesta in tutta la sua essenza. La persistenza della memoria apparsa in sogno all’artista assume un significato profondo riguardo alla capacità dell’individuo di percepire un senso del tempo e del ricordo che si discosta dal pensiero logico dominante, per questo motivo il dipinto riesce ad indicarmi una spiegazione della memoria soggettiva da un punto di vista diverso. La concezione deterministica del tempo viene così stravolta attraverso al raffigurazione degli orologi molli che si

57 Si veda ad esempio l’analisi di Ugo Fabietti su questi passaggi storici in relazione all’antropologia (Fabietti, 2001).
sciolgono al sole, scardinando la precisione del tempo meccanico, a favore della percezione individuale di ogni singolo istante che l'uomo vive; per questo motivo l'orologio in basso a sinistra, l'unico intatto, viene divorato dalle formiche, per ricordare all'osservatore che il tempo oggettivo è uno strumento razionale che ci modella sulle esigenze. Attraverso l'annullamento della cronologia e della memoria oggettive, Dalì intende sottolineare questa velocità o lentezza dei momenti in cui siamo immersi e di cui ognuno conserverà un ricordo più o meno dilazionato nel tempo. La deformazione degli orologi assume in tal modo la funzione di metafora della deformazione della memoria e del tempo dove il prima s'inserisce nel dopo e viceversa, contaminandosi mutualmente nello scorrere del presente.

Secondo questa concezione la linea del tempo non è più qualcosa di fisso bensì ricordi e oblii elastici che fluttuano o s'imprimono nella mente degli individui. Elementi scompaiono mentre altri restano vivi nei ricordi e nella gestualità quotidiana nonostante sentiamo il bisogno di andare oltre all'esperienza vissuta che ci ha segnato profondamente. Riaffiora al rumore del vento, all'odore della pioggia che sta per arrivare. L'uragano si vorrebbe far spazio nella dimenticanza, ma rimane sempre presente nell'essenza delle cose e nella vita degli individui di Grand Isle. «J. pensa che la gente abbia come chiuso il capitolo e abbia iniziato a guardare avanti come si fa dopo il passaggio
di un uragano, perché non si può sempre stare fermi, bisogna andare avanti perché la vita continua.»

Ricordare i fatti avvenuti nel passato significa anche mantenere viva la memoria di quegli istanti che hanno segnato profondamente la nostra esistenza. Fare esperienza attraverso la memoria diventa un modo per cercare di inserire la propria esperienza in un contesto oggettivo per riorganizzare la nostra linea del tempo vissuta fino ad oggi; per questo il ricordo a Grand Isle si é ordinato sulla base degli uragani: la temporalità della propria vita si crea con il passaggio delle forti raffiche di vento. Gli uragani sono il fulcro della società del sud Louisiana, modellano l’esistenza degli individui e ne permeano la mente in tutti gli aspetti. Così come gli orologi di Salvador Dalí si sono deformati sulla percezione soggettiva del tempo, gli uragani hanno plasmato la loro memoria in modo tale che ciò che accade risulta essere inserito in ‘prima e dopo’ quella forte tempesta. Se consideriamo che

Il territorio dentro il quale situare le nostre domande e comprendere dunque anche il modo con il quale le società ricordano o dimenticano, e la maniera con cui trattano o ignorano quei singolari testimoni del passato che sono i sintomi. Il trauma non è, in fondo, che una domanda sul difficile rapporto fra oblio e memoria: ma è una domanda sociale, non solo individuale (Beneduce, 2010: 109).

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58 Dalla trascrizione di un’intervista con Joey senza registratore effettuata il giorno 28 novembre 2012.
Allora possiamo asserire che l’incorporazione di questi fenomeni è tale da non considerare i loro effetti sulla memoria come esperienze di traumi vissuti, quanto piuttosto ad una profonda conoscenza di questi eventi che gli ha permesso di considerare diversamente il proprio passato per vivere diversamente il presente. Liberato dalle catene stesse della fissità del tempo oggettivo e collocandolo in un realtà extratemporale che sfugge all’oggi, in questo modo ha permesso ai Cajun di sviluppare questa attitudine di gioire della vita inteso nel suo senso profondo di *joie de vivre* che sta alla base della loro simple life.

12. Stay high and dry

Negli stessi giorni in cui stavo per prendere contatti a livello logistico con gli abitanti di Grand Isle per trovare un posto in cui dormire i notiziari comunicano che Isaac si guadagna il titolo di uragano, categoria 1. Le comunicazioni via mail con le persone del luogo iniziarono a rallentare e, in alcuni casi s’interruppero. In quanto membro dei gruppi facebook We love Grand Isle, Louisiana e Friends of Grand Isle ho potuto seguire in tempo reale
come la gente si stava organizzando per l’*evacuation*\(^{59}\) e, in particolar modo, come avveniva la condivisione delle informazioni tra chi era rimasto e chi invece se n’era andato. Il 28 agosto inizia l’arrivo della tempesta e il 29, a sette anni dall’anniversario di Katrina, l’allagamento nell’isola aumenta fino a raggiungere un massimo di cinque piedi nelle zone più basse. Nonostante Isaac fosse stato declassato a categoria 1 con venti ad 80 miglia all’ora, l’incertezza del suo possibile crescere in poco tempo incuteva pur sempre un certo timore; inoltre gli stati d’ansia che provocava erano aumentati per la sua puntualità nel ripresentarsi il giorno 29 agosto, ma non c’era spazio per altri ricordi in quella stessa data e la gente cominciò ad ironizzare sul suo tempismo perfetto, quasi a voler esorcizzare sul passato che sembra introdursi a piè pari nel presente.

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\(^{59}\) Termine coniato da alcune signore del posto, è dato dalla fusione delle parole *evacuation* e *vacation*. Chi appartiene alle fasce più alte della società sfrutta l’arrivo degli uragani per andare a fare una vacanza in Florida, dove la tempesta è già passata e i tempi di ripresa sono molto più veloci essendo uno stato benestante. Dall’intervista con S. del 26 novembre 2012: «S: But for the last couple of years, it’s only been about twice I think I’ve really left. But now we call those “evacucations”».
La potenziale pericolosità del fenomeno venne amplificata dai media locali e dal Presidente Barack Obama stesso, il quale temeva una seconda sottovalutazione dell’evento e l’impreparazione da parte delle autorità, per questo motivo firmò degli atti preventivi sullo stato di emergenza della Louisiana e del Mississippi. Katrina era diventata il cattivo esempio da cui imparare per non ripetere più gli stessi errori.  

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Chi non c'era chiedeva informazioni sulla sua casa, sull'isola e sulla salute di chi, invece, stava vivendo in prima persona l'evento. Grazie alla grande diffusione dei moderni smartphone la comunicazione scritta e visiva si è velocizzata attraverso l'uso delle applicazioni per i social network per questo ho potuto trovare le immagini caricate in tempo reale dai membri del gruppo.

Fig. 11. Allagamento e danni provocati da Isaac.62

In poco tempo, grazie all'aiuto dei cittadini, si rende noto che i danni a Grand Isle sembrano essere più estetici che strutturali, mentre il problema principale sembra essere la rottura dell'unica strada che collega Port Fourchon a Grand Isle (vedi fig.11), motivo per cui tutte le persone evacuate non hanno potuto far ritorno alla propria casa per diversi giorni mentre ai lavoratori

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dell’area petrolchimica di Port Fourchon vennero messi a disposizione degli elicotteri per poter raggiungere la sede di lavoro e riattivare quell’80% dei pozzi chiusi preventivamente. La ripresa dei servizi base avvenne in tempi veloci e agli abitanti dell’isola fu presto riaperto il gas ad uso personale e, qualche giorno dopo, anche l’elettricità; contemporaneamente si attivarono la Red Cross, la Second Harvest Food Bank e la First Baptist Church per aiutare le persone rimaste nell’isola, distribuendo loro cibo e bevande di prima necessità. Isaac non fu così forte da lasciare segni evidenti del suo passaggio, come riporta P. nel social network il giorno 30 agosto 2012 «Just to give you an idea about how high the water got, had 2ft of water in the Chief Office and about an inch in the police dept. for Katrina, we close to 4ft in the police dept.» un confronto che indica la limitatezza dei danni. Mentre seguivo lo svolgersi degli eventi nei notiziari nazionali e nei social network nell’incertezza di non sapere se avrei avuto un alloggio per il mio lavoro di campo, sembrava che Isaac fosse passato senza lasciare grossi danni e che, come ad ogni uragano, al defluire dell’acqua si potesse tornare nelle proprie case per riprendere la normale vita di tutti i giorni. Ma non fu così. Isaac non arrivò in maniera

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dirompente nell’isola, gli effetti del suo passaggio si resero visibili dopo qualche giorno, portando a galla un passato che si cercava di dimenticare nascondendolo nel fondo del mare.

**Ray:** I talked to some workers cleaning the beaches around this area... and I asked how some other beaches look and changed... and they said a lot better now, but I think after the hurricane they had a lot of tarballs, a lot of...

**Sara:** After Isaac?

**Ray:** ‘Cos he told me... He said... he said it looks a lot better now after what they did...it must... maybe with the storms and rough waters probably... brought more of it onto the beach, but... after, you know, spending three or four weeks, more than that...when was the storm?

**Penny:** Isaac was August 29th, so it’s been two months...

**Ray:** Two months of cleaning and they said it’s looking a lot better.

**Sara:** Ah, ok.

**Ray:** But you never know, maybe with the next storm you’ll have more, it’s...

**Sara:** It returns?

**Ray:** Yeah. I think that... you know, the water gets real rough, it turns it off the bottom, so...

[...]

**Penny:** I’d say... well...it’s been... I guess every time the water gets stirred up real good, like the hurricane Isaac, but also there was another time, just after... rough water, I remember they were talking about the ES&H people, you know, that got to clean the beach, they go to the Bridge Side and Elizabeth talks to them a lot, she’s
got… getting information about that, but I know that they’ve mentioned different times there would be more tarballs than others, but I don’t know what the reason is.

L’inaspettato accadde. Quello che si cercò di nascondere e far dimenticare in due anni e mezzo era riaffiorato visibilmente ai loro occhi. In quest’arco di tempo nulla era stato soffocato dalla quotidianità e il petrolio polverizzato continuava ad arrivare sulle spiagge di Grand Isle. Con la chiusura di 12 miglia di costa, Isaac ha ricordato che la contaminazione del più grande disastro petrolifero è un processo lento ed inesorabile di cui nessuno conosce la fine. Si è aperta una nuova concezione dei fenomeni naturali che non prevede più solamente l’arrivo di una forte tempesta ma implica anche il rischio che l’allagamento sopra il tuo terreno possa contenere dell’acqua contaminata e che la spiaggia presenti dei grossi pezzi neri di petrolio. Questa prospettiva di riflessione ricorda ciò che Walter Benjamin scriveva riguardo alla storia e alle atrocità commesse dall’uomo mentre osservava l’Angelus novus di Paul Klee:

C’è un quadro di Klee che s’intitola Angelus Novus. Vi si trova un angelo che sembra in atto di allontanarsi da qualcosa su cui fissa lo sguardo. Ha gli occhi spalancati, la bocca aperta, le ali distese. L’angelo della storia deve avere questo

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66 Letteralmente palle di cotrame.
67 Dall’intervista con Ray e Penny del 5 novembre 2012.
aspetto. Ha il viso rivolto al passato. Dove ci appare una catena di eventi, egli vede una sola catastrofe, che accumula senza tregua rovine su rovine e le rovescia ai suoi piedi. Egli vorrebbe ben trattenersi, destare i morti e ricomporre l’infranto. Ma una tempesta spira dal paradiso, che si è impigliata nelle sue ali, ed è così forte che egli non può più chiuderle. Questa tempesta lo spinge irresistibilmente nel futuro, a cui volge le spalle, mentre il cumulo delle rovine sale davanti a lui al cielo. Ciò che chiamiamo il progresso, è questa tempesta (Benjamin, 1982: 80).

Fig. 12. Paul Klee, Angelus novus. Israel Museum, 1920.

In questo passaggio ritorna il concetto della memoria attraverso la concezione della frammentarietà di Benjamin, la quale conduce l’individuo allo smarrimento, interrogandosi allora sulla vita stessa e sui cambiamenti introdotti dalla modernità che frammentano le basi della società. Attraverso la sua interpretazione dell’opera di Klee, il filosofo esprime la sua visione pessimista riguardo al futuro, dove non ci sarà una possibile redenzione per l’uomo essendo esso stesso attore del progresso e delle tragedie passate. Non ci sarà una giustizia per le vittime degli orrori commessi, ed è per questo che
l’Angelus novus ha uno sguardo tormentato rivolto all’indietro mentre il vento – che simboleggia lo scorrere del tempo – lo conduce lontano, ed è così che la «tempesta lo spinge irresistibilmente nel futuro, cui volge le spalle, mentre il cumulo delle rovine sale davanti a lui al cielo» (Benjamin, 1982: 80). È in questo senso che la memoria per Benjamin assume il significato principale nella vita degli uomini, diventando l’unica via di salvezza possibile: bisogna concepire il presente come un prodotto derivante dal passato, come una serie di eventi che consegue alle azioni generate dal passato.

L’Angelus novus è paragonabile all’uragano, il quale è spinto oggi da un vento che riporta il passato nel presente, tuttavia è un presente che non si può trattenere perché spira verso un futuro inesorabile. In questo senso la metafora del dipinto di Klee è parafrasabile alle tarballs portate a riva da Isaac, esse rispecchiano l’insensatezza della frammentarietà di un mondo che non riusciamo più a comprendere, è lo stesso tormento che Benjamin legge negli occhi dell’angelo. Seguendo il pensiero del filosofo, il progresso non può più essere concepito come un qualcosa che si contrappone al passato: essi si compenetrano nel presente, per questo l’unica redenzione possibile per l’uomo è la memoria. Se assumiamo, dunque, la memoria come unico strumento di salvezza, ci rendiamo conto che le persone coinvolte nel disastro sono allo stesso tempo colpevoli e vittime di un orrore scaturito dal progresso\(^69\) e il voler

\(^{69}\) L’evento ha posto le persone di fronte alla consapevolezza dei pericoli derivanti dall’uso del petrolio, attivando in loro una coscienza nuova rispetto alle trivellazioni per la tutela del proprio mare, tuttavia le abitudini degli isolani nell’utilizzo di tale risorsa non si sono modificate.
nascondere il petrolio presente in superficie costituisce un modo per non riconoscere gli errori da parte di chi è ritenuto responsabile dell’evento. In questo senso, Isaac ha assunto un nuovo significato: ha sconvolto gli schemi cognitivi degli isolani ristabilendo il principio di importanza della memoria e, al tempo stesso, la pericolosità dell’oblio.

Ritrovarsi delle aree di pesca e di balneazione chiuse per la seconda volta è stato come ritrovarsi al momento dello shock iniziale, quando la marea nera avanzava lentamente verso l’isola. Cercare di nascondere dagli occhi dell’evidenza ciò che non si è potuto fermare tre anni fa è ritornato a galla: andare in profondità oltre la superficie delle cose per non rimuovere i ricordi dalla consistenza oleosa, quella stessa consistenza del petrolio, il quale – nonostante galleggi – ti trascina a fondo impedendo di muovere liberamente il tuo corpo e il tuo pensiero. Il non vedere aiuta a non pensare, tuttavia non cancella il ricordo delle emozioni profonde provate nel passato e il cambiamento dell’esistenza che si è messo in moto a partire dal verificarsi di quell’evento. Come l’angelo di Klee osservato da Benjamin, Grand Isle rimane aggrappata al passato della tragedia causata dal progresso, mentre i venti dell’uragano vorrebbero sospingerla verso il futuro.
Fig. 13. Petrolio a Grand Isle, 21 novembre 2012. Foto: Sara Teston.

«Sabrina: And we’ve dealt with that, and now we’re moving on. And we’ve had a hurricane since then. You know, we’ve had a storm! We’ve all had to leave and come back, so the BP thing is kinda rolling down the road. We haven’t forgotten and we’re not gonna forget, and we won’t let them forget.»\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{70}Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
Cap. 3

THE BP OIL SPILL DISASTER

1. Last gas for 200 miles

*Roseate spoonbill* (*Platalea ajaja*), appartenente alla famiglia *Threskiornithidae*, si può trovare in Sud America, in particolare della zona ad est delle Ande: Colombia, Ecuador, est Perù, Bolivia e nord dell’Argentina, nelle regioni costiere dei Caraibi, America Centrale, Messico e Stati Uniti (Texas, Florida e Louisiana).

Il color bianco candido della sua testa si sfuma nel piumaggio rosa delle ali e del corpo, le gambe esili e longilinee lo sorreggono in maniera elegante facendoci pensare si tratti di un’esemplare di fenicottero ma osservando attentamente il lungo becco (due piedi e mezzo, circa 75cm.) dalla caratteristica forma a cucchiaio, non ci sono dubbi: è lo *spoonbill*, a cui comunemente viene accostato l’aggettivo *pink*. Egli nidifica in piccole colonie – spesso con aironi e garzette. Il corteggiamento è un momento complesso nella vita di questo uccello, dove il nido diventa un elemento importante nella competizione tra maschi: il vincitore sarà chi riesce a reperire il materiale migliore per costruire un nido abbastanza grande ed accogliente per l’accoppiamento e l’incubazione.
delle uova. La femmina di *spoonbill* depone in media dalle due alle quattro uova all’anno le quali vengono covate sia dal maschio che dalla femmina per circa 22-23 giorni.

Il *Roseate Spoonbill* è un uccello gregario che vive nelle paludi, vicino alle lagune, nelle mangrovie e nelle distese fangose. È un animale particolarmente socievole e ama vivere in grandi colonie con gli altri uccelli della sua specie come: cicogne, aironi garzette e cormorani. Quando sono in volo allungano il più possibile il loro corpo, distendendo graziosamente le gambe e il collo, in modo tale da formare con gli altri simili stormi di lunghe linee diagonali che si stagliano come precise geometrie nei cieli, interrompendo la monotonia dell’azzurro terso senza fine.

Trascorre la maggior parte del suo tempo a nutrirsi di piccoli pesci, gamberi, molluschi, lumache e insetti che trova nelle acque poco profonde e nel fango, nelle paludi e mangrovie, in acqua salmastra o salata, e di tanto in tanto in acqua dolce. Come il fenicottero rosa, la sua particolare pigmentazione è data dal cibo di cui si nutre, in particolare i gamberetti. Il comune *Pink Spoonbill* è un uccello migratore e percorre principalmente la *flyway* circolare

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1 Con il termine *Flyway* si indicano i percorsi utilizzati dagli uccelli migratori per spostarsi, in particolare da quelli acquatici. Questi grandi itinerari di migrazione, che generalmente vanno da nord a sud e viceversa, si conformano in base alle principali caratteristiche topografiche che gli uccelli intendono seguire. Le maggiori rotte del Nord America sono quattro: *Atlantic*, *Mississippi*, *Central* e *Pacific*. I confini delle *Flyway* non sono sempre nettamente definiti, infatti capita che l’allevamento del nord e lo svernamento del sud si sovrappongano.
che comprende gli Stati che si affacciano sul Golfo del Messico, stanziandosi poi
durante il periodo estivo, lungo le coste della Louisiana.

Classificato come terzo fiume più lungo del mondo e sesto in termini di
portata (dagli 8.000 m³/s ai 50.000 m³/s) il Mississippi assume un ruolo
principale per la vita degli uccelli migratori. Essi trovano tutto quello che gli
serve nelle paludi del Delta del Mississippi grazie all’abbondanza di cibo che si
trova in questo esteso ecosistema, per questo motivo rappresenta un punto
cruciale per la loro migrazione, soprattutto nel periodo invernale quando
quest’area di sosta viene chiamata “Last Gas for 200 Miles”. La ricchezza del
Delta del Mississippi lo rende quindi uno dei punti di centrale importanza per
gli uccelli, in particolare quelli acquatici, costituendo uno dei nodi
fondamentali della migratory flyway.

I think that everyone watches birds for much the same reason. As a hobby birds
provide recreational opportunities unmatched by any other class of animals. As the
highest of the vertebrates, next to mammals, they convey to us a feeling of kinship,
based partly, perhaps, on the fact that they display personality, such as lower animals
do not. And, unlike most of the mammals, which are difficult to observe in the wild,
birds permit themselves to be seen and studied without exasperating effort. [...] Birds
are just elusive enough (Lowery, 1955: 2).

La posizione della Louisiana favorisce il passaggio di molti uccelli
migratori, oltre a fungere da habitat per le specie acquatiche. Si contano,
infatti, più di 377 specie all’interno dei confini dello Stato – più della metà di tutti gli uccelli presenti nel Nord America. Il meccanismo dell’orientamento e del magnetismo fa sì che gli uccelli si muovano nella direzione delle loro case estive, in particolar modo lungo le spiagge del Golfo del Messico: Grand Isle, Cameron, Marsh Island grazie alla loro vegetazione, costituiscono un rifugio per molte specie migratorie (George H. Lowery, 1955). Il motivo di questa sosta è costituito dalla presenza dell’habitat Chenière2, un luogo particolarmente ricco che consente il riposo e la più importante fonte di cibo prima di riprendere il lungo viaggio; durante la primavera, infatti, più di 70 specie provenienti dall’artico e dai tropici utilizzano questi boschi rigogliosi (le foreste di querce e di bagolaro presenti sono riconosciute a livello nazionale come luoghi migliori per avvistare gli uccelli canori), ed è proprio durante questo periodo dell’anno che a Grand Isle si svolge il Migratory Bird Festival. Un evento nato nel 1998 con l’intento di proteggere e preservare l’habitat

Chenièr, luogo di primaria importanza per la migrazione e la vita dei volatili – oggi ridotto al 10% rispetto alla superficie boschiva originaria dell’isola. Grand Isle è l’unica isola barriera presente lungo la costa del Golfo del Messico che supporta una vegetazione dominata dalla presenza delle querce. L’organizzatore di questa manifestazione, il Sanctuary Group\(^3\), sta operando nell’isola in collaborazione con alcuni proprietari terrieri e dirigenti locali per assicurare una conservazione a lungo termine delle Chenières, evitando la definitiva scomparsa di questi boschi\(^4\).

Nonostante la preservazione dell’ambiente sia un tema molto sentito a livello locale, il problema della caccia rimane una questione di rilevante importanza. Lo Stato della Louisiana ogni anno guadagna una consistente somma di denaro grazie alla vendita delle licenze di caccia e alle imposte sui fucili e i proiettili, e la maggior parte di questi soldi viene poi spesa per il recupero della natura. In aggiunta a questo va considerato anche il mercato del turismo della caccia presente a Grand Isle: la vendita dell’equipaggiamento, gli alloggi e altri tipi di fornitura utili. Questo contorto gioco monetario garantisce un fondo per la conservazione del territorio, vietare completamente questo tipo di sport impoverirebbe maggiormente l’isola sia a livello economico che ambientale.

\(^3\) Gruppo dell’isola composto da enti, associazioni e finanziatori locali che supportano la promozione e la conservazione dell’ambiente.
Apparentemente parlare di uccelli e delle loro vie migratorie è un argomento che si discosta dal mio tema di ricerca, ma non considerarne l'importanza sarebbe come lasciare il mio lavoro incompleto. Tendiamo a trascurare superficialmente degli elementi che compongono il tutto. In un certo senso parlare del *Roseate Spoonbill* è parlare di Grand Isle.

![Image](image.png)

**Fig. 14. Roseate Spoonbill nei giorni seguenti la fuoriuscita di petrolio**[^5].

And... there was a lot of people upset... because they did... I know, I was one of them, I got upset one day because there... you know, they had a hundred reports of... of oiled birds and I was down there in Elmer’s and I saw this pelican that was completely covered, and... I got mad. And I should have known better, but I still got mad when you see they keep waiting and waiting and I’m saying: “Where the hell are they? Get them over here”! [...] but you get emotional when you see... a bird completely covered, you know, even his eyes completely covered in oil, you get

[^5]: [VEGAN BLOG](http://easyvegan.info/2010/05/13/bp-oil-spill/). Data ultima consultazione: 14.03.2013.
emotional over it. And the pelican kept looking at me, so I said: “I’m gonna pick this thing up”. [...] when that happened that’s... part of that doesn’t look like... the one I got mad about it.6

2. “Drill, baby, drill”

«For Grand Isle is merely sleeping now – a sleeping beauty – awaiting the enchanted kiss of the Prince of Progress who shall wake her from slumber to vibrant, pulsating life» (Thompson, 1944: 56). Le perforazioni al largo delle coste iniziarono nel 1896 quando venne creato un pozzo petrolifero nel fondo del mare della California a Santa Barbara Channel, tuttavia bisognerà attendere il 1943 per vedere il ‘bacio dal principe del progresso’ in Louisiana. Il petrolio venne scoperto in Louisiana nel 1901, ma solo nel 1935 venne creato il primo pozzo petrolifero nella Jefferson Parish da parte della Texas Company (rinominata poi come Texaco). A 9.572 piedi — quasi tre chilometri di profondità, esso rappresentava il pozzo più profondo effettuato fino ad allora nella nazione, con una produzione di mille barili al giorno. Nel 1935 la Texas Company iniziò la costruzione di condutture di gas e petrolio che conducevano a Marrero7 da cui poi sarebbero state caricate nelle navi e nei camion cisterna per distribuire i prodotti nel resto del mondo. Nel 1943 si contavano già 61

6 Dall’intervista con William del 9 novembre 2012.
7 Si tratta di una census-designated place (concentrazione della popolazione identificata per fini statistici) posta sulla riva occidentale del fiume Mississippi all’interno dell’area di New Orleans.
pozzi attivi nell’estrazione a *Lafitte Field*, producendo 3.634.000 barili di petrolio al giorno, avvicinandosi nel 1955 alla cifra di 200 milioni di barili. Queste cifre stavano facendo arrivare altre compagnie interessate all’emergente mercato del petrolio, infatti nella terraferma i campi disponibili stavano diminuendo sempre di più e nel 1947 la Humble Oil and Refining Company iniziò la prima operazione di trivellamento al largo della costa della Jefferson Parish a sette miglia da Grand Isle, motivo per cui la piattaforma prese il nome della piccola isola barriera seguita dal No.1; dato il successo riscontrato nell’estrazione in mare aperto, la compagnia decise di costruire trentacinque pozzi in quell’area in pochissimi anni. L’industria emergente stava crescendo inesorabilmente tant’è che nel 1959 solo nella Jefferson Parish si contavano venti campi di petrolio nei terreni con 292 pozzi che producevano 27.304 barili e 46.800 piedi cubi di gas naturale al giorno (Swanson, 1991).

Per capire lo sviluppo dell’industria petrolifera nel Golfo del Messico bisogna conoscerne il funzionamento e la tipologia di terreno presente in questo luogo diventato teatro di frequenti esplorazioni, per questo motivo qui sotto riporterò sinteticamente le informazioni relative al reperimento di tale risorsa. Per effettuare le prime operazioni di estrazione del petrolio è necessario preparare il sito dal quale si andrà a prelevare la materia prima, utilizzando una trivella di enormi dimensioni per le perforazioni della misura di circa 200 metri quadrati, la quale è costruita su di un apposito impianto di perforazione predisposto ad operare nelle paludi e nei terreni coperti da sabbia e conchiglie.
Questo impianto viene posto su di una piattaforma rialzata di tre o quattro piedi per precauzione contro le inondazioni, inoltre vengono costruiti attorno degli argini all’area circostante la perforazione per contenere qualsiasi tipo di fuoriuscita dal pozzo, mentre a fianco un pozzo di riserva funge da raccoglitore per lo smaltimento dei rifiuti in modo da non disperdere sostanze inquinanti nell’ambiente – oggi viene rivestito con del materiale plastico per evitare la contaminazione del sottosuolo. La trivellazione viene effettuata scavando una fossa rettangolare denominata ‘cantina’ al centro della quale verrà posto un tubo conduttore, in seguito verrà costruita la piattaforma in relazione al foro (Swanson, 1991: 173-176). Una volta completata l’operazione di perforazione, si procede all’esplorazione del pozzo attraverso l’utilizzo delle sonde, vengono poi inseriti dei tubi d’acciaio che verranno successivamente cementati per evitare fuoriuscite di qualsiasi tipo. Infine saranno installati dei tubi – chiamati tubing, dal diametro variabile da 7 a 12 centimetri, i quali, attraverso un complesso sistema di valvole definito ‘albero di Natale’ nel gergo degli addetti ai lavori, condurranno il petrolio in serbatoi di stoccaggio provvisori oppure negli oleodotti.
Fig. 15. Schema di un impianto di perforazione offshore.\textsuperscript{8}

Il Golfo del Messico aveva le condizioni necessarie per fare del petrolio un’importante industria a livello internazionale, il mare era particolarmente produttivo e c’era un rifornimento costante di sedimenti, tuttavia queste

\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Szkolnictwo}: <http://szkolnictwo.pl/szukaj,Ropa_naftowa>. Data ultima consultazione: 03.05.2013.
rappresentavano due condizioni necessarie ma non sufficienti: affinché l’oro nero diventi un’importante forma di guadagno bisogna che le gocce di petrolio incontrino uno strato di roccia poroso che lo intrappoli, altrimenti potrebbe andare verso la superficie disperdendosi attraverso il processo di evaporazione. La roccia più adatta per facilitare questo processo è la pietra arenaria, la quale funziona come una spugna, assorbe il petrolio senza consentirne la dispersione nella superficie del mare. Circa venti milioni di anni fa le Mountains Appalachian, situate ad est del Mississippi, hanno iniziato un processo di erosione riversando la parte sabbiosa nel fiume che l’ha trasportata fino al Golfo del Messico, questo fenomeno ha creato le condizioni ideali per trattenere il petrolio nel sottosuolo. Nel linguaggio comune i fondali del Golfo del Messico vengono chiamati pay sands, i giacimenti di petrolio che si trovano in questa zona non sono delle piscine sotterranee, bensì strati di roccia oleosa sotto pressione che, se sfruttati correttamente, possono trasformarsi in petrolio e gas naturale. Il migliore giacimento di petrolio presente negli Stati Uniti deve la sua esistenza al sale. Per milioni di anni il Golfo del Messico ha agito come un enorme riserva di sale: l’espansione e la contrazione dei mari causata dai cambiamenti globali delle temperature l’ha sepolto sotto ad altri strati rocciosi, tuttavia il sale non agisce come la roccia: sotto pressione diventa fluido e risale in superficie dove la pressione è inferiore, lasciando delle cavità vuote che si riempiranno di altri tipi di roccia che stavano al di sopra, in tal modo anziché avere uno strato sottile si troverà una “trappola” a forma di
ciotola piena di petrolio, il pozzo Macondo\textsuperscript{9} si trovava proprio in una cavità di questo tipo (Jacobsen, 2011: 34-35).

La prosperità della Louisiana è nascosta nel suo sottosuolo e gli stessi fattori che la rendono ricca di petrolio sono gli stessi che le danno l’opportunità di avere lo zolfo, per incrementare la sua produttività negli anni Sessanta e Settanta vennero assunti dei geologi ed altri specialisti per studiare approfonditamente la conformazione del terreno e capire come sfruttare al meglio questo nuovo tesoro nascosto. Si scoprì che le cupole saline della Louisiana, oltre a provvedere allo stoccaggio del petrolio grezzo, possedevano una seconda importante proprietà: sono spesso ricoperte da una formazione di roccia calcarea che di tanto in tanto produce importanti quantità di zolfo, un elemento chimico insapore, inodore e dal colore giallo intenso; fertilizzante, pigmento colorante, fibre acriliche, medicinali e prodotti petroliferi sono tra le principali applicazioni di questo elemento versatile. La miniera di zolfo di Grand Isle è ad una quindicina di piedi di profondità nel Golfo del Messico ed è facilmente visibile dalla spiaggia con la sua particolare conformazione composta da tre piattaforme di perforazione collegate da ponti d’acciaio lunghi un miglio. L’industria dello zolfo crebbe parallelamente a quella del petrolio creando un’alternativa di lavoro e una possibilità reale di arricchimento per gli abitanti del Sud Louisiana (Ditto, 1980).

\textsuperscript{9} Nome identificativo del pozzo della British Petroleum esplodino il 20 aprile 2010.
Il boom petrolifero fu negli anni Settanta, ma già nel decennio successivo la maggior parte dei pozzi onshore presenti sulla costa del Golfo avevano prosciugato tutta la materia prima; l’est Texas e la Louisiana si erano svuotati di materie prime e con esse se ne andarono anche le speranze di un futuro ricco e prosperoso, sembrava che questo riscatto tanto atteso fosse destinato a fallire continuamente. Ma c’era ancora un barlume di speranza che non si spegneva: le perforazioni offshore stavano dando segnali positivi e sembravano continuare la produzione del petrolio senza alcun timore. La spinta venne anche dalla California, dove una fuga di petrolio nel 1969 riversò quattro milioni di galloni di oro nero sulle spiagge, uccidendo la flora e la fauna della zona marittima e costiera. Mentre associazioni ambientaliste proponevano di chiudere tutta l’industria petrolifera negli Stati Uniti, venne emanata una moratoria nel 1981 che vietava le perforazioni in tutte le acque federali, ad eccezione delle coste dell’Alaska e della parte occidentale del Golfo del Messico. La corsa all’oro nero aveva portato molte compagnie in queste due aree ma soprattutto nel Golfo, tant’è che alla fine degli anni Ottanta si parlava già di un esaurimento della materia prima tanto preziosa quanto limitata, nonostante ciò i geologi erano sicuri che questa fortuna non si stava concludendo in quegli anni. Ci doveva essere per forza dell’altro, ancora più sotto. Si parlava di quaranta miliardi di barili o più, ma non era facile decidere di rischiare nel trivellare fino a profondità mai raggiunte prima. Nel 1989 la Shell dichiarò di aver trovato un giacimento a circa tremila metri sotto i fondali, benché la necessità di estrarlo
fosse alta nessuno possedeva ancora degli strumenti tali per compiere la pionieristica operazione. La prima perforazione a superare il sostrato salino è avvenuta nel 1994 quando si arrivò fino a quattromila piedi, ridando fiducia all’industria del petrolio nel Golfo del Messico sebbene le prime esplorazioni mescolassero la materia prima da estrarre alle formazioni saline.

Nel 1995 l’allora presidente degli Stati Uniti, Bill Clinton, firma il Deepwater Royalty Relief Act\textsuperscript{10}, implementando i diritti e alleggerendo i prezzi per la produzione di petrolio offshore, tuttavia per poter beneficiare di questi diritti ed incentivi bisognava attenersi ai seguenti requisiti: effettuare il pozzo nel Golfo del Messico, esattamente a 87 gradi ovest e a 30 minuti di longitudine, all’incirca nel confine tra Florida e Alabama. Il DRRA non fece che aprire la corsa all’oro nero ai più grandi imprenditori del settore; in tal modo al declino della produzione di petrolio nelle acque basse è aumentata quella nelle acque profonde grazie anche allo sviluppo delle tecnologie, gli anni duemila si sono contraddistinti nel Golfo del Messico per questa importante inversione di tendenza. Andare sempre più in profondità era l’ultima frontiera che le compagnie si prefissavano di abbattere: la ricchezza si nascondeva a cinque mila piedi sotto il sale e la roccia, ma rappresentava un’operazione

costosa e molto rischiosa – solo la Deepwater Horizon\textsuperscript{11} decise di affrontare questa sfida, consapevole della difficoltà dell’impresa si fece comunque strada negli abissi inesplorati che le avrebbero fruttato diversi miliardi di dollari.

Per capire l’importanza che queste nuove esplorazioni assumevano ed il ruolo che la British Petroleum aveva in tutto ciò in relazione al pozzo \textit{Macondo}, bisogna tornare indietro di qualche anno. Nel 2008 il prezzo del greggio superò i 100\$ al barile e nei mesi successivi la cifra non fece che aumentare in maniera esponenziale finché nel 2010 il presidente degli Stati Uniti, Barack Obama, diede il via libera a nuove perforazioni \textit{off-shore}, mettendo da parte la moratoria del 1981, in tal modo aprì un nuovo scenario per la corsa all’oro nero nel Golfo del Messico e altrove, in vista di una possibile ripresa economica. A inseguire questo grande progetto ritroviamo due \textit{corporations} rese famose dalla Deepwater Horizon: la Transocean e la BP (Jacobsen, 2011: 40). Transocean è tra le più grandi corporations appaltatrici per le perforazioni offshore ne possiede quasi la metà della fornitura mondiale con oltre 130 piattaforme in tutto il mondo; essa non vende petrolio e nemmeno locazioni bensì detiene l’accesso per raggiungere la materia prima in acque molto profonde per questo BP, Shell, ExxonMobil, Chevron e molte altre affittano gli impianti e i dipendenti della Transocean per effettuare questi

\textsuperscript{11} La Deepwater Horizon era la piattaforma semisommergibile esplosa il 20 aprile 2012, di proprietà della Transocean ma sotto contratto con la British Petroleum.
tipi di estrazioni. La British Petroleum decise di lanciarsi nel mercato delle perforazioni profonde, tanto temuto dalle altre compagnie, investendo metà del suo bilancio relativo alle esplorazioni nel Golfo del Messico, nonostante le centinaia di dollari che servivano per effettuare questo tipo di operazioni, la compagnia decise di correre il rischio perché sapeva sarebbe stata ripagata dalle risorse della natura, rivestiva, infatti, un ruolo importante per la Transocean in quanto riusciva a fornirgli il 12% dei guadagni e nel 2009 è riuscita a produrre 182 milioni di barili di greggio dal solo Golfo del Messico (Jacobsen, 2011).

3. Macondo. “The well from the Hell”

Molti anni dopo, di fronte al plotone di esecuzione, il colonnello Aureliano Buendía si sarebbe ricordato di quel remoto pomeriggio in cui suo padre lo aveva condotto a conoscere il ghiaccio. Macondo era allora un villaggio di venti case di argilla e di canna selvatica costruito sulla riva di un fiume dalle acque diafane che rovinavano per un letto di pietre levigate, bianche ed enormi come uova preistoriche. Il mondo era così recente, che molte cose erano prive di nome, e per citarle bisognava indicarle col dito. Tutti gli anni, verso il mese di marzo, una famiglia di zingari cenciosi piantava la tenda vicino al villaggio, e con grande frastuono di zufoli e tamburi faceva conoscere le nuove invenzioni. Prima portarono la calamita. Uno zingaro corpulento, con barba arruffata e mani di passero, che si presentò col nome di

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12 A questo proposito è interessante notare che il nome del sito web utilizzato dalla compagnia è www.deepwater.com.
Melquíades, diede una truculenta manifestazione pubblica di quella che egli stesso chiamava l'ottava meraviglia dei savi alchimisti della Macedonia (Garcia Márquez, 1974: 9).

Nel villaggio accadevano cose strane, questo mondo per loro era un posto nuovo e ogni anno con l'arrivo degli zingari s'inserivano nuovi oggetti a cui la piccola comunità cercava di dare un significato.

Andò di casa in casa trascinando due lingotti metallici, e tutti sbigottirono vedendo che i paioli, le padelle, le molle del focolare e i treppiedi cadevano dal loro posto, e i legni scricchiolavano per la disperazione dei chiodi e delle viti che cercavano di schiavarsì, e perfino gli oggetti perduti da moltò tempo ricomparivano dove pur erano stati lungamente cercati, e si trascinavano in turbolenta sbrancata dietro ai ferri magici di Melquíades. «Le cose hanno vita propria,» proclamava lo zingaro con aspro accento, «si tratta soltanto di risvegliargli l'anima.» José Arcadio Buendía, la cui smisurata immaginazione andava sempre più lontano dell'ingegno della natura, e ancora più in là del miracolo e della magia, pensò che era possibile servirsì di quella invenzione inutile per sviscerare l'oro della terra. Melquíades, che era un uomo onesto, lo prevenne: «Per quello non serve.» Ma a quel tempo José Arcadio Buendía non credeva nell'onestà degli zingari, e così barattò il suo mulo e una partita di capri coi due lingotti calamitati (Garcia Márquez, 1974: 9-10).

Macondo è il frutto dell'immaginazione di uno dei principali protagonisti del racconto di Gabriel García Márquez Cent’anni di solitudine, proprio perché luogo fantastico il tempo in questa città è fermo, tutto è statico e si ripete ciclicamente come fosse un eterno ritorno al di fuori del tempo stesso, collocando gli avvenimenti al di là della vita e della morte. Sembra di non sfuggire mai dal passato che si ripresenta sempre nel futuro generando un caos
costante nella piccola comunità sudamericana, nonostante la temporanea armonia data dall’arrivo del progresso, Macondo non conosce la pace, e la solitudine diviene l’unico strumento di sopravvivenza possibile nel paese folle e spettrale nell’attesa di una morte inevitabile.

Il capostipite della famiglia Buendía, seguito da altri giovani del suo villaggio d’origine, dopo aver attraversato l’amazzonia e girovagato per molto tempo, decisero di fermarsi e stanziarsi in un luogo sperso ed isolato dal mondo circostante: era un posto talmente bello da sembrare surreale. Inizialmente le persone vivevano in armonia tra loro, esse godevano della ricchezza della natura la quale offriva tutto il necessario per poter vivere nella pace della natura, purtroppo con il susseguirsi delle generazioni e l’arrivo della modernità introdotta dalla piantagione di banane, questo magico equilibrio si ruppe e per Macondo ebbe inizio un declino che lo porterà alla caduta: divenne un posto pieno d’odio e di violenza e degli anni fiorenti in cui la famiglia Buendía decise di stabilirsi in quelle terre non rimase che un nostalgico ricordo.

Ai confini tra l’onirico e il reale il romanzo si dispiega nei racconti dell’autore attraverso le vicissitudini delle visioni apparse in sogno ai protagonisti, ed è così che Josè Arcadio Buendía decise di assegnare al villaggio il nome Macondo, fu il sogno di una notte che echeggiava nella sua mente suggerendo questa parola dal carattere evocativo. «Quella notte Josè Arcadio Buendía sognò una notte che in quel luogo sorgeva una città rumorosa piena di case con pareti di specchio. Chiese che città fosse quella, e gli risposero con un
nome che non aveva mai sentito, che non aveva alcun significato, ma che nel sonno aveva avuto un’eco soprannaturale: Macondo» (García Márquez, 1974: 32).

Del paese scosso dalla follia e dai drammi che venne distrutto dall’uragano non si hanno ancora delle certezze riguardo all’origine del suo nome, tuttavia si presume che l’autore Gabriel García Márquez si sia lasciato ispirare da un villaggio bananiero situato vicino al proprio paese natale, egli lo osservava dal finestrino del treno mentre si spostava da una cittadina all’altra: Makond era il nome di una piantagione di banane presente nei pressi di Aracataca\(^\text{14}\) abitata dai gringos\(^\text{15}\), i ricordi di Màrquez girano attorno a questo villaggio racchiuso nel filo spinato in cui egli vi scorgeva una rimarcabile diversità che racchiude la sua visione di villaggio ideale, la stessa che poi decise di riportare nel famoso romanzo.

La parola Macondo oggi non rappresenta solo il villaggio visionario dello scrittore, lo stesso nome si decise di utilizzarlo per chiamare il pozzo pioneristico della British Petroleum situato ad una profondità tale che nessun’altra compagnia petrolifera avrebbe voluto affrontare. Forse la BP intravedeva la stessa prosperità che Josè Arcadio Buendia ebbe in sogno, ma il nome si rivelò tremendamente profetico e portò allo sfascio anche questa operazione, forse troppo rischiosa. Le compagnie petrolifere per garantire la

\(^{14}\) Il nome infatti nella lingua bantu significa banana.
\(^{15}\) Termine usato dalla popolazione Sudamericana per riferirsi agli stranieri di cultura occidentale, in particolar modo agli Statunitensi.
segretezza durante il periodo di pre-vendita, usano dare delle parole identificative in codice per le prime fasi di esplorazione off-shore. La categoria dei nomi che verrà assegnata si riferisce ad un determinato anno o area geografica ed è costretta a seguire un tema che non faccia alcun riferimento alla zona o alle sue caratteristiche geologiche, per questo motivo molti pozzi riportano i nomi di alcune bevande, dei corpi celesti, etc. Macondo fu la scelta vincente di un concorso per la raccolta fondi che si svolse in una campagna interna alla United Way\textsuperscript{16}, il nome faceva chiaro riferimento al paese innocente del romanzo Cent’anni di solitudine, quasi a realizzare quell’utopia di Tommaso Campanella trascritta nella sua opera filosofica “La città del Sole”; ma il richiamo allo sfacelo che il nome del pozzo esplorativo indicava era talmente evocativo da suggerire un titolo perfetto per le testate giornalistiche, tuttavia come riporta l’autore di “Communication and Organizational Crisis”, Matthew Seeger, «It's part of a long-term strategy. [...]Those who control the naming of something control how it is perceived»\textsuperscript{17}. Per questo motivo Macondo rimase il nome identificativo del pozzo e non del successivo disastro che ha distrutto i sogni di chi sperava in un futuro all’insegna di una nuova prosperità per il Golfo del Messico.

Macondo era localizzato nel Mississippi Canyon Block 252 a 130 miglia da New Orleans. Il piano della BP prevedeva una perforazione che sarebbe


continuata fino al raggiungimento della pay sands per poi sigillare con dei tappi di cemento senza rimuovere il blowout preventer\(^{18}\) permettendo alla piattaforma di pompare petrolio senza correre troppi rischi. Nel 2009 la Deepwater Horizon aveva creato un pozzo a 35.055 piedi di profondità, del quale detiene ancor oggi il record mondiale per quest’impresa. Per la BP il tempo era denaro: aveva concesso 96 milioni di dollari con un tempo massimo di settantotto giorni, il motivo di tanta fretta era rappresentato dai 1,5 milioni di dollari che ogni giorno venivano spesi principalmente per pagare la Transocean – proprietaria della piattaforma – e il noleggio dell’attrezzatura (Jacobsen, 2011: 46). Questi costi, estremamente elevati, facevano pressione sul dover terminare il lavoro nel più breve tempo possibile perché anche i giorni senza perforazioni rappresentavano un costo fisso per la compagnia.

Fred: ‘Cos it was over budget. The project was over budget. ‘Cos the oil would cost more and more money, they tried... I think they were trying to cut costs, trying to save money, because it was going over budget. They plead guilty... to it, you know. So now you know, but...

[...]

F: What happened? According to the tv they were trying to cut costs.

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\(^{18}\) Il pozzo petrolifero è composto da una lunga tubazione che, tramite pressione, estrae il greggio dal sottosuolo. Dato il metodo di estrazione basato su un sistema di pressione e contro-pressione è probabile che le materie prime, altamente infiammabili, raggiungano la piattaforma presente in superficie. Per questo motivo è stato creato il blowout preventer, ovvero è un sistema di sicurezza che verrebbe utilizzato nel caso in cui potessero verificarsi delle fuoriuscite, infatti in situazioni d’emergenza (eruzione del pozzo) il blowout preventer funzionerebbe come otturatore per il pozzo.
Jane: Try to …

F: Try to save money.\textsuperscript{19}

Ciò che rallentava il lavoro pratico erano le regolamentazioni imposte dal *Minerals Management Service*\textsuperscript{20} e dallo studio che si stava effettuando sul futuro di Macondo, ovvero a come si sarebbe potuto mantenere attivo l'impianto dopo aver effettuato questo lavoro di perforazione. Accanto alle pressioni esterne, il lavoro era sempre influenzato da un costante stato di agitazione nel riuscire a controllare il gas, l'elemento maggiormente infiammabile. Nel 2010 il pozzo Macondo fu teatro di vicende sfortunate che portarono al grande disastro che noi tutti oggi conosciamo. Il giorno 8 marzo le esplorazioni erano arrivate a 13.305 piedi sotto la superficie ed avevano quasi raggiunto le famose *pay sands* ma la forza del gas stava spingendo così prepotentemente da veder costretti i lavoratori a chiudere tutto con un tappo di cemento spesso 2000 piedi e a risalirne altri undici mila per spostarsi e continuare a perforare da un’angolazione diversa. In sole due settimane la BP aveva perso 25 milioni di dollari (Jacobsen, 2011). Il secondo incedente avvenne invece il 3 aprile dello stesso anno: l’obiettivo iniziale era quello di raggiungere i ventimila piedi perché si pensava potessero esserci più

\textsuperscript{19} Dell’intervista con Fred e Jane del 28 novembre 2012.

idrocarburi ma a 18.260 piedi ci fu una perdita dei fanghi di perforazione\textsuperscript{21}. Realizzare un altro tappo di cemento avrebbe comportato il rischio di creare un’altra rottura dovuta alla pressione esercitata per effettuare l’operazione, così decisero di chiudere il foro con il cemento high-tech di Halliburton\textsuperscript{22} usandone meno e pommandolo nel fondo più lentamente per ridurre la pressione. Tuttavia meno cemento impiegato significava anche minor spazio riempito e la scarsa pressione utilizzata poteva aver lasciato dei detriti all’interno che avrebbero indebolito il cemento.

Si decise di effettuare dei test per verificare se il materiale avrebbe sigillato completamente il pericoloso foro. I riscontri riguardo al funzionamento del cemento espanso utilizzato nelle condizioni in cui era posizionato il foro, avevano dato come risultato un completo fallimento, ma sia la BP che la Halliburton decisero di proseguire con il piano che avevano stabilito nonostante gli esiti negativi (Chief Counsel’s Report, 2011: 95-96). Il 15 aprile l’ingegnere Jesse Gagliano comunicò agli ufficiali della British Petroleum che c’erano alte probabilità che il gas avrebbe attraversato il cemento se non

\textsuperscript{21} I fanghi di perforazione sono dei materiali liquidi usati nella perforazione di pozzi – in questo caso per la ricerca di idrocarburi – permettendo di praticare dei fori senza che si accumulino detriti all’interno ed evitano la rottura della trivella al contatto con la roccia, inoltre, grazie alla contro-pressione che esercitano sostengono le pareti del foro e tengono sotto controllo la fuoriuscita di fluidi e l’eruzione del pozzo. 

\textsuperscript{22} La Halliburton è una multinazionale Statunitense che opera nel settore petrolifero attraverso il rifornimento del materiale; venne assunta dalla British Petroleum provvedere alla fornitura del cemento. Fonte: \textit{Macondo: the gulf oil disaster. Chief counsel’s report 2011, Agency publisher: national commission on the BP deepwater horizon oil spill and offshore drilling}, p. 34.
venivano fatte tempestivamente delle modiche$^{23}$. Per assicurare la tenuta del tappo e garantire una maggiore protezione, nel tubo in cui viene pompato il cemento è presente una valvola unidirezionale chiamata *float collar* la quale si apre in una sola direzione per evitare che il cemento possa fuoriuscire. Data la frequenza dei fallimenti relativi ai test sul cemento a profondità elevate, solitamente si usa effettuare un’ulteriore prova sulla sua tenuta, l’operazione viene chiamata *negative-pressure test*, un intervento preventivo che inizialmente né Transocean né BP avevano intenzione di effettuare ma Jimmy Harrell dipendente di Transocean e manager dell’impianto cambiò idea poco dopo dichiarando che i lavori non sarebbero proseguiti senza aver avuto i risultati di questo test. La Deepwater Horizon aveva già svolto questo tipo di verifica diverse volte, ma in quella circostanza decisero di cambiare il protocollo delle procedure di analisi: anziché aspettare l’esito del test questa volta si decise di accelerare i tempi sostituendo il fango di perforazione con l’acqua del mare mentre si stava facendo questa operazione per poi inserire il tappo di cemento. Alle 21.08 la situazione inizia ad essere critica: erano fuoriusciti 1.638 galloni di materiale liquido più di quanto era stato pompato dentro al tubo, mentre la pressione continuava ad aumentare costantemente. Mezz’ora dopo senza comunicare alcuna notizia le pompe che stavano immettendo l’acqua al posto

$^{23}$ **THE WALL STREET JOURNAL:**
dei fanghi di perforazione vennero chiuse per risolvere dei problemi meccanici (Jacobsen, 2011).

Il concatenarsi degli eventi scatenati da scelte sbagliate ha fatto avverare quell’inquietante profezia che il nome Macondo evocava sin dal momento in cui venne scelto. Il racconto di questi antefatti ci aiuta a comprendere cosa successe prima che noi leggessimo sulle testate giornalistiche del 20 aprile 2010 questa notizia che sembrava come emersa dal nulla, nell’ignoto della nostra quotidianità.

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On April 20, 2010, the Macondo well blew out, costing the lives of 11 men and beginning a catastrophe that sank the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig and spilled over 4 million barrels of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The spill disrupted an entire region’s economy, damaged fisheries and critical habitats, and brought vividly to light the risk of deepwater drilling for oil and gas – the latest frontier in the national energy supply. Soon after, President Barack Obama appointed a seven-member Commission to investigate the disaster, analyze its causes and effects, and recommend the actions necessary to minimize such risks in the future. (Chief Counsel’s Report, 2011: quarta di copertina)

4. L’esplosione

Il 20 aprile 2010, all’ottantesimo giorno dall’inizio dei lavori per la Deepwater Horizon, alle ore 21.40 locali l’acqua ed il fango esplodono dal tubo di perforazione, la pressione che si era creata all’interno della colonna di perforazione era tale da non essere più contenuta al suo interno e il gas metano venne spinto prepotentemente verso l’esterno, diffondendosi nella piattaforma dove s’incendiò e ne causò la successiva esplosione. L’impianto ha continuato a bruciare per due giorni prima che collassasse nel mare, spezzando un tubo che pompava il petrolio dal sottosuolo alla superficie. Il pozzo si trovava a circa 52
miglia dalla costa di Venice\textsuperscript{25}, i funzionari hanno dichiarato che al momento dell’incidente erano presenti 126 persone di cui 17 feriti vennero trasportati nei vicini ospedali in elicottero mentre 11 erano dispersi.

![Fig. 17. Punto di localizzazione dell’impianto Deepwater Horizon.\textsuperscript{26}](image_url)

Dal momento della rottura del tubo al 15 luglio 2010 si è stimata una perdita di petrolio compresa tra i 35 e i 60 mila barili al giorno, creando una chiazza talmente grande da poter essere fotografata dallo spazio e da non riuscire ad evitarne l’arrivo alle coste della Louisiana, dell’Alabama, della Florida, del Texas e del Mississippi. Ancor prima di avere tutte le cifre esatte del disastro si parlava già della più grande fuoriuscita di petrolio mai avvenuta

\textsuperscript{25} Venice è l’ultimo paese alle rive del Mississippi raggiungibile con l’automobile, per questo motivo si è guadagnata il soprannome “The end of the world”.

negli Stati Uniti. Le conseguenze di quest’evento furono devastanti sull’intera vita delle comunità situate lungo la costa del Golfo del Messico e sull’esistenza della flora e della fauna che ruotano attorno a questo ecosistema già fragile. L’inquinamento prodotto dallo sversamento del materiale altamente inquinante costrinse il governo Statunitense a chiudere oltre 84.000 miglia quadrate – circa il 35% – delle acque del Golfo destinate alla pesca commerciale, nonostante ci sia stata una lenta riapertura al commercio del pesce, dal 12 luglio del 2010 ad oggi molte zone rimangono ancora chiuse; avvenuto nel periodo della riapertura stagionale della pescagione, quasi come fosse stato uno strano scherzo del destino, l’inquinamento rappresentava uno dei maggiori danni che le comunità si ritrovarono ad affrontare.27

Le persone presenti nella piattaforma al momento dell’esplosione raccontano del forte boato che udirono e della corsa per mettersi in salvo, la piattaforma si spense e tutto venne avvolto nel buio della notte, quando anche una seconda esplosione si verificò qualche minuto dopo ponendo gli operai di fronte alla drammaticità e irreversibilità della situazione in cui erano immersi, ora bisognava cercare in tutti i modi di contenere la fuoriuscita del petrolio nel mare. Mike Williams lavorava sulla Deepwater Horizon ed era il tecnico elettronico responsabile dei computer e degli impianti elettrici della piattaforma, è stato soprannominato 60 minutes man perché quando venne

intervistato raccontò la sua percezione sulla durata dell’evento in quel determinato arco di tempo.

I hear the engines revving. The lights are glowing. I’m hearing the alarms. I mean, they’re at a constant state now. It’s just, ‘Beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.’ It doesn’t stop. But even that’s starting to get drowned out by the sound of the engine increasing in speed. And my lights get so incredibly bright that they physically explode. I’m pushing my way back from the desk when my computer monitor exploded.28

I primi giorni dopo l’esplosione la BP nutriva ancora delle grandi speranze per riuscire a sigillare il pozzo attraverso i due sistemi automatici di backup, ma la fiducia svaniva giorno dopo giorno mentre si cercava di riparare un processo irreversibile. Venne spedito un robot sommergibile per effettuare l’operazione il quale riuscì a stabilizzare la situazione ma fallì il tentativo di bloccare la fuoriuscita del petrolio, la sostanza oleosa si fermava sopra tutto quello che incontrava impedendo alla vegetazione e alle specie marine di respirare, soffocandole lentamente sotto questo strato di liquido nero impermeabile. Grazie alle foto aeree scattate dalla NASA si può avere un’idea più precisa sulle dimensioni che la marea nera stava assumendo:

Fig. 18. Immagine aerea della marea nera scattata dalla NASA il giorno 01 maggio 2010. 

Nel momento in cui venne scattata la fotografia il petrolio si trovava a circa 200 chilometri da New Orleans stimando un’ampiezza di 3.800 chilometri quadrati – superando l’estensione complessiva dello stato di Rhode Island, la temuta marea nera si stava spostando e qualche giorno dopo avrebbe raggiunto le coste della Louisiana nonostante tutti i tentativi che furono adottati per evitare questo pericoloso incontro. Il punto rosso presente nell’immagine indica la posizione della Deepwater Horizon, questo affiancamento delle due diverse fotografie ci permette di osservare dettagliatamente i particolari della marea nera, indicando le zone in cui è presente una maggior concentrazione di petrolio, la sua estensione e quale

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direzione stava prendendo mentre galleggiava maestosa sopra la superficie del mare.

Accanto alla preoccupazione da parte della BP e di Transocean nel riuscire a bloccare la perdita di petrolio si affiancava il problema della comunicazione del danno, indirizzata soprattutto verso chi il disastro l’ha vissuto in prima persona qualche giorno dopo, quando lo vide arrivare sulle rive delle spiagge e sulle zone paludose chiamate *marsh*.

**Fred:** What I think about the disaster? I think they could have cleaned it a whole lot faster if they would say how much oil was coming out, but they lied from day one, ‘cos they could have got this programme going on from day one, instead of letting the oil pouring out like it was pouring... it was like three weeks before they even told how much oil was coming out. Four weeks! From day one they would have let the Federal Government how much oil... the true amount coming out... they could have made something a lot faster, and stop all of that oil from coming... And they didn’t clean it out there, they just sprayed... they didn’t clean it out there, they could have done that from the beginning. Day one were still having... a whole bunch of boats ready to go, to get ready to go, they didn’t start doing it until the oil started hitting the land, that’s when they started to hire people to clean it all.30

Era difficile cercare di capire che cosa fosse successo, cercar di far rientrare questo disastro nel sistema dei significati era un processo che avrebbe richiesto del tempo, un tempo entro il quale le persone si ritrovarono disorientate nel

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30 Dall’intervista con Fred e Jane del 28 novembre 2012.
luogo in cui sono cresciute, un luogo che ora non sapeva più dare conforto e in cui non ci si poteva rifugiare dal pericolo perché esso era generato dal mare, lo stesso mare che aveva dato una ragione agli uomini di potersi stanziare lì per diverse generazioni.

5. La comunicazione dell’evento

Cercare di capire cos’è successo il 20 aprile 2010, a tre anni dall’esplosione della piattaforma petrolifera, è un compito più difficile di quanto si possa immaginare. Oggi giorno reperire le informazioni in internet dovrebbe essere un’operazione semplice grazie alla velocità della condivisione di materiale informativo con tutto il resto del mondo. Tuttavia ignoravo il fatto che uno degli atti costitutivi del web è la sua immediatezza, avere la notizia in tempo reale; la forza di questo strumento di comunicazione è rappresentata dalla velocità e dall’ampio raggio che riesce a coprire. Ad ogni modo, tanto più l’informazione è rapida e diffusa tanto più può esserci una copertura mediatica attraverso la dispersione delle notizie. Quello che stavo cercando era la comunicazione del disastro sui giornali locali statunitense nel giorno in cui si è verificato ma, data l’impossibilità della reperibilità del materiale, ho dovuto spostare la mia attenzione a livello nazionale e in Italia la notizia viene comunicata così sul quotidiano La Repubblica:
STATI UNITI

Piattaforma petrolifera in fiamme undici dispersi nel Golfo del Messico

Un'esplosione e poi un incendio sulla struttura della Transocean situata a 50 chilometri dalla costa della Louisiana. Sette persone ferite in modo grave.

WASHINGTON - Un'esplosione improvvisa e poi le fiamme su una piattaforma petrolifera nel Golfo del Messico. Sette delle 126 persone che erano nella struttura sono rimaste gravemente ferite e 11 risultano disperse. Per le ricerche sono stati mobilitati elicotteri, aerei e navi della guardia costiera.

La piattaforma Deepwater Horizon della compagnia Transocean, situata a 50 chilometri dalla costa della Louisiana, è stata evacuata. I feriti sono stati trasportati in elicottero in ospedali di New Orleans e Mobile (Alabama), specializzati nel trattamento delle ustioni. Quanto agli 11 lavoratori dispersi, si spera che siano riusciti a ritiriarsi su imbarcazioni di emergenza e i mezzi di soccorso stanno setacciando l'area del Golfo del Messico attorno alla struttura.

Il contratto per le perforazioni è della BP. La piattaforma, costruita nel 2001, misura 132 metri per 85 e può operare in acque profonde fino a 3.000 metri. L'area dove opera la piattaforma ha una profondità di 1.700 metri.

Le cause dell'incidente devono essere ancora determinate. L'inchiesta potrà essere avviata solo dopo che le fiamme saranno completamente domate. La piattaforma si è inclinata di dieci gradi per effetto dell'incidente. Un'unità della guardia costiera Usa specializzata nella valutazione dei danni ambientali è entrata in azione.

Fig. 19 Notizia apparsa sul sito de La Repubblica il giorno 21 aprile 2010.

Riuscire a trovare le informazioni diffuse il giorno del disastro a tre anni dall'accaduto, è stata un'operazione complessa per diversi motivi di cui parlerò approfonditamente più avanti. La Repubblica è una testata giornalistica che ancora oggi conserva l'articolo nella rete web, ed è questa la ragione che mi ha spinta a citare questo breve pezzo. Nei giorni e mesi successivi dall'accaduto le

informazioni reperibili aumentano in maniera esponenziale, tuttavia per ora ritengo opportuno inserire il comunicato diffuso dalla *British Petroleum*

**On the evening of 20 April 2010, a gas release and subsequent explosion occurred on the Deepwater Horizon oil rig working on the Macondo exploration well for BP in the Gulf of Mexico**

Eleven people died as a result of the accident and others were injured. We deeply regret this loss of life and recognize the tremendous loss suffered by the families, friends and co-workers of those who died.

The fire burned for 36 hours before the rig sank, and hydrocarbons leaked into the Gulf of Mexico before the well was closed and sealed.

The accident involved a well integrity failure, followed by a loss of hydrostatic control of the well. This was followed by a failure to control the flow from the well with the blowout preventer (BOP) equipment, which allowed the release and subsequent ignition of hydrocarbons. Ultimately, the BOP emergency functions failed to seal the well after the initial explosions.

We regret the impacts on the environment and livelihoods of those in the communities affected. We have and continue to put in place measures to help ensure it does not happen again.

Fig. 20. Comunicato della British Petroleum.\(^{32}\)

Con queste brevi parole l’importante compagnia petrolifera comunica l’accaduto, senza dare alcuna spiegazione di cosa sia stato a scatenare quello che viene definito come il disastro petrolifero più grande della storia.

Centoventisei persone sono riuscite ad evacuare in sicurezza, undici persone

mancavano all’appello e sette persone sono stati gravemente ferite e portate nei centri traumatologici in Alabama e a New Orleans. La piattaforma petrolifera a circa 52 miglia a sud-est di Venice, Louisiana stava ancora bruciando il giorno seguente e nessuno sapeva con esattezza quando le fiamme si sarebbero spente definitivamente.\textsuperscript{33}

Due giorni dopo l’accaduto la CNN riporta – con ancora molte incertezze riguardo all’evento – che l’esplosione non è legata ad eventi terroristici ed il vice presidente della BP, David Rainey, dichiara che "it certainly has the potential to be a major spill.", si stima infatti che dalla piattaforma esplorativa potrebbero uscire circa 336 mila galloni di petrolio e fino a 700 mila litri di gasolio. Dei mezzi a controllo remoto sono già stati inviati nel luogo dell’accaduto per cercare di contenere la fuoriuscita e pulire le acque, ma il fuoco non si è ancora spento e gli undici uomini dispersi non si sono ancora trovati.\textsuperscript{34} Il 22 aprile ancora non si sapeva nulla riguardo alle cause dell’incidente, c’erano solo numeri che facevano preoccupare il mondo intero, ma soprattutto gli abitanti della costa del Golfo del Messico che aspettavano il giorno in cui la marea nera sarebbe arrivata a riva. Dall’Italia si seguivano gli aggiornamenti con gli occhi incollati sui notiziari televisivi per capire se gli undici dispersi erano stati ritrovati e per seguire in diretta l’impresa degli operai addetti a fermare la fuoriuscita di petrolio. L’attenzione si concentrava


nella riuscita di quest’impresa da parte delle persone coinvolte, dai chiari elementi eroici delineati dai media; distogliendo l’attenzione da quello che stava succedendo attorno all’evento e dalle cause scatenanti l’evento stesso. C’era questa tendenza a ricorrere al fattore emotivo anziché riflessivo, come sostiene il linguista Noam Chomsky, usare il tono emotivo rappresenta una strategia per abbandonare la nostra capacità di analisi razionale creando lo spazio per entrare nell’inconscio dell’individuo e modificarne idee e capacità critica di osservazione. Inoltre, con lo sviluppo delle scienze forti, le persone credono di non conoscere più se stesse, biologia, psicologia applicata e neurobiologia si sono appropriate del potere della conoscenza degli altri comportando una svalutazione dell’esperienza acquisita da parte dell’individuo legittimando il potere degli esperti.\(^{35}\) La vulnerabilità scatenata da un evento imprevisto e dagli effetti incalcolabili, apre la strada ai media per la diffusione delle informazioni di qualsiasi natura, perdendo di vista la razionalità e la consapevolezza di sé in quanto individui dotati di ragione. Spesso ci si affida a fonti ufficiali perché godono di attendibilità a livello internazionale, ma capita a volte che anch’esse possano essere oggetto della nostra capacità critica. In momenti di particolare debolezza e fragilità tendiamo a cercare la risposta che possa essere più coerente con la nostra linea di pensiero e che possa rassicurare le nostre preoccupazioni riguardo al futuro e alla sua incertezza. Con la

\(^{35}\) News Magazine: 
diffusione dei nuovi media di comunicazione c’è stato un esponenziale sviluppo riguardo alle fonti alternative di informazioni che si discostano dal *mainstream* dei media dominanti: blog e siti web creati da singoli cittadini s’identificano in quella che oggi viene chiamata *active citizenship*, l’individuo diventa un attore esperto che opera in prima persona – in questo caso per la diffusione di notizie alternative. Nonostante si sia diffuso questo potere in internet, a volte ci si dimentica che il controllo delle informazioni può avvenire anche in questi canali comunicativi su diversi livelli. La possibilità di avere una maggiore molteplicità spesso risponde all’esigenza di avere delle regole uniformanti che sovrastano il sistema stesso. Non è una novità il fatto che grandi compagnie di fama internazionale manipolino la ricerca delle notizie sul web e il caso della BP diede conferma di questo controllo esercitato dal loro grande potere. La strategia adottata dalla compagnia petrolifera destava l’attenzione dell’opinione pubblica per la sua capacità di coprire su larga scala il meccanismo della manipolazione, e tutto ciò sembrava funzionare «The strategy appears to be working, as BP’s ads show up on neutral searches like “spill,” “gulf oil,” “offshore oil,” “oil spill,” “Louisiana coast spill” and “oil cleanup,” but not “oil disaster.”»37. Si stimano delle cifre enormi per poter mantenere il controllo sulla ‘fuoriuscita’ delle informazioni ambigue, per far

36 È una corrente di pensiero che sostiene la responsabilità civile e ambientale dei cittadini in quanto membri della società, in questo modo l’individuo ricopre un ruolo attivo all’interno della comunità.

apparire nelle prime pagine i termini considerati come neutrali la British Petroleum stava spendendo 7500 dollari al giorno per Google, e 3000 per Yahoo e Bing. A scatenare questa corsa al controllo del sistema di ricerca delle informazioni è stato il vigore del voler sapere con cui le persone da tutto il mondo si prodigavano per essere informate in tempo reale sugli avvenimenti. Nel solo mese di aprile le ricerche effettuate su google con le parole “oil spill” sono state di 2.240.000, un numero che fa riflettere sull’importanza per la compagnia petrolifera nel dover sorvegliare i motori di ricerca internazionali. In un’intervista effettuata ad un portavoce della BP l’Huffington Post riporta le dichiarazioni di Robert Wine «We’ve tried to pick terms which will help the people who are most directly affected in the Gulf coast states with information about how to get in touch with us and make claims for loss of earnings.»38 Le affermazioni riguardo ai costi della strategia non sono mai state confermate e lo scopo di questa operazione secondo i dipendenti sarebbe legato all’aiuto che cercano di dare alle persone colpite dal disastro, in maniera tale che, effettuando una ricerca online, essi possano trovare subito indicazioni relative a compensazioni o informazioni pratiche di qualsiasi tipo, secondo le parole di Wine l’obiettivo principale diventa allora un tentativo di riduzione dell’impatto del disastro sulle loro vite e sulle loro attività lavorative.

Sabrina: [...] To be honest with you, everybody around knew something was wrong, because you could hear the boat chatter back and forth from the boats that serviced the well of the rig... the drilling rig... and then just people talking about it, you know they were... you know, people were saying, you know: “They’re going really deep there, are they really prepared? Do they have to kinda blow up or whatever it is that takes to do that?” And... the oiling industry is an industry that there’s no books sitting around, saying how do you drill down 5000 feet of water.39

Nonostante i numeri pubblicati dalle testate giornalistiche che crearonosccape nei cittadini comuni, come ad esempio le 862 volte che furono citati in giudizio tra giugno 2007 e febbraio 201040, nessuno ha mai creduto alle loro parole, chi lavora nell’industria petrolifera o abita nelle zone delle estrazioni conosce molto bene le compagnie e sa come operano nel settore, per questo a Grand Isle tutti sapevano che la British Petroleum di certo non brillava per le sue qualità di trasparenza e sicurezza. Come mi disse S. in un’intervista: «And they obviously are suffering from bad... corporate culture.»41, è insito nella loro politica lavorare secondo criteri di dubbia correttezza e S. non è l’unica persona a pensare questo, purtroppo i soldi dell’oro nero parlano più forte di qualsiasi altro mezzo di comunicazione

39 Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
41 Dall’intervista con S. del 26 novembre 2012.
«William: You mean, did they know that could happen? Oh, people know that they can happen... but the oil companies know that it can happen. They just... they didn’t... they didn’t go by the rules, you know. They’re too worried about spending a few extra dollars on... for safety issues and that’s what caused the problem.»

Alla BP il costo del progetto stava iniziando a costare troppo, si calcolava circa 140 milioni di dollari, ovvero 44 milioni di dollari in più rispetto al budget iniziale, perciò non c’è da stupirsi se agli addetti ai lavori venne ordinato di velocizzare la trivellazione e la pressione nel voler finire il prima possibile si era instillata nella mente di tutti i dipendenti (Jacobsen, 2011: 57).

Lois: Oh yeah. Freeport's off was out there about seven miles out. It was a big, big platform, there was a sulphur mine out there, but all the rest I guess were oil field. And that’s great, I mean that gives our people a job, you know we have to drill for oil, but you know? Be careful and take responsibility for what you have done. If you have failed to follow the safety codes, take the responsibility for it, don’t keep trying to hide it and say you did everything. no you didn’t! Had you done everything and been very very cautious, it might not have happened. Can you imagine how these people feel that have lost their husbands or sons? Daddies? Would... BP probably gave them a lot of money, but that’s not going to bring them back.

È difficile comprendere un disastro di tali dimensioni, ma è ancora più difficile cercare di accettare ciò che è successo, soprattutto se le notizie diffuse

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42 Dall’intervista con William del 9 novembre 2012.
43 Dall’intervista con Lois del 26 novembre 2012.
sono state incomplete o distolte da una comunicazione parallela sul *clean up*

fatto dalla BP che avveniva in contemporanea al reportage dei giornalisti

trasmesso sui notiziari televisivi. Accanto alla deviazione delle informazioni sui

motori di ricerca online, la compagnia petrolifera stava investendo i suoi soldi

in campagne pubblicitarie sui mezzi di comunicazione, dove raccontavano di

come si prendevano cura delle persone afflitte da questo disastro, oltre ad

impegnarsi nella pulizia delle spiagge e del mare.

**Jane:** They’re spending all their money on advertisements on tv saying “We’ve made

people whole!” No, they didn’t make us whole, they’re killing us, you know?

**Fred:** One of my friends… a friend of mine is placed in Mississippi… she’s living in

Mississippi right now. I went with some seafood, some seafood that I caught, you

know, ‘cos that’s a good friend. So I went there and I brought some seafood up there

and she said: “I’m glad that BP took care of you all!” I said: “What do you mean BP

take care of you all?” “I heard on tv that they took care of you all!” I said: “We got

zero from BP, nothing!” “You’re lying!” I said “No.” “We see on tv every day BP is

taking care of all the fishermen and all” “No, don’t believe that.”

Il confine tra la diffusione delle informazioni e la copertura mediatica si era

fatto estremamente labile, rendendo note alcune notizie a discapito di molte

altre, in questo modo chi non viveva lungo la costa si affidava alla

comunicazione televisiva e ai notiziari di maggior rilevanza.

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44 Dall’intervista con Fred e Jane del 28 novembre 2012.
6. Old grease Corexit

La Nalco Holding è una compagnia che opera nel campo delle industrie offrendo un supporto per il mantenimento degli standard di rispetto ambientale attraverso la produzione di solventi chimici, come il trattamento delle acque, la riduzione delle emissioni di CO$_2$, etc.$^{45}$ In particolare nel settore della produzione e lavorazione di gas e petrolio offre una massimizzazione della redditività, una riduzione dei costi operativi e di protezione delle risorse attraverso la diffusione di diverse tecnologie, garantendo in questo modo la possibilità di operare in zone particolarmente difficili come nel caso delle perforazioni in mare aperto.$^{46}$ Tra i prodotti di maggior rilievo a livello mondiale è presente il Corexit: un particolare tipo di solvente che viene utilizzato nei casi di fuoriuscita del petrolio; questo tipo di disperdente a contatto con il petrolio ne permette la rottura molecolare e ne modifica la struttura incorporandolo all’acqua e facendolo così affondare sotto la superficie visibile del mare, ogni piccola goccia di petrolio viene rivestita di molecole di tensioattivi in modo tale da prevenire la ricombinazione nella forma liquida.

Il sito della Nalco riporta che se la macchia di greggio dispersa è consistente l’impiego di questa tecnologia può evitarne l’arrivo alla costa, inoltre riduce


Quella terribile macchia d’olio nero che continuava ad ingrandirsi sembrava non conoscere la fine dei suoi limiti, presi dall’incertezza e dalla fretta nel voler contenere l’immensità il 12 maggio 2010 l’EPA diede alla British Petroleum una lista con dei nomi di alcuni prodotti per decidere quale sarebbe stato secondo loro il migliore da poter utilizzare.\footnote{L’EPA chiarisce che i prodotti da loro presentati non sono approvati, raccomandati, certificati o autorizzati all’uso in casi di dispersione del petrolio. L’elenco viene fornito secondo un accordo stabilito dal Piano di Emergenza Nazionale. EPA: <http://epa.gov/emergencies/content/ncp/product_schedule.htm>. Data ultima consultazione: 13.05.2013.} La BP dichiara che in ventiquattrre ha identificato quella che secondo loro rappresentava la miglior risposta al disastro e tre giorni dopo viene reso noto che la Coast Guard e l’EPA hanno approvato l’utilizzo del Corexit EC9500A come forma di prevenzione di raggiungimento della costa da parte del petrolio. I produttori di tale solvente indicano che esso raggiunge la sua massima biodegradabilità in ventotto giorni di applicazione e garantiscono che non persiste nell’ambiente, inoltre, sulla base di informazioni disponibili al momento della scelta, dichiaravano che apparentemente gli effetti a lungo termine erano minimi, perciò queste qualità facevano sì che il Corexit rappresentasse la scelta più adatta. La British Petroleum aveva 246.380 galloni di questa sostanza
disponibili per un uso immediato e i produttori potevano fornire altri 68.000 galloni al giorno in modo tale da poter coprire l’intera area, disponeva anche di 100.000 galloni di Sea Brat #4 per un uso immediato. La compagnia petrolifera era pronta all’utilizzo delle armi che aveva immagazzinato per sconfiggere la marea nera. Nelle conclusioni del comunicato che fece specificò che nel verificarsi di una fuoriuscita di petrolio uno dei criteri più importanti è rappresentato dalla quantità disponibile in un tempo immediato, in quanto le condizioni atmosferiche modificano la struttura del petrolio rendendone difficile la rimozione, perciò qualsiasi tipo di composto chimico presente nella lista deve essere utilizzato il prima possibile perché abbia l’effetto desiderato.

«They were pioneering this clean-up business, because nobody really knew how to do it. In the past, if you had oil… you know, if oil hit the top of the water for whatever reason, they were generally… had big bombs and kinda boom it up, and then the oil would dissipate in the sun, the sun would break it down pretty quick and it just dissipates»\(^{49}\).

Nei giorni in cui gli fu chiesto di fare una scelta il Corexit rappresentava l’unica sostanza disponibile in grandi quantità, successivamente venne identificato il Sea Brat #4 come un’alternativa meno tossica, ma nel breve arco di tempo concessogli dichiarano di non aver potuto valutare i criteri di tossicità e di una possibile persistenza a lungo termine nell’ambiente. Nessuno degli altri disperdente elencati che presentavano caratteristiche simili al Corexit era

\(^{49}\) Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
disponibile perciò la disponibilità data dal prodotto dell’azienda Nalco rappresentava la scelta migliore.\textsuperscript{50}

Ignorando gli studi effettuati in vent’anni riguardo al disastro avvenuto in Alaska nel 1989\textsuperscript{51}, la British Petroleum acquista un terzo della fornitura mondiale di Corexit\textsuperscript{52} e inizia ad usarlo in maniera spropositata sul Golfo del Messico, per questo motivo il 26 maggio l’EPA diede l’ordine di ridurre al 75% i 25.000 galloni utilizzati giornalmente ma la compagnia petrolifera ridusse l’uso del solvente al 9%, scendendo a circa 23.000 galloni.\textsuperscript{53} L’ammontare complessivo del suo utilizzo sale a 1.84 milioni di galloni di Corexit EC9500A e Corexit EC9527A di cui circa il 58% venne disperso dal cielo.\textsuperscript{54} La composizione del solvente venne resa nota qualche settimana dopo l’inizio del suo impiego, rendendo noto agli occhi della popolazione del Golfo del Messico la pericolosità di tale sostanza: la lista degli ingredienti conteneva dei componenti

\textsuperscript{51}Il 24 marzo 1989 la superpetroliera Exxon Valdez stava attraversando lo stretto di Prince William quando urtò contro una scogliera disperdendo 11 milioni di barili di greggio. La Exxon Mobil decise di utilizzare il Corexit per limitare i danni già consistenti (vennero inquinati circa 44.000 km\textsuperscript{2}, di cui circa 1900 miglia di costa) del petrolio sulla flora e la fauna marina. Dagli studi che vennero fatti sugli effetti di tale solvente emerse che furono la causa di gravi problemi alla salute degli abitanti dell’Alaska e sospetta causa di morte dei lavoratori che l’hanno utilizzato (Gill, Picou e Ritchie, 2011: 3).
altamente inquinanti e la paura di uno scenario simile a quello dell’Alaska si stava fossilizzando sempre più nel loro immaginario futuro. Ad oltre un anno dal loro impiego vennero identificati cinquantasette chimici di cui cinque associati al cancro, trentatré alle irritazioni cutanee, altre trentatré alle irritazioni oculari, undici ai problemi respiratori, dieci creano problemi ai reni, otto risultano tossici per gli organismi acquatici e altri cinque per i pesci. Bandito dall’Europa, il solvente rappresentava la soluzione più pericolosa da prendere al momento di una fuoriuscita di petrolio, anche se la British Petroleum ribadisce di aver effettuato la scelta migliore nessuno riusciva a capire perché questa sostanza venne dispersa in piena notte e senza dare alcun comunicato riguardo alle dovute precauzioni che si sarebbero dovute prendere.

Lois: Who knows, maybe it would have been the right thing to do, but what they did wasn’t the right thing to do. They sprayed these dispersants. Why do you think we have so many people that are sick? Now sick… respiratory problems, cancer… it’s always something, you’re just not feeling good. Well, I think they have a lot to do with it. They say that they didn’t spray, that was bull(shit). You could get up at any time in the night and hear that plane go across that bay back there and across that gulf… but they still deny it.


57 Dall’intervista con Lois del 26 novembre 2012.
È difficile determinare se una scelta del genere possa essere stata giusta o sbagliata nel momento in cui si è verificato il disastro; tuttavia era dovere della compagnia petrolifera prendersi la responsabilità della decisione data dall’uso del Corexit e delle sue conseguenze già note in seguito all’episodio accaduto in Alaska, in modo da non far sentire lo sconforto e il timore di ciò che era già stato vissuto. Le emozioni provate in quei giorni riaffiorano negli abitanti di Grand Isle nel ricordo dell’esperienza provata attraverso i sensi, i quali costituiscono il frutto del contesto culturale in cui si è inseriti ma assumono significati diversi a seconda dell’interpretazione individuale. L’individuo conosce il mondo esterno grazie al proprio corpo ed è con il sentire che egli acquisisce una conoscenza sensibile dei luoghi, delle persone, tuttavia solo egli può dare un senso alle cose che lo circondano e che rappresentano la sua condizione di essere-nel-mondo: l’uomo definisce se stesso in relazione agli altri, rapportandosi nel mondo e col mondo (Heidegger, 2011). La percezione che abbiamo del contesto in cui siamo immersi e i legami sociali che costruiamo sono una lettura approfondita che facciamo del nostro universo attraverso l’utilizzo dei sensi; ricordare particolari situazioni non è solo una mera descrizione dell’accaduto ma diventa un’analisi profonda di una realtà corporalmente esperita. Ogni persona vive in un mondo percettivo che si differenzia da quello degli altri ed è tramite questa sensorialità che l’uomo dà un senso al mondo e alla propria esistenza; l’interiorizzazione dei sensi consente l’organizzazione stessa dei dati, la quale consente all’individuo di vivere in
luoghi pieni di significato, in quanto è esso stesso a fare esperienza attraverso la totalità delle percezioni che concorrono alla formazione del nostro io (Le Breton, 2007). Corpo e sensi formano l’unicità della persona, ci pongono in relazione all’altro e ci consentono di vedere le cose come dense di significati facendoci provare delle sensazioni che si fissano nella memoria.


L’uomo apprende attraverso i sensi, acquisisce nuove conoscenze che inserisce in un sistema di significati in cui è culturalmente inserito. Tuttavia capita, a volte, che arrivino degli stimoli dall’esterno a cui non sappiamo dare un senso nell’immediato ma che siano talmente intensi da entrare a far parte della nostra esistenza perché hanno dato consistenza ad un evento che ha sconvolto laquotidianità del presente.

**Sabrina:** [...] We’re gonna have rain down here, that usually washes the air out, you get a nice breeze, you’ve always got a breeze, but there was a time that you could smell it, you could smell the disulphur... well not the disulphur... you could smell the oil, the raw oil.
**Sabrina:** I don’t know what the Corexit smells like.

**Sara:** Ah, ok.

**Sabrina:** I don’t know. I mean, I don’t know what it smells like. The Corexit basically, they did fly over the island with it, from what I understand, I mean I didn’t see it, but that doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. I don’t know what it smells like. I know what oil smells like.

**Sabrina:** But I don’t know… what Corexit smells like.

**Sara:** Because it’s something new.

**Sabrina:** Something new. I’ve never smelled it, so I don’t know. I know it probably isn’t good for you… you know, if you breathe it in.\textsuperscript{58}

David Le Breton, contrariamente all’idea dell’*embodiement* alla quale mi riferisco, riporta che l’uomo vive all’interno di un corpo che presenta dei limiti, dispiegandosi verso l’esterno e lo comprende, ne fa esperienza sulla base della propria cultura, ed è così che Nietzsche parla in maniera imprecisa dei confini della conoscenza dell’individuo, quasi come fosse intrappolato all’interno del corpo. La cultura e l’ambiente in cui siamo immersi ci educano ad una percezione del mondo che ci rende diversi di fronte all’altro, tuttavia – contrariamente a quanto sostiene Nietzsche – il nostro corpo non è una prigione e la storicità non determina il nostro essere, in quanto le interpretazioni possibili sulle cose e gli eventi esterni intorno a noi sono infinite, ci modelliamo attraverso di esse e modifichiamo le nostre idee e le nostre

\textsuperscript{58} Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
conoscenze oltre che il nostro corpo e, al tempo stesso noi agiamo sul mondo esterno trasformandolo. Come ha messo in luce la moderna antropologia medica i corpi non sono un concetto astratto distinto dalla sensorialità, infatti non si può parlare nei termini di una differenza dualistica tra biologico e sensibile, quanto piuttosto dell’interazione tra i due. «Il corpo umano è la cornice tangibile dell’identità personale e sociale. Nell’esperienza umana fornisce una costellazione di simboli fisici con la potenzialità sia di significare che di realizzare la relazione tra la persona e il mondo» (Cozzi & Nigris, 2003: 174). Non esiste una separazione netta che vede corpo e mente come contrapposti, al contrario, tutto è fuso in una complessità irriducibile in cui le esperienze e le conoscenze come incorporate e dove il soggetto e l’oggetto sono inscindibili.

La teoria della pratica interpreta in maniera nuova il sapere esperienziale degli esseri umani il quale viene prodotto da scambi continui tra attori sociali e contesto. Le modalità attraverso le quali le persone si orientano col proprio corpo nel mondo è ciò che Ingold definisce con il termine di *taskscape*, esiste un’interazione tra abilità pratiche e ambiente esterno in cui gli individui vivono. «La differenza, in altre parole, non sta nel modo in cui la gente si *rappresenta* l’ambiente nella propria testa, ma nei modi in cui scopre ciò che l’ambiente permette o acconsente (*afford*) ai fini delle proprie attività. Questo implica che il modo in cui si percepisce dipende dal modo in cui ci si muove, compreso il modo in cui si cammina» (Ingold, 2004: 73).

Riascoltando le interviste condotte agli abitanti di Grand Isle emergono le loro descrizioni *thick* riguardo ai ricordi dei giorni del disastro, le loro storie sono dei percorsi sensoriali che attraversano la memoria, una memoria segnata dall’odore di un qualcosa di chimico che ancora oggi è difficile da definire, perché nuovo, perché mescolato ai fumi del petrolio bruciato, per mesi si esalava questo strano miscuglio che ristagnava nell’atmosfera umida e pesante del sud Louisiana. Il Corexit è l’odore della rabbia, delle malattie e del diniego verso gli obblighi di responsabilità.

*Lois*: It was this... old chemical smell like... You know how old grease? That’s what it would remind me of, like old grease would smell. That and when they sprayed these dispersants the eyes would burn. I know this lady that died last year: she got
sick shortly after. She was working out there, on the dock and when they sprayed she would be working at night as a guard, and she died. And I hope that that doctor can prove... he’s trying and he’s close... can prove that that’s what she died of. Then our kids will be compensated and can sue BP for millions I hope. ‘Cos those people don’t care about us. All they care about is the production of oil to make their pockets fat. They don’t care about us. What if it was them? How would they feel if it was their child or their family that had to put up with this? That’s how I feel.59

7. Cultura Gumbo

Lunga 60 miglia dalla sponda del lago Pontchartrain alle spiagge nel Golfo del Messico, con baie, swamps, marshes60, cheniers e isole, la Jefferson Parish61 presenta uno spettro completo sulle caratteristiche geologiche di uno dei più grandi sistemi deltizi, quello rappresentato dal fiume Mississippi. La lunga e stretta Jefferson si costruisce sui sedimenti del delta creando un paesaggio unico ed in continua trasformazione. Prima dell’arrivo degli europei questa parrocchia era formata principalmente da swamp di cipresso, foreste e argini naturali, quelle che oggi sono aree urbanizzate prima erano marsh, il loro

59 Dall’intervista con Lois del 26 novembre 2012.
60 Marsh e swamp sono ambienti tipici della zona umida, entrambi sono caratterizzati dalla presenza di piante erbacee e piccoli arbusti (graminacee, giunchi, canne), questo tipo di vegetazione è possibile ritrovarla alle sponde dei laghi e dei corsi d’acqua e funge da luogo di transizione tra gli ecosistemi acquatici e quelli terrestri. Ciò che differenzia le swamps dalle marsh è la presenza di mangrovie e cipressi che crescono sopra i depositi di torba e dalla maggiore profondità dell’acqua.
...insediamento ha bloccato la naturale formazione degli argini elevati del Mississippi, i quali sono gradualmente collassati all'interno delle swamp.

![Fig. 21. Sezione topografica della Jefferson Parish prima dell'arrivo degli europei](image)

È probabile che molte zone a fine Ottocento siano state bonificate per la costruzione dei canali di drenaggio, una tecnica iniziata dai primi pionieri che potrebbero aver trovato alcune zone secche lungo il fiume. I primi abitanti, inoltre, disboscarono parti consistenti delle foreste di querce che rivestivano un ruolo importante per l'economia e la difesa del territorio della Louisiana, il successivo degrado degli argini li vide costretti ad una costruzione artificiale. Compresa tra la parrocchia di Jefferson e quella di Plaquemines, Barataria Bay fu teatro delle rappresaglie del pirata Jean Lafitte, tuttavia oggi rappresenta uno degli ambienti più produttivi di tutti gli Stati Uniti e del mondo intero nonostante popolarmente venga definito come wasteland; si stima che ogni

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anno la produzione organica è quattro volte maggiore rispetto ad un campo a coltivazione mais, perciò tutta l'economia del sud Louisiana deriva dalle *marsh* del Golfo, il lavoro della natura rappresenta la produzione e il sostentamento primari in termini economici. Il sud Louisiana possiede la più grande palude di acqua dolce e il bacino idrografico maggiore di tutti gli Stati Uniti, con un'ampiezza di circa trenta miglia di zone paludose che s'affacciano sul Golfo del Messico, per queste ragioni non è sorprendente scoprire che questo luogo rappresenta la sede di un'immensa varietà acquatica e marina (Fry e Posner, 1999: 41). La ricchezza dell'ecosistema offre a questo ambiente una grande diversità biologica che ha permesso alla popolazione di stanziarsi in queste terre per generazioni, e ancora oggi molte persone vivono qui grazie alla pesca.

Al di là delle *marsh* e della baia di Barataria giace l'isola di Grand Isle, una barriera naturale che separa il Golfo del Messico dall'entroterra, le sue mangrovie e il bosco *Chênière* (bosco di querce) offrono rifugio e sostentamento agli uccelli e ai pesci (Swanson, 2004). Principalmente luogo di pescatori e turisti, l'isola si presenta come un luogo felice dove crescono oleandro, mirto, ibiscus, palma, quercia, etc., la lunga spiaggia selvaggia è attraversata da una moltitudine di animali: granchi, piovanelli, gabbiani... è la cornice che circonda chi passeggia sul lungomare mentre si osserva il Golfo immaginando da dove arrivino tutti quei pellicani che lo sorvolano, quanti gamberi sia
riuscito a pescare quel *trawl*\textsuperscript{63} in lontananza, da quanto tempo brucia la fiaccola sopra la piattaforma finché il rumore assordante dell’elicottero che giornalmente sorvola i cieli del Golfo interrompe brutalmente qualsiasi osservazione riflessiva sul territorio. Nel suo libro Betsy Swanson riporta la descrizione che Hearn fa dell’isola:

…with its imposing groves of oak, its golden wealth of orange-trees, its odorous lanes of oleander, its broad grazing meadows yellow-starred with wild chamomile, Grand Isle remains the prettiest island on the Gulf; and its loveliness is exceptional…. On the Gulf side of these islands you may observe that the trees – when there are any trees – all bend away from the sea; and, even of bright, hot days when the wind sleeps, there is something grotesquely pathetic in their look of agonized terror. A group of oaks at Grand Isle I remember as especially suggestive: five stooping silhouettes in line against the horizon, like fleeing women with streaming garments and wind-blown hair, – bowing grievously and thrusting out arms desperately northward as to save themselves from falling (Swanson, 2004: 20).

Grand Isle è delimitata ad est dal *Barataria Pass*, ad ovest da *Caminada Pass*, a nord da *Barataria Bay* e a sud dal Golfo del Messico; presenta sette miglia di spiaggia pubblica lungo la quale le costruzioni di abitazioni e *camp*\textsuperscript{64} sono aumentate grazie alla richiesta del turismo e al crescente prestigio della.

\textsuperscript{63}È un termine designato per un particolare tipo di pesca, viene inoltre utilizzato per indicare in maniera più generica, le imbarcazioni che praticano il lancio di grandi reti nel fondo del mare, pescando grosse quantità di pesce.

\textsuperscript{64}Abbreviazione di camping. In Louisiana fa riferimento anche ad un’abitazione esterna fissa di proprietà usata per attività di pesca, caccia e nautica.
casa con vista fronte mare. Nell’Ottocento i primi coloni si stanziarono con le piantagioni di cotone e di canna da zucchero utilizzando gli schiavi deportati dall’Africa per coltivare i campi dei proprietari terrieri, tuttavia presto le spiagge di sabbia e la ricca vegetazione selvaggia attirarono i vacanzieri estivi che volevano scappare dal caos delle città già grandi per rifugiarsi in un posto tranquillo dove poter godere della natura, questo fenomeno diede il via alla costruzione di strutture ricettive per i villeggianti aprendo l’isola ad un nuovo mercato, quello del turismo. Già nei primi anni del Novecento, prima della costruzione delle strade e della più importante Highway 1 nel 1930, vennero predisposti dei mezzi di trasporto\footnote{Nell’isola vennero costruiti i \textit{mule drawn train} e le \textit{one mule cart}, dei mezzi di locomozione antecedenti ai treni a motore simili a delle carrozze le quali correvano su delle rotaie grazie al traino esercitato dai muli e dai cavalli.} che attraversavano l’isola da nord a sud permettendo ai bagnanti di raggiungere facilmente il mare dai loro alloggi estivi. Purtroppo oggi non è possibile vedere i segni di queste strutture turistiche e delle piantagioni di epoca coloniale, tutto venne raso al suolo da due uragani di forte intensità che colpirono l’isola nel 1893 e nel 1915, ciò che ne rimase furono le abitazioni dei pescatori e dei contadini costruite in luoghi ben difesi dalle forti tempeste, nascoste nella fitta vegetazione delle querce che li proteggeva dalle violenti intemperie.

Oggi la popolazione si compone di circa 1500 residenti fissi impiegati principalmente nell’industria petrolifera, nella pesca e nel turismo – ogni anno si contano circa 300.000 visitatori attratti dalla biodiversità che l’isola offre e
dalle numerose opportunità di pesca sportiva, grazie ai diversi fishing rodeos organizzati in un periodo compreso tra la primavera e l’autunno, quando il Golfo è al culmine della sua produttività⁶⁶.

Sara: So it’s one of the most important industries?

Fred: Oh yes. In Louisiana is…

Jane: Louisiana is the biggest State for export of shrimp.

Fred: Seafood.⁶⁷

La Louisiana produce un terzo del commercio nazionale della pesca grazie alle numerose quantità di gamberi, granchi, menadi, ostriche e aragoste presenti e pescate in maniera intensiva, per questo motivo viene considerata una vera e propria industria; inoltre è sede di quasi un quarto della pesca ricreativa degli Stati Uniti (grazie anche all’istituzione di numerosi rodeo di pesca), dove sono presenti le specie preferite dagli sportivi: scorfano, dentice, sgombro, trota macchiata, platessa. Questo sport ebbe inizio nel 1928 quando venticinque pescatori decisero di istituire il Tarpon Rodeo a Grand Isle, ovvero il primo rodeo di pesca nato in tutti gli Stati Uniti, un evento che vide il successo di anno in anno, quando le iscrizioni raddoppiarono continuamente i propri numeri; ancora oggi gode di una fama internazionale per gli


⁶⁷ Dall’intervista con Fred e Jane del 28 novembre 2012.
appassionati di questo sport che si riversano nell’isola sempre più numerosi nell’ultima settimana di luglio. Oltre allo sport, la pesca è uno stile di vita che si tramanda di generazione in generazione tra i Cajun ed è considerata l’industria più pittoresca dello Stato. Le case costruite vicino alla baia permettono ai pescatori di raggiungere facilmente le proprie imbarcazioni che vengono considerate come delle seconde abitazioni data l’affettività, la passione e il tempo trascorso all’interno di esse. La loro abilità nell’essere indipendenti si riflette anche nell’autosufficienza della costruzione e riparazione delle trappole per pesci visibili nei giardini laboriosi o tra le fondamenta rialzate delle case di cipresso, dov’è possibile osservare questa sorta di officina a cielo aperto spesso accompagnata da un comodo dondolo difeso dal sole delle giornate afose, donando al pescatore un riposo all’ombra. Le lunghe giornate passate in mare ripagano sempre con delle consistenti quantità di pesce da rivendere al mercato o ai più grandi distributori, e nel caso la giornata non sia stata abbastanza produttiva il pasto è sempre garantito da dell’ottima jambalaya, o del buon gumbo nei mesi più freddi.

69 Tipico piatto creolo della Louisiana, originario dei Caraibi trova questo particolare miscuglio di ingredienti grazie alle influenze francesi, spagnole, africane e amerindiane. Esistono tre varianti per la preparazione di questo piatto, quella più comune a Grand Isle è la Cajun dove il riso e le verdure incontrano sia la carne che i gamberetti.
70 Si tratta di uno stufato di riso Cajun arricchito dai gamberi e dai granchi. È interessante sapere che l’ingrediente essenziale di questo piatto è l’ocra, pianta originaria dell’Africa tropicale, la parola gumbo deriva, infatti, dal termine Bantu “gombo” utilizzato per definire l’ocra.
Jane: It’s expensive here to live, but this has been our home forever.

[...]

Jane: You know, you’re born and raised, it’s your heritage. You know, our grandparents did this, and their grandparents before them, it’s... it’s our only way of life that we know.

[...]

Jane: You know.

Fred: ‘Cos we made a living out of... fishing, and we ate out of our fishing, you know, so everything we did was... you don’t know how much money I saved by...eating seafood, you know?[71]

L’intera società si è costruita nel corso degli anni intorno al proprio ambiente, cercando di vivere di quello che la natura aveva da offrire, facendo fruttare al meglio ciò che proveniva dal sottosuolo e, in particolar modo, dal mare. Benché l’amore per la propria terra sia fortemente sentito nell’isola, il perseguimento dell’obiettivo è sfuggito di mano ai residenti e il problema dell’overfishing[72] si sovrappone ad altre difficoltà che questo ecosistema mutevole si ritrova a dover affrontare.

[71] Dall’intervista con Fred e Jane del 28 novembre 2012.
[72] Tradotto in italiano con il termine di sovrapesca, indica lo sfruttamento delle acque dato da una pesca eccessiva, non consentendo alla specie di riprodursi.
8.  **Land loss e dead zone**


[...]  

Ol’ man river, dat ol’ man river,  

he must know sumpin’ but don’t say nothin’,  

he jus keeps rollin’, he keeps on rollin’ along.  

[...][73]

Al centro di poesie, canzoni e romanzi, il Mississippi ha segnato la vita di molte persone, costituendosi a simbolo del confinamento dei Cajun e della schiavitù degli Afroamericani, oggi continua a rappresentare l’elemento essenziale della Louisiana attorno a cui si definiscono le esistenze degli individui attraverso un mutuo adattamento. Dal punto di vista geografico ciò che concorre nella formazione del territorio costiero della Louisiana si basa su un processo naturale che vede il consistente trasporto di sedimenti da parte di questo poderoso fiume: i detriti composti da sabbia, limo e argilla si accumulano per tracimazione e sedimentazione, formando così la base delle paludi costiere tipiche di questo Delta, ed è grazie a questo processo che ogni anno si creano nuove terre lungo la costa del Golfo del Messico in prossimità dell’arrivo del

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[73] Tr. It. ”Vecchio Fiume, quel vecchio Fiume / deve pur sapere qualcosa, ma non dice niente, / non fa altro che scorrire e scorrire.” Dalla canzone *Ol’ man river* di Jerome Kern e Oscar Hammerstein II. Racconta dei contrasti e le difficoltà che gli Afroamericani hanno dovuto affrontare durante la schiavitù lungo le rive del Mississippi, venne interpretata da diversi autori di fama internazionale come Ray Charles e Frank Sinatra.
fiume. Tuttavia accanto a questo fenomeno si assiste al problema opposto di 
“perdita della terra”, definito in inglese con il termine di land loss, dovuto a 
diversi fattori – primo fra tutti è l’uragano: la forza dell’impatto che viene 
esercitata erode le marshes, introducendo nell’ecosistema un eccesso di salinità 
nell’acqua; inoltre il riscaldamento globale ha innalzato i livelli dei mari e 
questo concorre nel drammatico decremento della zona paludosa che ne risente 
più di molte altre aree del pianeta. I processi naturali del ciclo di vita deltizio 
comprendono questa perdita di terreno costiero che viene descritta con il 
termine di subsidenza, ovvero un abbassamento verticale del suolo dovuto alla 
compattazione dei materiali e ciò può avvenire per ragioni naturali o 
antropiche. Nel primo caso si tratta di un processo lento e su larga scala ed è 
legato ad attività vulcaniche, sismiche e al deposito dei sedimenti che si 
comprimono e attraverso una riduzione di volume, nel caso di un sovraccarico, 
si abbassano; nel secondo caso s’innesca un assestamento del terreno a causa 
delle estrazioni di acqua, gas e petrolio, questo causa un’accelerazione della 
subsidenza in aree ben delimitate.\footnote{PETROLIO E GAS: \url{http://petrolioegas.it/subsidenza/}. Data ultima consultazione: 20.05.2013.} Con la colonizzazione del Nuovo Mondo 
più della metà delle zone umide originarie sono andate perdute, oltre a ciò 
l’arrivo della tecnologia ha aggravato questo fenomeno: si stima, infatti, che 
egli ultimi cent’anni la Louisiana abbia perso circa il 20% delle zone umide, 
diecì volte tanto ciò che avverrebbe col processo naturale. Tra le cause del 
processo di land loss è necessario ricordare la costruzione di sistemi di controllo
dei corsi d’acqua, la quale ha portato ad una riduzione del carico sedimentario e ad una diminuzione delle sostanze nutritive necessarie per il mantenimento delle zone paludose\textsuperscript{75}; inoltre con la realizzazione di strutture di controllo delle inondazioni – caratterizzate da un sistema di argini – sono drasticamente calate le alluvioni per tracimazione, necessarie per la sopravvivenza di questo ecosistema.

Jane: Uhm… It was better because it was less crowded, and… they didn’t have so much coastal erosion, it was bigger… but now it’s getting more populated, and the coastal erosion has eaten up at it.

Sara: So why there is the coastal erosion?

Fred: There’s no… too much salt water. The marshland is dying by the day, just too much salinity… in the water.

[…]

Fred: Yes. The vegetation can’t handle this salinity. ‘Cos’ it’s opened up so much all over now, there’s no more… you know, there’s no more [audio poco chiaro] is getting wider and wider, so you’ve got more Gulf water coming in. And it’s just killing… the vegetation out there.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{75} Tra gli interventi antropici di maggior impatto ambientale c’è il dragaggio dei fiumi, questa tecnica di scavo dei corsi d’acqua impedisce alle piante di rigenerarsi. Nel caso specifico della Louisiana nel 1960 venne effettuata questa operazione per facilitare il passaggio delle navi nel Golfo del Messico. La creazione del Mississippi River Gulf Outlet (MRGO) con le sue 76 miglia di lunghezza distrusse oltre 23.000 acri di aree paludose. MRGO: <http://mrgo.gov/>. Data ultima consultazione: 20.05.2013.

\textsuperscript{76} Dall’intervista con Fred e Jane Del 28 novembre 2012.
“Quel vecchio fiume” che non fa altro che scorriere trasporta silenzioso i rifiuti della terra e degli uomini, l’inquinamento contamina quelle ricche terre prosperose di un’antica Arcadia che si ritrova oggi a dover ospitare una delle più grandi Dead Zone del nostro pianeta. L’accumulo di sostanze chimiche che si deposita sulle paludi della Louisiana causa un’eccessiva concentrazione di sostanze nutritive quali zolfo, azoto e fosforo, ne consegue un’incontrollata

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proliferazione di alghe, le quali sottraggono l’ossigeno necessario ai pesci per sopravvivere. In questo modo l’eutrofizzazione porta alla morte della biodiversità marina, soprattutto nelle zone costiere dove l’ecosistema è più fragile i microrganismi anaerobici prendono il posto di quelli aerobici che necessitano di ossigeno, così l’equilibrio che regola l’habitat di specie marine e vegetali viene completamente stravolto causando l’ipossia in questa area.

Fig. 23. Mappa della Dead Zone lungo la costa della Louisiana.78

Come si può notare nella figura 23, il colore rosso identifica le zone maggiormente colpite dall’eutrofizzazione presente in corrispondenza delle bocche dei fiumi formando questa sorta di barriera che isola l’acqua salata

dall’ossigeno dell’aria interrompendo in maniera irreversibile il ciclo di vita marino, solamente nel periodo invernale avviene una piccola ripresa di rigenerazione ma con l’arrivo della successiva estate s’interromperà nuovamente. Un altro fenomeno che permette la miscelazione dell’acqua reintroducendo ossigeno, è rappresentato dall’arrivo degli uragani che danno inizio ad un risveglio della produzione biologica. Tutto questo processo si ripercuote sulla flora e la fauna marine e di conseguenza sulle popolazioni costiere che vivono principalmente di pesca.

Oggi esistono diverse associazioni che si occupano di prevenzione e ripristino delle caratteristiche zone umide della Louisiana, necessarie per tutte le forme di vita presenti lungo le sue mutevoli coste. Le strategie messe in atto si basano principalmente sull’immissione di nuova acqua dolce attraverso la deviazione dei fiumi; la riforestazione delle marsh in modo da rendere il terreno più solido attraverso la reintroduzione di specie autoctone; e l’ambiziosa proposta di chiudere la lunga MRGO creando un canale alternativo in una zona che non altererebbe l’ecosistema della Plaquemines Parish.\textsuperscript{79} Grand Isle, l’isola barriera, si deve scontrare violentemente in prima persona con la forza degli uragani che rappresentano la principale causa di erosione costiera, e nonostante si sia cercato di intervenire in diversi modi, gli abitanti sanno che il

\textsuperscript{79} Tra le principali associazioni che si occupano della conservazione di zone umide è importante citare il Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program (BTNEP) il quale comprende l’area in cui s’inserisce Grand Isle, ad ovest del Mississippi e a nord del Golfo del Messico riceve tutto quello che viene scaricato ritrovandosi a vivere in prima persona le rapide trasformazioni inarrestabili.
terreno muta più velocemente del suo tentativo di arrestarlo. Tuttavia le
violentì tempeste hanno una valenza duale: da un lato sono una risorsa per
l’ecosistema, in quanto interrompono l’ipossia del Delta, dall’altro lo
consumano.

**William**: It was… we lost a lot of beach everywhere.

[…]

**W**: For Isaac. Every storm we lose a lot of beach.

[…]

**W**: What we’ve done in the past, we actually get big dredges… and they pumped
sand from offshore… to replace the sand that was lost. For Gustav… everything came
in from the Gulf, so… it pushed off all the levees and the sand… onto the island. But
after Katrina… we had lost so much sand on the beach that they actually pumped it
in the whole lot of it. A lot of sand. ‘Cos we lost… you know, a tremendous
amount…hundred feet or so of the beach, you know.\(^{80}\)

Consistenti cambiamenti sono visibili ad occhio nudo dagli abitanti che
risiedono nell’isola da meno di una generazione e William lo sa bene che questo
processo è accelerato, vive qui da oltre quarant’anni. Ma non è l’unico ad
accorgersi della mutevolezza del paesaggio, i residenti sensibili nei confronti
della propria terra, osservano le trasformazioni sempre con questa loro aria da

\(^{80}\) Dall’intervista con William del 9 novembre 2012.
laissez faire⁸¹. Il disastro della British Petroleum si è sommato a dei problemi già esistenti nelle coste del Golfo del Messico, aggravando la situazione da un punto di vista spaziale e temporale «Fred: And then the oil spill hurt a lot, ’cos there’s so much oil went in the marsh land and it killed the grass. And once the grass has died, the erosion just eats it away, so it didn’t help as much.»⁸²

Nella famiglia di Fred c’è B. che da sempre vive del proprio mare. B. è un ragazzo del mia età che ricorda bene com’era l’isola quand’era piccolo, ricorda della sua larghezza dai confini più ampi, della vegetazione più folta; mi racconta della sua passione per la pesca iniziata quand’era ancora bambino e di quando il padre cercava di tramandargli le conoscenze con la speranza che, una volta diventato adulto, sarebbe diventato anche lui uno shrimper. Oggi B. continua a pescare ma solo a scopo ricreativo, ha deciso di lavorare a Port Fourchon nel settore più proficuo dell’industria petrolifera, lasciando l’onore al fratello di perseverare nella pesca dei gamberi senza rompere questa conoscenza che si tramanda da generazioni nella loro famiglia.

9. Seven bars in eight miles

Finirà mai, tutto questo? C’è un silenzio orrendo, sulla zattera e tutt’intorno. Nessuno più si lamenta. I morti sono morti, i vivi aspettano e basta. Niente preghiere,

⁸¹ Vedi nota 56 nella pagina 67.
⁸² Dall’intervista con Fred e Jane del 28 novembre 2012.

L’isola di Grand Isle conta, nel periodo invernale, sette bar, mentre durante l’estate, quando si affolla con l’arrivo dei turisti, la cifra raddoppia. Le comunità di pescatori crescono isolate, quasi ai margini della società in cui sono inserite e questa lontananza segnata dai confini di un’isola mutevole, li allontana fisicamente dal resto del mondo. Per anni, sin dal momento in cui si sono stanziati qui i primi abitanti, hanno costruito il loro microcosmo in poche miglia fungendo da filtro tra la natura e l’antropizzazione, vivere un’isola barriera significa decidere di affrontare in prima persona il mare abitandolo anche nei suoi contrasti. A circa quaranta minuti di auto dal primo grande centro abitato, Grand Isle si è costruita autonomamente attraverso le risorse presenti nel territorio. Questa lontananza – inserita in un più ampio contesto culturale colonialista – ha favorito la diffusione di un sistema di norme che si autoregolano grazie ad un giudizio morale presente all’interno della comunità; tuttavia il loro stile di vita basato sulla joie de vivre pone al centro dell’esistenza dell’individuo la spensieratezza e la semplicità del presente senza preoccupazioni per il futuro, ragion per cui – al di là della ricchezza naturale –
l’isola è conosciuta e viene ricordata come *Grand Isle Paradise*. Questo stile di vita ha consentito la diffusione di una cultura del buon cibo, del consumo di bevande e di un divertimento che si basa sull’idea di *enjoy the life*, frequenti travestimenti e feste sono occasione per esorcizzare questo luogo di uragani e in posizione di marginalità rispetto al resto degli Stati Uniti.  

**Joey:** And so we help people by guiding them through God’s word... and encouraging them to seek the Lord... that God helps the majority to make wise decisions that lead to blessing. And then when the storms of life hit us... and disasters happen, then you have a trust and hope that... other people don’t have. And that’s why other people turn to alcohol, and drugs, or suicide, terrible decisions, or spending sprees... depression... there’s all kinds of things they turn to, but those who hope in the Lord, run quickly to God and realize: “We’re weak people, and we need each other, we need the strength of the Lord” and so... that’s what we get to do, that’s what I get... encourage people all the time and I’m glad to do it.  

A Grand Isle il consumo di alcol e droghe è un fenomeno diffuso e, per diverse ragioni, il passaggio dall’uso all’abuso si verifica frequentemente. Il temperamento Cajun e l’ambiente geografico contribuiscono e definiscono una

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84 Dall’intervista con Joey del 28 novembre 2012.
società che sembra aver eletto la *joie de vivre* a simbolo raffigurativo delle proprie esistenze: il cercare di non avere preoccupazioni mette in moto un processo che gli consente di andare avanti senza soffermarsi troppo nella disperazione del dramma che li affligge. Se da un lato questo atteggiamento li aiuta a superare situazioni particolarmente difficili, dall’altro porta al desiderio di voler godere di ogni istante, disarmando qualsiasi fatalismo che sembra non conoscere alcun tipo di forma attraverso cui esprimersi in queste terre. Durante la mia permanenza in Louisiana ho potuto osservare come l’alcol e la droga fossero un fenomeno crescente, rappresentando un problema importante per la comunità, come mi disse Joey «this is a drinking community with fish problem»\(^{85}\). Grazie alla vicinanza con la Chiesa Battista sono potuta entrare in contatto anche con una fascia di popolazione economicamente più bassa, questo gruppo di fedeli fornisce sostegno a persone disagiate e alle famiglie impiegate nel lavoro *offshore* grazie ad un primario e fondamentale aiuto psicologico basato sul sentimento della speranza.

*Joey* […] Because now the stress is even more… when the wife kisses the husband who’s gonna be gone for two weeks on one of those rigs, the wife now on the back of her mind thinks: “What if my husband’s rig blows up?”

[…]

*Joey* “Is this the last time I’m gonna see him?” That’s a lot of stress! And so… and the person that’s working on the rig is thinking at the back of their mind: “Well I

\(^{85}\) Dall’intervista con Joey del 28 novembre 2012.
hope that’s not our rig that next time catches on fire” There is a lot of risk, that’s why
they get paid a lot of money, ok? Because there’s a lot of risk. But no amount of
money is going to pay for one’s life.86

Lo spaesamento e lo stress provati in particolari momenti deprivano
l’individuo di quel sentimento che dà un senso alle loro vite, inoltre «All the
South-East of Louisiana, there’s many new believers because of disasters,
hurricanes, oil spills, because there has been chaplains and missionaries there
to show them the hope in Jesus, and so that’s been very encouraging».87

Nonostante si tenda a considerare in una visione dicotomica i disastri naturali
come “atti di Dio” e quelli tecnologici come una responsabilità umana, è
impossibile determinare una netta distinzione tra i due essendo entrambi
cataclismi che coinvolgono ambienti antropizzati. Per questo motivo i disastri
si presentano sempre come eventi che sconvolgono routine e gli equilibri,
disgregando socialmente la comunità interessata: il disastro permea il presente
degli individui e produce diverse risposte sia individuali che collettive in
relazione all’evento le quali andranno a ridefinire la società stessa. Ciò che
emerge da un disastro tecnologico, soprattutto legato ad una contaminazione
ambientale, è la sua indeterminatezza che Steven Picou definisce con il termine
di corrosive communities, ovvero un modello costante degli effetti cronici
sviluppati negli individui e nelle comunità. La dispersione di sostanze chimiche

86 Dall’intervista con Joey del 28 novembre 2012.
87 Dall’intervista con Joeydel 28 novembre 2012.
pericolose per l’ambiente e per l’uomo spesso risultano impercettibili, il non riuscire a circoscrivere l’evento ne rende difficile una possibile interpretazione riguardo ai rischi e all’esposizione, motivo per cui vengono descritti come *never ending* (Picou, Marshall, Gill, 2004: 4). Il trauma inteso come un evento socialmente costruito, continuerà a contribuire attraverso risposte cognitive, comportamentali e adattative a lungo termine da parte dei sopravvissuti, ridisegnando tutto quel sistema di significati in cui erano inscritte le loro vite.

**Lois:** BP stripped us… I feel like … They stripped us from our dignity, the pride that we take in Grand Isle, we still do take pride, but they really… It really hurt when that happened. It not only hurt our tourism which is a big thing for the island, it just hurt us deep down inside, because of that one thing they made us feel like they didn’t care. They acted like they did, but didn’t care and they thought they could just come in here and offer a few dollars to some people and some people were desperate and took it.\(^88\)

Sin dal 20 aprile 2010, giorno in cui ci fu la fuoriuscita di petrolio, ci fu un’immediata attribuzione di colpa verso la compagnia petrolifera che stava operando nelle profondità del Golfo del Messico, e ancora oggi sono in corso i processi e le cause per riacquistare la dignità e i diritti strappati via dal petrolio e coperti dal Corexit.

\(^88\) Dall’intervista con Lois del 6 novembre 2012.
Fred: Everyone. Like I said, some of my friends took those 25,000 dollars... and they’re starving to death right now, ‘cos they can’t do nothing.

[...]

Fred: They’re finished.

Jane: When you take the money and you take the settlement you have to sign a paper, so if that... cap they put out there ever busts again, we can’t sue them again.

Sara: So this is the form that you fill at the BP claim center?

Fred: Yes.

Jane: Once you sign off on it, if it busts and puts oil all over again... what you’re gonna do, we can’t sue them no more. They don’t have to pay you no more.

[...]

Jane: So they’ll pay us for all the damages, but if that pipe ever busts again... and covers everything with oil again and we cannot work no more, we can’t do nothing about it. 89

I pescatori che hanno accettato la compensazione di 25 mila dollari sono gli stessi che oggi non possono pescare, le loro vite sono state stravolte da questo disastro sia a livello economico, ambientale e psicologico. Dopo aver passato una vita a pescare ritrovarsi a dover affrontare la marea nera li ha spinti ad accettare i soldi che la BP aveva da offrire perché le scadenze a fine mese arrivano, e la vita nell’isola è più cara che altrove in Louisiana. Purtroppo la depressione ha colpito gran parte della popolazione: c’è chi è

89 Dall’intervista con Fred e Jane del 28 novembre 2012.
riuscito a superarla attraverso forme di resistenza e chi invece soccombe nell’abuso di alcol conducendo una vita ai limiti della povertà.

Mary: It wasn’t like… we were renters, we could just sleep and do something ourselves, I mean, this was our life, we hadn’t had plan B, you know? This was our globe… there was nothing else we wanted to do past this. So we couldn’t walk away from it, and… all of our reservations were cancelling and our people were living that we had, we had nine or so different folks that lived here full time, that was a full time income. And as the… the spill… progressed, all of their jobs were cut out, so… the guy that worked at the electrical plant had been here for four years left, we haven’t seen him since, and just down the line all the folks that lived here full time were gone, they were… they had no more jobs. They left. We had an empty campground, we had no people coming for the summer. And then for… about two months we didn’t know how we were gonna live. And we… we… we knew that we really just couldn’t leave, ‘cos this is our home.  

Mary è stata una persona chiave per la mia ricerca perché grazie a lei sono entrata in contatto con la comunità di Grand Isle. Sin dal primo giorno in cui ci siamo conosciute ho percepito in lei una grande determinazione e un forte senso materno di protezione nei miei confronti. Mary è una persona solare e sorridente ma anche molto sensibile, durante l’intervista mi ha raccontato della difficoltà nel superare quel periodo terribile in cui tutto sembrava perduto; si era trasferita da poco con il marito nell’isola di cui si sono innamorati molti anni fa, per iniziare una nuova attività di affitto piazzole per i camper. Lo

90 Dall’intervista con Mary del 29 novembre 2012.
sconforto nel non avere più la sicurezza di un lavoro in cui avevano investito tutti i loro risparmi cresceva sempre di più, ma fu proprio in quel momento che decise di rispolverare la sua passione per l’hobbistica, creando accessori di bigiotteria femminile quali bracciali, collane, orecchini, etc. Attraverso l’atto creativo è riuscita a dissipare l’inizio di una forma di depressione che la stava pervadendo, e ciò le ha permesso di dare un senso nuovo del suo essere-lì, nella sua casa.

La natura ricca e selvaggia, la quiete in un clima temperato nei giorni invernali, il fermento della vita notturna ed il buon cibo sono elementi che portano ad innamorarsi facilmente di quest’isola. Meta ambita da chi vive nei freddi Paesi del nord e luogo privilegiato per trascorrere qui la propria vecchiaia, qui non sembra che la quantità di tempo trascorso sia rilevante per sentirla come la propria home, l’abitare il territorio non è semplicemente occupare un posto fisico con la propria house ma è un processo che trascende questa separazione, in quanto esiste un attaccamento ai luoghi che si realizza in un rapporto personale e collettivo con essi. Questa relazione non è un qualcosa di statico rappresenta bensì uno sviluppo dinamico che si modifica nel tempo, infatti «il senso dei luoghi è connesso con i progetti personali di vita […]», la loro realizzazione non dipende solo dalle motivazioni interne della persona ma anche dalle risorse che l’ambiente offre» (Arace in Giani Gallino, 2007: 106) e l’attaccamento che sviluppiamo con essi definisce ciò che siamo ed è proprio attraverso questo sentimento che costruiamo la nostra home in
equilibrio con l’ambiente. La dinamicità del flusso emotivo descrive il rapporto
dell’individuo che abita il territorio, ma è solo di fronte a situazioni di
modificazione e di interruzione della quotidianità che l’uomo si rende conto
dell’importanza che assume l’ambiente nei suoi confronti (Giani Gallino, 2007).
Il disastro inatteso ha contribuito all’accrescimento del senso di appartenenza e
di attaccamento all’isola, pertanto nonostante la sensazione sia quella di sentirsi
come intrappolati in una gabbia, il futuro per loro è visibile solo a Grand Isle
perché il senso dell’home supera le barriere create dalla compagnia petrolifera.

Mary: The people that were really hurt by this were not reimbursed. We were
held captive in our homes for a year, it smelled so bad at times, if you opened your
door you could almost chew it, it was like having a mouthful of axle-grease. And their
advice to us was to... “If it smells like that, stay inside.” How can you live your life
staying inside? If someone else told you to stay inside your house and wouldn’t let you
out... that would be like forced imprisoning. And anybody was compensated for
anything like that. No, we weren’t, we were kept captive. And our government let it
happen. And they’re still letting it happen91.

Nessuno può restituire il dramma di quei giorni, cercare di far rientrare nei
propri schemi cognitivi il disastro è cercare di dare un nuovo significato alla
propria vita e al luogo in cui viviamo, ciò che prima era il simbolo della
ricchezza e del riscatto verso gli Stati del nord adesso ha dovuto ampliare il
proprio concetto assumendo un senso nuovo che riconduce nelle memorie delle

91 Dall’intervista con Mary del 29 novembre 2012.
persone a quell’esperienza vissuta che ancora oggi continua a ridisegnare i confini semantici e ambientali. In situazioni di disastro l’attaccamento ai luoghi si manifesta sia attraverso forme attive di resistenti che vedono un riconoscimento dei propri diritti, sia in forme passive in cui si è ben coscienti che la propria vita può avere un senso solamente in quel posto del mondo, ma quando la sicurezza di un lavoro che la natura ti ha sempre offerto svanisce in pochi istanti allora l’unica cosa che rimane è trascorrere il tempo al bar e nella propria barca92 perché il mare, da sempre fedele, è diventato anch’egli un pericolo. Come riporta Beneduce «Ricoeur ricorda che la memoria è concepita da Aristotele come un processo duplice, che si costituisce sul tema dell’alterità e dell’assenza, ma anche della differenza tra l’essere padroni di un ricordo […] o l’esserne semplicemente sopraffatti» (Beneduce, 2010: 145). Per molti la speranza di un ritorno ad un’epoca fiorente è ancora viva, allontanarsi dalle zone chiuse alla pesca e aspettare che il tempo guarisca le ferite è quello che rimane da fare.

Penny: Because of the oil spill, do some other type of work?

[...]

Ray: No, I’m not interested in… like I said I can… go away from the oil spill, you know, there’s still a lot of area in Louisiana that didn’t get affected, but... I

92 Per il pescatore Cajun la barca rappresenta la sua casa, il suo posto sicuro in cui vivere. Dal giorno del disastro la barca ha subito una risignificazione, tuttavia rimane il luogo in cui abitare nonostante la sua funzione primaria sia quella della pesca; per gli uomini del mare oggi rappresenta principalmente la propria home e non più il proprio lavoro.
think, I think things are coming back and... it’s gonna take some time, but I think eventually we’ll get back to what it used to be, it’s just... you know, something... I think it’s gonna take the time, because it did... it does better this year than it did last year\textsuperscript{93}.

10. Equilibri interrotti

Sabrina: Andy’s birthday is 6\textsuperscript{th} May, and we walked down the beach that morning about... and we went to see the sunrise... at about 5:30 we... the beach was still clean, and we saw the first globs of oil come in. Just the first ones starting to come in. And you could see it was really thick, heavy-duty crude, and when it got here it just... you know, just started piling up on the beach! And as soon as that happened... you know they sent... started sending crews out to clean it, to... scoop it up and do whatever they did with it, you know, they cleaned the beach, but the... mainly the people who came were paid to work. It wasn’t volunteers\textsuperscript{94}.

Nella piccola isola la televisione internazionale era sbarchata in massa nei giorni in cui la marea si stava avvicinando alla spiaggia: centinaia di giornalisti si sono recati a Grand Isle per cercare di ottenere qualsiasi tipo di informazione riguardo all’accaduto. L’invasione non fu solo fisica ma colpì soprattutto a livello psicologico e gli abitanti iniziarono a sentirsi circondati da gente che non conoscevano nello spaesamento già indotto dal disastro. Sembrava – in un

\textsuperscript{93} Dall’intervista con Ray e Penny del 5 novembre 2012.
\textsuperscript{94} Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
certo senso – si stesse realizzando ciò che l’artista Andy Warhol disse negli anni in cui la televisione stava diventando un fenomeno di massa «In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes»⁹⁵. (Andy Warhol, 1968)

Era bello avere l’attenzione internazionale in un posto così piccolo conosciuto da poche persone ottenendo quei famosi quindici minuti di gloria, purtroppo avere la propria vita sempre sotto i riflettori rendeva ancora più difficile scontrarsi con questa quotidianità spezzata.

**Sabrina:** I don’t think the island has changed dramatically. We had a miserable year, when all those people were here cleaning it up and you had the newspaper people in your face constantly and that… you know, news crews from anywhere, you would walk out of the, you know, the post office and there was somebody sticking a microphone in your face going: “Tell me how bad it is” And it’s like: “I’m not having a bad day, ok? I’m ok!”⁹⁶

Giornalisti provenienti da qualsiasi parte del mondo non stavano aiutando le persone nel superamento del dramma, bensì accrescevano l’ansia, le preoccupazioni e la rabbia già innescati al momento dell’esplosione. Nessuno era preparato al disastro e nessuno era pronto all’arrivo di migliaia di sconosciuti che avrebbero sconvolto le loro vite.

⁹⁵ L’artista sosteneva, con questa massima, che chiunque avrebbe avuto i suoi quindici minuti di gloria grazie all’ampia diffusione della televisione.
⁹⁶ Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
William: You know? I said: “I’m not trying to hide, we’re keeping you out of the oil! That’s it.” But... but I’d say that... I understood we needed the media... to let... to let everybody know what the hell was going on. It was a bad situation, but... some of them got ridiculous. They just... you know, the whole lot of them just... for months. Workers and media.

[...]

W: I suppose it was a... during the spill I mean, it was... constant. And then I had reporters that wanted to go to Elmer’s. Every day they’d be up... up here, and usually tried... at first they tried to find out what... what you’re trying to say, and... If I talked, there was going to be a decent story and a bunch of bull. I might take one of them out there, but I had to sneak them off. ‘Cos they would say: “BP said no media? That you had to have it clear?”.

L’arrivo in quest’isola, un luogo già derubato della propria storia e dignità, ha creato in me una sensazione di profondo disagio dato dalla mia presenza: ascoltare i loro racconti accresceva questo mio sentimento del poter essere una figura inopportuna all’interno delle loro vite. Tuttavia loro hanno dimostrato fin da subito una grande fiducia nei miei confronti ed è per questo che ho cercato di restituire l’affetto che hanno dimostrato nei miei confronti attraverso il rispetto delle loro vite senza pormi come obiettivo principale la ricerca di notizie dall’impatto emotivo forte, quanto piuttosto capire attraverso la narrazione come possano cambiare i rapporti con il mondo esterno e con se stessi. Durante la mia presenza sul campo le persone con cui

97 Dall’intervista con William del 9 novembre 2012.
ero maggiormente in contatto continuavano a darmi i contatti di individui che ritenevano fossero degli esperti del disastro per diverse ragioni, tuttavia la maggior parte dei residenti mi ha rivelato di aver rilasciato più di un’intervista, una confessione che li rende orgogliosi: l’aver contribuito alla stesura di articoli li faceva sentire importanti, costituivano le uniche persone esperte dell’accaduto per il semplice fatto di vivere in quel territorio, per queste ragioni la mia attenzione si è focalizzata sui racconti legati alla trasformazione dell’esistenza umana in relazione all’ambiente vissuto.

Per la popolazione di Grand Isle il senso di appartenenza e attaccamento ai luoghi si è manifestato con l’approdo dei giornalisti e dei nuovi dipendenti assunti dalla British Petroleum per la pulizia delle spiagge, entrambi li hanno posti di fronte ai confini fisici e psicologici dell’isola: accogliere un numero così consistente di sconosciuti per mesi significa trovarsi di fronte all’inevitabile accettazione del reale, il disastro ha colpito questa terra e ora non rimane che affrontarlo prendendo coscienza anche delle conseguenze future.

«Mary: We’ve lost our peace of mind, that was our big loss through this whole thing, we have no peace of mind. We saw what has been done to the

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98 In molte interviste che ho condotto sul campo ho potuto notare le differenze tra chi aveva dimestichezza con il registratore e chi, invece, si approcciava a questo strumento per la prima volta. La situazione confidenziale che spesso si creava con l’apparecchio, da un lato permetteva dei dialoghi più fluidi, dall’altro creava nelle persone una certa aspettativa riguardo alle domande che gli avrei posto. Per questo motivo l’atteggiamento, da parte di alcuni, sembrava pre-impostato all’intervista classica, tuttavia l’assenza di una videocamera e l’utilizzo di uno strumento poco invasivo hanno favorito una conversazione meno formale anche con le poche persone con cui non avevo stabilito un grado di intimità elevato.
least among us… if they would do it to the least among us, they would do it to
all of us.99 Sentire di aver perso lo stato di pace interiore significa vivere in
una situazione di squilibrio psicologico che irrompe nella quotidianità, la
trasformazione delle abitudini costituisce un processo inarrestabile ma
necessario per dare un senso alle incertezze ed inserirsi diversamente nello
spazio dove ci si sente più guardiani che proprietari.

Mary: Today we can’t even… walk our beaches… and find fun things. BP is out
there picking up everything before we could get to it, so if there is a dead dolphin or a
dead turtle… a dead fish, we never know. It’s cleaned up. Likewise, we don’t find any
drift wood or sea shells, or anything fun you’d like to find on the beach, because it’s
all cleaned away before we even get there, so now we can’t beach comb, we question
the health of eating the seafood that’s out there. And since we’re in the tourism
industry, we even are afraid to talk about it, because we need our tourists to come
here, so we’re in a catch-22 if we say what we’re think and feel we lose our business100.

Anche se Grand Isle per molte persone oggi non rappresenta più un luogo
felice dove poter realizzare i propri sogni o poter perseguire il proprio obiettivo
di poter condurre una vita lontana dallo stress, il legame che si è instaurato con
essa è divenuto imprescindibile e indissolubile nonostante le barriere, prima
fisiche e poi psicologiche, create dall’arrivo del petrolio e delle persone esterne,
entrambe segno di una contaminazione profonda e totale dell’isola e dei suoi

99 Dall’intervista con Mary del 29 novembre 2012.
100 Dall’intervista con Mary del 29 novembre 2012.
abitanti. Questa invasione ha radicalmente trasformato le loro vite, per la popolazione il concetto stesso di sicurezza è mutato: l’arrivo di persone esterne (sia giornalisti che dipendenti della BP assunti per pulire le spiagge) è stato percepito come una violazione della privacy in casa propria, una casa che non può essere intesa semplicemente come la propria abitazione ma come un concetto che si estende all’isola stessa, in quanto essa rappresenta la home principale. Chiudere le porte della propria casa a chiave racconta di questo fondamentale cambiamento, del non sentirsi più sicuri e della mancanza di fiducia da parte del mondo esterno che ora potrebbe ancora avere gli occhi puntati su Grand Isle. La difficoltà maggiore per le persone che hanno vissuto il disastro in prima persona è dover affrontare una separazione involontaria indotta con il proprio territorio inteso come un’estensione del Sé (Arace in Giani Gallino, 2007). Il sentimento di nostalgia che corre lungo i racconti degli isolani fa emergere un allontanamento e uno spaesamento da un luogo che oggi non esiste più ma che non si dissipa nelle memorie del loro passato perché si assume una ri-significazione della propria home. Riguardo a questo argomento si è sviluppato un filone dell’antropologia che si dedica allo studio del paesaggio definendo i luoghi come dei microcosmi costruiti culturalmente, in cui la realtà fisica, oggettiva è strettamente connessa alla realtà di sentimento – intesa come l’essere inseriti in un ambiente con tutto il proprio corpo, infatti «gli effetti dei mutamenti territoriali non si avvertono solo sul piano ecologico e sociale ma anche sul piano delle rappresentazioni» (Lai, 2001: 36). In accordo

**Sabrina:** [...] People in Louisiana are just very resilient to begin with... they... they’ve had disasters and they understand how to handle them and... you know, they’ve got the right mind set to deal with that.

**Sabrina:** And we’ve dealt with that, and now we’re moving on. And we’ve had a hurricane since then. You know, we’ve had a storm! We’ve all had to leave and come back, so the BP thing is kinda rolling down the road. We haven’t forgotten and we’re not gonna forget, and we won’t let them forget.\footnote{Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.}

Capire i luoghi è capire gli uomini che li popolano, concentrare la propria attenzione solo su uno di questi due aspetti significa non attraversare la superficie visibile delle cose per arrivare alla loro sostanza. La forza della natura che frequentemente si riversa nell’isola concorre alla formazione del temperamento Cajun,
Sabrina: When BP hit, it was a little different. When the BP spill happened, it was a little different situation. A natural disaster is one thing, but a man-made disaster is a little different. I think... we were all kinda... it... I think the spill happened in April, and... it took it about... three weeks... to oil before it got to Grand Isle\textsuperscript{102}.

William: No, it’s pretty fresh for us. We’ve probably forgotten more hurricanes than we’ve forgot the oil spill. We’re... so used to getting hit by hurricanes, you know\textsuperscript{103}.

Il processo di territorializzazione a Grand Isle si è costruito sulla cultura degli uragani, in quanto la società si è formata e modificata nello spazio e con il territorio: la complessità delle loro esistenze inserite in un ambiente naturale si esplica attraverso il controllo simbolico, materiale e sistemico del luogo. «Elaborata per agire in un ambiente, la struttura territoriale diventa momento di espressione e di identificazione complessiva della società»(Faggi, 1991: 200). Nell’isola la denominazione e la modificazione sono legate agli uragani e al petrolio, l’addomesticazione e l’atto del nominare definiscono le cose conferendogli una forma entro la quale posso agire ed essere agito. «L’identità locale ha un forte radicamento nel territorio, e – nello stesso tempo – implica un potere sul territorio» (Lai, 2001: 40). Se per gli uragani esiste già un processo di territorializzazione, per la fuoriuscita di petrolio si è dovuti ricorrere a schemi cognitivi conosciuti in cui poter inserire questo disastro, tuttavia si è avviato

\textsuperscript{102} Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
\textsuperscript{103} Dall’intervista con William del 9 novembre 2012.
un percorso di *ri-significazione* del territorio che ancora oggi è in corso. Le calamità naturali vanno a scontrarsi in un ambiente con un livello di vulnerabilità variabile presente nella natura e nella società: l’individuo costruisce il territorio per controllare la natura, tuttavia grazie al processo di semplificazione la catastrofe si riflette su di esso attraverso il territorio stesso, in quanto la complessità originaria è stata ridotta. Ciò che aumenta o diminuisce gli effetti di un disastro viene determinato dalla mia percezione del rischio, la quale si attua attraverso l’espressione della vulnerabilità – intesa come un processo dove comportamenti previsti e comportamenti attuati l’aumentano o la diminuiscono. Essa non riguarda solo gli elementi fisici, quanto piuttosto le percezioni e le conoscenze degli individui, per questo motivo si può dire sia un insieme di relazioni e processi incorporati in cui si dimostra il mutuo rapporto tra cultura e ambiente (Bankoff, Frerks, & Hilhorst, 2004). In questo senso, allora, possiamo dire che il disastro si configura come il risultato della vulnerabilità sociale sommata all’intensità dell’impatto. La percezione del rischio rappresenta il profilo di un paesaggio disegnato dalla vulnerabilità: società e elementi distruttivi si costituiscono mutualmente, sono incorporati in sistemi sociali e naturali come processi che si estendono nel tempo.
Ann: It used to be such a positive, happy place... and people are trying, they want to have that back, that’s the reason they don’t want to believe that they can get sick, that they don’t want to believe their children are sick, because they’re still trying to hold on to whatever little bit of happiness they can still have, but... it’s just really disappointing and sad to see how much everything has changed.¹

Nella mia ricerca ho cercato di delineare un quadro complessivo, prima in maniera generale e poi approfondita, su Grand Isle, con l’obiettivo di porre a confronto due disastri che l’hanno coinvolta e ne hanno modificato profondamente la struttura fisica e simbolica, innescando una ri-significazione delle conoscenze sul territorio. Sono partita dalla descrizione di un profilo storico per capire come gli abitanti hanno acquisito una conoscenza del luogo, attraverso la quale hanno modificato il territorio permeato di simboli e significati culturalmente costruiti e condivisi dalla comunità.

¹ Dall’intervista con Ann del 29 ottobre 2012.
Sin dall’arrivo dei primi esploratori c’è stato un continuo alternarsi tra periodi di massima fioritura a periodi di grande depressione, dovuto a diversi fattori, tra cui la struttura fisica del territorio. L’abitare nell’isola li ha resi consapevoli dell’imprevedibilità della natura, della forza che hanno i venti e del loro potenziale distruttivo, per questo nel corso degli anni hanno adottato delle strategie adattative per far fronte ai rischi che ogni anno arrivano dal mare. La sua conformazione geografica di isola barriera la rende protagonista nell’affrontare l’urto degli uragani. Essa si deve scontrare con i venti che risalgono dal sud, tuttavia non ha mai manifestato titubanze fino all’arrivo di Katrina, quando la paura si è resa visibile per la prima volta. È stato in quel momento che gli abitanti del sud Louisiana si sono resi conto dei limiti della tecnologia, degli errori che possono commettere gli esperti. Questo ha generato una crisi delle certezze rispetto al potenziale distruttivo degli uragani e alla legittimazione verso chi detiene il potere nella gestione dei disastri. Terra ricca e pericolosa. Gli stessi motivi che spingono molte persone a insediarsi in questo piccolo lembo ai margini della Louisiana, portano molte altre ad abbandonarla. Decidere di convivere con le forti tempeste rappresenta il prezzo da pagare per poter beneficiare della ricchezza del Golfo, queste acque pacate e tranquille nascondono fortune ambite dagli amanti del progresso. La scoperta del petrolio ha rappresentato per molti un’alternativa alla pesca, più si è disposti ad affrontare il rischio delle esplorazioni e più si viene ripagati economicamente. L’ecosistema e la comunità dell’isola si sono adattati alla presenza delle
piattaforme crescendo in un rapporto di mutuo scambio. Sembrava che quelle strutture rappresentassero l’unica certezza in un luogo che sembra non conoscere la longevità del futuro. Il lento mutare dei suoi confini è stato drasticamente accelerato dall’industrializzazione portata a riva dai Paesi del Nord e dalle deviazione dei fiumi. Il verificarsi di Katrina e del disastro petrolifero hanno posto loro di fronte alla consapevolezza che l’unico elemento fisso presente nelle loro esistenze è costituito dall’acqua, la vita a Grand Isle ruota principalmente attorno a questo bene prezioso, il quale non li ha mai traditi, ha sempre provveduto al loro sostentamento nonostante le situazioni avverse si presentassero periodicamente.

Con l’arrivo della marea nera la sicurezza data dal mare ha iniziato a vacillare, cadendo nell’incertezza profonda del presente e del futuro, ciò che prima rappresentava una risorsa lavorativa e un elemento cardine della propria cultura ora costituisce una forma di indefinibile paura e timore. Le zone limitate alla pesca sono entrate a far parte della mappa dell’isola. In seguito al disastro si sono delineati dei confini fisici dai quali hanno preso forma anche quelli mentali, gli abitanti di Grand Isle stanno ridisegnando i luoghi che abitano attraverso nuovi significati che hanno dovuto apprendere per far fronte alla contaminazione apparentemente invisibile. Oggi quando Betsy cammina sulla spiaggia non vede solo i sand dollar frantumati dai truck dei dipendenti di ES&H, a fianco trova anche tar ball e, non è raro, vedere degli animali morti con qualche malformazione – come ad esempio pesci ciechi, o
meduse con tentacoli più corti rispetto al normale. Capita anche che si trovino dei _lucky bean_ e questo ridona la speranza e la fiducia che un nuovo periodo fiorente per l’isola possa ritornare, l’essere temprati dalla forza degli uragani e la loro attitudine alla _joie de vivre_ permette loro non soccombere all’indeterminatezza data dallo sconvolgimento ambientale causato dal petrolio. «Sabrina: Yeah. Yeah! Yeah. ‘Cos you won’t get anywhere if you just sit and cry about it. You, you have to get in and do what it takes to… to move forward… which is what… I think most of us have done».

Grazie a questa esperienza di campo ho potuto arricchire i miei studi teorici riguardo all’antropologia, soprattutto rispetto a quella branca che si occupa dei disastri. L’etnografia ha rappresentato una componente essenziale per la costruzione dell’elaborato finale e per superare quelle soglie che s’interponevano tra le mie conoscenze e la realtà della vita a Grand Isle, questo ha contribuito a darmi una nuova visione della disciplina, più completa. Cercare di capire i disastri dal punto di vista antropologico significa apprendere le dinamiche di questo processo integrando diversi saperi attraverso un approccio multifattoriale che prenda in considerazione più prospettive. Il recente sconfinamento dal piano accademico a quello applicativo ha aperto una nuova strada all’antropologia divenuta ormai uno strumento essenziale, seppur

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2 Gli abitanti di Grand Isle usano chiamare i semi della pianta *Entada gigas* (una specie di liana famosa per la grandezza dei baccelli, i quali possono raggiungere i 12cm) _lucky beans_ perché vengono trasportati dalla corrente e dagli uragani fino alle rive dell’isola, rappresentano un segno di speranza lasciato dopo la tempesta.

3 Dall’intervista con Sabrina del 26 novembre 2012.
non sufficiente, per dare un senso alle varie fasi del disastro che una comunità si ritrova ad affrontare. L’importanza di questi studi trova compimento nella pratica, a partire dal lavoro sul campo fino a possibili contributi nelle situazioni di emergenza e recupero, oltre alla produzione di nuove conoscenze. Il contributo dell’antropologia dei disastri è nell’interpretazione, essa coglie le variabili culturali che sfuggono ad altre discipline, le quali pongono in primo piano elementi differenti. Le variabili culturali sono ciò che la gente crede e prova e che, di seguito, ha imparato sul piano delle proprie esperienze. Tuttavia la difficoltà maggiore è rappresentata dal tentativo di non avvicinarsi ad un punto di vista deterministico riguardo alle persone e ai luoghi, quanto, piuttosto, cercare di mantenere uno sguardo aperto e sensibile verso il mondo esterno che ci circonda. Le numerose pubblicazioni e ricerche effettuate rispetto a Katrina e alla fuoriuscita di petrolio mi hanno permesso di entrare nel cuore dei disastri, ma è stato attraverso la permanenza sull’isola che mi sono addentrata in profondità nella vita della comunità. Il lavoro non si esaurisce con la stesura di questa tesi, rappresenta piuttosto un approccio alla tematica affrontata, in quanto costituisce la mia interpretazione rispetto all’esperienza di due fenomeni estremi divenuti punti essenziali nelle loro memorie ma, soprattutto, segni visibili nella loro quotidianità.
Sai cos’è bello, qui?
Guarda: noi camminiamo, lasciamo tutte quelle orme sulla sabbia, e loro restano lì, precise, ordinate.
Ma domani, ti alzerai, guarderai questa grande spiaggia e non ci sarà più nulla, un’orma, un segno qualsiasi, niente.
Il mare cancella, di notte.
La marea nasconde.
È come se non fosse mai passato nessuno.
È come se noi non fossimo mai esistiti.
Se c’è un luogo, al mondo, in cui puoi non pensare a nulla, quel luogo è qui.
Non è più terra, non è ancora mare.
Non è più vita falsa, non è vita vera.
È tempo.
Tempo che passa.
E basta.

Oceano mare, A. Baricco
Ringrazio tutte le persone incontrate a Grand Isle che hanno condiviso il loro tempo e le loro storie con me. Ringrazio la mia famiglia che è sempre presente. Ringrazio i docenti che mi hanno fornito gli strumenti per osservare il mondo dalla giusta prospettiva. Infine, ringrazio gli amici e tutte quelle persone che, inconsapevolmente, mi hanno portato a seguire questo importante percorso.
ALLEGATI
Abbiamo parlato del problema della BP, lei e suo marito mi chiedono sempre come procede la mia ricerca e cercano in tutti i modi di farmi avere delle interviste con le persone (quelle che dicono loro però). Devo ancora capire se la sua è una forma di affetto o una sorta di precauzione, dal momento che mi hanno avvisato di non parlare con tutti, di non intervistare chiunque e di stare attenta.

Lei dice che il Corexit sia il più grande problema - come tutti gli altri abitanti - che è stato spruzzato pur sapendo gli effetti negativi che ne avrebbero comportato per la salute delle persone e delle specie marine (vedi Alaska, 1989). "Il punto è che è più facile vedere gli effetti del disastro a livello ecologico, ma a livello economico è molto difficile", sono conseguenze che dureranno anni, nessuno sa quantificare il tempo.

Certo i biologi possono fare una stima dei problemi dei pesci, ma chi può quantificare la perdita affettiva ed economica verso il proprio lavoro, la propria terra e, soprattutto, la propria salute?

Questo è quello che lei cerca di dirmi con il suo accento del sud, i suoi occhi dall'espressione triste che hanno visto centinaia di uragani e ora anche il petrolio, ma con una forza imprenditoriale che non la scoraggia dal continuare a vivere e a proseguire la propria attività nell'isola.

Sue è la classica donna americana: ultra sessantenne, che si è costruita la propria corporation nel corso della sua vita attraverso piccoli passi e, sembrerebbe, in maniera...
del tutto onesta (cosa non così sorprendentemente frequente). E' oversize nonostante non si abbuffi di cibo, non fa il minimo sforzo fisico perché l'America gli dona tutti i comfort possibili e il suo mondo è fatto per essere a misura di macchina.

Passiamo abbastanza tempo insieme, che si divide tra auto e cibo, e, davvero, l'idea che abbiamo sul cibo americano è completamente da sfatare qui nel sud della Louisiana, se non fosse per il problema dell'inquinamento, si vivrebbe in maniera migliore rispetto al resto degli USA, perché effettivamente questo Stato è diverso, in molte cose.

La conversazione che abbiamo avuto poco fa è stata molto interessante, forse è la prima conversazione fluente che riesce ad avere con lei. Il mio carattere è sempre stato un po' taciturno, ma il problema della lingua un po' accentuata, ma inizio a buttarmi, anche se faccio degli errori a loro non sembra importare poi così tanto, l'americano si basa molto su termini intuitivi, non ha la stessa formalità del british english perché l'importante è capirsì senza star lì a perdere troppo tempo.

Quando ho iniziato a chiederle se il Corexit era stato riversato dalla BP ha cambiato discorso, ha iniziato a spiegarmi gli effetti di questa sostanza. E' quello che fa la maggior parte della gente, mi racconta dati, dati tecnici, non passa subito alle sue emozioni e ai suoi stati d'animo, è per questo che preferisco aspettare per il registratore, perché le persone si devono sentire a proprio agio e non indagate nel loro profondo stato d'animo.

Le ho richiesto se è responsabilità della BP il Corexit e mi ha risposto di sì, mi ha detto che molto probabilmente la BP era d'accordo con Obama, hanno pagato un sacco di soldi e si pensa abbia finanziato anche una parte della sua campagna elettorale. "Il Corexit si sa che provoca problemi respiratori, ma non ci sono prove che quello che è successo agli abitanti sia dovuto ai dispersanti, qui molte persone soffrono di allergie date dai pollini dei fiori e dagli alberi, quindi come fai a dire se è colpa del Corexit o se è la tua allergia?" Di chi è a responsabilità? Come si fa a determinare di chi sia la colpa? "Un sacco di persone qui lavorano per le compagnie petrolifere, non pagano benissimo, ma è meglio di altri posti di lavoro, però sai, è molto pericoloso e dovrebbero pagare di più".

Siamo passate a parlare di scuola, di lavoro, di immigrazione, di piantagioni. Molti qui vivono con piantagioni di canna da zucchero, gran parte del cotone è stato sostituito dalla soia, più redditizia. Molte coltivazioni sono di riso, il terreno qui è molto fertile, c'è abbondanza di acqua e controllando le esondazioni cresce molto bene. Tuttavia è raro che una famiglia si arricchisca coltivando, è un'idea sbagliata quella che ha la gente sulla ricchezza dei farmer.

La cosa strana è che mentre parlavamo di questo ci trovavamo in un ristorante messicano e così mi è sorta spontanea la domanda sul problema dell'immigrazione in America. Apprezza i messicani, oltre al loro ottimo cibo mi racconta che sono dei bravi lavoratori. Le chiede se sono gli unici a emigrare in questa zona e mi racconta di questa storia sui vietnamiti, che la Chiesa cattolica ha pagato dei soldi per sistemargli le barche e per consentirgli di stanziarsi qui, le loro conoscenze ittiche gli hanno
facilitato l'inserimento in Louisiana, in questo modo sono qui da diverse generazioni, vanno a scuola, conoscono l'inglese, e aprono le loro attività, per la maggior parte ristoranti vietnamiti.

Solitamente è la gente del Sud America che non è vista molto bene, anche se l'intolleranza maggiore è verso gli afroamericani, sono loro quelli che gli creano più problemi "non vorrei sembrare razzista, però sai sono il 90% e per forza quando succede qualcosa... sai di chi è la colpa...".

Le parlo della situazione lavorativa in Italia e del problema dei disoccupati, soprattutto per noi giovani non ci sono prospettive per il futuro. Lei con tutta sincerità mi dice che ama davvero l'Italia però l'unico posto in cui vorrebbe vivere è l'America, "giro spesso per il mondo e ho visto molti Paesi, ma quando torno qui tiro sempre un sospiro di sollievo perché qui è più facile stare bene" (non è la prima persona che me lo dice). "Noi abbiamo lo stesso problema della disoccupazione e ogni governatore ci promette posti di lavoro, ma sappiamo benissimo che non ci saranno. Rebeccha ad esempio ha tre lauree: scienze politiche, lingua inglese e poi ha dovuto fare il master in management altrimenti non avrebbe mai trovato lavoro con quei titoli di studio. Devi anche saper scegliere qualcosa che poi ti garantisca un lavoro sicuro, e lei adesso lavora per me. La compagnia G. S. è mia e l'ho costruita io pian piano."

Un delle cose che mi ha lasciata perplessa è che mentre le spiegavo che in Italia i contratti di lavoro sono precari lei mi diceva che qui non ci sono contratti, i contratti si fanno solo per grandi progetti tra corporation e azienda, nel suo caso c'è stato un contratto tra la sua compagnia e la Energy XXI che lavora anche'essa nell'isola. Ma tra capo e dipendente c'è un'intesa verbale, perché è più comodo per entrambe le parti "se a me non va bene posso licenziarlo quando voglio, e se lui non si trova bene può andarsene liberamente", non è come da noi che ci sono i sindacati che tutelano i diritti dei lavoratori, da come me l'ha descritto sembra un sistema che si autoregola, in realtà credo che finché l'azienda è di famiglia sei sicuro, ma dal momento che inizi a lavorare per altre persone devi comportarti secondo determinate regole per mantenere il tuo posto. La pensione si raggiunge in teoria a 65 anni, ma non ne è certa, dipende dalla tua età, lei ad esempio avrebbe dovuto andare in pensione a 62 anni, ma come la maggior parte della gente ha deciso di restare per avere una pensione più alta (ci credo che la disoccupazione aumenta).

Ho capito che lei, come molte altre persone benestanti con cui ho parlato non vorrebbe un sistema sanitario pubblico, e nemmeno la scuola. Essere cresciuti in un sistema di privatizzazione fa vedere il sistema statale come qualcosa che non funziona, è meglio pagare per avere la sicurezza di essere ben istruiti e avere un ottimo medico che si occupi di te. Però d'altro lato ci si lamenta perché a Grand Isle non c'è nessun dottore, nessun infermiere e se stai male devi farti almeno 3/4 d'ora di auto per raggiungere il centro sanitario più vicino.

Ogni tanto ritorna sul fatto che conosce molte persone che potrei intervistare e mi dice che i signori che poi mi daranno un passaggio per Grand Isle hanno un figlio che è stato in Afghanistan, molti si arruolano per avere una buona istruzione senza dover
pagare rette sproposte, lei apprezza il fatto che altre persone mettano a rischio la vita per il loro bene, è come se gli facessero da scudo con il loro corpo. "Lui adesso vive in Alaska, potrebbe essere una buona persona per te da intervistare", il perché proprio non lo so!

Sue è una persona che ama la bella vita, non quella fatta di sfarzi ed eccessi, quella che ti permette di stare bene senza avere preoccupazioni, enjoy the life.

La nostra conversazione è durata un'oretta. E' piacevole parlare con lei, ti racconta tutto e non si fa problemi a dirti ciò che pensa, il confronto forse è una cosa che in Italia manca molto. All'inizio temevo di esprimere le mie opinioni - soprattutto politiche - ma fortunatamente qui ognuno rende nota la sua posizione, anche se sei democratico in uno stato repubblicano nessuno ti esclude. Forse non sei visto molto bene, ma sei un abitante del sud Louisiana! Io preferisco mantenere la neutralità, soprattutto con questa famiglia.

Mentre assaporiamo questo meraviglioso cibo messicano mi accorgo che in fondo a loro piace lodare l'America, l'Italia è bella da visitare, è un paese ricco di storia e la gente la trovano fantastica, però "la mia fortuna è quella di essere nata in America, e sono felice per questo perché la mia vita è più semplice".

Non si può non parlare di Katrina, è stata una "big mess", gli alberi mezzi morti che abbiamo visto lungo la strada stanno ricerendo piano piano dopo 7 anni, prima era molto più verde. Anche a Grand Isle la vegetazione cambia, il paesaggio muta, Katrina ha persino donato una nuova spiaggia prima di attraversare il ponte che collega l'isola all'ultimo lembo di marsh. Le chiedo se lo Stato paga per i danni subiti dall'uragano e mi dice che per la gente che ha un "Checking account" vengono dati 1000 dollari da parte dello Stato federale, per poter vivere durante l'evacuazione in quanto anche le banche sono bloccate.

Mi racconta che nessuno era preparato ad un evento del genere e che molta gente, abituata a non evacuare, anche quella volta decise incoscientemente di non farlo, ma nemmeno il sindaco aveva un piano. I problemi più grandi sono sorti i giorni dopo l'uragano, la gente rimasta in città ha iniziato ad impazzire: gente rifugiatisi nel Superdome che ha iniziato a comportarsi come a degli animali "non lo so perché, voglio dire...sei lì come tutti gli altri per salvarti, sei vivo, devi solo cercare di sopravvivere perché devi commettere violenze?". "E' come se ci fosse stata una guerra?". "Oh sì, sì se lo è stato! Gente armata che sparava, rubava...nei casi di emergenza succede, ma cosa te ne fai di un televisore LCD enorme sopra le tue spalle?". Follia. E la polizia era corrotta, anche la polizia sparava, a caso. Era un problema già esistente la corruzione nei confronti della polizia, con Katrina è stato un problema che è diventato visibile a tutti. Qui è come se l'acqua facesse emergere i sotterfugi, le cose fatte dietro l'angolo dove nessuno sembra non ti possa notare. Ma galleggiano, i problemi galleggiano sulla superficie negli stati d'emergenza. L'acqua esausta rigetta la sporcizia e la riporta a riva, te la restituisce come una sorta di contro-dono melmoso che ha perso tutto il suo valore, sempre se un vero valore ce l'aveva.
Io ed Elizabeth accompagniamo Pam a votare nel Community Center di Grand Isle, un grande edificio con all'esterno diversi giochi per i bambini. Appena scese dall'auto Elizabeth mi dice che qui lavorano quelli della BP e che magari loro sono disposti a parlarmi, così mentre Pam si reca ad eseguire le carte per la registrazione noi andiamo nella porta a fianco dove in alto si legge "Deepwater horizon claim center - economic and property damage claims", sulla porta sono attaccati due cartelli: in uno c'è scritto che i telefoni non sono consentiti e nell'altro che le borse verranno ispezionate, gli oggetti vietati sono pistole, coltelli, ecc... Entriamo assieme ed Elizabeth spiega al primo impiegato (abbastanza anziano) chi sono e perché sono lì al che lui subito dice "meglio se parlate con lui", spieghiamo al suo collega di nuovo e lui ci fa uscire e ci dice "torno subito, intanto leggete questo foglio, arrivo in pochi minuti". La cosa ci ha lasciate un po' perplesse, leggiamo il foglio il quale si riferisce al trattamento dei dati, al fatto che i media possono entrare nell'ufficio, che le loro risposte sono limitate verso i media e che per qualsiasi tipo di informazione in più bisogna contattare Mr. Juneau. C'era un ufficiale fuori della porta, un signore di colore che ha passato tutto il tempo al telefono a ridere e parlare animatamente, la sua divisa blu credo fosse stato della guardia costiera. Ad essere sincera un po' mi ero spaventata e non sapevo bene cosa fare, il signore torna dopo qualche minuto, mi dava l'impressione di essere indaffarato, così gli dico che volevo fargli qualche domanda a livello molto generale ma che sarei ripassata in un secondo momento, tuttavia lui insiste nel dire che adesso è disponibile così accetto pur non avendo ben chiaro che cosa facesse e che domande potergli fare.
Elizabeth se ne va e io chiedo ad Ivan se gli va bene il fatto che accendi il registratore, lui sorride e mi dice che va bene. Lì per lì non avevo compreso quel sorriso ma quando mi ha detto che non potevamo parlare all'interno dell'ufficio per una questione di "privacy" facendomi accomodare in un angolo gentilmente mi spiega che se voglio posso accendere il registratore però la maggior parte delle sue risposte saranno "Non sono autorizzato a darle informazioni, se vuole avere chiarimenti chiami Mr. Juneau", allora gli dico che non importa che lo tengo spento, lui acconsente per avere un colloquio più informale (anche se non lo è stato più di tanto) e me lo consiglia per non rischiare di avere una registrazione dove si sente spesso dire "non sono tenuto a rispondere".

Iniziamo la conversazione a microfono spento e mi racconta che è un ufficio della Deepwater e lui è assunto in qualità di manager per aiutare la gente. Le persone di Grand Isle afflitte da questo problema decidono se usufruire del reclamo per avere soldi o se continuare a lavorare per loro. Spesso mentre parlava mi ripeteva che tutto quello che mi diceva lo potevo trovare scritto in un opuscolo che mi avrebbe dato alla fine della conversazione.

Per lui non è un lavoro difficile, la parte più complicata sta nel decidere chi ha bisogno dei soldi e chi no. Molte persone sono state colpite da questo problema e molti altri cercano di reclamare soldi pur non avendone direttamente subito danni. Mi riporta l'esempio di un tassista che andò lì a chiedere soldi per i danni subiti dalla BP spiegando che lui prima del disastro guadagnava tanta e adesso molto meno perché nessuno vuole più venire nella spiaggia sporca di petrolio e quindi lui non trasporta più persone. "il suo ragionamento non fa una piega, come faccio io a dirgli no tu non sei stato colpito economicamente? Capisci che non è facile".

Gli chiedo da quanto tempo è aperto questo ufficio e mi risponde che c'è da poco dopo che è successo il disastro, lui però è arrivato qui 5mesi fa, prima faceva tutt'altro: lavorava sempre nell'ambito petrolifero ma doveva investire i soldi per decidere dove scavare per trovare petrolio, prendevano dei campioni dalla terra, i paleontologi li esaminano e decidono se è il caso di scavare o meno, poi ci sono anche molte altre figure professionali. Lui era stressato perché era un lavoro stancante e così ha presentato la sua candidatura per lavorare qui, ma spera di non doverci rimanere troppo a lungo perché si annoia, vengono poche persone al giorno e soprattutto non è un gioco d'investimento, lo fa da dipendente e per lui non è emozionante.

La maggior parte della gente è convinta di venire qui, parlare con me e alla fine della conversazione avere l'assegno che gli spetta, in realtà ci sono tutta una serie di procedure da seguire, forse all'inizio era così...non lo so perché non c'ero. E' capitato di vedere gente che arrivava qui piena di petrolio fino alle ginocchia che diceva "Ho bisogno dei soldi subito perché la mia barca dev'essere pulita, è sporca di petrolio e non riesco a navigare".

Gli chiedo quanto è durato lo stato di emergenza "Questa è una buona domanda" mi dice, esattamente non lo sa ma mi risponde con sicurezza che ci sono stati due periodi e
che quest’ufficio parla di tenerlo aperto fino al 2014, ma non è nulla di certo. Lui spera di potersene andare via prima!

Gli chiedo anche se la gente è arrabbiata o se apprezza questa cosa, mi dice che sicuramente all’inizio venivano qui per questionare però adesso vengono qui spesso per ricevere più soldi, dicendo che quelli che hanno non gli bastano. Oltretutto la BP dovrebbe pagare in tutto 20billion dollars ma ad oggi se ne sono visti "solo" 7miliardi circa, il 5 novembre il caso verrà ridiscusso in tribunale e si avranno ulteriori aggiornamenti. Effettivamente mi dice che è un buon periodo essere qui per me ora, ci sono sviluppi in corso e nell'isola non c'è la confusione dei turisti.

Per farmi capire quanto piccola è l'isola mi racconta questo aneddoto. Lui doveva iniziare a lavorare il lunedì mattina, arrivò qui il giorno precedente e andò con il suo collega al Starfish Restaurant per cena, mentre parlano seduti al loro tavolo si rendono conto che proprio a fianco a loro c'era Arnold Schwarzenegger, quando me l'ha detto avevo un’espressione sorpresa e lui mi ha detto "Sì è la stessa cosa che ho pensato anch'io quando l'ho visto qui!", era lì per girare una scena del film ad ogni modo nessuno gli prestava attenzione e lui era stupito da questo perché tutti parlavano tra di loro e delle loro cose, è assurdo perché in qualsiasi altro posto ci sarebbe stata la fila per andare a salutarlo!

Per avere un’idea più specifica di quello che fanno mi consiglia di andare a vedere anche le altre 18 sedi presenti lungo la costa, giusto per rendermi conto che tutti fanno la stessa cosa. "Lo so che la gente che viene ad intervistare cerca storie particolari, gli piace ascoltare le differenze e non la generalità però è davvero utile credimi.

Il suo tono era molto impostato e professionale, si vedeva che le risposte erano controllate, sicuramente veritiere però non lasciavano traspellare nulla di più, non di quanto uno possa trovare scritto negli opuscoli oppure in internet, solo nel momento in cui abbiamo iniziato a parlare della sua vita si è un po’ ammorbidito e la sua voce ha cambiato espressione facendo addirittura qualche battuta. Ha fatto i più svariati lavori per vivere. E’ stato in Italia, le sue origini sono per metà russe la sua famiglia trovò rifugio politico durante la guerra fredda in Italia e si ricorda di questo frangente della sua vita: quand’era arrivato in America non ricordava più l’inglese e doveva andare al supermercato a comprare il formaggio ma non gli veniva la parola così l’unica cosa che gli è venuto in mente di dire è stato "ricotta", ma nessuno lo capiva perché qui la ricotta non c’è!

Dice che è divertente il fatto che io studi antropologia perché s’iscrisse all’università al corso di geografia ma era dentro lo stesso dipartimento di antropologia e ne ha seguito qualche corso, poi ha cambiato indirizzo con il master. Pensava gli facessi delle domande più specifiche, i giornalisti vanno lì parlare con loro per cercare di avere delle cifre personali sulle persone che vanno lì e sulla BP, cose che non sono tenuti a riferire per un disco della privacy, stesso motivo per cui non sono potuta entrare nell’ufficio nonostante non ci fossero state telecamere. Ad ogni modo è stato molto disponibile a parlare e a rispondere alle mie domande, si è addirittura offerto di riportarmi a casa e mi ha lasciato il suo biglietto da visita informale con
segnato il suo numero di telefono personale, così se leggo e non trovo le risposte che cerco lo posso sempre chiamare per avere ulteriori chiarimenti.
Gli ho chiesto inoltre se sa dove posso trovare un report delle malattie in seguito al disastro, mi dice che non sa dove potrei guardare però mi lascia un opuscolo con delle categorie a cui corrispondono diversi gradi di malattie, sempre per un discorso di rimborso medico e inoltre mi dice che la BP per 20 anni paga un check-up all'anno alle persone direttamente afflitte dal disastro, però la gente deve andare dai loro medici.
E' stata una conversazione molto interessante dal punto di vista del "cosa posso dirti e cosa non posso dirti", questi segreti che non fanno altro che incuriosire le persone ma che non ti permettono di indagare troppo a fondo per non rischiare di entrare in questioni che non ti competono.
È interessante notare che durante l'intervista utilizza la parola Deepwater Horizon e mai BP.
Sono andata a restituire i libri a Michelle. E’ una donna così tenera e apprensiva ed è stata una delle prime persone ad aiutarmi a trovare alloggio e appoggio prima ancora di sbarcare nell’isola.

Mi chiede come procede la ricerca, se ho raggiunto il mio scopo… è sempre una domanda difficile a cui non riesco a dare una risposta precisa.

Come ho fatto anche con altre persone le chiedo se ha scattato delle foto durante il disastro e mentre le cerca inizia a raccontarmi spontaneamente della situazione durante l’oil spill.

E’ come se ci fosse stata un’invasione, come se si fosse rotto qualcosa, la quiete e la pace che c’era qui. Prima potevo uscire di casa e lasciare la porta aperta, ma quando ha iniziato ad arrivare gente, brutta gente… è stato orribile. Media e giornalisti ovunque che cercavano di intervistarti, e persone assunte dalla compagnia per ripulire la spiaggia che non si sapevano da dove venissero perché nessuno ha fatto dei controlli preventivi prima di assumerti. Erano per la maggior parte gente uscita di galera che si candidò per lavorare per prendere qualche soldo, erano pagati bene. E la compagnia aveva bisogno di assumere in fretta 200 persone altrimenti perdeva l’appalto, così ha
tirato su in fretta e furia le prime persone che ha trovato. Qui non c’erano ancora molte case da affittare, hanno preso tutte le case libere che c’erano e lì hanno collocati qui ovunque. Questa gente camminava nel tuo giardino senza permesso ed erano davvero spaventosi… che motivo hai di camminare nella mia proprietà? E’ stato brutto. Ci dicevano di chiuderci dentro casa, per i chimici, e noi lo facevamo anche per la gente, ma che vita è se rimango chiusa in casa impaurita? Posso vivere chiusa dentro?

Questo è durato per sei mesi. Sai a New Orleans trovi gente di colore simpatica, ma quelli che hanno mandato qui non lo erano. Poi c’erano militari, un sacco di militari… era come se ci fosse una guerra civile. C’è stata una vera e propria invasione.

E non abbiamo avuto nessun supporto, nemmeno da parte del governo. Siamo rimasti fermi con la nostra attività per mesi (RV rental park) non sapevamo più cosa fare, avevamo appena iniziato, ci eravamo trasferiti qui da poco ed è stato uno shock. La barriera lungo la spiaggia che non potevi attraversare. Mio marito adora pescare e non potevamo fare niente. La nostra spiaggia, la nostra casa, l’inquinamento, l’equilibrio… nessuno ce lo può restituire.

La gente qui vive in maniera semplice, ed ho iniziato a farlo anch’io perché ci sono gli uragani. Non ha senso comprarsi cose costose se poi puoi perderle, così riduci tutto all’essenziale dando valore a ciò che tieni veramente.

Ad un certo punto la gente ha bisogno di andare avanti “move on”, non si può vivere restando fermi, bisogna voltare pagina. Questi lavori che faccio sono il prodotto della BP, è cominciato come un mio sfogo perché dovevo fare qualcosa altrimenti impazzivo.

A metà conversazione ho acceso il registratore e i suoi occhi non riuscivano più a trattenere le lacrime, piangeva con gli occhi chiusi, quando li apriva fissava il vuoto. Non si vergognava delle sue emozioni e sentiva il bisogno di tirare fuori tutto quello che aveva dentro.

Mary: So, every day there was a new thing to handle and deal with. So you just figured out what you were going to do with that… storms to come ashore. The next day, they would say: “Ok, there’s a big oil… puddle of oil out there, it’s so many miles long and so many miles wide. If that storm takes that oil and washes it over the island… they’ll tell you to leave and you won’t be able to come back. So, now everything you own, you might not be able to go back to.” “Ok, what’s our plan, we’re gonna pack it up, we’re gonna do this and this, ok! We can breathe now, we’ve got a plan.” The next day would be something else, you know? Something else horrible is gonna happen. And the air quality… “Oh my God, what we’re gonna do? Ok.” And so… living in this… for that whole summer… we couldn’t leave, we own this place. It wasn’t like… we were renters, we could just sleep and do something ourselves, I mean, this was our life, we hadn’t had plan B, you know? This was our globe… there was nothing else we
wanted to do past this. So we couldn’t walk away from it, and… all of our reservations were cancelling and our people were living that we had, we had nine or so different folks that lived here full time, that was a full time income. And as the… the spill… progressed, all of their jobs were cut out, so… the guy that worked at the electrical plant had been here for four years left, we haven’t seen him since, and just down the line all the folks that lived here full time were gone, they were… they had no more jobs. They left. We had an empty campground, we had no people coming for the summer. And then for… about two months we didn’t know how we were gonna live. And we… we… we knew that we really just couldn’t leave, ‘cos this is our home.

Sara: Yeah.

M: It would be like abandoning your child. We couldn’t leave. And after a while… we would be damned if we were gonna leave, we had to stand and fight. We stayed, then we got contractors, the oil spill people. A lot of really nice folks. They maybe weren’t the smartest people in the world, they maybe weren’t the best educated, maybe they didn’t have a lot in life, but they were trying to work. They found a job, they had… finally, you came from everywhere to have a job, to work the spill, and they were told they couldn’t wear respirators… that it would look bad. And here… we know the chemicals they’re spraying are gonna be horrible on these people. We know how sick they’re gonna get from it, we know that they’re just trying to save their family farm or make a living to send home to their families…they’re good, honest people… and they’re being taken advantage of by this huge company. And our government is allowing it to happen. We’ve lost our peace of mind, that was our big loss through this whole thing, we have no peace of mind. We saw what has been done to the least among us… if they would do it to the least among us, they would do it to all of us. There were contractors here… that were renting a space with a big camper in it. BP paid 150 dollars a bed… they had no one staying in their campers. They were paying my 125 dollars a week… for that camper, to rent a spot, and billing BP for 6 or 8 beds in that camper, they were making a fortune. Every day, groups of people got on the boats, to go out [audio poco chiaro] they would go through the line, and the guy in charge to stay in our campground scanned their white vest out. The people would wear the white vest that day, they’d come back, throw it in the dumpster, the next day they’d all go through the line and they would scan another life vest. A life vest that maybe the company paid 3 dollars for they were charging BP 15 dollars a day. 15 dollars a life vest every day. Times all the hundreds of workers that were using them, so they were re-selling something, every day. It wasn’t being reused, it was thrown in the garbage. There were so many instances… the tyvek suits, finally they were allowed to wear a protective tyvek suits. We were told they probably paid 15 or so dollars a tyvek suit, and they were charging BP like 80 dollars a suit. These workers in the heat were allowed to work for 20 minutes and then they would take 40 minute breaks because of the heat. So they
would go to work... for 20 minutes they wear a suit. They take it off and throw it away... take their 40 minutes off, put a whole new suit on... go out and work there 20 minutes, take their 40 minutes off. All the hundreds of workers that were wearing tyvek suits... the cleanup companies were billing BP all these money for all these suits. It went on, and on, and on. All the waste that the contractors were making all kinds of money... and we were being told this by the people that were here. The contractors came in to settle the claims they were insurance suggesters and they all had ways to say their sister own their camper, so they were renting the camper from their sister. Basically they were being reimbursed a whole bunch of money because of the way they rented through fake corporations, and... they were all sitting in the evenings with their calculators figuring out how much money they were going to make by... saying one thing about where they were staying, and actually having another thing going on. I had three guys that were all doing it. So they were all making a fortune. And then we knew people who truly had always worked as a fisherman... maybe they didn’t read and write so well, but they had always [audio poco chiaro] their families, put their kids [audio poco chiaro] had worked so hard since they were little... and were being refused. BP wouldn’t pay them money for anything, and that was with the people that were truly... had a loss. Meanwhile, the contractors were making hazillions of dollars. When they were talking about the numbers, they have so many dollars they paid out and you’re sitting here see where all that money went, knowing that folks that really, truly... were deserving and needed... we went down there... at least three different times to the... to the claim center. And they wanted all our tax returns, and all our paper work, and all the... any documentation we had and we brought it down, and they photocopied it, and they put it into their computer system. Then we went back to check on it... and they lost our tax returns... for... three different times they lost all our paperwork. They said. So we had to go through it again. Generally, we all thought in the island that they were just... trying to make us give up, trying to... beat us down. We felt lied to, we were the little people. Anyway, when they said that... they said that all beaches are open, all the beaches are not open... the last year that we would have had with...Elmer’s Island, before the hurricane took it, was closed because of the BP thing. Today we can’t even... walk our beaches... and find fun things. BP is out there picking up everything before we could get to it, so if there is a dead dolphin or a dead turtle... a dead fish, we never know. It’s cleaned up. Likewise, we don’t find any drift wood or sea shells, or anything fun you’d like to find on the beach, because it’s all cleaned away before we even get there, so now we can’t beach comb, we question the health of eating the seafood that’s out there. And since we’re in the tourism industry, we even are afraid to talk about it, because we need our tourists to come here, so we’re in a catch-22 if we say what we’re think and feel we lose our business. Then we need to leave. We weren’t reimbursed. The people that were really hurt by this were not reimbursed. We were held captive in
our homes for a year, it smelled so bad at times, if you opened your door you could almost chew it, it was like having a mouthful of axle-grease. And their advice to us was to... “If it smells like that, stay inside.” How can you live your life staying inside? If someone else told you to stay inside your house and wouldn’t let you out... that would be like forced imprisoning. And anybody was compensated for anything like that. No, we weren’t, we were kept captive. And our government let it happen. And they’re still letting it happen.

S: So nobody have a compensation here?
M: No. We had contractors.
S: Ok.
M: So... after the first couple of months we got contractors. But... we still couldn’t move about freely, we couldn’t [audio poco chiaro] we came here for. And we didn’t have the beach, we didn’t have the fishing... we didn’t know if we were going to have the beaches and the fishing. We had the contractors. Once the contractors left, we knew we would have... our local people would support us, because South Louisiana folks support you, period. No matter what goes on down here, you see a kid having a car wash, you have a car wash, you give them some money. You see a bake sale, even if you don’t need anything you give them some money, and you buy something. You support your neighbor. If they make or sell something, you buy it. It’s just what we do, so we knew that folks would support us and come back, but we were worried of what would happen after that. And once the contractors left... the summer we had our campers, and our... our local folks came back, and then when they left after the hurricane evacuation in September, we had no one for six months. There was not a soul on this island for six months.

S: Wow.
M: That was when we were hurting, that was the result of BP. But by that time... they found a way to say it wasn’t that. So... did we get compensated? No. We have a lawsuit in progress.
S: So, this is a personal question: why you decided to live here?
M: Before this, or after this?
S: Before, why you decide to move on Grand Isle?
M: Because it was quiet, it was peaceful, my husband wanted to fish, we wanted to retire here...
S: And so you... you know, you already knew the beach, you went before?
M: Yes. We knew about the beach, we knew what was out there, we had... Elmer’s Island... we visited Elmer’s Island we knew what was on that beach. That beach was totally wild and free, and anything that washed up was always there to find, and to... it was like being 12 years old, and just... everything was a wonder and something new, and... you could see the change of seasons by what was washed up on the shore, and... the curiosities and the fun things, and... then our beach in Grand Isle was always... they always picked up the big chunks... they always
grated it and made it look nice... pick up the trash, but there was always fun things to find on the beach, But not anymore. They still are picking everything up, so there isn't anything fun out there from [audio poco chiaro]

S: So you think that your business will go better the next year?

M: We just keep working. We bought the... campground nine months before... the spill happened. But we had lived here for... six months before that and we had visited... prior to moving here, so... Anyway.
E' nato a Chicago, poi all'età di 9 anni i suoi genitori hanno deciso di trasferirsi in Grand Isle e diventare shrimper comprando un trawl. La sua situazione familiare non era felice, non era un ambiente sano e i suoi genitori non erano credenti ma lui quand'era adolescente ha sentito che qualcosa stava cambiando dentro di lui e ha deciso di entrare nella chiesa Battista ed è così che Gesù si è mostrato a lui. Ha studiato in Florida poi ha fatto il pastore in Alabama e alla fine ha deciso di tornare in Grand Isle.

Baptist Church aderisce alla Second Harvest food bank dando supporto alle famiglie bisognose con un basso reddito che non riescono ad arrivare a fine mese, inoltre cucionano il cibo portato dalla Croce Rossa nelle situazioni di emergenza, come gli uragani. Ci sono circa 400 persone che fanno richiesta di aiuto alimentare, contando che nell'isola ci sono circa 1000 persone, è quasi il 4% che è molto per una piccola comunità. È costoso vivere qui e spesso la gente se ne va. Gente vende la propria barca per il caro vita e decide di andare a cercare un altro lavoro up the bayou. Non è che sia direttamente collegato con la BP, è stata Katrina a dare il primo grosso colpo, la gente non lo sa ma ha distrutto circa 100 piattaforme che stanno ancora ricostruendo e questo ha definitivamente bloccato l'economia, alzando il prezzo del petrolio e il prezzo dell'assicurazione sulla casa è raddoppiato per Katrina, così come il costo della vita è aumentato con la crisi. Certo la BP ha aiutato perché era disposta a pagare bene gli affitti per la gente che veniva qui per
lavorare durante il disastro. Sicuramente l’isola è cambiata da quand’era piccolo c’è molta più gente esterna che decide di venire a vivere qui e molti locali se ne sono andati, ma lui continua a sentirlo come un posto sicuro. E’ cresciuto in una piccola comunità dove tutti si conoscono e puoi uscire di casa senza chiudere la porta e lo fa ancora, ed è difficile trovare un posto così in America, per questo a molta gente piace.

Lui è tornato qua dopo il disastro, ma ha risposto come punto d’appoggio per le persone che avevano bisogno di supporto morale perché la sua chiesa ha come scopo quello di dare fiducia alla gente, soprattutto nei momenti difficili e la chiesa Battista di Grand Isle è l’unica sicura perché quelle della baia sono poco raccomandabili.

Dopo il disastro è stato a trovare un membro della comunità che era ricoverato in ospedale dove il suo non era un malessere dato dai chimici ma dallo stress, molta gente si è ammalata, ha accusato sintomi per la situazione stressante: perdita del lavoro, la propria “casa” rovinata, l’isola cambiata, giornalisti che vengono qui in cerca della tua storia. La maggior parte delle malattie era data dallo stress, abituati alla tranquillità e alla quiete si sono visti all’improvviso spersi e spaesati dove non sapevano più cosa fare della loro vita, questo è il grande problema.

I problemi di alcolismo non sono legati direttamente alla BP, ci sono sempre stati “this is a drinking community with fish problem”. E’ una piccola comunità dove non c’è niente da fare ed è un po’ nell’indole dei pescatori.

Ci sono molti disagi e molte ragazze madri, bambini che stanno con i nonni perché i genitori non sanno prendersi cura di loro. Non c’è molta educazione in questo senso.

Anche lui ha rilasciato molte interviste e diverse tra loro. Pensa che la gente abbia come chiuso il capitolo e abbia iniziato a guardare avanti come si fa dopo il passaggio di un uragano, perciò non si può sempre stare fermi, bisogna andare avanti perché la vita continua. La gente qui è abituata a ricostruire le proprie vite e ad aiutarsi vicendevolmente.

Il fatto è che la gente qui è preparata per gli uragani, non come la gente del nord. Qui sanno esattamente cosa fare, come organizzarsi prima dell’arrivo, quando evacuare e quando tornare e poi da lì si ricomincia a ricostruire, c’è un tempo nell’uragano che loro hanno imparato vivendo per anni qui, hanno una conoscenza incorporata di esso, ma non ce l’hanno per la BP, nessuno sa come si può reagire ad un evento del genere e nessuno ne conosce il tempo. Credo davvero che la BP abbia cercato di fare quello che poteva per contenere il disastro però non c’è nessuno che ti possa restituire la vita di quelle 11 persone morte e non c’è un valore monetario che puoi dare alla perdita del tuo lavoro. Per questo bisogna avere speranza, ed è quello che noi stiamo cercando di dare alla gente. Perché anche quando non ti è rimasto niente se hai la fede e una comunità che ti supporta puoi comunque continuare a vivere.

Ci sono 3 comunità religiose: metodisti, battisti e cattolici. I cattolici sono la maggior parte per l’influenza francese ed europea.

Penso che proprio perché ci siano più disastri naturali qui la gente abbia più fede, infatti è un fenomeno in crescita, abbiamo nuovi membri e diamo supporto in molti modi non solo
con la lettura della bibbia, ma anche con il doposcuola dei ragazzi perché vogliamo aiutare l’altro, la nostra fede non è solo pregare.
Molti mi chiedono perché dovrei vivere in un posto dove ogni volta devi evacuare e corri dei rischi, beh non è l’unico posto unsafe, ci sono posti con i terremoti, con i tornado... non c’è un vero posto sicuro al mondo, e decidi di starci perché lo senti come la tua casa nonostante tutto e perché Dio ha scelto che io fossi qui.
Mi racconta di un’intervista spirituale fatta qualche anno fa sul forgiveness of god.
Noi non possiamo cancellare i disastri o le brutte situazioni, i cattivi momenti, ma possiamo dare speranza e fiducia.

Sara: I thought it was there.
Pastor Joey B.: It died?
S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: O-oh.
S: And why you decided to return in Grand Isle?
P.J.B.: Well, it’s hard-wired, you know it’s how... I’m passionate about it... the culture, the people here... the ministry here is very challenging... I like challenges, so... I like to help people when they’re in difficult situations. I think that’s my calling, it’s to give them encouragement in difficult times. And God used me in those times in their life so... with that comes... you know, in also being as a person who is accepted as a local, growing up here... It comes with great influence and responsibility as a community leader, and so I take that as a personal calling, but also as a blessing. And a lot of people that visit here and they say: “This is a hard place” – and it is a hard place – but there’s nothing too hard for God... and God knows exactly who he wants, where He wants them, and so are family is blessed to serve here. And there’s many things we can do, there’s more than we’re gonna do in our region and in our area to minister to the people. So the food ministry, after-school ministry, working with the community in the school, working with the [audio poco chiaro] and disaster relief... all those things we’ll continue and we’ll look to do more! We’re blessed to have mission teams that come all over to help us do that... so we’re a small church, but we do a lot of ministry, and so... but that’s what the church is supposed to be! It’s not just about meeting...
S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: It’s about being, and... they know that we’re always there for them, and so that’s something that we enjoy doing... to show them the hands and feet of Christ... through our activity, not just our lessons.
S: So here is others... other places to... have a ministry?
P.J.B.: As far as doing ministry in other places besides here?
S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: Yeah, we’re looking at Port Fourchon... we’re looking to do some kind of ministry, chaplain kind of work... for the workers there. There is about 1,018 millers every day that go to the port... and so... there is truckers, and just to encourage the truckers
who are away from their families, and so we want to do that... some hospitality, people that are working, the guard shacks, the people that are working in the docks... there's ways that we could get involved just to be an encouragement. The oilfield lifestyle is hard. When you look at it in a 12 month... perspective, 6 months of the year they're gone away from their family.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: And so... that's a long time... two weeks on and two weeks off sounds good when you look at it: "I get two weeks off!" You know, "At one time!" You know, and so they're excited about that, but it's the two weeks away that really creates life-stress on the families here. And so we, as a ministry, look at those stressors and say: "How can we help alleviate the stress? How can we help them with that stress?" So... I have a good church family, I have good Christian people that can help share life with you... it's crucial and just to be available because... just like the other day with the explosion that happened five miles from ashore... I was in a meeting last night in New Orleans and we have prayed for the families, and there's three people who died now... because of that explosion. All three of them were Filipino. And... and so we're praying for families in another country... who happened to work for a company... here... who was on that rig when this explosion took place! And so... there's some stress there and there was other people that were injured... on that rig, but they're still recovering in the hospital, so... We look for ways "How can we help them?" Because now the stress is even more... when the wife kisses the husband who's gonna be gone for two weeks on one of those rigs, the wife now on the back of her mind thinks: "What if my husband's rig blows up?"

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: "Is this the last time I'm gonna see him?" That's a lot of stress! And so... and the person that's working on the rig is thinking at the back of their mind: "Well I hope that's not our rig that next time catches on fire" There is a lot of risk, that's why they get paid a lot of money, ok? Because there's a lot of risk. But no amount of money is going to pay for one's life.

S: No.

P.J.B.: And nobody wants to see that happen. So it's very unfortunate, but it's very dangerous! It's very dangerous, and... but we want to help, we want to help being encouragers to them. So we're looking to do some ministry at the port, and even up the Bayou area... Galliano, Golden Meadows, those areas, because a lot of our families... And we shop there...

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: It's part of our market place, we bank there, we have to go through there to get out, and so we're looking to kinda... broaden what we're doing as a ministry.

S: So because here now there isn't a ministry?

P.J.B.: There's not a healthy ministry.

S: Ah.

P.J.B.: There are some other churches, but they're not doing missions like we do.
S: Ok.
P.J.B.: There are... some of them are maybe trying to start again, but it’s not... it’s not being effective. So we wanna partner and help them to be effective, but then also show them that... we're gonna come alongside of them and... do effective ministry. And to do that in those regions, because the need is great. And more and more people have more questions about spiritual things than ever before, because life is very unpredictable. And... when... bad things happen, they have spiritual questions. And so the role as missionary and pastor is always gonna be a valuable role in this region, because there’s gonna be more disasters. And there’s gonna be more people asking the deeper questions of life.

S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: And so we want to be available as a person of hope... and encouragement, that they can seek the Lord and that God’s word will provide them answers and we can show them those answers.

S: So you have to give always an answer?
P.J.B.: Well, I think sometimes... we can’t always answer, you know, the whys and why somebody’s tragedy has happened are still unknown to us, but as I encourage them, it’s only unknown to us, it’s not unknown to God. I think, when we hang our head on our pillow, we can either trust in our power, to fix it... or the government... or BP... or we can trust God. And, you know, last time I checked the most powerful... is God. The most knowing of all the situation, is God! And because God knows, I can be assured that I’m in His hands and His care. That He’s in care for me. And it’s not up to me to fix my life... or to fix the Gulf of Mexico... that I can trust God even amidst the disasters and terrible things... you know, we talk about big disasters like hurricanes and oil spills... but if a person’s house burns down...

S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: That’s a big crisis for them! That’s very personal, the house doesn’t belong to the whole community... but it happened to them. Or somebody robs them in their home, or they lose a limb in a car accident. Those are life changing, so each of these crisis lead people to ask these tough questions. And we’re glad that we can stand there and give them encouragement. Any other scripture speaks to most things in life, and then those areas where we go and we just have to trust God, at least He gives us hope to put our trust in something. ‘Cos last time I checked, there’s not much you can trust in this world.

S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: There’s not many people you can trust in this world!

S: No.
P.J.B.: So we really get to put our trust in somebody who came to this world but that’s not of this world. And that’s the word Jesus and so... and I tell you, more people that have done that, I’ve truly had a life change... and they get better perspective with crisis and disaster. And all our life is about conflict resolution, we live in conflict.
From the moment we’re born, we come up kicking and screaming, right? And so we’re always in conflict, it’s how we resolve that conflict that either helps us or hurts us.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: And so we help people by guiding them through God’s word… and encouraging them to seek the Lord… that God helps the majority to make wise decisions that lead to blessing. And then when the storms of life hit us… and disasters happen, then you have a trust and hope that… other people don’t have. And that’s why other people turn to alcohol, and drugs, or suicide, terrible decisions, or spending sprees… depression… there’s all kinds of things they turn to, but those who hope in the Lord, run quickly to God and realize: “We’re weak people, and we need each other, we need the strength of the Lord” and so… that’s what we get to do, that’s what I get… encourage people all the time and I’m glad to do it.

S: So they have a question about life and problems all times of the year or more when disasters happen, like hurricanes?

P.J.B.: I mean, it depends on what happens in their life. You know, somebody having a baby… that’s a time when somebody starts questioning… when somebody gets married, hopefully they got married before they have a baby.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: Because then, you know, causes more questions. Life change, a move, [audio poco chiaro] coastguard here, we minister to young families… in the coastguard… here, and try to get them encouragement when they’re away from their families. Life-changing disaster obviously is a time when they’re asking those questions, and so… Yeah, there’s plenty of opportunity when they’re gonna stop in a moment and say… you know, ask these questions. So we’re here to get them hope and encouragement and all we can do really is point them and show them the lifestyle that has helped us. You know, just like I told you: I didn’t grow up in Church, I grew up in a hostile environment, a broken home and in a culture that wasn’t really looking to please God. And yet God’s offered to send people in my life that rescued me and gave me that hope, and gave me a focus to live for, rather than myself. And so, and that’s changed my life, it’s changed my family, it’s changed the people around me. And we work that for others, and they see that, and this community sees that, they knew what I was like growing up.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: They’ve met my family, and so they look at this and say: “Only God could have done that” And so we want to give them a hope to know that it could happen to them too.

S: It is difficult to listen to all the problems of all the people? And then always an answer to these people?

P.J.B.: I mean, it’s not difficult in the sense that… it’s a load, it’s a heavy burden for people to do that… and for a ministry to do that… ultimately, it’s up to the person to make right decisions when given the information, as they understand the hope in the Lord, they have to act on faith… to trust the Lord and to learn those ways, and to
walk in them. It’s not a quick fix, it’s not a pill, I can’t— you go to the doctor, he’ll give you a prescription and alter the way you think— we don’t do that here, we want people to understand God and to be guided through God’s word, and we believe that the power of change is in the Spirit of God through His word and His— that’s why we encourage people to be at Bible studying, and preaching at worship services— and small groups that we have, so that they can learn the word of God, and that is the power— the knowledge of God’s Spirit and— the presence of God’s Spirit in their life changes them. And so it’s better than any prescription— and you don’t have to pay for it, it’s free!

S: Hahaha.

P.J.B.: And so... it changes people’s lives, and the proof of it is... I can show you family after family... all these people who had destroyed lives, and God fixed them. God restored their life and they are testimonies— you know, you can’t— you can’t make it up, it’s... it’s who they were and our community knows that, and they see the change in them. And so that gives them hope and encouragement and say: “If God can do that for them, than what could God do for me?” And so giving them that hope and encouragement is what we do.

S: Wow. So what is the differences between the Baptists and the Catholics?

P.J.B.: Well, there’s some... historical differences... and then there’s some practical differences. One: the Catholic Church is different depending on the Catholic you’re talking to, but what the Catholic Church stands for is more about the Church, the traditions, the rituals of the Church.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: Those things are very, very important to Catholics: going to Mass, doing the prayers, doing the traditions, ok? In Baptist life, we’ve been more about the Bible... and what Bible teaches. We’ve been more about learning, and then not learning in the classroom, but actually doing it outside the classroom. And so we learn as we read... and studying the Bible, it’s a book about doing and being on a mission and life change. It’s not about just... religion and going through a process, or steps.

S: Ah, ok.

P.J.B.: So the doing part shows the people of the world who God is. It’s not just going to Church, putting a sign at the road and having worships services is gonna save the world, then everybody would be safe. But they’re not, they’re hopeless and helpless without the Lord, because they need to see Christ. And how they see Christ is through life change. So and so, I showed you Pam and Ricky, you talked to Pam and Ricky. Ricky’s life was destroyed... by Sandy and everything Grand Isle could throw at them, and his life was... bad. And then when he found the Lord, and the Lord found him and rescued him, his life was changed. And God has blessed him tremendously, and he’ll tell you, and everybody looks at Ricky’s life and sees that. And they’re encouraged, because they say: “Well, God did this for them! Can God do this for me?” And so we get to help them and lead them on that journey, and so, that would be one difference in the Catholic faith where... you know, it’s more about going to the
church, and going to services, and rituals, and then for Baptist, we’re about studying the Bible, and maybe not so much the traditions, though we have some traditions, ok? But… we wanna do, we wanna help, we wanna get our hands together for a purpose, a mission, and show people the reason we’re going to worship, the reason we’re going to a Bible study group, the reason we pray, the reason we ask God to do things in our life is because He changed us. And those changes are only shown to the culture around us as we go to the culture and tell them. And so… so we do a lot of that, we do… after every hurricane we have great disaster relief, actually the American Red Cross who does all the feeding… the meals are actually cooked by southern Baptist missionaries. And so… a lot of people don’t know that, but… like in New York, they passed on… how many… as… millions upon millions of meals that they’ve cooked, ok? But all that has been cooked by southern Baptist missionaries.

S: Wow.

P.J.B.: And so we have retired people that travel the nation when a disaster hits, they take these mobile kitchens and they go on, cook the food for… the Red Cross buys the food, we cook it, and then it goes out on the Red Cross vehicle to the places to feed the people. But that’s happened [audio poco chiaro] Baptist, and so we’re glad to do that in every disaster we show up, and that we help people, you know, cleaning up their house, and their yard, even in some repair, you know, or in things like that, and so… most of all, helping them spiritually. That’s our goal, that’s not just to fix their homes, because… to fix somebody’s home and then ignore their life… and the stress that they’re dealing with… wouldn’t help anybody, really. So our thing is we wanna help fixing their home, but really our target is their heart, not their home. And when we can get to the heart and start talking with them about their relationship with the Lord, then we’ve seen a lot of people’s life changed… as a result to that… and we’re not in competition with Catholics!

S: Hahaha!

P.J.B.: You know, we’re not here to say: “We wanna be… bigger, better, more”

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: I just think it’s a difference, that even the cultured would say, many Catholics have come to me and said those very things, than noticed those differences. When it comes to youth and children, we do an excellent job, I have missionaries that help us, and so we’re always doing an outreach to the youth and children. Many times in… in place of the parents… because the parents are working so much… or they don’t want… really a life with their kids, and so… there’s a big disconnect… kids grow up lonely. Lot of kids grow up and their parents are alcoholics, so they don’t really have parents that’s going to pay attention to them, and being investing in their life, so they find a great place of hope and encouragement here. Just as I did as a teenager, when my parents were drunken, I would come here and find hope and encouragement. And so we’ve been offering that. We’re not gonna stop the alcohol abuse… we’re not gonna stop the stressors from happening… we’re not gonna stop hurricanes and other disasters, but we can get them hope when that happens, and that’s what we do.
S: So one there is most of Catholics in the island?

P.J.B.: I think most of the town... just tradition and history. This area was settled by the Canadian French

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: And so with the European influence was...the Catholic influence, so much so that our State is divided into parishes, rather than... counties... that's because of the Catholic influence... and the French influence. And so... we look just at the people who have settled here. But through the years, because of missionary work, because of changes, because of the oilfield, there were people from other areas who moved in to Southern Louisiana and they grew up Baptist, you know.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: Actually this church building was built because there is a lot of Baptist here, from different parts of the country... because of the oilfield. And then the oilfield changed, they sold out to another company, and that company decided to do their workers not living here but just driving in two weeks on and two weeks off, or thirty days on and thirty days off. And so a lot of those families that helped us build this nice building that we have moved. At one time this church was probably 120 every Sunday, you know. And now we're good to have 40 or 50, you know here. A lot... a lot of contributing factors, the population decreasing, you know, the [audio poco chiaro] family... young generations are becoming more and more unchurched, they don’t go because of their parents... Even the Catholic Church is facing this problem.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: And they see that the older generation is faithful to go, but the younger generation doesn’t care.

S: No.

P.J.B.: And so we're losing the church as we know it, because... the younger generation is saying: “Show me”, “Show me that studying the Bible, worshipping God matters”. And that’s what we do as a mission, is we show them that it matters. And so we have many people that have been touched and changed because of that.

S: But in the school they teach religion?

P.J.B.: No, in our public schools here in America they can teach it from a History standpoint, but they can’t really teach it as a spiritual influence... or spiritual counsel.

S: Ah, ok.

P.J.B.: So that's separated, out and it’s left to local community churches and the families to decide.

S: So it’s an individual choice?

P.J.B.: That’s right, it is. It’s an individual choice, but even today, as I was at the school and we were helping the kids with the Christmas choir that we’re leading and our ministry is leading that choir, and some of the kids that are in there are Catholic. And I talked about Monday afternoon and one of them raised his hands and said: “We
have catechism on Monday, I can’t come!” And I said: “Ok, well then we’ll pick a different day”.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: And so we work together with the church, where the kids going to Catholic catechism and then, you know, they also work, you know, with us. And so I have kids that both go to the Catholic Church and to our church. And so... I think more of the Bible is good, less of the Bible is not good.

S: Ok.

P.J.B.: So that’s... we just want them to be in the Word, that realize that their life is gonna get power there. And it’s outside of our hands, it’s not my hand as a pastor or missionary, that’s gonna fix them. It’s gonna be the hand of God... that fixes them and gives them hope. And that’s what we wanna point them to, and it’s not really a church, and that’s where we look a bit different from the Catholics, because we don’t focus that the Church itself is part of the salvation. We see that Christ is center...

S: Ok.

P.J.B.: To salvation, and not... the Church, not the men in the name of the Church... in the faithfulness of one. Now we that if a person is truly following Jesus, then he’ll be faithful to Jesus. So, you’re gonna have those who follow the Lord because they love the Lord... and they come because they... they have a relationship with the Lord, and with the people who gather at the Church. But they’re not coming because it’s a tradition, or...

S: No.

P.J.B.: You know, they’re obligated. They come at free will.

S: So if a person wants to be Baptist, they just go to the... Bible study?

P.J.B.: Yeah, our Bible studies and worship services are open to anyone... whether they’re Christian... Catholic, whether they’re lost and don’t know anything about God, or whether they’ve been Baptist all their life, and they know a lot... it’s open to any of them, so people of all different kinds of spiritual [audio poco chiaro] find a place to come and hear a message of hope. Now, our leadership is different, obviously we want somebody who surrendered their life to Christ... and been baptized, what we believe... Biblical baptism is that a person’s... it’s a picture, it doesn’t save you.

S: Ah, ok.

P.J.B.: It doesn’t make you a Christian.

S: So you don’t have to make the baptism.

P.J.B.: No, but we believe that a person that is... wanting to be a follower of Jesus... wants to abide to the command of Jesus... and Jesus commanded us to be baptized...

S: Ah ok.

P.J.B.: To show a symbol of our devotion to follow Him. He gave us that example of baptism, where He is placed underwater and that would be a big difference to Catholics sprinkle with water, and Baptist putting in a pool and putting under water.

S: Wow!

P.J.B.: And that’s a big difference!
S: Yeah!
P.J.B.: And not just in how we do it. I think... you know, the Catholic Church would lean towards... “It’s essential for salvation” and we would say: “It’s not anything of salvation, but it’s an action that we do in obedience to our Savior. But we believe that salvation happens supernaturally by God, when we order our life to trust Him to save us from our sins. And that life change happens, and when His Grace comes in and saves us, then we’re different on the inside. So we spend a lifetime after that point, helping our outside activities and our lifestyle match what Christ did on the inside by putting His spirit in us. And so if His spirit lives in us, His spirit lives through us... and the only way it’s going to be perfected is when we die [audio poco chiaro] and then it will be perfect.

S: So is the right lifestyles that give you the salvation?
P.J.B.: No.

S: No.
P.J.B.: Obviously living a good life is commendable, the Scripture requires that we would strive for holiness.

S: Ok.
P.J.B.: But we believe that a person who is changed by God’s grace spiritually... when that has happened, their desires are gonna change.

S: Ok.
P.J.B.: You know... I didn’t have to teach any of my children how to say: “No”. I mean, I have three children, one more on the way, and all of them learned at a very early age how to say: “No” on their own! If they were bad, than by themselves ?? they learned to be selfish and I didn’t teach any of that! But it’s in them, because we’re born into a simple world, and the only way that we could be saved from this sinful world... and our sin isn’t just against each other, our sin is against God. So how can we forgive them from that sin? The only way is through Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. And that’s a spiritual thing that takes place when a person by faith trust Christ. It’s like we’re trusting in these chairs to hold us up, it’s placing your life in the hands of God, so that He could change us. And that’s a spiritual thing that happens to a person that only God can do, no church can do that, no pastor, no missionary can do it for you, it’s literally a spiritual change where... in ourself all we have is sin... our sin produces that. And so all we can offer God is... is nothing! It’s sin, it’s broken... but God loves us enough that He says: “I want you, I want your life” and He will come in and save those who call on His name. And so when that has happened, when salvation has happened... then the immediate response is a life of love, love for God, resulting in an obedient life to follow His teaching. And so a person who is put under stress to say: “You need to live this way, so that you can be saved” is works, is a work-based salvation, which the Bible teaches against the apostle Paul in the book of Romans and Ephesians, other places teaches us that salvation is something that God does to us, when we’ve opened and surrendered our life to Him. And once that change happens,
He’s changed our heart, so now we don’t want to do the things we used to wanna do with sin, now we want to please God.

S: Ah, ok.

P.J.B.: And so… an adoption, being part of family… we’ve talked about in Grand Isle has a lot of that family atmosphere.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: That’s the same thing to God. We were separated from God because of our sin, and God adopts us as children of His, and when that changes, we now become children of God. And as a child of God, everything changes for me, because before becoming a child of God Jesus actually talked to John that we’re children of the devil. So… child of the devil I’m gonna do evil things… child of God I should want to do… good things to please God. But it’s about that change, that salvation moment where they’re changed spiritually.

S: So you feel like something different?

P.J.B.: Definitely the Lord gives us some emotional response to know with our feelings… I think that’s a bonus, but really our change is based on the facts of God’s word.

S: Ok.

P.J.B.: God’s word says: “Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”. That if we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that God was raised from the dead, we will be saved. And that confession is to say the same thing to agree with God. What He did, that His sacrifice on the cross was pure, and perfect, and then by trusting Him in His sacrifice and inviting His spirit to come inside of us, then that results in our forgiveness, and eternal salvation. And He puts His spirit inside of us, so when we become living… see, sin produces death, Jesus produces life.

S: Ok.

P.J.B.: And so we know we have a living spirit inside of us, which will result into eternal life, rather than a dead spirit resulting going to eternal death. And so the reason that we’re saved is not because we’ve done good work, the reason that we’re saved is that God did a good work to change us.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: Resulting in a life dedicated in servicing Him. It’s not to say that we don’t make mistakes, people do make mistakes, people still sin, but the difference is a Christian, who is really been born again and changed by God’s grace struggles in sin. A person who doesn’t struggle with sin I don’t think that understands or knows God at all, because they’re just walking in darkness. It’s all they’ve known… it’s all they do, but a person who has changed by God’s grace… when we go back to sin we go: “This isn’t right, I shouldn’t do this”. And that’s the spirit of God that has changed us… and it continues to change us. And so… that’s what the young people need to hear… and they need to see it… and it’s more services and Bible studies and fellowships and trips… it’s about real life. And every family matters, what all my families do, when they go home, close their door, that matters what we do when we go to worship. And so helping them to live… right before God is a big challenge… and ultimately they
make their own choices, and so... so we emphasize that spiritual moment of salvation, a lot.
S: Ok.
P.J.B.: We emphasize that moment, because if there's no change, they're not gonna be able to do it.
S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: 'Cos it's their power. Their power vs God's power. God's able to do it, and so... I'd rather God do it, in me... into me, and then I'll honor Him by living for Him, and let that power change me, rather than me trying to change me, or religious idea... change me, or church change me. They can't do this, all Christ can do that. So that's...
S: It's very different from the Catholic.
P.J.B.: It is! It is... It is very personal.
S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: And me growing up here, I know a lot about Catholic background, and I'm running into a lot of Catholics that do understand what we're talking about with personal change and that they experience that. And then many of them, our of respect of their tradition and respect for their families may still worship as a Catholic, and still understand the Bible from a different perspective, but many of them once changed, actually will leave the Catholic Church... and start getting in a Bible Church. You know, we as Baptist... we want to be focused on the word, that's why we do a lot of teaching... a lot of time in the Word and then expect the people to live it out, in whereas in the tradition, even in the Catholic Church not too long ago everything was done in Latin, a lot of people didn't even understand what was being said... about the word.
S: Yeah.
P.J.B.: And everything was built on traditions... and things that you had to do... as a Good Catholic. We have some traditions that we do, but most of that is... we trust the Holy Spirit of God that lives inside every believer, and we expect them to mature, to grow in their faith.
S: Ok.
P.J.B.: And if they don't, we ask them why... and we... we go to the source. If they've never been changed by God's grace, then that can be a problem. And that happens a lot.
S: So there is people that left the Baptist Church?
P.J.B.: Oh yeah, there's people that will come in and they might be religious for a little while, but there is no real change... and they reject that real life change, and they just wanna... still sin, they still wanna do their life the way they want to, they don't wanna surrender their life to God, and so... but they don't realize they're missing everything. Jesus said: "What is the profit of gaining the whole world but lose your own soul" and Jesus said "I've come to seek and to save those which is lost" so Jesus's purpose is to save those who are lost, but it seems as though those who are rejecting
Him… rejecting lose everything. Because they can gain everything the world has to
offer, including religion, but then lose their soul.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: Because it’s really about the real relationship with Christ… He is the focus of all
time… in Creation. He’s the most argued person on the planet. Religion and wars are
still happening over the person of Christ. And it’s because He’s the center focus of…
of who we are… how we were created… and who will complete us. We can’t complete
ourselves, we can’t present ourselves [audio poco chiaro] no matter how many good
things we do. We’re all sinners in the sight of God. And our sin deserves punishment,
and Jesus says that this punishment is hell, that’s what we deserve!

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: But grace is that Jesus down the cross and then whoever will accept that
sacrifice… and surrender to Him by faith, He will give them the grace gift of
salvation, His spirit and He will… He says that He will redeem them, or He’ll blow
out all of their sin and He’ll make them and adopt them as His own. And so that’s
what Christ does. He invites all who will believe to receive Him. And… that can’t be
changed.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: Just as I was changed, just as many in our church, but not everybody in our
church has changed yet, but you know what? I’d rather them being here trying to
learn it and them eventually get changed, than them to be out in the world, because
they’re not gonna teach them that out there. [audio poco chiaro] They need to be
around Christians to see it. And for every person it’s a different time.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: It’s a different situation, so… it’s a personal thing. That’s what Christ did. He
didn’t die to build a church, so that we could be religious. He died for sinners, so they
could be saved from their sin. Very personal: “I’ve sinned against God and I have to
stand before Him. But because Christ has saved me, He’s done away with my sin,
sinning away, and has given me a place that I didn’t deserve… because he loves me,
and so… that happened to me when I was a teenager here on Grand Isle. And then I
was baptized as a teenager here, began to walk in obedience, and… I get to tell other
people about that.

S: So you think that people lost their faith after a disaster?

P.J.B.: I think there are moments when their faith becomes… questionable, but I think at
the end of the day… they cling even more to God. Because when the world
disappoints us, you gonna get the character of God and His faithfulness, and He
doesn’t disappoint you. He’s faithful and I think we can’t look and see faithfulness
around us in people, other than people being faithful to God and God has always been
faithful to us. And so if they wanna look at something, consistently being faithful to
love them, and to be there… it’s God! And so I think naturally we long for that
connection with God. And there emotions that sometimes carry us away and ruin our
prospective…
S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: And so they might reject that… but at the end of the day most people come back to that, and… for some that’s been ruined… by this world, then they were changed by God and now they’re different persons, totally different. And so, how do you explain that other than the supernatural power of God to change people’s lives? And so that’s our true hope. And many people because of disasters, and because of them getting to that question of “God, where are You?” has led them to put their faith in God, and now they’re changed. All the South-East of Louisiana, there’s many new believers because of disasters, hurricanes, oil spills, because there has been chaplains and missionaries there to show them the hope in Jesus, and so that’s been very encouraging.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: [audio poco chiaro] is coming, she’s supposed to be on her way. She said she’d be a little bit late.

S: So you think that if a person lost their faith… he come back to the church?

P.J.B.: Yes, we see that, it depends on their life… problems. We’ve seen people walk away from the Church and be mad at God… or mad at the people of the Church… but then come back, and then truly be changed on the inside, and then look for the Lord. And sadly sometimes we see people walk away and we don’t know if they’ll ever come back, but that’s part of… part of life.

S: Yeah.

P.J.B.: Sometimes people I can’t make them do it, the Churches used to, you know, [audio poco chiaro] all kinds of things over their head to make them believe: “You have to do this” or “This is our tradition” and “Don’t turn your back on God” and for us as Baptist we’re focusing on the personal, our sin against God. Everybody realizes that we’ve sinned against God, and when you realize that it’s gonna be useful at the end of the World one day, that’s not going to be Catholic or Baptist, it’s gonna be you and God. And what did God provide for you to be saved? The person of Jesus. What did you do with Jesus? Did you receive Him? Did He come in and change your life? If so, it would be proved in how you’re living from that moment on. If not, it also would be proved in how you’re living, because those who are not changed by God’s grace still sin, and they don’t mind sinning. They keep on doing it, they don’t even struggle with it. They naturally want to sin and satisfy themselves… and that’s just because they’re lost in darkness. I was like that before Christ and there’s many people, even in our Church today, who are not yet Christians, they’ve not yet changed, but they will be. We believe that as we keep being faithful to model before them, and preaching and teaching to them, then they will one day surrender to Christ. So we’d rather them make steps towards than to be out in the world and lost forever. So we keep being a light.
Ann T.: Jessica slept on the boards one night. We had a couple of long chairs and we’re glad that we were there the next night until the [audio poco chiaro] us up.

Sara: How was with Isaac the situation?

A.T.: It was... a lot of people panicked then here, like... Isaac was basically the same kind of storm that we had with Sandy, but you know, we’re just so used to it that when it comes we’re like: “Ok, whatever”. A whole bunch of people just panicked and left. I’m like, you know, it’s barely a [audio poco chiaro]. And we get about thirty inches of water downstairs, and I parked my car over there. At the time nobody was living there, and that belonged to my landlords, so they told me I could park there. The water creep up my tyres, but it didn’t get high enough to really... damage my car. And we were without power for a few days, but that always happens.

S: The people was not obligated to evacuate? You can stay here?

A.T.: Well, they always call for a mandatory evacuation, that way it covers their behinds in case one of us gets killed or something, you know, a house collapses or something, which you never know. But a lot of people stay, you know, because a lot of people have been through... you know, really bad storms here... and... you know, they’re just not really scared, but of course they’ve been a lot more scared since Katrina. So you just... you just never know. But I couldn’t see... Whenever storm hits, the water... the road gets washed out, and then you’re stuck wherever it is you go for days, sometimes weeks. And I say I’d rather be here and... the power was off for almost a week and... But you know, after the storm passed, we went down the stairs and [audio poco chiaro] and washed everything... you know, we got everything
cleaned up and secured everything that was loose. You know, other people, when they finally were able to come back to the island, we would just sit down: “Hey, how are you doing?” “We’re all done!” They had been stuck in [audio poco chiaro], they had to come back and finish clean that up, and we were just like: “Oh, hey!” so there’s a good thing about being gone, or being here, when everything’s over you just clean up and you’re done! I’ve evacuated so many times, it’s been worse when I evacuated than if I had stayed here.

S: Yeah. And about the BP? How was the… the situation was really different from having a hurricane and…?

A.T.: BP was awful. You know, we know what to do when a hurricane is coming, BP was just something… You know, they were like “Oh, it’s like in [audio poco chiaro], it’s… that will keep from going to wash ashore, we’re going to keep it from washing ashore. Bull… Bull. It still washes ashore. They had no idea what to expect, of course, people came down here and lied through their teeth… about everything, that they were going to clean everything up and everything would be back the way it was and… you know they’d make everything right. [audio poco chiaro] And they’re still not. A lot of people have left because they’ve got sick or because they couldn’t find work anymore, and BP didn’t give them any money and… I had the opportunity for a good job that I lost [audio poco chiaro] because we didn’t have the main season that year. So… and BP still didn’t pay me anything for that. I had been sitting there all day filling up the health insurance claims… the health claims for BP that I’m not going to get anything from that either, if I get anything at all. Because they’re paying, the most affected people… Most of the people who were BP workers, supposedly.

S: So not the inhabitants of the island? BP don’t pay the inhabitants of the isle?

A.T.: They say they will, but it’s not very much, it’s like they’ll pay for… I was told you can file a claim on as many illnesses as you want, but they’ll only pay you for one.

S: Ah.

A.T.: And if you had a hospital stay that was more than overnight, they’d pay I think 10,000 dollars plus a certain amount for everyday after the first day. And… But I didn’t stay overnight, I had a couple of out-patient procedures that they’ve done, but I didn’t stay overnight and my insurance covered most of it, but I don’t know what the long-term effects are gonna be, I might end up with a cancer in five year, so… and just because I have the kinds of problems that are not even covered by the… They have a list of illnesses you can have which is basically respiratory-type illnesses: ear, nose and sore throat is what is covered. Brashes, eye problems… like if you had an eye infection or something like that. But that’s it, that doesn’t cover people who had bleeding problems and so many people here have bleeding problems: out of their nose, out of their ears, out of the… girls that have peeing trouble like crazy. That’s not even mentioned in the claims, so…

1 La parola bull viene qui usata come un’abbreviazione di bullshit.
S: Because I went to the BP claims center and they gave to me the form to fill about your illness and...

A.T.: Sure.

S: I thought that they gave the money to all the people that lived here, but it’s not true.

A.T.: No. They said “Oh, yeah, yeah, if you live here, you’re almost guaranteed to get something!” but no, it’s not true. So… I’ve read it very very carefully but no, it’s not true.

S: The people are almost sick now?

A.T.: Oh, there is a lot of people who are sick, a lot of people left. And then a lot of people just don’t realize how sick they are. I was talking with some parents just recently about their kids, and there is one woman sitting there and she says: “Oh, my kids are fine, my kids are fine” and I said: “Let me ask you something” Cause she has a daughter the same age as my daughter. “Let me ask you something: has your daughter menstrual problems?” “Oh yeah yeah! She’s on her third different medication for that. They can’t seem to find out what’s causing it” I’m like: “Then your daughter’s not fine”.

S: But she don’t care about this?

A.T.: She doesn’t realize that it could be something that’s related to the oil spill. You know, all the teenage girls here are having bleeding problems when they have their menstrual cycle. That’s like they’re going through the change of life that they are bleeding so badly, and they’re too youn young to have hysterectomies. And they are on all kinds of medication, or on birth control pills, and all kinds of other stuff. You know, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen year old girls have no business being on the pill, you know, if they are not sexually active. So ..

S: And there is… there is no doctor that have care about this?

A.T.: Because we don’t have a regular doctor in the Island, some people here go to doctors in New Orleans, some go to doctors in Houma, and some go to a number of different doctors up in Galliano, and Golden Meadow... and so for a long time the doctors didn’t realize that there was anything unusual going on. I mean, they had a lot of people showing up with pancreatitis, and flu-like symptoms... and there’s a lot of people going up there, but they don’t even put it together that a lot of people are from Grand Isle, because a lot of people... lot of people in this area are having the same problems and the doctors just started to put them together. And now that they’re supposedly gonna be trained on things to look for, that’s two and a half years later! So it’s a little late for them to be putting it together now. A lot of us [audio poco chiaro] don’t go to the doctors any more, they’re not doing anything to help us. They’re not running the tests they should run, because the tests aren’t covered by our insurance. And the tests are... I was told two years ago to pay between 250 and 500 dollars apiece for volatile organic chemicals and poly aromatics... polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons... and insurance doesn’t cover because the insurance doesn’t recognize we have that kind of problem down here. And the doctors really don’t wanna be
involved in a lawsuit either, so they don’t run the tests even if you ask them to, they
don’t run the tests. So …

S: It is really difficult…

A.T.: So you go to the doctor, you have an unusual rash and they give you a cream, and
you go back two weeks later, if they can squeeze you in their schedule, and they give
you a different cream. And then you go back two weeks and finally just go like:
“Forget it, it’s not doing anything good, nothing they give you is doing anything
good”. And all these girls are on the pill, on the pill or whatever… Jessica was on the
pill for a while, I took her up, it wasn’t doing anything good. So I told the doctors:
“You’re not treating her for what’s truly wrong with her and so your treatment is not
doing her any good”. And they said: “Well, I’ll just put her on another pill” I said:
“No, we’re not going for a different kind of pill” you know, down the line that could
cause her having reproductive problems, so no”. And it’s really frustrating for us.
We’re supposed… they’re supposed to do the tests, they won’t treat what they’re
supposed to treat. And then, every time you take them, you have to pay it out of your
pocket.

S: Yeah.

A.T.: And we can’t afford that either. So…

S: And the meeting they have made the last week? What they said?

A.T.: When I went, there were… five other mothers… no, there were four other mothers
beside me. And two of them were insisting “Oh no, our kids are fine” until I started
asking them specific questions. You know, their kids had flu-like symptoms after the
oil spill, you know, of course, that’s more than two years ago. And they were like:
“Yes, they were sick all the time, but you know…” If their girls were having
menstrual problems “Yeah… but, you know”… Well, “Have they had respiratory
problems?” “Oh yes, my daughter’s got asthma really bad and, you know…” “Did she
have it before the oil spill?” “No”. “Maybe it’s not asthma!” A whole bunch of people
have eye infections, including me, I have really bad eye infections, I know a lady who
went blind in one eye! She got like a cataract thing over her eye, the infection was so
bad. She was being treated for… pink eye! Just like I was when I first got it. And I
knew, I knew something had blown in my eye, because I remember just like a couple
of days before… before my eye started getting pink something blew in my eye. And so
this other lady… she was having what she thought was pink eye, I said: “No, that’s
not pink eye” I said: “If it’s pink eye, it’d spread to both eyes, not only in one eye” I
said: “It’s an infection”. “No, no, my doctor says it’s pink eye” So finally the doctors
started treating her for an infection, and by that time she had almost gone blind and
so… [audio poco chiaro] and it’s happened over and over to a whole bunch of people I
know. And that’s what the mums are talking about: “Oh yeah! So many people are
having, you know, problems to their eyes, they’ve really bad pink eye, and eye
infections and stuff”. I said: “It’s not pink eye”.

S: Oh.
A.T.: It always seems to happen like it’s in one eye. And lot of times… I’ve found lot of times is the left eye. I think that’s because people were driving around they got the windows down and dirt has blown in… the window on the driver’s side.

S: Before the disaster nobody had problems… health problems?

A.T.: Oh, everybody here was as healthy as… people here would live to like 90-something years old, everybody was healthy, even people… Louisiana has a bad problem with cancer, it’s… as far back as I can remember there has been a lot of cancer problems here. But I mean, people have cancer treatments and still survive… and heart problems, and still survive… and strokes, and still survive. I mean, there were people here who had beaten cancer several times and in different parts of their bodies, and… they covered from heart problems and all other kinds of health effects and lived for years and years and years afterwards, and then when the oil spill happened all of a sudden everybody died. Always people who had survived all kinds of other things [audio poco chiaro] now just died and I mean a matter of a year, a whole bunch of them just died. And then there were other people who were even really sick before, suddenly started getting really sick. And I knew several people who started having problems with their legs swelling up and they were in and out of the hospital for their legs swelling up and turning black and everything else and nobody knew why. One lady died, one lady got so scared after the first lady died, she moved to the Baton Rouge area and she’s been much better since she got away from here. There’s been a lot of miscarriages here, there’s been a lot of bad health problems here. And… miscarriages aren’t listed on the BP settlement either. So… then everybody have been… I mean, I had really good health before the oil spill. And Jessica had never been sick. And we’ve had one thing after another starting June 1st, she went a week running a fever 104 every night, refused to let me take her to the doctor, during the day she was feeling better. But she was having real bad respiratory problems, and she was coughing, and she was… you know… just… like she had the flu. And finally I realized, you know, this is probably related to the oil spill. And I took her to the doctor and the doctor said… they ran all kinds of tests on her and said: “How long has she had asthma?” I went: “She’s never had asthma!” And he just looked at me… you know… just… like he had ever seen, like I didn’t know… my kid had asthma and she was 13 years old, you know? And I used to be an EMT, so I knew what asthma was, and I know she never had asthma. And… it’s just been one thing after another. It’s not just with me, that’s a lot of people here.

S: So there is someone that tried to… have more visibility about this problem?

A.T.: I have a friend who lived here… and she busted her butt trying to make people aware of what was going on. We’ve had people like Ricky Ott here, we’ve had… my daughter in particular has done interviews on the radio over and over again, she’s been interviewed by the Animal Planet… people… Marine toxicologist on the Animal Planet. A bunch of other documentary people have come down here and interviewed her, and she’s so sick of talking about it, it hasn’t done any good at all. I mean, so many people have come down here and asked us questions and she in particular has
been filmed over and over again, and done interviews on the radio, and nobody listens! I had a friend who lived here who busted her butt trying to make people aware of the health risks. She brought all kinds of people down here, to talk to the people. Even Erin Brockovich was here in the beginning. And no one listens. When you ask them if they’ve been sick since the oil spill they tell you: “Oh no, no! I’m fine, I’m fine!” Until you start asking them specific questions. People used to come in the library all the time. And I’ve asked them: “How have you been? Have you been ok?” “Oh yeah, yeah!” “Well, you don’t sound really good!” “Oh, it’s just my allergies!” and I’m like: “How long have you had that?” “Oh, I’ve been working on that BP spill thing and… you know it’s just… I don’t know, my allergies are just killing me probably you know, from” and I’m like: “It’s not your allergies!”

S: No!

A.T.: And no one would listen. Everybody just wants to believe everything is ok. They eat the seafood, even if they get sick, they still eat the seafood and… they get sick one time, like really really really sick and… have all kinds of toxic-type reactions to what they ate, and… you know… you eat healthy for a while, you become temporarily vegetarian or whatever, and then after a while they’re like: “Oh, ok, you know, that was just one thing” and they’re back eating seafood again until they’re sick again.

S: Oh.

A.T.: And I have told people: “Don’t eat it!” And they don’t listen. So…

S: So it’s like the mentality that is wrong?

A.T.: I think down here… well, it’s… people have lived here for such a long time, and it was such a great place before the oil spill. This was like heaven… anything you needed you could either… you know, get it from the land, or out of the water. You know, as far as food here, whatever it’s… as long as you can provide a roof over your head, you know you could fish, you could hunt, you could do whatever and survive here, and… people don’t want to admit that that’s changed and they have this mentality like everything’s great and everything’s fine… everything’s gonna be alright and you know, or that you pray and everything will be better, you know, and… people have gotten sick and they don’t want to admit that they’re sick. And I’m afraid five years from now, when a whole bunch of us will end up with cancer or something else really bad, it’ll be too late. It’ll be too late to file a BP claim, it’ll be too late to… do anything.

S: And now the problem of the dispersant, the Corexit is still here or not?

A.T.: Oh, I believe it’s still here. I believe a lot of the [audio poco chiaro] washed ashore again, after Isaac, and… when all the tarballs washed ashore. People found tarballs in their yard, back in the back of the island. I think… yeah, I think it’s still here. I think it’s mixing up in all that stuff that’s washing ashore.

S: So… I met you on Facebook, so I wanted to ask you if you use Facebook for communicate about this disaster or it’s just…

A.T.: We had so many Facebook pages set up, dealing with us… my friend that lived here, that finally got so aggravated and fed up that she moved to Florida. She posted one
thing after another, after another, after another, after another, for... about a year and a half. Almost two years. And... people would tell her she was crazy...you know, that she was over-reacting... we were fear mongrels and... The mayor actually went... a friend of mine who works at... the... community center said the mayor actually went and talked to the old people who go there and have lunch every day, and told them not to pay attention to anything they hear about... hear from Facebook or whatever, that the seafood is fine.

S: Oh.

A.T.: And it’s ok to eat the seafood, everything’s alright. And we were just trying to scare everybody, you know... And people are gonna listen to the mayor, not listen to me, I’m not from here, so...

S: Ah. So the people from here have a different reaction of this?

A.T.: [audio poco chiaro] get sick, like I said they don’t. A lot of the people here... they don’t know how to use the internet and do searches and a lot of them are not on Facebook, I mean, some are, maybe half the people here, but the older people of course aren’t. And so a lot of people just don’t have access to the information, and...if I tell them what’s going on, they’re gonna go: “Oh, you say this, but the mayor says this” or “You said this, but the [audio poco chiaro] say this”. Because of course the mayor’s family, the mayor used to be a trawler, the family are trawlers and they sell seafood, I mean, they’re involved in the seafood industry. And all the town council people are involved in tourism, you know, so they’re not gonna say: “Don’t come here! It’s not safe, don’t eat the seafood”. You know, because they want people to come, that’s where their income is. One of the town council women owns a restaurant... they’re not gonna tell people “Don’t come”, it’s... how do they make their money? If they’re telling people it’s not safe here, then they’re like “We’re not going to be elected next time”, too, because people who make their money after tourism won’t vote for them So... a lot of people here either make their money through the seafood, most of the people make their money through the seafood industry, working offshore, and tourism. So of course [audio poco chiaro] people don’t wanna say anything bad about, you know, the oil.

S: Yeah.

A.T.: ‘Cos they don’t want any sanctions [audio poco chiaro] oil companies and... the seafood people don’t want anybody saying “Don’t eat the shrimps, don’t eat the crabs, don’t eat the fish” the Charter Boat captains don’t want anybody saying “No, you can’t come down here and get into that water” you know, “Can’t go fishing out there, don’t eat that fish!” And tourism people don’t want people saying “Ah, don’t go to the beach! You know, you can’t swim into that water, it has got Corexidin in it!” So...whenever somebody who reads all the reports and stuff on Facebook and says... tries to warn people and go:“Look, I’ve read all these studies, and they say, you know, you can have... like maybe a couple of shrimp a day, or a piece of fish about the size of the palm of your hand, and that’s what’s considered a safe amount of fish”.

S: Yeah.
A.T.: For the amount of poison that’s in it now, you know... That’s now how we eat here!
And so they say: “Oh, no, you can have so many crabs and seafood... so many crabs, or shrimp or whatever, they consider it perfectly safe! So many kilograms, or whatever” Well, that’s not... people don’t realize that it might be two shrimp, or it might be one and a half shrimp and a little... three-inch long piece of fish or something, you know... it’s just not what they think it’s safe.

S: It is strange because they said that this disaster was a big deal and the fish is not like...
A.T.: That’s what everybody says! If they’re not gonna catch the fish they used catch
S: But they eat the fish... why?
A.T.: I have a friend that... for months was walking over to the beach every day and taking pictures of all the dead things that washed up on the beach, and the piles of foam every single day. She was taking samples from the sand, she was trying to... get dead fish and stuff and have it tested. Every day there were turtles, fish and birds washed up... I’m talking about for months and months. Washed up on the beach with their intestines hanging outside their bodies she would find crabs washed ashore, they were alive, but they were empty inside. You could flip them over and see there wasn’t anything inside of them.

S: Oh.
A.T.: Shrimps that would be coming ashore with no eyes. I have a shrimp trawler told me that about a third of what catches, and this was about six months ago... he said about a third of what he was catching had no eyes. And, you know, his family still eats the shrimp and sell the shrimp. And I told him: “You know, that’s a mutation... and if the shrimp are eating stuff in the water, it’s causing them to mutate and have no eyes, and then you eat the shrimp, then maybe your children will have children with no eyes”. You know... and they’re not just getting that. They don’t see that it might be a danger. Dolphins were washing ashore, dead, there were all kinds of miscarriages, dolphin’s fetuses washing ashore and nobody seemed to think anything was wrong, and I’m like: “They eat the fish! You know, they eat seafood!”

S: Yeah.
A.T.: So, if you eat the seafood, and you have a miscarriage, you know, I mean the dolphins are mammals, they’re breathing the same air we are, because they breathe... the air, they eat the seafood just like most of the people here do, so don’t you realize there’s a corollary there? That the same thing that’s happening to them, the miscarriages and the deaths, and everything? We hardly know how many died and just sank to the bottom of the ocean, You know, we can only judge by the amount that washed up on the shore. And people don’t put that together, they just look at you like... and roll their eyes, you know.

S: Hehehehe... and you never think to go away from here?
A.T.: I have thought about it plenty of times. But it’s like this: I’m 56 years old, and I have two jobs, one job I can do [audio poco chiaro] my house. The other one, I might not be able to find a job somewhere else, at my age. Especially [audio poco chiaro] my daughter’s 15, so she’s not old enough in most places, she’s worked here, but in
another place she probably wouldn’t be able to find a job, she must be at least 16 or 18. And she’s the top of her class at school, so she’s in line to be and get all the scholarships to pay for the college, that I can’t afford on my own. And so I hate to leave, because I hate to take her away from the opportunities she has if we stay here, but at the same time I’m worried about the fact that if I’m staying here it might be a hazard to her health, or my health. I just don’t know, it’s… just… cross your fingers and pray.

S: Yeah.
A.T.: That cat possibly
S: It seems like my cat.
A.T.: [audio poco chiaro]
S: Oh.. and why did you decide to stay here?
A.T.: Oh, why?
S: Yeah.
A.T.: I moved here 27 years ago, I… my husband worked offshore, and we were living outside New Orleans and the property values there were ridiculous. We wanted to buy a house and we were able to buy a house here, at the time, for 44,000 dollars. It was a great, big house. And that was like half what we would have paid for a tinier place in the New Orleans area. And, even though he and I eventually split up, and he went his way, and… I just decided to stay, I just loved it here, till the oil spill. This was like paradise until then. It’s changed a lot since the spill. People were… not as trusting, they were… not even with the people they’ve known all their lives. You know it’s… there’s a lot of… a little bit of fighting and there’s been a lot of back stabbing going on since the spill and… a lot of people who got sick either died or moved away, so there is a lot of good people who used to live here but they don’t live here anymore. The rents and everything have gone through the roof, and so a lot of people can’t afford to live here anymore, especially given the fact that a lot of people lost their income. People are sad, and they’re bitter and discouraged, and they’re… When BP came, a lot of people trusted them, and trusted our local government, and they trusted our State government, and our national government to be on our side and protect us against this other company and… and we haven’t been, and now everybody is just really disillusioned and angry, and…
S: Yes.
A.T.: It used to be such a positive, happy place… and people are trying, they want to have that back, that’s the reason they don’t want to believe that they can get sick, that they don’t want to believe their children are sick, because they’re still trying to hold on to whatever little bit of happiness they can still have, but… it’s just really disappointing and sad to see how much everything has changed.
S: Is difficult? And you know where I can find a report of the people sick?
A.T.: I don’t know. She almost got sick. A lot of people haven’t been really honest about it.
S: And the people who moved away from here is a lot or a few?
A.T.: Well, like I said there is a lot of people I know that left because... and a lot of people who want to move, but they haven’t sold their house yet... whatever
S: But is... they’re not local people that go away?
A.T.: Well... since the rents have gone through the roof, the people who have graduated have another place so they can live here, on the income they make here. And so they’re living up the [audio poco chiaro] which will eventually mean... a lot of these local families who have their children and grandchildren will move away, too, to be closer to their families. [audio poco chiaro] From the fact that I got to high-school here, I probably would have moved somewhere else. I have a friend who moved to Florida, there’s a number of people who moved to Baton Rouge, or the Baton Rouge area to get away from here... Some people moved back to wherever their families lived. Between being sick and the rising cost of renting a property and... and even if you own a property, the insurance and taxes have gone through the roof, too. So, owing a property is not even a guarantee anymore. And... so much has been lost in tourism, and so much has been lost in... the seafood industry and...everything else is... not just much money coming up from the people who live here. And now we have [audio poco chiaro] 15 year old daughter who is working to help me pay my bills, because I couldn’t afford to live here, in fact she’s working, so... I was living in a place and I was paying 450 dollars a month and... the guy got tired... he was renting... it was a duplex and in the other apartment he kept having people that lived there who were... just really lousy tenants, and he got tired of dealing with it, so he sold it to his daughter and she renovated the other place, and it cost her so much that she raised the rent. She wanted to raise the rent on my property 100 a month, from 450... and that’s just about what my net income is a month working two jobs. And so I moved here, which is a 1000 and my daughter went to work. But there’s a lot of people who live here they had a fight just recently because they had a little converted hotel, they weren’t charging a whole lot for the rooms, and the place was... from what I understand, a death trap, obviously. And they had a fire and people died. Because they were living where they could afford living.
S: Yeah.
A.T.: So...
S: It’s not easy living here?
A.T.: No, it’s not. And every now and then you have a storm, you have to evacuate and if you don’t have any money put on a side... you have to go stay at a shelter and take your chances there and... but still you have to take food, you have to take water, you have to... that’s why I stayed, I said: “I don’t wanna stay in a shelter”. I have friends who [audio poco chiaro] the gas for going where you’re going and... the gas for coming back and I don’t want to put my friends out, so if I do evacuate some place else, my daughter and I eat out all the time. So instead I bought a whole bunch of can food and stayed here. Can food [audio poco chiaro]
S: And wait?
A.T.: It actually isn't that bad. But you take a chance, no matter where you go, because of the risk of tornados, I mean anywhere the storm's gonna go there's a bad risk. And even after [audio poco chiaro] tornados all over the place. A lot of people go to places where... they think they're safe, and then bad weather comes through, and knocks over trees and... we evacuated for Katrina, of course, we would have had for Katrina anyway. But the place I was living in at that time lost some shingles from the roof, but the inside of the place didn't get wet.

S: Ah.

A.T.: It was a duplex and the apartment next door had a telephone pole going through the wall, but my apartment was fine. But where I was staying... it was six weeks before we could go back, so I would have lived here probably with no running water and no electricity, all that time. No one was able to come back so... I would have had to evacuate anyway, but I stayed with friends and Rita came through and dropped a huge tree branch from an oak tree, the branch itself was the size of a tree and dropped it on my car. Fortunately, it just [audio poco chiaro] my car and broke my windshield, but then my brakes failed which cost me 600 and something dollars to have my windshield replaced... when I came back and I found I hadn't even lost anything in my house, that was so... I would have been safer here had I had access to food and water and stuff... And then we evacuated for Gustav and Ike I went to... the same people I had stayed with before. And trees fell all over their neighbourhood, knocking off the power, this was in Baton Rouge. And part of a tree came through the roof of their house and broke the pipe to the water heater which flooded part of the house with water and all the inside of the attic area flooded, because the water heater was up in the attic. And water went down inside the walls, so everything in their house mildewed and they... when the insurance adjusters were finally able to come several days later, when all... they knocked over trees, they cleared the streets, and everything. I mean, we couldn't even get gas for the generator because there was no way to get out of the subdivision because of all the down trees.

S: Oh.

A.T.: And so we were miserable, and hot, and had... all of the food went bad and... then finally the adjuster comes and tells them: "You can't live in this house anymore!" It was mouldy everywhere, and so they had to find a place to stay, so I went to Illinois to visit my sister, because Ike was coming and I still couldn't come back to Grand Isle. So I went up there and stayed with my sister and Ike followed me, it went the whole route that I normally would have used to come home, knocking out electricity and there were no hotels, there were no gas stations, there were no restaurants, all the way up to Illinois, [audio poco chiaro] and so the eye of Ike passed out of my sister's house in southern Illinois.

S: Wow!

A.T.: We never had a storm like that. My brother in law was thrilled, because he was a big weather fan, you know, so this was a big experience with a major storm. When my daughter and I tried to come back we had to go all the way to Indiana, then come
down through Kentucky and I was map questing all the way, because I didn’t know where I was and I was afraid about being lost, having car trouble in the middle of nowhere. So when Isaac was coming I went to my daughter and said: “Are you scared?” and she said: “No” I asked her: “Do you want to stay?” “Yeah”. So we stayed.

S: Wow!

A.T.: It wasn’t that bad.

S: So, can you repeat when there is a hurricane… what do you bring with you and to evacuate from a hurricane?

A.T.: Well, you bring everything that is important to you, like if you have pictures, I bring my computer, all your papers like your marriage license, birth certificates… driver’s license, whatever… money, you have to bring money… jewelry or anything like that that is important to you, anything you think that you don’t want to live the rest of your life without. Something… something you inherited from your mother, something… you wanna take that. Then if you have to end up staying in a shelter or something, then… you might be robbed. You know, so… But I have plenty of friends I can stay with, there’s never a problem, my friends and family, there’s never problem with me having a place to stay, but it’s just… I have an old car, and I run the risk of having a car trouble going wherever it is that I’m going. One thing you don’t wanna have is you don’t wanna be stuck on the side of the road with a dead car when there’s a hurricane coming, and… then there’s… you know, if you get a hotel, which occasionally I have to get a hotel room for one reason or another, you’d better have a place to stay. You know, that’s usually a hundred and something dollars a night. I’ve had to rent cars to make trips before, because I didn’t want to take my car all the way to Illinois, so I rented a car. You know, so there’s a lot of expense involved in… not staying into your house, and… and you wanna bring food, because if you don’t want to eat out all the time, you wanna at least have something, or if… you know, usually there’s food in your freezer, in your refrigerator, that if you’re gone for a week and the power’s out, you come back and it’s gonna be bad anyway, so you take that with you. And it’s kind of a burden… it takes part of the burden off whoever you’re staying with, or if you stay in a hotel at least you don’t have to eat out, because a lot of times you evacuate to some place and the storm hits there too, and then the restaurants and everything are closed anyway. Restaurants and the stores… when Jessica was little, about a year old, hurricane Georges came through, and her dad had never been in a hurricane, he was from California and he panicked, and so we had to evacuate. And we went up by Boogaloo and stayed in a hotel down there by and it hit worse there than it hit here. And we were trapped because of down trees and all over all the roads, the power was out at the hotel we were staying at, all the restaurants were closed, the gas stations were closed… we couldn’t even walk nearby to get lunch and meat, or something like that… fortunately we had lunch and meat and… a loaf of bread, and… the people at the hotel we were staying at… I think they opened up their coke machine, and we gave them money and so we could get cokes, because the coke
machine wasn’t working anyway, so [audio poco chiaro] but it was coke. And so we had something to drink, but… you know, it’s a chance you take when you evacuate the storm is gonna follow you. You know, it’s hard to know exactly where they’re gonna go, until they make land fall.

S: Yeah.

A.T.: And then a lot of times wherever it is you are, they go too, so… we stayed here and that way once it came ashore it was past us. And then a few days of really hot weather, we sat down here and [audio poco chiaro] through the porch.

S: Hahahahah. So It’s difficult that the water comes here?

A.T.: We had about 31 inches downstairs we… measure… if you look at that car next door, and imagine the bottom part of the rim of the tyres underwater, that’s how our water went.

S: Ah.

A.T.: I couldn’t take my car anywhere. People kept calling me and sending me text messages and my cell phone went dead. I have a landline here, that I plug the phone into so I can call out if I need help… and as soon as the water… I was worried about the water! You know, I was worried about it coming from the back, I was worried there might be Corexit in it, because there had been so much oil and stuff washed into the back of the island after the oil spill. And all that stuff that was trapped [audio poco chiaro] and everything, so… I told my daughter: “We can’t go into the water until it’s gets [audio poco chiaro]” about ankle length and ankle-up and we went next door and ran the engine of the car to charge up our cell phones, and check out Facebook, and sending messages to people. And I made sure a had a full tank of gas ‘cos I knew I could charge my phone in my car.

S: Hahahah.

A.T.: And then we didn’t have running water for… they turned the water off for… a day. So we didn’t have any water and… when Katrina hit, we were staying with a friend, in [audio poco chiaro] and we were watching footage of New Orleans on his TV and all these people in the Superdome were complaining that there was no running water and buses couldn’t get to them to get them out because of the flooding in the street. But they had no running water and all the toilets were floating and my daughter who was 8 at the time remarked: “Don’t they have buckets?” She said: “Because they could take buckets and scoop up buckets of water and pull that in the toilet and then flush the toilet with the…you know… And so, we didn’t have any running water and I told her: “You know, we get to try your bucket idea” so I gave her a bucket and she… I said: “Don’t get into the water” she got out of the bottom stair, bent over and scooped up enough water to pull in the toilet tank and flush the toilet. And that worked!

S: Wow!

A.T.: So… and we had plenty of bottled water, so it wasn’t problem, but we didn’t want to use bottled water to flush the toilets, so we used flood water to flush the toilet. So… she had a good time. We played a lot of card games, we played a lot of board games, which we normally don’t have time to do, and she took a t-shirt, cut it up and made a
“cast away” shirt out of it… which was really cute. She looked like she was on some deserted island or something like that, hahaha!

S: Hahahah.

A.T.: [audio poco chiaro] her shirt all cut! But we actually had… it was fun. Considering that everybody else thought it would be the end of the world. “Hurricane’s coming, we have to leave!”

S: So you was the only two that remains here?

A.T.: I heard that there were seven people that stayed on the island.

S: Ah, seven.

A.T.: Well, I mean, some people stayed at the fire station and the town hall people stayed. And I heard that there would be emergency personnel and the town hall… officials and there were seven other people who stayed, that’s what I heard. So that was [audio poco chiaro] people. And the lady who lived right here, in that little white house…

S: Ok.

A.T.: She and her husband stayed. They had a generator. And then there were some people at this grey house over here, ‘cos I heard their generator running all the time. But… there weren’t a whole lot of us.

S: Yeah… and there was… the water that flooded was dangerous because of the… the Corexit, or…?

A.T.: Well, I didn’t know and I didn’t want to take a chance. Because… you know, well it’s dangerous when it floods ‘cos you don’t know what’s under the water. A roofing tile can blow up at somebody’s roof, you could walk through the water and step on a nail, you know, from the roofing tile. There could be something… I have a tree that fell… in the front yard… I think they call it the crown of thorns tree. The branches from that have really long thorns all over them. So brushing against one of those branches in the water would have been painful. And if there’s anything in the water, bacteria, or anything like that, you get to end up with a real bad infection and nowhere to go, you know, ‘cos there was no way to get out. My car was laying [audio poco chiaro] there was no way I could [audio poco chiaro] my car, so. So we were careful, we didn’t go into the water.

S: Good.

A.T.: This was my first [audio poco chiaro]. Before I had Jessica I always stayed, it was great staying for hurricanes, I was never afraid. And everybody was so afraid. People gave me a hard time because of her: “Oh, you’re not gonna stay with that baby!” And people panicked, to me that’s the wrong thing to do to make your child so afraid, that everytime… people… people panic over storms, [audio poco chiaro] about the oil spill. If they see… like the power is flickering in the morning and they’re supposed to have a hurricane coming, they actually keep their kids home from school.

S: Oh.

A.T.: Because they’re afraid. And the minute they hear something is coming from the Gulf, they evacuate. And I can’t see raising my kid to be that afraid of something you have no control over anyway. Because like I said you go somewhere else and it could
just come behind you. So… I told her, I said: “Well”, and she knows, ‘cos when we’ve evacuated it’s been worse where we were, than when we stayed here. And I said: “This house was built in 1950, and it survived hurricanes… one hurricane after another, major fires, it has got double pane glass, it’s got a gas stove so I was able to cook. It’s got [audio poco chiaro] in the attic, I said…I mean… “I think it is a solid building, so we can make it here”. And I said…I think I had a place to park my car that was high, and she said: “I’m not afraid” and I said: “Neither am I”. So… so we stayed.

S: Wow. It’s very…

A.T.: And we had a great time.

S: Yeah. You are born in this area?

A.T.: I was born in Louisiana, but not here in Grand Isle.

S: But in Louisiana.

A.T.: But I’ve lived all over. I moved here and I decided… when I moved here about twenty years ago I decided that I’d stay here. And nothing changed my mind until the oil spill happened. It’s only been since the oil spill that I thought… you know… And so basically I’ve told my daughter when she graduates… high school and goes on to college… wherever it is that she goes to college, I’ll go too. And you know, that way… I’ll be out of this. I have three years left. Actually two and a half years.

S: Oh. So you were born in a culture with the hurricanes. You know all this.

A.T.: I grew up… I was born when the hurricane Flossy hit. And so… I’m just glad my mum didn’t name me Flossy! I’m glad… I’ve just never been afraid of bad weather. Of course [audio poco chiaro] I know how to swim. I mean, I want to get [audio poco chiaro] but… another problem being in a flood water and I figured all that out over the years… we have fire ants here, and if a fire ants’ nest floods, they kinda all ball together in a ball and they roll along in the water in this ball, until they hit something high, like a high piece of land, and then they re-establish their nest there. Which is why the high areas are usually where you find more fire ants. And so if you’re [audio poco chiaro] through the water you might just [audio poco chiaro] through a nest of fire ants, so it could just be snakes in the water, you just don’t know. You just don’t know the risk of nails and things like that. So I try to stay out of the water, I don’t know… It’s been many many years since I’ve had shrimp boots. And if you wear tennis shoes into flood waters you might throw it away afterwards, because they smell horrible. Marsh water and most tennis shoes just don’t go together. So I had a pair of really old tennis shoes and my daughter had a pair of crocks, and that’s all we had to go into the water… after the storm, ‘cos we stayed… we had like a couple of inches of water in the yard for days afterwards, the flood water receded and the yard was still flooding.

S: Oh.

A.T.: That… I don’t know, I’ve always sworn that if it was worse than a two… I told my friend, ‘cos my friends worry so much “If it’s worse than a two, I’ll leave” at least since I’ve had Jessica. But for one, or possibly even a two… twos are getting worse, but… because of the flooding situation here, but a one is nothing, we have hundreds
storms worse than a one so... I can sit out of one. The hurricanes we know what to do, how to deal with, but the oil was something we weren’t prepared for. And we still don’t know what to do about it. I’ve been watching the birds up in the trees. There’s a whole flock of them, [audio poco chiaro] they’re watching us. I throw bread out in the yard all of the time, they’re probably waiting for me to throw some more bread out. One of my Facebook friends posted a picture of a bunch of Canadian geese... up north, they’re just all on the ground because bad weather is coming, and I wrote: “Flight south has been cancelled for the immediate future, until further notice.”

S: Ok.
Betsy: [audio poco chiaro] But I don’t have the problem that I had before when I couldn’t walk straight.

Sara: Yeah.

B: I don’t… I can’t think of what it is… with a Z… I think the name, of what they call it. But I don’t… I don’t feel… I don’t… feel or ever was… diagnosed with any kind of problems… that happened during the oil spill, it seemed like if anybody got anything I would have because I was out there every day.

S: Yeah.

B: Every day I was out there. And wouldn’t stop me from walking. But it gets, I mean some day they wouldn’t let you out at all. They would tell you… it would be like on the news when you couldn’t go at all. [audio poco chiaro], but other than that… there wasn’t too many days when you couldn’t go at all.

S: Yeah.

B: I guess that sometime they had to do… kind of surveys or something. What was the hardest thing is that it was so loud… the pumps they had… they ran them 24 hours a day.

S: Wow.

B: And… I know there’s a lady on the beach, you need to go talk to… she’s… she… in fact I think she has a lawsuit against BP. ‘Cos she thinks her dogs died… and her cats, ‘cos she had seven dogs, and… like 6 cats.

S: Wow! They died?

B: They died, yeah. She was right the beach, down the street, from me, but… I think she had a lawsuit against them, she filed a law claim… a claim against them for her losing her animals.
S: Yeah. And the picture that you take... you post it on Facebook, or it is just for you?
B: Just for me, I didn’t... you know, I don’t know enough about the computer to do all that.
S: Yeah.
B: Did you find... Did you look at it in the other pictures?
S: Yeah.
B: No? [audio poco chiaro] I know there’s a man that has about 20, but [audio poco chiaro] ‘cos he was... doing some research, on how to invent a machine to help them get the oil.
S: Ah, ok, yeah.
B: So he... he got my pictures and I don’t know where they are, in another city or something. So you only found two pictures, out of all those?
S: I have some pictures...
B: There’s no picture of the animal, birds?
S: No.
B: I had pictures of turtles, I had pictures of [audio poco chiaro] I always took pictures of those.
S: No, it’s the only one of the fence, that [audio poco chiaro] On the beach.
B: Yeah. That’s all... I don’t know what happened to my pictures, I’m 63, I need to know! I can’t use that excuse, can I?
S: Yeah.
B: Yeah, I knew I wouldn’t really have a lot to tell you, because... you know... my knowledge and education of it all is... not the best.
S: Yeah.
B: But... I just know it was bad.
S: Yeah, you have your experience.
B: Uh?
S: You have your experience, it is a lot of information.
B: Everybody had their own, individual experience from it.
S: Yeah.
B: Like I said, it affected my business... made me the angriest, that my customers...
S: Yeah.
B: Weren’t able to come down to their homes and enjoy... I mean, each one of my customers and I had probably... I have 27 customers altogether... right now in my business and... my customers would come 2-3 times a month, ok? Sometimes every week-end, they were here every week-end. And they paid me 100 dollars every time I cleaned their camp. And I was used to making in the summer time, which is the only time they ever make any money, it’s in the summertime, I was losing 1000 dollars a week. And BP didn’t want to give me that thing, that’s why they made me so angry. I didn’t... I mean I didn’t go hungry, because I have a husband who works... but that was the time of the year that I made my money.
S: Yeah.

B: And I made nothing. I lost a lot of money. About 6-7 months of the year out of business, and there’s about 3 months I don’t have anything… you know, ‘cos people’s children are in school, and… and the holidays come, so… but… start that March, people start coming back. And ever since then, you know, it’s been two years. Ever since then I don’t have all my customers come back. Like just… like really they used to come maybe… 2-3 times a month, they may come… every 6 weeks now. Just to check on their camp, but they don’t come like they used to to Grand Isle. So that affected me and it’s still affecting me, you know… for my business… to clean up. But that’s only… I can’t go out and get a job, because I can’t [audio poco chiaro] I can do this and work at my own pace, you know, and do… just get it done. It’s a job where you don’t have to hurry up and get it done, you know. But…

S: So you think that BP will never pay?

B: Pay me?

S: Yeah.

B: I don’t think they’ll ever come back and give me any money, no. I know they got more moneys out there, but… at the time they told me because I couldn’t prove what I was making… I had my customers writing letters… that… I worked for them, and they were coming down here, and I had them write how much they paid me for cleaning… and they still… they still didn’t help me, you know. They just… they refused me… and that hurt, you know. ‘Cos I had my goals in life and my moneys… you know, my budget of what I was going to be doing in the future, and they messed all that up, it messed… they messed me up. Then like right now, that’s one reason we’re building a house here in Grand Isle, because we couldn’t sell our property, you know, ‘cos people just started coming to buy in Grand Isle. And if we could have sold our properties, it would help… but we couldn’t sell. We wanted to. I don’t know, maybe one day… but now… our life is over. Grand Isle will be back beautiful and everything be normal.

S: I hope.

B: [audio poco chiaro] ‘Cos they love the beach, and… one day it’ll be back… the same, I guess. Not the same, I guess… They’ll always be problems… ‘cos the oil is never to go away completely. It’s gonna live under that water. I think it grows and causes bacteria, and causes diseases, or I don’t know. I don’t know enough about it, I bet you do… know more about it. You think one day that it… that we will be able to eat the seafood at all?

S: I think that… maybe you can eat it, but the island will never be the same.

B: Is never going to be safe…really safe.

S: I think in the far future.

B: In the far future?

S: Yeah.

B: I ate fish last night and it was very good.
S: Hahahah!
B: Hahahah!
S: It’s good.
B: Don’t put that on the interview. Oh, we had some good trout last night, Carl went fishing… about four days ago.
S: Yeah.
B: He caught 6 trout… and I cooked them last night, they were so good!
S: Hahaha.
B: He caught 7 this morning. Yeah. But… I guess, if we’re going to die, we’re going to die, we’re gonna eat the fish.
S: Yeah. We die happy.
B: You know, I’m gonna go home and get a nap, and get a clean up. Anything else you need to ask me?
S: No, it’s good.
B: I did good?
S: Yeah.
B: I don’t know too much.
Sara: Ok. So you ever ever lived here? You have ever live here? You always stayed on the island?
Jane: Always stayed.
S: In Grand Isle?
J: Yes.
S: Yeah. And since when you’re married?
J: Thirty years.
S: Thirty? Wow! And your job?
J: Commercial fisherman.
S: Ok.
Fred: She shrimps with us…
J: Shrimp, crab…
F: Shrimp, crab, oyster.
S: And it’s like a family tradition?
F: Yes, for four generations, and I got a son that is the fifth generation, he’s out there shrimping right now, my son, on his boat.
S: So your boat now is…
F: At the dock [audio poco chiaro]
S: Ok.
F: And he’s out there shrimping. I got to do a test, I go to the doctor tomorrow. So my boat is at the dock, but he’s out shrimping right now.
S: Ah, ok.
J: My son has his own boat.
F: Yes, his own boat.
S: Oh, so it’s another boat, ok.
F: Yeah, he has another boat.
J: Two boats, haha.
S: So it’s like the… principal work here? And… how… what do you do?
F: She picks shrimp.
J: I pick shrimp.
F: She picks shrimp, crabs…
J: There’s several different things in the year that we do. Part of the year we oyster, we have oyster leases where we go out, it’s our leases… and we go out, and we harvest the oysters to sell, but the oil spill wiped them all out.
F: So that’s what we’d be doing right now.
J: This is the time of the year when we do that. So we’re out of work right now.
S: Ah, ok. So, you can’t fish?
F: No.
J: No, we have no oysters to fish.
F: We have no oysters, they all died.
S: Is died?
J: They died.
F: The oil spill killed them
S: Oh, and so the oyster that you find here is from another place?
F: There’s no… yeah, yeah, they find… yeah, yes, from… further West.
J: Further West.
S: Ah, ok.
J: Not the Grand Isle area. Lafourche Parish and further West.
S: So… because the place are good?
F: They didn’t get hit with the oil.
J: They didn’t get hit with the oil, that way.
S: Ah, ok.
J: Yeah.
F: Also the oil was like from Fourchon, coming this way to… Plaquemines… Parish. But most of the oil was in this area here.
S: Wow.
F: So it killed all the oysters, it killed the shrimp larva, and the crab larva, they just killed everything, so… the crabbing is starting to pick up a little bit… the crabbing… we’re starting to have a few more crabs in the last couple of… the last four months… a little bit more crab than usual, ‘cos [audio poco chiaro] but the shrimping is terrible. The shrimping is the first time in thirty years… what thirty… I’ve been shrimping since I’ve been 15 years old, on my own boat. My dad… my dad bought me a boat, and I never had to leave Grand Isle. This was the first year, and I’m 48 years old, I had to
leave Grand Isle to go make a living and to Lafourche Parish and Terrebonne Parish to catch shrimp.

S: Oh.

F: ‘Cos they didn’t have... over here you’d starve to death. And I always made my living here, every day, right here. Every day! But I had to leave this year. I didn’t go for the first two weeks. I said “There something showing up here”, and my son... he left, he went... he was catching a lot of shrimp over there, so I had to go there, work over there for the first time in my life.

S: Wow.

F: It’s about a four-hour boat drive, but how else could I make it, we are starving to death over here. Now the oysters there... oysters lease... the way it works, you lease the area... it’s yours, nobody can work there. And you can’t lease no more areas, so I can’t go to lease no areas over there to work oysters. ‘Cos they have no more lease out there. That’s it, and they could do that about ten years ago. They [audio poco chiaro] lease and oyster lease, so you can’t get... do no more oyster leases. So all our oyster leases here were affected by the oil spill. It killed... killed them all. So... now, your option is to go to State Beds, and everybody is going to the State Beds, and fish ‘cos they have no oysters either and stayed open five days... six days! And then they shut it down, six days is open. And you can’t make enough in six days.

S: No. So, you can do nothing now?

F: Nothing. I can’t go work in the oilfield ‘cos I can’t pass the physical.

S: Ah, ok.

F: ‘Cos I had... some... disease in my neck messed up, disease in my back messed up, you know, all kind... and I had cancer and all, so I can’t do... I can’t, you know... I can’t work in the oilfield ‘cos I can’t pass the physical. But this is the only thing I can do is this right here.

S: And you can’t retire now?

F: No. Can’t afford it.

J: He’s 48 years old.

S: Oh. So, how many years you have for retire?

F: Probably at 62, so I get about... 20... 24 more years...

S: Ok.

F: No! 14 more years.

J: 14 years.

F: 14 to 15 more years before I retire.

S: Ok.

F: That’s what we’re hoping. And when I get about to 62-65, then I’ll think about retiring, maybe. It all depends on... the way is going right now, we’re not going to afford right now, the shrimping is going worse. I’m using... the last two years I’ve been using my money to live us off. ‘Cos I don’t make enough... I’m using my retirement money. I don’t make enough to survive... shrimping, that’s shrimping, crab, oysters because of the oil spill. So I’m hoping it changes for the next couple of years, the crabbing is
starting to pick up a little bit, I’m hoping the shrimping does the same thing... start picking up... the oyster... that... the oysters that could be five... four or five years before they even... shows any... more... ‘cos it’s been two years that we haven’t seen no [audio poco chiaro] none.

S: Yeah.

F: For the oil spill, so we’re looking about that three more years, say [audio poco chiaro] take in April this year, you’re looking about at two years.. two and a half years before our harvest is going to be big enough.

S: And before the BP... how was working?

F: Oh here, before the oil? We were working every day. We were doing good before, but when the oil spill came, it just killed everything, it killed the oysters, killed the shrimp, killed everything.

S: And you don’t receive money by the BP?

J: Still waiting.

F: Still waiting... I hired a lawyer... we gave it to a lawyer, make the lawyer do it. We tried to work with BP and they didn’t want to work with us.

S: Why?

F: Oh, they don’t wanna do nothing... they want you to starve to death. They want to give me 25,000 dollars, and finish with it. 25,000 and you’re finished. I make more than that in three months, four months, I make 25,000, you want me to take 25,000 and be finished? No. BP... whatever you hear on tv is a lie.

S: Yeah?

F: Yeah. They want... they’re making... they’re forcing people to take that 25,000 is... they just lose everything. Luckily we have saved money that I hadn’t to take them, but I got some friend of mine that took it, because they had to, and he’s crying now because they can’t make it, because there is no shrimp. Two friends of mine took 25,000 two years ago and they can’t... they got no shrimp and they’re starving to death. That’s why BP is paying everybody at 25,000 [audio poco chiaro] people think, because they need to survive, you know, they need to survive. I didn’t do it, I gave it to a lawyer that will all handle it.

S: And so who paid the BP?

F: Uh?

S: Who is paying the BP?

F: Who is paying the BP? Who BP is paying?

S: Yeah.

F: Oh, they’re paying nobody.

S: Nobody?

F: I don’t think. The 25,000, that’s what they’re giving them. After you finished all you get is 25,000 and you can’t sue them after that. You can’t do nothing! So a lot of people took it, that’s what we hear on tv “We get this much money out.” BP when the oil spill first started, they treated us good. For the first couple of months they
S: Ah, ok.
F: And then the next two months they gave us 2,300 to live off, and then they cut us off.
S: This is crazy. How was when happened the BP? What do you think about the disaster?
F: What I think about the disaster? I think they could have cleaned it a whole lot faster if they would say how much oil was coming out, but they lied from day one, 'cos they could have got this programme going on from day one, instead of letting the oil pouring out like it was pouring... it was like three weeks before they even told how much oil was coming out. Four weeks! From day one they would have let the Federal Government how much oil... the true amount coming out... they could have made something a lot faster, and stop all of that oil from coming... And they didn’t clean it out there, they just sprayed... they didn’t clean it out there, they could have done that from the beginning, Day one were still having... a whole bunch of boats ready to go, to get ready to go, they didn’t start doing it until the oil started hitting the land, that’s when they started to hire people to clean it all.
J: They sprayed dispersants to sink it.
F: Sink it.
S: How was when they sprayed the dispersants? You can smell it?
J: Yes.
F: You could smell everything [audio poco chiaro]
J: My daughter got sick.
S: You were sick?
J: We all got sick.
F: Yeah. Headaches.
J: Headaches, nausea.
F: Bleeding nose.
J: Nose bleeding, stuff like that. But if they would not spray the dispersants, it would have been floating, it would have been easier for them to clean up out there. But when they put the dispersants, it sinks it.
S: Yeah.
J: And then they can’t find it.
F: They wanted to hide it.
J: They were trying to hide it.
S: Yeah.
F: How much oil there was.
S: And so there was another... they can’t clean it in another way?
F: Yeah, yeah.
J: If they didn’t spray the dispersants it would have floated, they could have suck it up off the water.
S: Ah, ok.
J: Those machines that were sucking up...
S: Yeah.
J: They could have sucked it up. You could see it, to clean it. But when you spray dispersants it sinks it, and nobody can see it.
F: They say [audio poco chiaro] it might break in little particles and it goes down, the fish eats those particles and all that stuff with... They just...
J: The raw crude oil is black, black black. When they spray the dispersants it makes a rust color, and it's like thick, thick, thick, but it sinks.
S: Yeah.
F: And they had... I didn’t work out there, I worked inland waters... out there, some friend of mine that was out there... when they had a big area of oil they would not... they were told to leave it alone. At night a plane would go spray the dispersants on it, so that they wouldn’t even pick it up. Just leave it out there, they sprayed the dispersants. And that’s a friend that could have swept it up, picked it up, you know, they didn’t want to. 'Cos they charge for every barrel they pick up, so they were trying to hide it. Now they’re in trouble, 'cos the [audio poco chiaro] showed how much oil was coming out, but a friend of mine they said “Just leave it, just drive through back and forth just to break up in smaller patches, that we don’t see it so big.” That’s what they did out there.
S: Yeah.
F: They picked it up.
S: So why do you think that this happened?
F: What, the...?
S: The BP?
F: The BP, why it happened?
S: The explosion?
F: What happened? According to the tv they were trying to cut costs.
J: Try to ...
F: Try to save money.
J: Try to save money.
S: Ah ok.
J: By doing it cheaply.
F: ‘Cos it was over budget. The project was over budget. ‘Cos the oil would cost more and more money, they tried... I think they were trying to cut costs, trying to save money, because it was going over budget. They plead guilty... to it, you know. So now you know, but...
S: So it has changed the way of life in the island after this?
F: Oh it has changed a lot, terrible. A big change in life for us, for most fishermen. The shrimps are not there no more, the oysters are not there no more... or the crab wasn’t there no more... the crab is picking up a little bit, it’s not like it used to be, we’re starting to pick up a little bit, before we could catch two dozens of crab with fifty traps. Now with five traps you might be able to catch 8 to 10 dozen now. Before with fifty traps you could catch 40 dozen... so that’s a big difference.
S: Yeah.
F: I say nobody will never know how much... how much they’ve killed out there... 'cos everything sinks to the bottom. So you can’t, you know, you don’t know how much fish they killed, how much crab they killed, how much shrimp they killed, ‘cos it all sinks to the bottom, and... [audio poco chiaro]
S: The fish eat the...?
F: Eats it, yeah. Fish eat the... fish eat the... they eat the shrimp, eat the crab... and the big fish eat the big crab and the little crabs... the big crabs eat the dead fish on the bottom... you know, it’s...
J: It’s a chain reaction.
F: It’s a chain reaction.
J: It just keeps going and going, and going.
F: And then the seagulls, the birds eat the fish that died that floats to the top... so the birds eat that, with all those chemicals in it.
S: So you can eat now the shrimp here?
F: Yeah, you can... yeah, it’s safe...
J: They say it’s safe.
F: I’d say... I’d say... I think it’s more safe now, but when they said it was safe before I don’t think it was.
S: No.
F: ‘Cos when we ate shrimp and crab, had headaches.
S: Oh.
F: Now we don’t get any more headaches. I just think that... now I think it’s safer now than the last year... And the year before last it was terrible. Everytime we ate seafood, we’d always get headaches and I ate it, you know, ‘cos I love seafood, ‘cos... I eat seafood probably five days a week over here.
S: Wow!
F: Yes. Five days a week we have seafood over here. ‘Cos that seafood, crab, boiled shrimp... spaghetti. Shrimp spaghetti, [audio poco chiaro] shrimp and onion. If that’s fried shrimp, you know, it’s just... you name it, we fry it, and we do it in so many different ways.
S: Yeah.
F: [audio poco chiaro] super shrimp, that’s how we do it, you know. We eat shrimp five days a week over here. I usually put about five hundred pounds of [audio poco chiaro] in the freezer, a shrimp peel, and about three hundred pounds of big shrimp in the freezer for us to last on and on. [audio poco chiaro] We don’t buy much meat... we are cooking... [audio poco chiaro] eat the seafood out of the freezer.
S: Ah, ok. And now you eat the same fish?
F: Yeah, yeah, yeah, the same fish, everything... yeah. We eat crab, shrimp, oyster. Thanksgiving, the day of Thanksgiving we had fried shrimp, fried oysters, fried fish. In Mississippi, in a camp, I brought it up first to fry, where... her sister and her family, we ate... that’s all we ate the day before Thanksgiving. All fried seafood.
S: But the fish grown even if there is platform in the ocean?
F: Yeah, yeah, yeah, the fish is still out there.
J: A fish could swim away from polluted water.
S: Ah, ok.
J: The crab could swim away, the shrimp, but it affected the breeding grounds, where they laid their larva. A oyster can’t move, it’s just stuck there. They can’t swim.
S: Ah, ok.
J: That’s why all the oysters got wiped out. But most of the other seafood could swim away and move out of harms where... you know... the way... but the oysters couldn’t. It contaminated the breeding grounds where the fish spawn their eggs and the shrimp lay the larva, it contaminated all of that for a while. So that’s why we’ve had such a big decrease in the amount of seafood that we catch.
S: Ok.
J: And now it’s slowly coming back, but it’ll take several years for the oysters to come back.
S: So how many years do you think that...?
J: Five to six.
S: Yeah.
J: It’s already been two years.
S: Wow.
F: They didn’t come back yet.
J: Still waiting.
F: [audio poco chiaro] so.
S: And so the oyster and the shrimp you can catch all the year?
F: No, the shrimp... it is seasonal shrimp, oysters you catch every day of the week... year. But the shrimp... we’ve got a small boat, so we just work inland waters. They open like from May ‘til July and it closes for a month, they open back in August ‘til December. About December 15th – 16th it closes.
S: Ok.
F: Crab... you can fish all year crabs, all year round. And regular fish you can fish all year round... certain kind of fish. I don’t fish fish for a living. I just do oyster, crab and shrimp.
S: Ok.
F: I don’t fish... I don’t fish all sorts of fish.
S: So you’ve learned to fish with your father?
F: My father is the third generation... he’s the third, I’m the fourth, and my son is the fifth. We’re five generations.
S: And you speak French?
F: Yes. Not good good, but I speak it! I speak a little bit, but not as good as everybody else, but my grandmother always spoke French. The only thing she knew was French but after she passed away, she [audio poco chiaro] so we didn’t get [audio poco chiaro] out there, so...
J: They didn’t allow the children to speak it in schools, so he just... really stopped.
S: Ah, ok.
J: ‘Cos then the parents... when they had children... they couldn’t speak it in school, so they’ve never taught to their children. It was a Cajun French.
S: So at school now they can’t learn French?
J: Yeah.
F: Well now it’s bringing at school again.
J: It’s not Cajun French.
F: Not Cajun French. It’s not our French.
S: So it’s like an old, old French?
F: Yes. It’s like over there in the ... the Caribbeans and all?
J: And France.
F: The Caribbeans... France is a little different than our French. Remember that we talked about it?
J: Yeah. There’s different dialects.
F: Yeah.
J: We’ve more of a creole, Cajun dialect.
S: Ok. So it’s the same in all the South Louisiana?
J: Yeah.
F: Yes.
J: We can... I can understand it all, I comprehend all, I just... I can’t speak it. It’s hard.
S: Ah, ok.
F: Same, you know, I can understand everything in French, I can speak a little bit but not much, I understand everything in French. So you can’t talk bad about me in French.
S: Hahahah.
J: Hahahah.
S: The island was better when you was young?
J: What?
S: The island, or is the same?
J: The island?
S: Yeah.
J: Uhm... It was better because it was less crowded, and... they didn’t have so much coastal erosion, it was bigger... but now it’s getting more populated, and the coastal erosion has eaten up at it.
S: So why there is the coastal erosion?
F: There’s no... too much salt water. The marshland is dying by the day, just too much salinity... in the water.
S: Ah, ok.
F: And the... what’s... the word... not the grass... not the vegetables...
J: The vegetation.
F: Yes. The vegetation can’t handle this salinity. ‘Cos it’s opened up so much all over now, there’s no more... you know, there’s no more [audio poco chiaro] is getting wider
and wider, so you’ve got more Gulf water coming in. And it’s just killing… the vegetation out there.

S: Ah, ok.

F: And then the oil spill hurt a lot, ‘cos there’s so much oil went in the marsh land and it killed the grass. And once the grass has died, the erosion just eats it away, so it didn’t help as much.

J: They made it worse.

S: So it accelerated the erosion?

J: Yes.

S: Ah. So when happened the BP there was something that came here to explain what was happened or you just see on tv?

F: We just saw it on tv.

J: They would show a lot of things on tv, but they never ever came around… for house to house and see if people needed anything, or explain anything, they never came around.

F: They did things for the kids, they put some…

J: They did movies for the kids, and snow halls, and… they did a lot of stuff for the children, but… I mean they just came in and interrupted our lives.

S: Yeah.

J: You know? We were a peaceful community and then they just… it… for two years, all our life…is crazy! It’s just… it wasn’t normal. Not at all.

S: So…

J: And they were trying to make it normal for the kids, but it wasn’t… with so many different people working from all over the place and… and like… I’m so used to going outside and working in my low garden and all, and they had so many people walking the streets that I was afraid to go outside.

S: Because you don’t know…

J: ‘Cos you don’t know who these people are.

S: Yes.

J: And it was like that for a whole year and a half.

S: Wow.

J: It was bad. And then they had tv reporters, and news people, all over the place. Wanting stories and… and it’s like… the phone would never stop ringing, people would see us on tv and then they’d get our phone number… And a lot who were scams, like trying to say: “I know how to stop the oil flow”… all kind of stuff! And it was crazy!

S: Yeah.

J: It was crazy.

S: So it was stressful have all these newspaper people here?

J: Yeah. It was.

F: Oh, you had some people call, I could… I said: “It’s not me, I can’t do anything, you gotta call BP, because they did that”.
J: Last week… last week the phone rang and it was CBS news reporter, because they had… that they pleaded guilty, and he wanted to know our reaction and also… two years later people are still calling!
S: Yeah.
J: You know, they wanna… they wanna know what’s going on… and… and just how things are.
S: But they… they’ve tried to do something, or just…
J: No, they just wanted us to write an article on how all the people were doing… you know… what the reaction was that it pleaded guilty… to lying on about how much oil.
S: Yeah.
J: We… we knew from day one they were lying… it’s just they got caught. You know it’s… [parla del gatto/cane]
S: Yeah. And now you think that the people have forget this?
J: No. I don’t think no one will ever forget. It’s kinda like when hurricane Katrina hit us. It’s been 7 years and we still…
S: Remember.
J: Remember. It’s something that will stay with you. Especially that you’re not making money like you are used to supporting yourself and… your way of life has totally changed.
S: Yeah.
J: And it will take a long time before… hopefully it will get back to normal. It just messed up the way we live. You know, this time of the year we would be oystering. Now we’re sitting around waiting for BP to pay us.
S: Yeah.
J: For the damage they did! That could have averted… you know, it didn’t have to be like this. If they would have never sunk the oil with the dispersants, they could have fought it out there, it would have been easier to clean. But they were trying to cover up, cover up, cover up. So… for… to save them money, because they… they had to pay a fine by however many barrels they… of oil they picked up.
S: Ok.
J: So they were trying to cover that amount, ‘cos it was a huge amount. So they were trying to save themselves money, but in the meantime they ruined our lives.
S: So it’s the same that happened in Alaska?
J: Yes. It took 20 years for those people in Alaska to collect any money.
F: You have to figure that what happened in Alaska was just one area. What happened over here was a big area with… I don’t know, I mean… maybe what… 80 times more oil, 100 times more oil than what they had up there, and so in Alaska it just affected [audio poco chiaro].
J: In Alaska it was in a bay.
F: In a bay.
S: Ah, ok.
J: So it couldn’t get out.
S: Yeah.
J: It was in that one area.
F: Over here it affected…
J: Over here it was out there in the Gulf, so it affected a huge area.
S: Yeah.
F: It’s just that here you can’t see… the real… [audio poco chiaro] too much, ‘cos they sank it out there in the Gulf, and it washes up on the beach and then tarballs come in now, and you gotta… And the tarball is mixed with sand, ‘cos they sink the oil in the sand, so… it’s really not that’s gonna float, it’s gonna be washed here from the bottom onto the land for you to see it. Like after the last storm we had… Elmer’s island was covered with it.

(Parlano del gatto)
S: So every hurricane could bring the tarball on the beach?
F&J: Yeah.
S: Ah.
F: It brought a lot, and they closed the beach down. In Elmer’s island they’re still picking up so much.
S: Yeah.
F: That’s what mostly washed up in that area right there in Grand Isle [audio poco chiaro] right there, it’s just [audio poco chiaro] came in, you know? It could be years, I’d say they’re gonna be 25 years before… for it to get better.
S: 25 years?
F: That’s what I’m saying. You got to figure that the bottom is covered all… and you can’t pick it with the net ‘cos it’s mixed with the sand, so it’s not [audio poco chiaro] Shrimp buries, crabs bury. If the bottom is covered up with that, they’re not gonna come up or go down, ‘cos it’s full of their oil, so what happens to them, you know, what happened to those crabs and shrimp that bury, that they used to bury, but you can’t bury, or to lay their eggs, or whatever [audio poco chiaro] (parla del cane)
S: So you’ve seen the shrimps sick? Because I’ve seen the photos of like the shrimp without eyes?
F: Oh, we caught some!
S: Yeah?
J: We caught a lot. Still alive but no eyes.
F: With no eyes.
J: Like a… like a white sack where the eye would have been. ‘Cos usually their eyes… it’s like a pouch.
S: Ok.
J: And the eyes pop out of it a little bit, like they’re black black, and they can pop out a little bit and move around. And the ones that we caught had like a white sack over them… or it was just hollow… but it was white.
S: Ah, ok.
J: And they were still alive. So... that has to be from the chemicals.
F: We were getting shrimps with black gills... and the shrimp in the head was black, black, black... inside. The first year, when we got to go back shrimping, it was like 70% of them with the black gills. Last year it was about down to 40%, this year is probably about 10% of black gills.
S: So it’s because of the oil?
F: That’s what we think.
J: Yeah.
F: But I think... I think our government was bought out from BP. [audio poco chiaro] paying.
S: Yeah?
F: They don’t tell you the truth. Somebody is paying some money to somebody out there... [audio poco chiaro] paying for that. Our government was bought out. The would buy out [audio poco chiaro] fishing people [audio poco chiaro] boats [audio poco chiaro] boats and all. Why did they do that for? Why are they buying the Louisiana [audio poco chiaro] boats and all?
S: Yeah.
F: I think it’s... it was bought out.
(parlano del cane)
S: And you ever think to go away from the island?
J: No.
S: No?
J: This is our home.
F: I’ve been here 48 years, I’m not leaving!
S: You are scared about the future?
J: Yeah, it’s...
F: Well I’m scared... I’m scared about this future. If I... BP is paying me money I’m going... I’m starting another business. I see we can’t make it with this business, no more.
S: You can’t fish no more?
F: Oh, I still want to do it, but I just can’t depend on this no more...
J: We can’t support ourselves no more.
F: I still want to do it, but I just can’t support our family no more with this.
J: We’re gonna have to supplement our income with something else now.
S: Ok.
J: Not just... not just being commercial fishermen.
F: So they come across some... pay us some money I’m going to invest them in maybe rent a property, that’s what we’re thinking: rent a property... to rent a place at... [audio poco chiaro]
J: Real estate.
F: Real estate.
S: Ok.
F: With the real estate thing. That’s what we think. You know, I have to sell about repossessing homes, fix them up and put them back up to sale, and one to rent it out, you know, just to think… trying something new, ‘cos we can’t make it only with just this. I’m not gonna use the money… If I get the money from BP I’m not gonna use them to live off farming and maybe I’ll be broke in five years down the line I’ll have no income coming back ‘cos the shrimp don’t still back up. No I’m going to rent… into real estate. That’s what I’m looking at.

S: So, all the shrimpers here have the same problem?

F: Everyone. Like I said, some of my friends took those 25,000 dollars… and they’re starving to death right now, ‘cos they can’t do nothing.

S: Yeah.

F: They’re finished.

J: When you take the money and you take the settlement you have to sign a paper, so if that… cap they put out there ever busts again, we can’t sue them again.

S: So this is the form that you fill at the BP claim center?

F: Yes.

J: Once you sign off on it, if it busts and puts oil all over again… what you’re gonna do, we can’t sue them no more. They don’t have to pay you no more.

S: It’s like a contract?

J: Yeah.

S: Oh. Ok.

J: So it’s either not signing the paper and don’t get paid… you’re stuck, you have no choice.

S: But you… they told you… they tell you this?

J: Yes.

S: Ok.

J: Yeah.

F: Our lawyer.

J: Our lawyer.

F: Our lawyer.

S: Oh.

J: They won’t pay you the money they owe you for the damages they did to our oyster leases until we sign a paper saying that if they ever have a spill like on that pipe, that same pipe, that we cannot sue them no more.

S: Ok.

J: So they’ll pay us for all the damages, but if that pipe ever busts again… and covers everything with oil again and we cannot work no more, we can’t do nothing about it.

S: Oh, you can’t work if [audio poco chiaro] this money?

J: We can’t… if the oil pipe busts again…

S: Yeah?

J: And causes another disaster… we’re not entitled to nothing.

F: To no money.
S: Oh.
J: No money at all.
S: Wow.
J: Yeah! Yeah! It’s crazy!
S: Yeah!
J: [audio poco chiaro] “I’ll pay you for the damage I did, but after that I’m not responsible if I damage that again”.
S: Yeah!
J: You know… and we have no choice! You know, we have no choice. We need our money, we need to survive.
S: Yeah.
J: We have bills to pay… you know, and they just… that’s what I’ve said, they’ve ruined our lives. There’s nothing we can do about it. Because they’re the rich company. They have all the money and they can do what they want.
S: Yeah. So here is difficult to live because the life is more expensive than other places?
J: It’s expensive here to live, but this has been our home forever.
S: Yeah.
J: You know, you’re born and raised, it’s your heritage. You know, our grandparents did this, and their grandparents before them, it’s… it’s our only way of life that we know.
S: Yeah.
J: You know.
F: ‘Cos we made a living out of… fishing, and we ate out of our fishing, you know, so everything we did was… you don’t know how much money I saved by…eating seafood, you know?
S: Yeah.
F: Ground meat is 3,50 a pound. The shrimp is 1,50 a pound? [audio poco chiaro] you know… ‘cos it’s so much cheaper.
S: Yeah.
F: And that… and now all you can catch is… is just terrible.
S: So the shrimp that… and the fish that you catch here you buy for all America? You sell?
F: Yes, yes. It goes all over the United States, yeah.
S: Ah, ok.
F: It goes to New York, New Mexico… I guess Missouri, everywhere! That’s.. they’re sort of shipping all over.
S: So it’s one of the most important industries?
F: Oh yes. In Louisiana is…
J: Louisiana is the biggest State for export of shrimp.
S: Ah, ok.
F: Seafood.
J: Seafood.
S: So it’s a big loss for the country?
F: Oh yes!
J: A very big hit for the economy, very big.
S: And the State of Louisiana did something or?
J: They have a lawsuit in... but when is everybody going to get paid?
S: Yeah.
J: They're spending all their money on advertisements on tv saying “We’ve made people whole!” No, they didn’t make us whole, they’re killing us, you know?
F: One of my friends... a friend of mine is placed in Mississippi... she’s living in Mississippi right now. I went with some seafood, some seafood that I caught, you know, ‘cos that’s a good friend. So I went there and I brought some seafood up there and she said: “I’m glad that BP took care of you all!” I said: “What do you mean BP take care of you all?” “I heard on tv that they took care of you all!” I said: “We got zero from BP, nothing!” “You’re lying!” I said “No.” “We see on tv every day BP is taking care of all the fishermen and all” “No, don’t believe that.”
J: That’s a lie.
S: So the other countries don’t know what...
F: Oh, no, they hear what’s on tv.
S: Yeah.
F: They think that’s right. No, it’s not right, they’re lying. Why did we hire a lawyer? I didn’t believe in suing them, but I had to hire a lawyer, because they were just giving us the run around.
S: Yeah?
F: [audio poco chiaro] He’s no good. The guy was in charge, taking care of the money of BP after... BP hired him... you’re trying to buy yourself 25,000 dollars... a lot of people took that 25,000... I gotta survive, I gotta support my family, I’m not gonna take the 25,000.
J: His lawfirm was getting 250,000 dollars a month! To disperse the money...
S: Yeah?
J: To the people and he never dispersed no money... until they finally got rid of him.
F: 250,000 a month?
J: Yeah, it was a whole lot of money
F: It wasn’t...
J: A lot, a lot of money! And they... they collected more money than they paid out.
S: Oh!
J: So... and he was the one that did the 9/11 money, and he did the same thing over there.
S: Ok.
F: Well, terrorism in New York...
J: He’s rich, he’s rich!
S: And they come less people in the... on vacation now?
J: It’s slowly picking back up. They had to shut the State Park down for over a year. And that’s when a lot of people come to the State Park, and it was shut down for over a year, and... the beaches were closed.
S: Yeah?
J: So like we had no... hardly no tourists, and it’s just now..
F: They wouldn’t eat seafood either.
J: Yeah, they didn’t want to eat.
F: They still don’t eat seafood, a lot of friends of mine wouldn’t eat it.
J: They’re scared.
F: They’re scared. Two... a friend of mine said “Maybe next year I might eat the seafood, maybe next year... not before.” I’ve been eating that everyday. I said: “I’m not gonna pay 3,50 for some ground when I can get shrimp for a dollar 50.”
S: So when you fish... you went to this area, around Grand Isle?
F: Yes, Grand Isle... that’s our working area.
J: But he had to go further West.
F: Yes, this year I had to go to Terrebonne Parish, Houma... Terrebonne Parish, that way.
S: Ok.
F: ’Cos they didn’t have none in Grand Isle.
S: And the area of Venice and Plaquemines Parishes are worse than here?
F: Same problem. I don’t know about worse, I think it’s about the same. It’s all about the same. Grand Isle and Plaquemines had about the same amount of oil.
S: Ah, ok.
F: Grand Isle might have had a little bit more came inland, but... the way in line is Plaquemines Parish in line is over here to where the line is, so... it’s about the same, Grand Isle and them had all about the same... amount of oil.
S: Ok. ’Cos somebody thinks that there is worse.
F: I don’t think so.
S: It’s the same.
F: I think it’s all about the same. ’Cos I tell you, Grand Isle... Plaquemines Parish is just...
J: They had a lot of marshland affected, where we had residential areas... affected. They... it was mostly marshland.
S: Ok.
J: Which Grand Isle is all residential... the whole island. And the whole island was impacted.
S: Yeah.
F: Plaquemines starts... you’ve seen the fort, you ever took a ride to see where the fort was? Fort Livingston?
S: No.
F: Have you ever been to the State Park?
S: Yes.
F: Yeah, have you ever been to that tower ? In the State Park you climb...
S: Oh no, because it’s closed now.
F: That’s closed?
S: Yeah.
F: Oh well, on that tower there, if you look straight to the East... far East... the next island over is Fort Livingston. It’s a Fort. Right another side fort... there’s another fort. That’s where the Plaquemines Parish starts at.
S: Ah, ok.
F: So, you know, they all came in right here, so they came in right there through, so... you know, that’s... that’s why they say that Plaquemines had more, ‘cos there was... but... ‘Cos Plaquemines is so much bigger than Grand Isle.
S: Yeah.
F: Maybe that’s why they have more... they can have more damage, but... Grand Isle was a smaller area, but we had a lot oil that came. A lot!
S: So there is more people that live in Grand Isle?
J: Oh, yeah. A lot more! Yeah.
S: So this... in what sense they are more affected?
J: Right. More residence...
F: The tourism was affected for Grand Island more than Plaquemines... Plaquemines has no tourism over there. There’s only marshland over there.
S: Yeah.
J: They have nothing.
F: This is a tourism place. This is where people come fish... and swim... and have their... you know, they couldn’t come, the beach was full of oil, it smelled so bad. You walk outside and the smell was so terrible.
J: The typical year every week-end from the spring through the fall they have a fishing rodeo... where they all catch fish for trophies.
S: Yeah.
J: And every week-end they have that, and it brings a lot of people to the island. And in... in July they have the huge Tarpon rodeo which brings a lot of people. So like... all of that was completely shut down. The whole first year.
S: So there was nobody?
J: Nobody. All the businesses lost a lot of money, because they depend... they depend on the summer months to make all their money, and then they can have... take a break in the winter time. Because they’ve made enough money in the summertime to carry them over, and it just never happened. They just shut down everything.
S: So it’s like you... you are waiting for something?
J: Yeah.
S: But you don’t know how what to wait.
J: There’s uncertainty... a lot of uncertainty.
F: It’s like we don’t know how much money we’re gonna get, if we’re gonna get anything. In Alaska it was 20 years before they got their money. Some people.
S: 20 years?
F: Some people 20 years! 15-20 years.
S: Wow.
F: When the oil spill happened, two families came down here to tell also about it, they just got... it was 15 years, or 16 years, or whatever 20 years before they got their money.
And they didn't get much.
S: But there is Exxon, or BP?
F: It was Exxon, oh yeah, it was Exxon.
S: It was the same explosion, or it was different?
F: No, it was, no, no.
J: A tanker, a big ship.
F: It was a tanker, a ship of oil in the ground. This was oil coming from the bottom of the sea.
S: Yeah.
F: It was a oil ship.
J: The earth...
F: From the earth come out. That was just... so many barrels in a ship.
S: Yeah.
F: It was just one big ship with... I don't know, maybe 100,000 barrels, 200,000 barrels maybe in it. This was... I mean [audio poco chiaro] end up saying how much oil came out of that...ground. And it wasn't just oil, and gas, H2S gas and all coming out through those [audio poco chiaro], you know? There's a lot of pollution coming out of that pipe.
S: So you think that pollution in the air is still now?
F: No, no. I don't think the pollution. The... most of the pollution will stay on the bottom, the oil that's left, and mostly... tarballs in the sand, mixed with it so... there's no more... you won't see no more... oil stream coming up like that... now they still a little oil coming out from there about a month ago, but they went to fix it. One of the [audio poco chiaro] was coming out to fix this, so...
S: So... Now you don't know what thing to do.
J: We're just waiting on our money.
S: Yeah.
J: If we get another line of work. And pay our bills. It's just a waiting game now.
S: Yeah.
J: Wait, wait, wait. So...
S: And so this... four... four billion that they have to pay... BP?
F: Pay? They paid four billion?
S: Yeah.
F: Yeah, but to whom? Who they paid them to? Not the fishermen!
S: No?
F: No. They paid... Let me tell you what.
J: Their fines.
F: No. Let me tell you who they paid! The restaurants, waitresses... got 30, 40, 50,000 dollars each! They gave us... BP gave us... 15,000 [audio poco chiaro] affected for years! They gave us 15,000, but waitresses and all got 50 to 60,000. A waitress!
S: So why the waitresses have more?
J: ’Cos the restaurants were shut down.
F: The restaurants were shut down ’cos the business, nobody would dine there.
J: They’ve been working ever since now.
S: Yeah?
J: And we haven’t! It’s crazy. It’s messed up.
S: Yeah.
J: It’s really messed up.
S: So the mayor of the… of Grand Isle is trying to do something for this?
F: The mayor?
J: The mayor?
S: Yes.
J: He’s been fighting.
S: Ok.
J: He’s been fighting, he never stopped. He’s good, he’s really good.
S: So he’s the same that was when BP happened?
J: Mr. Camardelle.
S: Ok. So it’s difficult to imagine how was the island before.
J: Hahaha. [parla col cane]
S: And Mrs Leoda told me that she was scared when the workers for the cleaning came.
J: Yeah, they were all over the place. They would round the… when they weren’t working, they would round the neighborhood, just looking around, and…
S: Yeah.
J: That’s why I was afraid to go outside. They were all over.
S: So you don’t feel to be safe there?
J: No, not when they were here, no. They’re all gone now, there’s still a few left…
S: Yeah.
J: Because [audio poco chiaro] they came in on our… Elmer’s Island, they’re cleaning up, but… they were all over the place, it was bad.
S: So there was bad people?
J: Yeah. They didn’t background check on them… or they took them from a prison… They took them from like a prison and brought them here and made them work.
S: Oh.
J: Ah! I’m sorry.
S: Don’t worry.
J: [parla col cane]
S: So they took these people because they can pay like…
J: Cheap labor.
S: Yeah.
J: Cheap labor. They’d bus them in… and then they’d work them. And then they put them back on the bus and [audio poco chiaro] them away. But didn’t… a lot… then
they started giving the contracts to companies, and then they would... they needed so many workers, so they would just hire anyone.

S: Yeah.

J: They wouldn’t do background check. And then they would bring them here to work and house them in different rental places, and house them down here... and they were on the streets and the cops would arrest them, they had like... warrants out there for harass... child molesters... it was... unreal!

S: Yeah.

J: Just anybody. It’s like everybody wanted to make money, so they didn’t care what they did, you know. They didn’t care who they hired, or... they just wanted a piece of their money.

S: So before they comes here you can leave the house of them?

J: Yeah, we wouldn’t lock the doors, like I forget the keys on the car, and now you can’t do that. Grand Isle was just a simple place to live... and raise your kids and when BP came here with all those workers, it... it just... it disrupted everything. There were no more peace and quiet.

S: So it’s like something is crashed?

J: Yeah. And then some people that moved here to work the spill never left.

S: Is here now?

J: They just stayed here.

S: Oh.

J: Yeah.

S: And there’s people that left?

J: A lot of people left.

S: Local people?

J: Local people, ‘cos they were afraid they would get sick. And... and so they left and they didn’t come back.

S: Yeah.

J: But we... we had a lot of.... An influx of ... like people that were chasing the dollars that would come in, and... ‘cos like they thought they would collect money because they lived in the area. So they stayed here and they just bum off everybody... we need to get rid of all of that!

S: Hahaha!

J: We need our town back, we need to get back to peace and quiet.

S: Yeah.

J: Where you know everybody, and all.

S: Oh.

J: A lot of people you don’t know. And all.

S: And you have any health care?

J: My daughter got really really sick... during the oil spill... and we had to take her to the hospital, and they found phenol in her system.

S: What is phenol?
J: Phenol is part of... when the raw oil mixes with the Corexit, it makes a chemical reaction, and they found different stuff, but that was one of the most they found in her system. And the toxicologist told us that we’re lucky her heart didn’t stop.

S: Wow.

J: With all of the stuff that she had. And that was just from breathing... from inhaling. Like we would... if you walk out of the door, you could smell... a smell like [audio poco chiaro] it had a strong, strong chemical smell. And it was like that for days and days. When they were spraying, and spraying, and spraying.

S: They told you that they... they sprayed the dispersant?

J: They said that it wasn’t harmful. But Corexit is banned in other countries.

S: Ah, ok.

J: The United States is one of the very few countries that never banned it. It’s banned everywhere else.

S: Oh.

J: Yeah! But they say it’s safe. Well, if it’s safe, how did my daughter end up with all of that stuff in her system, just from breathing? You have to breathe... you know?

S: So there was a doctor in the island, in the hospital?

J: I took her to the hospital which is 45 minutes away.

S: Ah, ok.

J: And they had never ever had to deal with anything of that magnitude, so they didn’t know what to do. They didn’t know what to test her for... they didn’t know nothing, but she had a severe headache, nose bleeds, throwing up, and, and just... she couldn’t stand sound or light... and she kept that for 14 days. And the hospital gave her a shot for like a migraine headache, and they said within 20 minutes it should stop the pain. It was 3 days before her headache went away, because we took her and brought her to Mississippi at our... our aunt’s place in Mississippi, we took her off of Grand Isle.

S: Ah, ok.

J: And that’s the only reason that she got better. But she still wakes up with nose bleeds... she still has really... violent headaches.

S: So the only thing that you can do was to go away?

J: Take her away from here, yeah. Yeah.

S: And now she lives here?

J: Yeah. She still gets headaches and nose bleeds... but... part of their medical settlement is for 21 years. They’re gonna monitor the people... but it’s like once every three years you can get to the doctor and get checked.

S: Once of three years?

J: Once every three years. And they will check, keep you, and after the end of 21 years... then, if nothing comes up with you.

S: What kind of checkup they did?

J: Oh...

S: They see everything?
J: Blood work and stuff… but they came over here and do a test, and I failed the blood part and the breathing part… about… a year after the oil spill.

S: Ok.

J: It was probably about a year and I failed the blood part, my iron was too low, and that’s one… one of the things… if… you inhale too much of the chemicals has benzene in it, and… it affects your blood.

S: So is the doctor of the BP or you choose?

J: No, they have a doctor, they paid for someone but I don’t… you don’t know!

S: Yeah.

J: ‘Cos we have long pictures of the EPA\(^2\) where they had the air monitors to monitor the air quality… and they had it behind the Levee on the ground, instead of on the top of the Levee or in front of the Levee where the air was coming from the Gulf.

S: Ah, ok.

J: They had it behind it on the ground! And even with it on the ground it had high readings… that the air quality wasn’t safe. But they never evacuated Grand Isle.

S: Wow. So you thought that they could evacuate the area?

J: Yeah. [parla del cane]

S: And so how long was the… strange smell in the air?

J: Let’s see… the oil… the rig blew up in April… the end of May is when the oil impacted the beach, before that we started smelling it… when they were trying to spray it out there to sink it, and… from… probably all the way until October. So from April through October.

S: Yeah.

J: That whole year. We smelled it.

S: It’s a lot of months.

J: Yeah. A lot.

S: And when… the last explosion that happened? Two weeks ago… I think? You was…

J: They were cutting with a torch, and they had left oil in the pipe and that’s why it exploded. But nothing… nothing ever escaped, or nothing. It was just a mistake they made.

S: So it was controlled.

J: They controlled it, yeah. Yeah. Usually they’re pretty safe out there, until they’re behind on a deadline, and then they start cutting corners.

S: So before the BP you never thought that this disaster could happen?

J: We’ve never had one. ‘Cos they monitor them, they monitor them.

S: Oh, so they have restrictions.

J: They have a lot of restrictions, it was just… I guess something that happened that day that were trying to hurry up and cut corners, and do what they wanted. Two of them just pled guilty yesterday.

S: Oh.

\(^2\) US Environmental Protection Agency.
J: Doing that, not following orders.
S: Yeah.
J: Trying to hurry up and get it done. So...
S: So... there was like a... the community put together to do something, or each people contest the BP?
J: For what?
S: If... after the disaster, for...
J: Everyone really came together and then... they started... at the beginning they started paying people money... like we were out of work, so they gave 5,000 dollars a whole month. Which we could pay our bills, you know, we usually make more money than that during the shrimp season.
S: Yeah.
J: But, I mean it was fair, we had money to pay our bills, you know, we could survive, and in the second month they gave us 5,000 dollars... and in the third month they cut it down to 2,200 dollars... and in the fourth month they didn’t give us nothing no more... even though we were still out of work.
S: And the community is united about this?
J: Yeah.
S: You can try to help with other people?
J: Right. But what they tried to do is get everybody to sign off on the 25,000 dollars, they tried to get people take 25,000 dollars.
S: Ah ok.
J: And sign a paper, and once you sign that paper, that is it.
S: So it’s because there is the claim center?
J: They sit there all day long being paid a lot of money, not doing nothing. Five days a week they sit there.
S: Wow.
J: Getting paid!
S: Yeah. I talked with...
J: Wasting money.
S: One of the men inside there and he told me like: “Since like we’re paying everybody a lot of money!”
J: They’re lying! They’re certainly getting paid, they’re paying themselves!
S: Yeah.
J: I was there yesterday... my daughter’s having a pageant tonight at the Community Centre, the Miss Grand Isle Pageant, and she was practicing yesterday and... they were... talking about Real Estate... about what they wanna buy. We were listening to them. They were looking at maps about what they’re going to buy, and... “Yeah, I could buy stuff!” They’re getting paid a lot of money just to sit there.
S: And...
J: But mostly everyone had to get a lawyer.
S: Ah, ok.
J: So the lawyers are handling it. Because they weren’t giving money to nobody.
S: Yeah.
J: So what you’re gonna do? You know, we all have bills to pay, they were trying to make everybody take that 25,000 and sign a paper. But they owe us more than 25,000, they wiped out our oyster beds. You know, if it would have been just for the shrimping and all... but they wiped out our oyster beds... And that’s... we have some of those oyster leases that have been in the family for a hundred years. They were for... my husband’s great great great grand-father... you know? And they just were handed down, and renewed, and... that’s just our way of life, you know, that’s how we do things.
S: So it’s like that... you stopped the generation of the shrimp?
J: Yes. It’s like wiping that out.
S: Yeah.
J: So... [parla col cane]
S: So the people here comes... many years ago... for fish? Because it was a rich land.
J: Right.
S: Now it’s like... it’s starting to become a poor land?
J: Yes. Yeah. A lot of people made their living by... either... being a commercial fisherman... which we go out and catch the seafood. Other people are charter fishermen, where... people pay them and they take them out fishing. And when they shut the fishing down for a whole year, all of those people were out of work.
S: Yeah.
J: And when... when it’s the only thing you’ve ever done your whole life... what you’re supposed to do? You know it’s like... if you have a job and that’s what you do, and then... that’s it, you don’t have your job no more, you have to start all over again.
S: Yeah.
J: You know, when it’s not your fault! You know, it’s not your fault!
S: It’s the baddest thing.
J: You know what’s the worst part?
S: Yeah?
J: We didn’t ask for this... you know... so I don’t know. So it’s just gonna be a wait-and-see thing, to see when they’re finally gonna pay us and... and what we’re gonna do. But my... my husband he... he had cancer six years ago, and... when... he had to go work for BP when they were paying people to go clean up the oil. He... we tried very hard not for him to go to work, because it’s a potential... that causes cancer!
S: Yeah.
J: All that stuff... and he really didn’t wanna go to work, but we were eating up on our savings, and I mean, we had to make money, so he decided he had to go work, and he asked them, you know, please if they could get him a job of... not handling the oil. They had a lot of jobs where you could just ride around, look for birds that had oil on them... and call it in and somebody came there, or you could be the person that brought the ones to pick up the bird, and you never had to touch it. And... they gave
him a job of pulling in the dirty oil [audio poco chiaro] That’s the job they gave him. But he had a family to support, so he had no choice, and… Monday he has to start cancer treatments again, his cancer’s back.

S: Oh.
J: So Monday we… we have to go to New Orleans on Monday… and we have to stay up there until Friday. For 8 weeks. We can only come home on the week-ends. ‘Cos he has to go get cancer treatments.

S: Yeah.
J: So…
S: And so BP… asked for all the fishermen to go to clean? Because they have the boats?
J: Because they couldn’t work, so they gave them a job.
S: Ah, ok.
J: To try to supplement their income.
S: Ah, ok.
J: But then you put yourself in harms away. Because you’re breathing it in, even if you had gloves on, and everything, it’s still… It’s kinda like syrup, like thick honey or syrup… whatever you got, it stucks to it and like… no matter how hard you try not to get it on your skin… sometimes you got it on you. You know, if you ripped the tyvek suits they gave you…
S: So they gave you the equipment?
J: That suit…but they never ever gave the mask to wear. Never.
S: Never?!
J: Never.
S: Oh!
J: Never. They had the suits, and the gloves, and the boots, that was it. Never had the face protection.
S: That’s the most important thing.
J: Yeah, now we know that… you know?
S: Yeah.
J: You know, who would have thought you could get sick just by breathing? You know, when you don’t… when you’re not knowledgeable of stuff like that…
S: Yeah.
J: Now we know… you know. Not that everybody on Grand Isle has cancer and they’re dying of cancer, and a lot of people have respiratory problems, and blood problems, and… and like… a lot of stuff is gonna take a while before you realize… you have it… and it’s from the oil spill.
S: So before people didn’t have these problems?
J: No. My husband was in remission for six years.
S: Oh.
J: From prostate cancer. And they removed the whole thing.
S: Wow.
J: And now he has cancer again. So... you know, I'm not saying it's the oil spill, but I'm thinking it possibly is!
S: Yeah.
J: You know? So...
S: So in the island the cancer is not so... a big problem?
J: No.
S: Oh.
J: You know we have the Gulf salt air that comes off, it's just... we have no... no huge chemical plants that put pollution in the air, around here is just... pure, Gulf air that you have. You know, and hardly no one was ever sick! Now everyone is sick.
S: Yeah. So that the platform didn't...
J: They're so far out there.
S: It's not pollution coming...
J: No.
J: No.
S: Ah, ok.
Sara: So, you was born here?

June: Yes, madam.

S: And how old are you?

J: I’m 15.

S: Ok. And... how do you experience the disaster when it happened?

J: Well, when I first started hearing about the oil spill, I didn’t really think much of it, until I’ve started realizing that it was gonna hit here. And when it hit here everyone started getting sick, and started having a lot of trouble with... female problems. And I had bronchitis, really bad, and a lot of the kids in my class had bronchitis, terribly. I had fevers, almost 104 every night.

S: Wow.

J: And then I... I was really disappointed because we couldn’t go to the beach anymore, the beach... you’d see... I didn’t... I was really scared to go on the beach. But people would go out to the beach and take pictures every day, and there would be dead fish washing up and mats of tar, and a few of my friends would go to the beach, and said it was just disgusting, with oil all over in the water. And so I haven’t... I haven’t gone to the beach in... quite a while. In the last two years I’ve probably gone twice or three times. And there’s people that come to the store every day, even now, years after it, and they have a lot of BP workers that are on Elmer’s Island and... they have to wear a mask during the cleaning, and they say that they’re finding big, huge piles of oil washing up still.
S: Oh, still now they find it? Oh, wow. And you go… you went to the beach… frequently before?

J: I used to go to the beach a lot, I used to go to the beach whenever I could… it was always really a peaceful place to go.

S: Yeah, and now is different?

J: Now it’s different, before… you’d go to the beach and before… you’d just smell the salt in the air and… and there would be a lot of people on the beach, but it would still be quiet. And the beach would be relatively clean, besides the litter from people. And now, every now and then you find a bit of oil on the beach.

S: So it has a different color now?

J: It seems different.

S: Ah.

J: It probably just… could just be the thought of… there having been an oil spill, but… it just seems different.

S: So you don’t go to take a bath now.

J: No, we didn’t [audio poco chiaro] before. But before you could just stay on the beach all day, and… after the oil spill a few of my friends went on to the beach, and they were sunbathing. And they came back and they had oil stuck on their skin.

S: Oh.

J: And they went to take a shower but it really wouldn’t come off. And then they had mosquito bites, and the mosquito bites turned into a… staph infection.

S: Oh.

J: And so they had this big infective thing that they had gotten caught up.

S: You don’t have infection?

J: No, ‘cos I didn’t really go on the beach. I’ve gone to the beach… maybe about three times, since the oil spill, I haven’t gone very much. But I used to go all the time and go whenever I could.

S: It’s scary now?

J: It’s scary, yeah I’m really scared. And they have a lot of people down here that… a lot of older people that have made it through cancer, everything you could imagine… we’ve had some really tough Cajuns down here, and they just started dying off, and we have a few people that used to have cancer… and they’ve reached almost that five year mark, and then they had cancer again.

S: Oh.

J: So now they have cancer.

S: And is related to this?
J: Related to us?
S: To the disaster?
J: Yes, we think so. Same thing with the bronchitis and all the sicknesses, and the female problems. There have been many women that had miscarriages... down here since the oil spill.
S: And at school they explained what happened?
J: Really the people at school...the kids in my class... and their parents just tried to ignore it.
S: Oh.
J: Really, but... a lot of the kids in my class have parents that are fishermen. But they're not catching anywhere near as much fish as they used to. But they're just trying to kinda ignore it, pretend like it's over. That's what we do down here.
S: Yeah? So they don't make like a... laboratories or something like this for explain what was happening?
J: To the... people down here?
S: Yeah.
J: Well, they've had people come down here and test the water, and tell the people... tell the islanders that the water is polluted, but... really none... like I said everyone tries to pretend everything is alright. People just kinda ignore them, they have almost no... they have scientists come over and speak at the community center and no one would show up. They only had a few people.
S: And the scientists what said?
J: They would say... they had... a lady named Riki Ott down here and she was testing the water and telling us... I can't remember the exact parts per million that she was telling us, but... she was saying that has increased by many parts since the oil spill and that is really... the water is really contaminated. And she tell us about all the dispersants... what it does and how it...kinda breaks up the oil but makes it even worse, 'cos just the oil by itself really isn't that bad. But the dispersant was really, really toxic. But no one of us has really showed up when she came down here.
S: Oh, so you don't have any help.
J: Any what?
S: Help.
J: Help? Not really. They've had people that they've tried to come down here and help, but like I said no one... no one really shows up for these things, they have get-togethers to tell us how we can do to help. And really no one will... no one will support them.
S: Oh.
J: I'm terrible at these things, so sorry!
S: Don't worry. So is...
J: A lot of people have just kinda given up.
S: And the people also... move away from here?
J: We've had a lot of people that have moved away from here, yes.
S: Yeah. And your friends what think about this?
J: My friends? Well, like I said they just try to ignore it. A lot of them don’t go to the beach anymore, ‘cos they’re scared, they know that the oil spill happened, that the waters have been contaminated, but they just don’t talk about it anymore. They just stay clear from the beach. But it’s not just on the beach, it’s in the air.
S: Yeah.
J: They just don’t realize that.
S: And before the oil spill the water was contaminated or it was good?
J: Well, every now and then… The Gulf never really was clean. But… much cleaner that it is now. But every now and then you’d have… a lot of algae in the water, and then [audio poco chiaro] same you could go to the beach, but that one last really long. And then… not too long afterwards, the beach would be clean again. And you would have shells, but you wouldn’t have oil as many dead fish. We might have had a few dead fish on the beach, but not… tons with lesions on them and… their guts falling out… it wouldn’t be like that.
S: So the color of the sand is the same?
J: Well, the sand we have by the levees, that’s further out is pretty much the same, but the one by the water is constantly… you can dig down in the sand, and you can find oil in the sand, underneath… So there’s a layer of sand… there’s a layer of sand over a layer of oil.
S: Ah, ok.
J: People are taking pictures of that. I haven’t, I’m too scared to go dig up sand on the beach. People have taken pictures of where they’ve dug. They’ve stuck a shovel in the sand and just dug up a layer of oil right underneath the sand. And they’ve had kids building sand castles out of this… when they go to the beach.
S: It’s not good. And how is living in the island?
J: Madam?
S: How is living here?
J: Well, before it wasn’t really that bad, it was a peaceful place. [parla d’altro] Before, rent down here really wasn’t that expensive… it wasn’t cheap, but… not as expensive as it is now. People would leave their doors open, leave their windows open… and they really weren’t worried about… theft, crime, or anything like that. We had virtually no crime down here. And then, when the oil spill happened they had a lot of… workers down here, that [audio poco chiaro] convicts.
S: Yeah.
J: And so suddenly the theft increased, by… probably twice as much. If… probably more than that, but the theft increased, and so people were scared to leave their doors open at night, and leave their windows open. And… the rent increased to thousands of dollars a month, because… BP workers were staying at these places… these camps down here. And BP would just pay that, whatever the cost of the rent was. So, any renter… any… landlord could charge as much as they wanted for a camp, and they
would be able to get the money, so you could charge 5,000 dollars a month for a camp, and you’d be able to get it.

S: Wow.
J: But islanders weren’t able to afford that, so the rents have gone up. Before we were renting a place that was... 450 dollars a month, and now we’re renting this place that is a thousand. And that’s the cheapest place that we could find.

S: Yeah?
J: And before you could find a place down here for maybe 400, 500 dollars. And now it’s twice as much.

S: Yeah, it’s twice!
J: Yeah.
S: And there was... many volunteer groups... that contrast this disaster?
J: Volunteers? We didn’t really have many volunteers. They’ve had people that were trying to do something. They really did have the BP cleanup crews on the beach, because a lot of field workers were scared to clean up that beach, they didn’t want to go up and clean that beach. And so the volunteers groups were mainly to... help get the word out... about the oil spill, because everyone really thought it was alright. Right after the oil spill, people were being interviewed and people were seeing if they could help. And then... about a year later, you heard about it a little bit, but not very much. And now you almost never hear about it. It’s just like everyone forgot about the oil spill.

S: So you think that people here start forgot this?
J: People are just ignoring it now, because... according to the BP the oil spill is over. But they’re still sending cleanup crews down here, but a lot of people are just trying to ignore it.

S: And there was a lot of media that come here?
J: Right after the oil spill, they did have a lot of people. About a year... about a year... till... about a year after the oil spill they did have a lot of media that came down here. Fox News, which is a local news station, interviewed a few kids down here and... they’d have... different news networks... come down here and they had rallies, but now you really don’t here anything on television... anymore about the oil spill.

S: They don’t say nothing.
J: Virtually nothing.
S: They’ve made the process for the money? They decided how many moneys BP have to pay?
J: Well... BP spent an average of about what... 10 millions or 10 billions? That they wrote off from their taxes. [parla la madre Ann, ma l’audio è poco chiaro] That’s another thing they’re supposed to have caused, another problem is that... memory loss, but... BP made an estimate of how much money they spent cleaning out, and then they just wrote that off of their taxes. So they just took that off their taxes and didn’t have to pay that.
S: Ah! Oh. Yes it’s too smart. Wow, and did you make a lot of interview for the… other people?
J: I’ve been interviewed a few times… can’t say I’m the best… can’t say I’m the best person to interview, but… they did have a lot of people coming down here… to interview students of Grand Isle, and…to interview a lot of their parents, ’cos this town was built on the fishing industry… and tourism. And after the oil spill not many tourists want to come down here, and… the fish, we’re not catching nearly as many fish as we used to.
S: Yeah.
J: So that really made this island fall apart. And people are still going fishing, but they’re finding fish that have lesions, and really red blood color all over them. Because something that the dispersants cause is that causes your blood vessels to [audio poco chiaro] and so these fish are… are having internal bleeding, and so you’ll find fish that are just… bleeding from the inside, and… or you just find no fish. They don’t have anywhere near as many fish as they used to.
S: So still now the fish is sick?
J: The fish are sick, yeah. Still now they’re finding fish with the mutations, and fish that have died from sores and bleeding.
S: And the air now is more clean?
J: They haven’t had anybody test that. Really there’s no way to know.
S: Ah.
J: The scientists that I talked about earlier, that came down here, Riki Ott she would test the water and then she’d test the air and she said that in the night time... the air would settle and the oil in the air would be more condensed, so the people are breathing that in at night if they left the windows open. And so she was telling us that the air was contaminated and that we were breathing it in, which would make sense, since everyone on the island was sick, whether they went to the beach or not.
S: Yeah.
J: So breathing it in with the air.
S: And when they spray the Corexit you have to close the windows and the doors?
J: When they sprayed the Corexit... sometimes, when they’d burn the oil you’d be able to smell it, and the Corexit... they... they weren’t supposed to spray it anymore at one point, but you could still see them flying over and spraying it. You wouldn’t be able to close your windows, your windows and doors, ’cos you wouldn’t know when they were spraying it. They just sprayed... you’d see... you might see... just airplanes flying over and spraying the Corexit, but you wouldn’t know when, you’d just...
S: So they didn’t tell you when they sprayed?
J: You were just supposed to automatically know that, ’cos you knew that they were spraying it... they were spraying it constantly.
S: For how many days they sprayed?
J: For months after the oil spill they would spray this.
S: Months?
J: Yeah.
S: Wow. You think to go away from the island?
[ vengono commentate delle foto che mi mostrano al pc]
J: We have considered leaving the island, but... I'd like to stay here because of the school... the school is great down here, and it's the only reason we're staying down here, but... it's just our home. And it's really difficult to leave your home.
S: Yeah.
J: And a few... quite a few people have left, but a lot of them are staying because they just don't want to leave home. Like us.
S: And what do you think for the future?
J: The what?
S: The future?
J: For the future? It's really scary, and people are already starting to get cancer... and we know that some time in the future we will leave, as soon as I'm done with the school down here. But for the fishermen down here, believe it or not, it took years. We... we look at the oil spill... at the Exxon Valdez oil spill as an example. 20 years from now they're still showing effect, they still have fish that are showing up mutations and stuff, oil on the beach, and they have people... [parla d'altro] They have... people that were cleaning up the Exxon Valdez and now they either have cancer, or they're dead, or they're on tons of medication. It's just really scary to...
S: Yeah.
J: To just think about what might happen in the future.
S: So the number of the cancer is grown since the Exxon Valdez?
J: I think. Scientist Riki Ott that came down here had... been there for the Exxon Valdez, she helped clean up, and... she lived up there for a little bit.
Ann T.: And she wrote a book about what happened, and... everything that happened to them is happening to us now.
S: With the same consequences?
A.T.: Yeah.
S: Oh.
A.T.: Same symptoms, same everything.
J: And even... the Exxon Valdez happened 20 years ago, and even than they used the same, exact method for cleaning up the oil. They used booms and they used the Corexit. Same exact thing... and the same things that happened to them are happening to us right now.
S: And there was... the mental disease, too?
J: The mental... the things the Corexit is supposed to do... It's a toxic and it's supposed to cause memory loss and... kids down here have had bleeding from their ears.
S: From the ears?
J: From the ears, yeah, which is even scarier. And the main thing the Corexit... I'm sorry, I interrupted you.
S: Don't worry.
J: I know that the main thing the Corexit caused was breathing problems.
S: Ok.
J: A lot of kids have had breathing problems, they developed asthma, I’ve had a severe bronchitis… every now and then severe bronchitis would start showing up again. I’ve had that right after the oil spill.
S: And there was another method to control the oil spill? Instead of the Corexit they can use something else? No?
J: You’re saying something to get rid of the Corexit?
S: Oh if they can stop the oil spill with other things?
J: Like I said, 20 years ago, over the Exxon Valdez they used booms and Corexit. And not it’s all they’ve used, it’s the booms and the Corexit, they haven’t really tried anything else.
S: Oh.
J: At one point they were burning the oil, but people were complaining about the smell. ‘Cos you could just smell the oil when you walked out of your door.
S: And is bad the oil burn, too?
J: They were… madam?
S: Is bad to burning the oil?
J: Oh, that’s just going in the air when they burn the oil. And you could smell it down here, it’s just terrible. It was really thick in the air. So then they used the Corexit, and now they have this layer of Corexit mixed with the oil, down at the bottom of the ocean.
S: So the fish eat the barrels of the oil?
J: [parla d’altro] Actually, they used to have booms surrounding the bridges, and I saw a fish eating particles off of the boom, when I went to the bridge, and they have not just oil at the bottom, but it’s really [audio poco chiaro] the water they just have a thick layer at the bottom. And so, no matter where the fish are, they just…they’re consuming the oil, it might be in another fish that they eat, they might be taking it in, and they…
S: Yeah.
J: [audio poco chiaro] these things.
S: You’re nervous?
J: Yes!
S: Why?
J: Just nervous.
S: You’re angry about this?
J: Yes, definitely. They’ve shrimp.
A.T.: There were shrimp with no eyes.
J: That’s one of the mutation that’s happening to all these… to these fish.
S: So… a lot of people post these photos in internet?
A.T.: This lady post it because she was proud of the big shrimp her husband caught.
S: Oh.
A.T.: And didn’t realize it didn’t have any eyes until I told her something.
J: And they have these shrimps that have no eyes, and have this other… animals that are eating the shrimp… with no eyes!
A.T.: A shrimp with no eyes is a mutation.
S: Yeah.
A.T.: So you eat that, and you’re gonna end up mutating, too.
J: Or dying… one of them!
S: So there is study about the mutation of the fish?
J: I really don’t think so. No one is even studying down here anymore.
A.T.: The lady… when I said something about the mutated fish… on her web page, she got really mad at me.
J: When we actually… when we saw that picture on Facebook of… the mutated shrimp.
A.T.: ‘Cos her husband sell shrimp.
J: Yeah. We saw the picture of the mutated shrimp… and we said something in the comments, and… she actually was offended… she was mad that we said something about it, ‘cos she was proud of her big fish, she didn’t even…
A.T.: Her big shrimp.
J: Her big shrimp, she didn’t even notice it had no eyes. And frankly, it looked as if she didn’t even care it had no eyes.
S: Oh!
J: Sad.
S: Wow. So you don’t eat fish.
J: No. Before fish was free food, down here. If you didn’t want to… go and buy food at the store, than you could just fish and you’d have dinner for days. Now, if you catch anything, it’s probably toxic.
S: So the people fish less than before?
J: Well, a lot of people just ignore the oil spill, and they still fish and they still eat the fish. And I think… the man that had… that’s had a relapse of cancer was a fisherman, and he was eating the fish. And… his daughter… his daughter has health problems, and… I forgot what the question was.
A.T.: The lady who has… who is the tourism director has just found out. It has been five years she’s been in remission from cancer, and she’s just found out that her cancer has come back, and her husband is a trawler… and they eat the shrimp.
J: And the people…
S: So the cancer were… they come… in which part of your body?
A.T.: I think she had like colon cancer or something like that. And the other guy had prostate cancer, and had been in remission for five years, and then it came back, right after five years. It came back. And he worked on the clean-up… you know, laying up booms and stuff like that, and he also… he is a trawler, you know they’ve been really broke ‘cos there hasn’t been a lot of… for a long time there was no market for the seafood, so they had to eat the seafood ‘cos they didn’t have any money.
J: And the people who do fish, they aren’t catching as much… people complain all the
time, they say they used to catch hundreds of fish, if they’re like they might get 20 or
so. They used to catch hundreds of fish, fish was just easy to find… and easy food,
now…
S: It’s difficult to find it?
J: Yeah, it’s difficult to catch a lot of fish.
S: So people lost their job?
J: A lot of people really did lose their trawling job, because there is no… no one really
wants to buy seafood from here anymore.
A.T.: People like us definitely [audio poco chiaro]
J: Yeah!
S: And how is living with this… with this thought? If you think about the air and the
ocean, the Gulf.
J: Same difference.
S: You’re worried?
J: Yes, I’m very worried, because… even if you’re not eating the fish, you could get it
from the air… even if you go walking on the beach. You’d get that. That’s a scary
thing. And people all around here… they have… the older people down here, the
Cajuns… they were tough, they’ve gone through … pretty much everything, cancer…
so they just all started dying.
S: So the people here die young?
J: Yeah, no. These were tough, but they still were… they still were pretty young, ’cos the
people down here are pretty hardy people. They could survive almost anything. It
was young for them.
A.T.: Oh, seafood used to be a really healthy thing to eat. And that’s what most of them
ate, and so, you know, they had all kinds of natural immunities built up in their
systems. And they maybe get cancer, or something like that, but their system was
strong and would fight back, you know. And heart trouble, or anything else, some had
that, and fought it off and lived for years and years, and years and the oil spill just
drop them dead. There is a whole bunch of people that we’ve lost. They have been,
you know… they were old, yeah they were old, but they were still [audio poco chiaro],
going around doing stuff and everything. And then the oil spill happened and six
months later we lost a whole bunch of them. You know, in the last two years it’s
amazing how many people have died.
J: I mean, compared to…
A.T.: And now these younger people… are getting cancer back that have had cancer
before. And other young people have all… like young girls have all kinds of female
trouble. And there’s another little girl whose dad has cancer, she’s got all kinds of
problems with kidneys and all kinds of other things, and…
J: And women down here are having miscarriages… we’ve had almost no woman down
here that could keep her baby, they’ve been having miscarriages.
S: They lost the babies?
J: Yes.
S: Oh.
A.T.: And Pam just lost her second baby.
S: Oh yeah, I was thinking right about this.
A.T.: And Ricky's a trawler.
S: Yeah.
A.T.: And they... they eat seafood.
S: And this is the second baby that she lost.
A.T.: In a year, yeah.
S: She said it's because she's 40, or so.
A.T.: I had her when I was almost 41.
S: My mum too, so...
J: And people used to say that they go over the bridge... and they'd go over the bridge, as soon as they crossed the bridge they started getting headaches, and... and get this... this really bad taste in their mouth. And people who aren't used to being down here. And I used to have nose bleeds and headaches all the time. As well as the female trouble.
S: So it is only when the disaster happened, or now too?
J: Well, now the nose bleeds aren't as common, and... so the headaches, and... the effects have kinda lessened, but every now and then they'll come back. It's like... suddenly...
S: So is the Cajun people that is no worried about this? Or it's the people that live here in general?
J: The people... the Cajun people, the islanders... they've lived here their whole life, and so they're... they like to think that nothing's wrong. And few people that live here are worried about it...and I think most of the people that live here are worried about it. But down here people just try to act like everything is ok. Even when it's not.
S: It's just like a mentality?
J: That's how people get through things, they just act like everything is alright.
A.T.: Denial.
J: Denial, yes.
S: So before this happened you never imagined that this could be possible?
J: No. 'Cos living down here... isn't really like... isn't really like city life, the worst thing there is down here is a hurricane, and... you can do with it. That was the only thing I could ever imagine that... that's the worst thing I could imagine happening to us... a bad hurricane, and then when we got the oil spill I just...it completely destroyed this island.
S: So this is worse than the hurricane?
J: I think so. 'Cos everyone would be able to... everyone would build back after a hurricane, people would come together. But after the oil spill there was really nothing you could do.
S: So the people don't help each other after the oil spill?
J: Well, people tried, but there’s really nothing you can do. They’ve had people with BP coming down here, supposedly trying to help, but… they’ve had the claims, and we actually… received some of the paperwork for making the claim. And it’s like it was designed to confuse you. And we’re some of the… I feel terrible saying this, but… we’re some of the more educated people down here… a lot of the people down here… just did not… did not understand the claim paperwork at all.

S: Ok.

J: [parla d’altro] And also, a lot of people down here were [parla d’altro] People reported to have memory loss, and less… more trouble concentrating, and...[parla d’altro].

S: I lost the question. I can’t remember!

A.T.: Jessica was talking about how much trouble it is concentrating.

S: Yeah.

J: What was I talking about? I keep remembering these sudden things like “Oh, yeah, I forgot to talk about this!” Then we were talking about the mental problems. I mentioned the… the memory loss and the trouble concentrating was a big one and I forgot that one. But the people down here...[parla d’altro]

S: So you like to live here?

J: I liked it more before the oil spill. Really, it’s a safe place even with... the theft increasing after the oil spill. It’s not like a city, it’s a really safe and quiet place. And... people down here... every time there is a hurricane... people try to... people work together, and people come together and help each other. Down here everyone knows everybody.

S: Yeah.

J: It’s a friendly environment. It wouldn’t be like that in the city, that’s why a lot of people have stayed... instead of moving away.

S: Yeah and the most people here decided to move here is not... too much local people?

J: We have... we have a few retired people, but... half of the local people here are... we have a lot of locals, but they still do have a lot of people down here that have retired. A lot of locals are finding it really hard to afford the price of living here.

S: And you worked at Sureway when it happened?

J: I started working at Sureway just after it happened... because we had to move to... this place, because the place we were renting was 450 a month... and our owner sold it to someone else and they wanted to... the new owner of the place wanted to rent it for... 1,250 dollars a month. So we moved here and it’s just 1,000, but it’s still... twice as much as 450, so we were having trouble affording that, and... I got a job at Sureway, a supermarket... because we couldn’t afford working here, we couldn’t afford living here... with only her income.

A.T.: And that’s with me working two jobs.

J: Yeah, with her working two jobs. And over the summer I work two jobs. Whenever I’m out of school.

S: Here is not difficult to find a job?
J: Actually no… but really the only place you can find a job… is at Sureway, and there are a lot of people here. Because… they have construction jobs down here, they have good jobs at the grocery store, at the restaurants, but a lot of people don’t really have very much money to give, even the owners of the stores, and the restaurants. So it actually isn’t that easy to find work. But it just depends when.

A.T.: They just have to make a lot to be able to afford to live here, and that’s a problem.

J: What?

A.T.: I said you have to make a lot of money to afford to live here.

J: Yeah. Even if you do get a job, just with one income is really hard to afford to live… down here. So even if you can find a job, you still might not be able to afford the rent… the cost of living down here.

S: So is higher than other place?

J: It is. Like I said, after the oil spill all of the prices, the rent, and the camps just skyrocketed, because… the owners of the apartments and the camps could charge anything they wanted, and they… and BP would reimburse all of the workers.

S: And also the food is higher?

J: The food? I don’t really think so. I think the food is just as much as it was. But just the rent takes the toll.

A.T.: Even the food is higher here than it is in a lot of other places, because… it has to be trucked all the way down here, which drives up the price.

S: Ah, ok.

J: Plus, before you could just fish and that was free food. Half of the time you didn’t even need to go to the restaurant or go to the supermarket. Because you could just get free food.

S: So the people become more poor after this?

J: Yes. People have tried to make a claim, but the paperwork to fill out for the claim is extremely confusing.

S: Yeah, I’ve seen that.

[parlano d’altro]

S: So you filled the form for the BP?

J: We tried, but… it’s really confusing, they refer to different articles… they have different articles in the paperwork, and refer to an article that would have anything to do with the question that they’re asking.

S: Oh.

J: And just… things like that. It’s just like it was designed to confuse you.

A.T.: And the thing is that… when you file a claim… they’re covering things like respiratory problems, and stuff like that, they’re not covering anything like if someone has bleeding problems, or like girls who have female trouble, which is something I’m really concerned about, and so… you know, you could file a claim, and they might pay you. And they’re not pay very much, either. And they’re only paying for one thing, they’re gonna review all the stuff you turn in, doctors, reports, you gotta get all the stuff from your doctor, copies and everything, and then send it all to
them, you write a long list with everything that is wrong with you, you send it all to them, they look it over and they’re going to pay you with one element. After the judge said it, just one, no matter even if you had 20, and it doesn’t include the bleeding problems, and the female trouble, and all the other stuff which could turn into cancers somewhere down the line. You know, or reproductive problems, or whatever, you know.

J: And...
A.T.: They’re paying for things like... like if you had eye infections, or if you had respiratory problems, or if you had rashes or something, and it was pretty much it. [audio poco chiaro] stuff not with long term problems you might have.
S: Yeah.
J: They wanted people to settle...and when you settled for the claim you only got 5,000 dollars, and 5,000 dollars... is... isn’t... 5,000 dollars is a lot, but it really wouldn’t last you very long down here. 5,000 dollars would 5 months of rent for us, and we wouldn’t even be half of the year’s rent.
A.T.: [audio poco chiaro] if you had to pay for cancer and stuff like that.
J: 5,000 dollars wouldn’t last really long if you have cancer.
S: Yeah, they don’t help people very much. So only few people have the money from the BP?
J: Yes, only a few people really got money. And a lot of people settled for a claim and they got the 5,000 dollars, but... after you settle for a claim you can’t sue... you can’t sue them. And that’s the reason why they were just giving out these 5,000 dollars.
S: Yeah. And you heard about the explosion of Friday, the other platform?
J: I heard about that. They have another one!
S: Yeah.
J: It’s not as bad as... the Deepwater Horizon was...
S: No, fortunately.
J: Yes.
S: What did you think when it happened? What do you think when it happened?
J: What did I think when happened this one?
S: Yeah.
J: I’m really not sure, I’m just hoping that it doesn’t hit us again, we’ve already been hit by that. The well that was feeding oil was sealed, but... it’s still leaking oils out of cracks, and the surface in the Gulf, and... they still do have the oil bubbling up around the well... even if it’s supposedly sealed.
S: So always there is a few loss of the oil in the Gulf?
J: There is still oil being lost, even... it’s... it’s not as... there isn’t as much being spewed as before. Before it was just being spewed out of the well in the Gulf. But... when the oil rig exploded, and the explosion was under the surface of the Gulf, so there’s cracks on the surface and the oil can come out of that, too. So it doesn’t only come out of the well.
S: Ok.
J: [audio poco chiaro] fresh oil that’s coming up right here.
S: And the young people made… any kind of protest?
J: They’ve had rallies, but the young… the younger people haven’t really participated in the rallies… the closest thing that the younger people have come to is for… the one-year anniversary they’ve had a ceremony, and the students of the school painted portraits about the oil spill, but the… the younger kids didn’t do very much. They have been interviewed, students at the school have been interviewed, but… the protests were in the forms of rallies and we haven’t had any of those lately.
S: So there is like indifference?
J: Pretty much, yeah.
S: Oh, wow. It’s not good, the younger are not worried?
J: Well, they’re worried, they just don’t wanna say anything.
S: Yeah.
J: ‘Cos everyone just tries to act like everything is ok. It’s a state… that’s the mentality down here.
S: Oh. Yeah… it’s only down here that people don’t care about this?
J: It’s all over, really. When the oil… the oil spill first happened, they had these rallies to get the word out. Now the word hasn’t really been getting out, and people are just unaware, people really just don’t even pay attention to it anymore.
A.T.: And a lot of the people who were really working hard trying to get the word out are just frustrated, a lot of them just left.
J: Yeah.
A.T.: It was very frustrating for a lot of them, nobody seemed to care.
S: So the people that feel bad this situation move away?
J: You know, we had one lady down here was organizing rallies, but… almost no one would show up for the rallies, and… I mean she tried to get the word out, nothing would happen, everyone would just ignore her really. So she got frustrated and moved away.
A.T.: We’ve had people saying that we were just trying to stir up fear among the people.
J: We were called fear mongrels, because…
A.T.: We were just trying to scare the population. We were told… people were told not to listen to us.
S: Oh. This is weird.
A.T.: The mayor went to the Town Hall and said to the elderly people who eat their lunch there every day… not to worry about eating the seafood, that the seafood was perfectly safe. And not to pay attention to the stuff that was on Facebook, and everything, because, you know, we were just lying, just trying to stir up everybody.
J: Of course, the mayor made money off the fishing industry, too.
A.T.: The mayor used to be a trawler.
S: The mayor?
J: The mayor.
S: Oh.
J: He used to be a trawler, so... he was encouraging people to eat the seafood, saying that the people who are actually trying to get the word out that there’s still oil in the water, were just... were just fear mongrels. Just trying to get everyone upset.

S: They encourage to eat the fish?

A.T.: Yeah, he told everything was ok.

J: Yeah, he encouraged... he encouraged the older people to just eat the fish, and just told them that everything was ok. Which might be why we’ve been losing a lot of elderly. But he encouraged not only the old people, but... the people of the town that everything was alright, that the seafood wasn’t contaminated anymore. Just told them that.

A.T.: BP did what they were supposed to do, everything was fine.

J: That nothing is contaminated anymore, that BP just cleaned everything up.

A.T.: And they knew it was contaminated, ‘cos they sniffed the seafood and the sea [audio poco chiaro]

J: Yeah.

S: Oh my god.


S: And there is any laws that...said about how many platforms could be there, or... the regulation about the oil spill?

J: We’ve gotten a few statistics for that, on...

S: Yeah.

J: I forgot... I have memory loss! Forgetfulness! I used to have trouble with that. I used to have the trouble, but not just as bad.

S: And the consequence of the environment here is... is good or, people don’t care neither about this?

J: People really don’t even care! Like I said people are just like... like I keep saying people ignore... And they act like everything is alright. Everything is just ok and you can just take anything. Or that can just bounce back from whenever hits us.

S: Do you have any laboratories about the environment in school?

J: No.

S: No?

J: It’s not even a topic discussed at school anymore. You almost never hear about the oil spill.

A.T.: Riki Ott was down here for the second-year anniversary. And... said she wanted to go to the school and talk about our community involvement, by the young people and stuff like that, and once they got her in there she started talking about the BP oil spill and they weren’t really happy, because... she kinda... we misled everybody, so they’d let her talk with those kids.

S: So this Riki Ott is a doctor?

A.T.: Yeah.

J: She is, yes.

A.T.: Marine toxicologist, yes, from Alaska.
S: Ah, from Alaska.
J: And she was there for… when the Exxon Valdez hit… hit Alaska.
[parla d’altro]
S: And Riki Ott was… take care about you here?
J: Yes, she… she really did care, she would always try to get the word out, she interviewed
people and sent it to news… to news… she made documentaries about… the Exxon
Valdez and the oil spill down here, but she was one of the people that just got
frustrated, like everyone else. Because no one really responded to it.
S: Also she tried to do something, but…
J: Yeah. She tried to do something, but really no one… no one would listen, she was
considered a fear mongrel.
A.T.: Just like us.
S: Oh. So everyone tried to do something… is…
J: Ignored.
S: Yeah.  
J: Everyone that really tried to do anything was just ignored… or looked down upon.
A.T.: Yeah, they don’t seem to understand we’re not trying to destroy their way of life,
we’re trying to save their lives.
S: Yeah.
J: But their way of life is already destroyed by the… oil spill.
A.T.: Exactly.
S: I don’t understand why they are no worried about their health.
J: Well, people are worried, but… either they’re misinformed, or they just try to act like
everything is ok. Whether they’re worried or not.
A.T.: [audio poco chiaro] their children.
J: Yeah. Or they’re just misinformed.
S: Also I talked to Wayne, Wayne Keller, he’s not scared.
J: Misinformed, really.
A.T.: Even John, Pastor John still eats the seafood and…
S: Yeah!
A.T.: You know, they have dinners on the grounds and they have like… seafood [audio
poco chiaro] seafood [audio poco chiaro] and stuff like that, they all eat it.
J: And people down here don’t wanna…
A.T.: They come to the meetings and everything, but still eat it.
J: People don’t wanna…stand out, if… if they think that no one else cares, they’ll just…
forget about it too. If no one else cares, they just won’t care either.
A.T.: Or if you have somebody like the mayor, they say that everything is ok.
J: They’re gonna believe everything is ok.
A.T.: It doesn’t matter he’s not a marine toxicologist, and the marine toxicologist says
[parla d’altro]
S: And you try to talk about this with your friends?
J: Yeah.
S: And they don’t care?
J: They’re not worried. Went to the beach, their skin, oh well. People down here are so stubborn. They just want to continue their way of life, they don’t want anything to change.
S: And they search any papers about this to learn something more?
J: Facebook.
S: Yeah.
J: They keep informed in Facebook, and [audio poco chiaro] really.
A.T.: Because I don’t [audio poco chiaro] with the locals at all.
J: Yeah.
A.T.: They stand... they gain too much from receiving people, so [audio poco chiaro]
J: And plus at the store, we’re always getting the workers... and they’ve come in, and they’re telling me how they have... big mats of oil washing up onto the beach now, and they’re telling us how they have to wear masks, so that they don’t breathe in fumes, so they don’t... get sick from all the chemicals in the oil... They still do have cleaning crews, they’re always saying how terrible Elmer’s Island is.
S: It’s always the same... the same person that post?
J: No it’s different people.
A.T.: Some of my friends are always posting stuff, but yeah, she’s been posting stuff.
J: But they do have different people. Then they had... was it a crab or shrimp that had black lungs? With those black lungs in it?
A.T.: Yeah, the shrimp and the big crabs... they were catching crabs that were empty.
    Had no meat in them, there were a lot, because...
J: Crabs that had just... shells. And then they started having shrimp washing up... that had black lungs... from the oil, but they just... just call that black gills... they just call that black gill disease.
S: So you post it in the group of Facebook, the group of Grand Isle?
J: Yes.
S: Ok.

Da qui iniziano i commenti alle foto

A.T: This lady has all kinds of pictures, she went every day to the beach and took pictures of the stuff that was washing ashore.
S: This is the [audio poco chiaro] of the oil?
A.T.: This was chunks of oil and stuff.
S: It is very big.
A.T.: She has a whole bunch of albums and stuff. She took pictures. These shrimps have their insides coming out.
S: Yeah.
A.T.: You can see them bleeding internally.
J: [audio poco chiaro] So this is gonna be a report that you do?
S: What?
J: What are you working on, is it a report or?
S: It's for... my... for take the degree... in anthropology. So it's like... the perception of the risk that the people have here... about the oil spill.
[audio poco chiaro]
J: See, the allergy rate is very high, we used to have trouble with that before, but not nearly as bad, that wasn't really common.
S: So you can see the changement every day?
J: Yes.
A.T.: That's a crab that is black inside. That's the lungs, lungs are black.
S: Oh. Is it a bird? And the birds are a few than before?
A.T.: Oh, there's much less birds! [audio poco chiaro] there were birds everywhere, now you go, and there's almost no birds on the beach.
J: [audio poco chiaro] Yeah, I used to see birds and they'd be eating, every now and then you'd get a beach fish, and they'd be eating the fish that had washed up. Now the birds won't even touch the fish that wash up, because the fish are so... disease-looking. And, like my mum said you used to see birds all over the place. Now you see almost no birds.
S: And the butterfly, too?
J: The few times I've been on the beach I saw almost no birds.
S: Butterfly?
J: Butterflies? I never really saw them, those are mainly in the little wooded area, the woods, and like mum said they migrate, but...
A.T.: So this is something interesting.
J: We didn't really have many of those.
A.T.: A crab that has washed up on the beach and is empty.
S: Is empty inside.
A.T.: See, it's completely... The lungs are all dissolved and the meat is gone. And it hasn't been on the beach for long, because the outside isn't red, [audio poco chiaro] so it hasn't been there for long. And it's empty.
S: The other days I've seen a lot of jellyfish dead. It's very small.
A.T.: This is a cat fish, and see how it's bleeding inside, 'cos it's all red. Then she put the hand inside and the inside was empty. She said that if a bird had done that, eyes and [audio poco chiaro] would be gone, too. They would just eat them out from the inside. You can see that the back was all collapsed.
J: This is why we are worried. And before we used to have... sometimes you'd have [audio poco chiaro] jellyfish wash up, but... now they're finding jellyfish all of the time. And [audio poco chiaro] happen very much, but sometimes you just have a lot of jellyfish wash up. Now they're finding jellyfish [audio poco chiaro] and that's very scary.
S: Yeah.
J: And now you have it all the time, it [audio poco chiaro] much.
S: And this is very sad, because here is a very beautiful place.
J: And... well we had a really great way of life down here. It was just a really simple way of life. And they had people that have lived down here all their whole lives, just loved it, now... we just... the oil spill completely turned our world upside down.

S: Yeah. Your style of life has changed after this?

J: Yes, our way of life is... completely changed.

A.T: See? Look at the Corexit washing ashore, isn’t it disgusting?

S: And this was the last year?

A.T: This was 2011, yeah. And all the stuff just sinks down into the sand, and then the kids go over there and dig... in the sand.

J: They’ve oil, Corexit, all mixed in the sand.

S: Yeah.

A.T: Look at that, isn’t it disgusting? That was July, of last year. A year after the oil spill, over a year after the oil spill... still washing ashore. BP sucks.

S: Yeah.

A.T.: Tarball. [audio poco chiaro]

S: Oh my god! But this is local people, or tourists?

J: vis no telling. Some people down here just refuse... they’re in total denial, they just refuse to say there is anything wrong.


J: We had people that used to walk down the beach and then they had rashes going all the way up their legs... from where they walked in the water.

S: Wow.

J: Yeah.

A.T.: It’s just insane! So nasty

S: Yeah, it’s totally insane. Is that a dolphin?

A.T.: She’s taken so many pictures. [audio poco chiaro] That’s when it started coming ashore. In October, 2011 [audio poco chiaro] on the beach.

S: So they [audio poco chiaro] lot of time to clean the beach? What is?

A.T.: [audio poco chiaro] the pictures all the time.

J: She’d go out every day and take pictures of what she found.

S: She makes a report?

A.T.: Oh, it was her... it was her idea to go out and say how things changed.

J: She started getting sick and she stopped. She started getting rashes all over her hands... and she started getting breathing problems, and just getting sick, so she stopped. She moved away. [audio poco chiaro]

A.T.: Yeah, she’s almost never here anymore. She comes down every now and then, [audio poco chiaro] here, but...

Continuano i commenti alle foto, ma si sentono pochissimo
Sara: So, if you want to talk about you, you’re grown up here?
Lois: A-ha.
S: So you’ve never left here, Grand Isle?
L: Never. I never moved away, I’m one of eight - number seven - and I’m the only one that was actually born on the island by a midwife. Everyone else was born off the island, hospital, or wherever.
S: So you was born in Grand Isle?
L: Yeah, yes.
S: And how is living here?
L: Growing up it was awesome. I only wish my two kids could have grown up in the era that I did because things have changed so much. Kids today are more inside kids, while we were outside kids. We may do with what we had. And there weren’t a lot of people here at the time. You know, once in a while you’d have somebody come spend summers here or things like that but it weren’t that many like there is now. But we enjoyed it, we enjoyed people coming down and enjoying the island. Oh yeah, yeah.
S: So before there wasn’t a lot of tourism.
L: No, there wasn’t a whole lot. Not when I was coming up. The beach had very few camps on it. Now almost every lot is... you know has a camp on it. And ‘til now, the tourists... the camp owners have, you know they ventured out toward the back of the island and they’ve had their subdivisions which are very very nice.
S: Yeah?
L: Yeah and it’s good that they’re here.
S: And the island with the coastal erosion is changed?
L: Oh, yes. Yes, it has changed a lot. The beach you used to... when I was a little girl you used to walk out a good ways before you’d get to the water but also they had plenty of sand dunes where you couldn’t see the water. You know to you... it was almost like the Levy\(^3\) but not quite as heavy, there were many sand dunes I can remember that... going to the beach, and when we would go to the beach we would always be a bunch of families together, where the men would be fishing pulling the sand and the mothers would be in a circle with all the kids swimming in a circle and never more than ankle-deep water.
S: Wow!
L: Yeah. Very protected.
S: Yeah.
L: Yes.
S: And the houses... was a lot one time or just a few people lived here?
L: Well, back in the ’70s, late ’60s and early ’70s it was mostly... I would say 95% of the kids that were in school here were from here, they were born-bred islanders. We had a Humble Oil which was Exxon. Not Exxon, but Exxon Mobile, but they used to have a campsite where their children would be, but they never sent their kids to school here. They bussed their kids up to Golden Meadow to go to school.
S: Oh, why?
L: I don’t know why, I wish I could answer that. We kinda felt not angry, but like we weren’t good enough for our school, we weren’t good enough for them to come to school here. You know, and they continued to bus and then I don’t know why they stopped, but of course the campsite left but. I know it cost them so much per student because it was crossing parishes. We’re Jefferson and they’re Lafourche, so...
S: Yeah? And with the hurricanes? How was the life here?
L: We always tried to get back after a storm because we could always... we could always do without electricity, we could always do without natural gas. I remember when I was a little girl we had a butane tank so... You didn’t have natural gas then, but... I mean we may do it, we were used to living without light. That’s just the way it was down here and like I said most, most of the people lived in the middle of the island from, let’s say, maybe Santini Lane to probably around Sureway, maybe a little past Sureway, that’s where most of the island people did live. So it was... in this neighborhood, from Santini Lane, maybe a little further, let’s say from Capital Lane to Jo Augustin’s or Ludwig Lane we had like five grocery stores in the back lanes.
S: Five?!
L: Five neighborhood grocery stores. There were two on Santini Lane, that I remember, there was one on this street, which is Chighizola, there was Jo Augustin’s general store

\(^3\) Molto probabilmente si riferisce a Levy County dove sono presenti le dune.
and then they had another store across the highway, Miss Minyard. We had a movie theater right across here.

S: Oh, what there’s now?

L: A movie theater and when Betsy came, Betsy kinda messed it up. If I remember correctly, we still had the movie theater after Betsy, I think it was still there. But this island was awesome to grow up. We had a lot of things, a lot of places to go play.

S: So there was more things one… years ago than is now?

L: Yeah, it’s just… it’s not that there were more things then than there are now, but kids today are more apt to stay inside and play these videogames. We didn’t have any of that. When you’d get up in the morning and everybody had to… by seven o’clock you were up: weekends, everyday. And we would watch certain cartoons, or Roy Rogers, and by 7:30 – 7:45 we were out of the house, ‘cos school let in at 8:20 and we were out the house and we would stop at the little neighborhood store to get our drink and then we were on our merry way to school. A lot of times we came home for lunch, ‘cos they weren’t cooking at school then and… just kids today don’t do much physical activity.

S: Yeah

L: We used to play baseball, you know, softball, kickball, we always… building hopscotches, we had these three little things we called [audio poco chiaro]. We would go up, my mum could see from the back of the house where we were. It was probably I bet you two or three blocks away from the house on the bay but there was flat land and we’d always go play hopscotch or chase or something like that. We’d go back in the woods we’d play hide and go seek. We always had a good time. We would get together, sometimes five or six of us, one would go home and sneak a potato, one would go sneak a cup of grease, the other had a frying pan, one had a knife to peel the potato, one would take a couple of eggs and we had those few little things we would go in the back and cook and we would eat, it was so good!

S: So you shared all the things?

L: Oh yeah, yeah, sure we did. We used to take this old man’s pirogue when he was napping. And we would take it go out in Oyster and we would see him come, he knew about what time we would come everyday, I think he didn’t try to catch us. He would come on the bridge across the beach and he’d fuss at us: “My pirogue!” and he fusses in French: [audio poco chiaro] Bring my pirogue back!” He would tell us all that in French. And then when it was time for us to come back, we would come back and one of us would get off before and see if he was still sleeping or if he was there so we could park the pirogue but every day we took that pirogue and always brought it back so he knew. It was just funny with us. But it was fun, it really was fun growing up here. I loved it. Wouldn’t give it up for nothing.

S: And was more slow the life? The life was slowly?

L: Lonely?

S: Slowly

L: Lowly?

S: More slow?
L: Slowly?
S: Yeah.
L: Oh, definitely, definitely! Oh, yeah. We would go to school, the school would let in at 8:20, and get out at 3:10 and after that you went, you did your homework and then you went to play. Did your chores, whatever you had to do and then you went to play. We weren’t allowed to stay in the house and just stay and lay down all day long. We just weren’t allowed, we had things we had to do, and we had better get it done by the time mum came back from work. Mum always worked up the house, always. And there were... we were eight, like I said I had four brothers and three sisters.

S: Wow!
L: And the older ones always had to work. If you quit school you had to find a job. So out of four brothers we had one that graduated, the rest went on and found a job and did well for themselves. I had two brothers that own the business. Three of them own the business for themselves.
S: And they’re on the island?
L: Yes they were all on the island. They’re not here anymore... It’s... I have three of my brothers here and I’m the only girl here.

S: The only? Wow
L: So I’m a die-hard and then my … I have three sisters, two of them live about 40-50 miles away and then my younger sister lives up in Tennessee, and my one brother that moved away lives in Galliano, so I’m the only girl and three brothers.

S: Good. Hahaha.
L: It’s... it’s a life that I wouldn’t give up, I loved it, I loved it. I loved it here. I wish I could live back in probably like in the ’40s, ’30s and ’40s were even better than when I grew up, I’m sure.

S: Yeah.
L: I’m sure, I’m sure. Things were a lot more simplified, you know? Now it’s just everything... I don’t know, they want this thing, want that, and they don’t need this and they don’t need that.

S: Yeah.
L: You know, we did it with what we had. I remember one Christmas my mum worked all year to buy us a tape recorder. She paid eleven dollars apiece for it. She worked all year and saved for that. My little sister and I got that, my big sister got like a radio, I don’t remember what my little brother got. But it was never... we never got a really... big, big gift. One year I remember getting a bike and that bike last with me forever. We had to take care of what we had. I can remember my mum taking an [audio poco chiaro] Bread Wrapper one year and she folded it up and cut it, till when she opened it up all the little girls were holding hands when she opened it, all the little girls opened it and that was a Christmas gift one year. And my aunt used to tell me that when they were little they got an orange for Christmas and they were so grateful to have that. Now kids... they don’t know what it is to get... they don’t. They don’t have a clue.
S: Yeah.
L: I like simple life, I do.
S: It’s better.
L: I like very simple things. I can make do with whatever. It doesn’t bother me.
S: And you studied in French at school?
L: No, actually my mother’s mother, which was my grandmother, only spoke French.
S: Oh.
L: Spoke not one word of English and that’s how we learnt it. And then by the time I got to high school French was not offered anymore. My brother took up French and then I’d say about six, maybe seven years ago we had a lady from France, Brigitte [audio poco chiaro] was her name and she came here and kinda refreshed my French speaking skills which I learnt a lot of new things from her but I can speak it, I understand it better, but I can speak it, I can get by with saying what I’m trying to come across with.
S: Yeah?
L: Yes, may not be as well as what they do now, but I can speak it. I have an uncle who speaks it very very well and one brother. My other two brothers used to speak it, but my uncle speaks it very very well.
S: Because there is something… words that…
L: That are not the same.
S: Yeah
L: We say… For a car, we say: “Ça c’est mon char” and in France, where Brigitte came from, she said: “Ça c’est une voiture”
S: Yeah?
L: And I could never get that concept! “What the hell is a voiture?!”
S: Hahahaha!
L: Hahahahaha! It was like: “Qu’est-ce que tu parles Brigitte? C’est pas une voiture, c’est un char!” “No! No no no, Leoda!” So we… you know, we used to have fun her and I, she taught me a lot, she really did. She really did! She has taught me a lot.
S: It is very weird.
L: Yes, it is! But we had a good time, her and I.
S: Yeah. And when did you decide to enter in the council member?
L: I was elected in 1998 as a…. I filled in the two year term which I took mayor Commondale’s place. And then in 2000 I didn’t win the election, and I waited. I wanted to run again, and I waited until my son had the age, you know, I could get him out of school and whatever. And then in 2008 I went again and won, and then I just ran again in 2012 and was re-elected, so I enjoy it, I do. I like helping people, I want people to know what Grand Isle is really about.
S: So what do the council do?
L: We would more or less kinda tend to the local issues. You know it’s a close-net community, right now we have a couple of people you know that need things and we are going to see so that they get it. You know, we try to help everybody, that’s our
main goal. On the Government side, I kinda leave that to the mayor, he does a pretty good job on that. You know he keeps tabs on what he’s doing and things like that, so… I just like being there. I just don’t mind working for somebody and that’s what we work for; we work for the people of this town, not for ourselves, so… It’s been good. It’s been good.

S: It’s not a paid work?

L: It is a paid position, but it’s not much, but even though… if they didn’t pay I would still stay if I could, yeah, I like it.

S: And like when happens the hurricanes you respond like a council member?

L: Yes. Actually what we do, we get together along with the civil defense director, we get with the Fire Department, the first responder, we also get with the parish, then the parish comes in and helps us, then we make a decision, whether we should evacuate or stay. And then, on the return-home side, we try to get everybody home as quickly as possible, because we have people who have a low income and cannot afford to stay in a hotel thirteen or fourteen days. If we can get our people home, our people can do without lights, As long as we’ve got running water we’re ok. We can cook outside… I love to do it anyway! We can make do, we’re pretty resilient here, we can survive.

S: Yeah.

L: We can survive, definitely. Definitely. I would… It wouldn’t bother me if they never had a bridge over here. We never could leave. I’d be satisfied with that.

S: Yeah.

L: Oh, yeah. At one time back in the ’30s and ’40s Grand Isle grew vegetables that would leave here and bring to New Orleans. We grew the best vegetables.

S: Oh yeah? Why you don’t do this now?

L: Where are you going to do it now?… So many homes, you know, houses and camps and stuff like that. I mean they grew vegetables that they shipped to New York City. My dad used to drive that detachable truck twice a week and deliver fresh vegetables to New Orleans twice a week.

S: That’s a good land for… ?

L: Oh yes, yes! There’s a story that I… Did you? I don’t know if you read the story about Grand Isle, it’s called Three Wise Men.

S: Oh that… yeah!

L: That story tells what Grand Isle is today. They envisioned that, they saw this that is happening now. They saw it happening. I don’t like it you know, too much… It just seems like it should be a little bit slower. It’s not that I don’t like it, I do… I love people that come here and enjoy Grand Isle, I really do, but when summer’s over, I’m ready for the quiet and then when fall and winter’s over I’m ready for that spring/summer. You know, that’s… I like it peaceful and a lot of people come down here and stay in their camps because it’s so peaceful, you just do it… there’s no clock in Grand Isle, to me. You know, there’s no clock, you just do what you’re doing to get up. So that’s good and this place here was my dream, I’ve been wanting this twenty
years and never could. I’ve been watching this place for years and years and close up
and I said: “Oh my Gosh! This is the place!”
S: Oh, yeah.
L: It took me two years to acquire it… and once I did acquire it, it took me six months to
get the people to come to the bank. Because they’re not people who like to get rid of
things. My mum and dad worked for them for over forty years so they were gracious
enough to sell it to me and at a fair price. So this is [audio poco chiaro]
S: Why this is not elevated?
L: Well, way back, way before Betsy all the buildings were built on the ground. All the
buildings were either on the ground or just a few feet up. Because we, we… for Betsy
they had fourteen feet of water that covered the Island and after Betsy that’s when
they started elevating homes. I remember how our house cracked in half, it was about
only about three and a half, four feet off the ground and it cracked in half at the
[audio poco chiaro]. And then after Betsy my mum and dad built another house, they
built it up and everybody else, that their house didn’t break or whatever, they lifted
it. Like they’re lifting these houses now.
S: So it was after Betsy?
L: After Betsy.
S: And when happened?
L: Betsy was in 1965, and then… this place was built after Betsy, but FEMA has come
with stricter codes, but they build this on the ground. This building is not going
anywhere, it’s built very very strong, it has wires throughout, where we had to cut
windows. I mean you could see the rivet bar coming through it was built very very
strong and the cement blocks go down three feet in the ground.
S: Ah ok.
L: So it’s very very strong. It’s… it took a lot of work but it’s worth it. It’s gonna be
worth it, I know it will be…
S: Yeah, it’s a very nice place.
L: Yeah, I like it, I really do. And that’s why I’m trying to bring back in here some of the
old Grand Isle. I’ve a little museum across the street, and I have all kind of things in
there. That we never could get it open, my brother and I, so I asked him could I take
some of the stuff here. So I’m gonna bring some of the stuff here. I have a lot of old
pictures, old… I have old ledges that are beautiful and a painted [audio poco chiaro]
beautiful. Beautiful!
S: And where is?
L: It’s across the street, in that yellow building you can see from where you’re?
S: Yeah.
L: It’s there, so… I have a lot of things in there… about the history. So I hope to
incorporate it in here, somewhere in here and then I hope to incorporate a gift shop
somewhere in here. It’s gotta be a one-stop shop.
S: Yeah, yeah.
L: Yes. It’s good, it’s a good thing.
S: So, and when the BP happens, what did you think?
L: BP stripped us… I feel like … They stripped us from our dignity, the pride that we take in Grand Isle, we still do take pride, but they really… It really hurt when that happened. It not only hurt our tourism which is a big thing for the island, it just hurt us deep down inside, because of that one thing they made us feel like they didn’t care. They acted like they did, but didn’t care and they thought they could just come in here and offer a few dollars to some people and some people were desperate and took it. You know, and some people did, which I’m glad, and we have a fellow down here, Dean Blanchard, he’s a fighter. And you know they say, “the squeaky wheel gets the grease?”, well he’s very very squeaky and we need that because if it were not for him I wouldn’t realize a lot of the things that could happen that haven’t happened yet.
S: Yeah.
L: But as a fisherman and a shrimp dealer he knows! He knows about the waters, he knows about the food on the bottom, he knows everything there is to know about that, and I listen to him a lot. You know, ‘cos he… I think he can see what’s happening where I can’t because that’s not the industry I’m familiar with. You know, he can see how his business is going down a lot, and he knows why and he would never listen to people like us. Because we have people who go to college and learn all of this stuff… all this ecological… biological, all of this stuff and you know what? They don’t know a damn thing. They just study it in books, you gotta come out here and work in here. And had they listened to the good old Cajuns ingenuity they might… they’d have burned that oil off. Who knows, maybe it would have been the right thing to do, but what they did wasn’t the right thing to do. They sprayed these dispersants. Why do you think we have so many people that are sick? Now sick… respiratory problems, cancer… it’s always something, you’re just not feeling good. Well, I think they have a lot to do with it. They say that they didn’t spray, that was bull(shit). You could get up at any time in the night and hear that plane go across that bay back there and across that gulf… but they still deny it.
S: They deny it?
L: Sure they deny it! They didn’t want that out to flow, they wanted it to go down and so they sprayed it and that’s what made it go down. Lay it on the bottom, some of it and that’s what kills the plants which feed the [audio poco chiaro] and you know, and so on, and so on.
S: So before the BP the people weren’t so sick?
L: No. No, it just… I think if they were, or had a touch of something, they still didn’t help it. They helped bringing it out. It hastened, speeded it up, I’m sure… but I don’t think BP cares. They’re still trying to pay people off. The town of Grand Isle was ground zero and we have got nothing. NOTHING!
S: Ground zero? What it means?
L: Yes, this was the main… this was the most affected area. It was Grand Isle. Why? Because we have tourism here. You don’t think… Who would wanna go on a beach full of oil?
S: Yeah.
L: Who would let their child swimming in that mess?.. Nobody and I don’t blame them!
S: So the other places were not affected like Grand Isle?
L: No. I mean the Marsh was affected and that’s a big plus, don’t get me wrong… but this place was inhabited, you know? It took our fisheries away. It took our tourism away. I mean, people are still skeptical. What, three years later? And they’re still skeptical about it. You know, I mean… I eat the sea food, I’m cautious I love the shrimps, I loved the oysters, you know, I like to go out there and pick them myself, but you can’t do that anymore, but… but… You know… It just has taken a lot away from us, and it’s like because we’re such a small place they’re not concerned about us. That’s how I feel. You know, just give ’em a little money and they’re gonna go away. It doesn’t work that way. What happens in 20 years? Just like the [audio poco chiaro] is, what’s happening?
S: Yeah
L: You know, the same thing is gonna happen here. What is this going to be a ghost town one day? Hopefully not. I mean the fishing’s been good. But the shrimping has not been good.
S: Is different?
L: I guess.
S: Why?
L: But the fishing has been good. I don’t know why, I wish I could answer that. I don’t know enough about that to say why. But the shrimping… you know, they catch the shrimps from the East, from the West, but they’re not catching anything here, like it used to be.
S: Yeah?
L: Of course we knew. You know it was… it was… it was on the downside anyway, but we probably had many more years to [audio poco chiaro] . And now? And you can’t put a price on that, to me you can’t. Just like this business here. I know I opened know what I could be facing. But this is my home. I feel like BP should come in, and pay every person who is living in Grand Isle, every home owner. If you owned a home they should pay every home owner 100,000 dollars.
S: Really?
L: That’s a start. Then, ok, my husband and I own the home, I have a son that lives with me, he should get fifty. If you’re a renter, you get 50,000 dollars. That’s not going to take away everything, but you know what? It’s gonna help people getting started somewhere else if they have to leave, which I hope we never do. But you don’t know that… We don’t know… We don’t know what’s going to happen here. Nobody knows. I just feel that… And they made billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars. I think everybody that was living here at that time should be compensated. If you can prove you were living here, on that day, not before, not after, only on that day, if you were living here…
S: Only on that day?
L: If you were living here prior to that day, let’s say before and ’til that day, you should be compensated. Another thing that hurt us when they started bringing up all these [audio poco chiaro] They had to rent houses in this neighborhood which wasn’t good. Some of these people they got from… they were… some of them were prisoners. You think that I could feel safe getting out of my house at night when at any given time at night, if I felt like going out sitting on my porch and I do that… twelve o’clock, one o’clock, two o’clock… I didn’t feel safe after that.

S: Why you don’t feel safe?

L: Because we have people here that we know nothing about, they keep coming, we don’t know who the hell they are! We are very lucky, because we kinda look after one another. That’s a good thing about down here. You know, if I see something at my neighbor’s house that shouldn’t be going on I’m going to find out who he is and what he is doing there, but not everybody’s like that. And we don’t want them in this facility, we don’t want them here. We don’t know you? Be on your way! Just go find some place else. I know we had a group that came down and rented a house one night and they walked down the street and urinated on that man’s fence. What was he doing? And why did he have to do that? He just left the camp that they rented, why couldn’t he urinate there? He called the big old [audio poco chiaro] I’m telling you by that night at ten o’clock they were gone. That group… that little group in that area stuck together and said: “We don’t want them here. They have to go find some place else to stay”.

S: So they… were bad people?

L: Well they must have been bad, everybody that comes down and goes urinate on somebody’s fence in a place that he knows no one, or nothing about… he’s bad! Yes, I would say he’s bad. Definitely.

S: And was people that were here for cleaning the beach?

L: Yes. It was people that were here to clean. I mean… I think it was just a big “show myself” that brought many people down here. They were picking up little bitty pieces like that. It was just to show. The day the President came I don’t how many people they had there on the beach. After he left in the afternoon you didn’t see nobody. It was just a big show. Yeah, it’s true! Just a big show. The President came down here: he came and he visited one of the places and ate some of the sea food and after that we didn’t have much. I mean, the mayor’s been back and forth to Washington, which is a good thing. Hopefully, we will get help… who knows.

S: Yeah.

L: It has yet to come.

S: And there was a lot of news… newspapers, journalists?

L: Oh, yes. I bet you I gave probably forty interviews.

S: Wow!

L: Oh, yeah. From all over the place. And we were good to them, we brought them around because we wanted… we wanted the way we fought and how we felt to get out, and let people know what it feels like, so that maybe, just maybe we would have the
support of the country. You know, not just have the State of Louisiana, but the whole damn country to ... you know our whole life was interrupted. I tried to file a claim for... what is it called... for... I can't say for what it was, how I put it. Quality of life!

S: Quality of life?

L: Yes, I tried to file a claim but when I went there, the man said: “What do you mean quality of life?” He said: “Has the BP oil hurt you?” I said: “Most definitely has!” He said: “Where do you work?” I said “I work in Grand Isle’s school. I had for about twenty... almost twenty years at that time”. He said: “How do you feel that it hurt you?” I said: “Let me ask you this: how many people you think are gonna move down to Grand Isle and put their kids into our school? That school gives me a job”!

S: Yeah.

L: “We have to have kids there to have a job”. He said: “Well, I understand your point, but we can’t file a claim for that”. I said: “Give me a damn number!”. So I do have a BP number in the event that anything was to happen. But it did! We went out at night and you could smell the oil, you could smell the stuff they were spraying. You could just... I don’t know... It just... Just Grand Isle will never be the same.

S: How was the smell?

L: It was this... old chemical smell like... You know how old grease? That’s what it would remind me of, like old grease would smell. That and when they sprayed these dispersants the eyes would burn. I know this lady that died last year: she got sick shortly after. She was working out there, on the dock and when they sprayed she would be working at night as a guard, and she died. And I hope that that doctor can prove... he’s trying and he’s close... can prove that that’s what she died of. Then our kids will be compensated and can sue BP for millions I hope. ‘Cos those people don’t care about us. All they care about is the production of oil to make their pockets fat. They don’t care about us. What if it was them? How would they feel if it was their child or their family that had to put up with this? That’s how I feel.

S: The platform... the platform that you see from the beach, there was also when you were young?

L: Oh yeah. Freeport’s off was out there about seven miles out. It was a big, big platform, there was a sulphur mine out there, but all the rest I guess were oil field. And that’s great, I mean that gives our people a job, you know we have to drill for oil, but you know? Be careful and take responsibility for what you have done. If you have failed to follow the safety codes, take the responsibility for it, don’t keep trying to hide it and say you did everything, no you didn’t! Had you done everything and been very very cautious, it might not have happened. Can you imagine how these people feel that have lost their husbands or sons? Daddies? Would... BP probably gave them a lot of money, but that’s not going to bring them back.

S: No.

L: You know? It’s just a... It was a bad situation, and they’re not going to make it better, they don’t want to make it better. You know, I don’t know what else I could ask BP for, that would satisfy me. I just don’t know... I don’t know what I could ask them
for. It seems like everybody thinks that money, you know, if they get money, they can live. Money is not everything.

S: No.

L: You know? And yes, I would love to have 100,000 dollars from them, but it’s not everything, it doesn’t bring back what we’ve lost. I don’t know if we’ll ever get that back. But Grand Isle is a prosperous place, we have many, many camp owners that come here, lots of tourists that come here and I like for them to come and enjoy Grand Isle, I mean that’s our livelihood, that’s where… what makes our living, it’s camp owners and tourists, people who visit. So we want them to come here, but we want them to come to a clean place, you know, not a place they have to worry: “Is it ok if we go swimming? Is it ok if we eat the fish we catch here?” you know or whatever.

S: Do you think it’s gonna be for a long time?

L: I think we’ll still be seeing the effects of this for a good twenty-thirty plus years. Oh yeah, I do. I do. I think that if they would have listened… You know, I’m not an environmentalist, I don’t know anything about the air but, you know, with all this smog, and this and that in New York city, in these big cities that have all this stuff blowing off into the air what the hell harm would have done to burn this [audio poco chiaro] off and burn that oil? What would it have done? It couldn’t have worsened the situation! We’d be done! The stuff would drew back. It would have never stayed in the bottom and ruined the fisheries like it did. You need to talk to Dean Blanchard.

S: Who?

L: Dean Blanchard he’s the owner of the shrimp ship. He could tell you a heck of a lot more. They just did a documentary, I can’t think of the lady’s name [audio poco chiaro]

S: They did a documentary?

L: Yes. They just did a nice little documentary that they brought to Amsterdam a year… a week or so ago and hopefully it’s going to help. Hopefully things like this will help, so that people can see what, you know, really what’s happening here.

S: So that the rest of the world that forgot...

L: Yes. Because… and not just for that. I don’t want the same thing to happen in the East-Coast where they drill… You know, to some little town, or anywhere, for that fact. I don’t want it to happen to anybody, you know, because it has been tough. It’s been tough to… it strikes up the emotions and makes the local people get angry, because one believes this, one believes that. You know, it just hurts all the way around, it’s a big sore and we don’t have… I always said Grand Isle is like a big steak, a big rib eye steak. At one time we had plenty, plenty of meat. A lot of people from Grand Isle that actually lived here stayed here. Then, now the meat has started turning into the fat, and now many of us islanders left. I bet you we don’t have a hundred of us.

S: A hundred?

L: I don’t think we have a hundred…. That I can honestly say I’ve been here from the beginning. That actually have been in Grand Isle a long long time.
S: And you never thought to leave Grand Isle?
L: No, I don’t wanna ever leave Grand Isle. Never ever ever! I don’t care if there is one
gran of sand, this is where I wanna be. When I die, I want them to spread my ashes
in this area right here. That’s what I want. I love this place! It’s the only place that I
have ever known... all my life... and I don’t want to go anywhere else. [audio poco
chiaro]I love our school [audio poco chiaro]
S: No?
L: No. If you know that you’re in a comfort zone, and that’s how I feel here. When we can
push the BP situation aside, the... just other issues that it was really really hard...
We are fighters and we’re gonna get through, it might take us a long time, but we can
get through it. And down here I’ve raised both of my children. All eight... seven of
my siblings were raised here. We were... this was a comfort zone for us. And yes we do
have plenty of camp owners and a lot of them fall right in the place with us. I mean I
have someone to come here, you would never know they’re not from here for how
much they love Grand Isle. I love it one hundred times. Fact. But they love it and I
would never, ever... I hate to see when people leave here. It’s not easy for our young
children here. They have to leave to make a living and I don’t want my kids to leave.
It’s just all very hard.
S: So when you were young the people didn’t leave?
L: No, no! I mean, we had a few... we had... my aunt had seventeen children, and I think
that only... I can think of only three of them that don’t live here now. Four of them,
maybe. But for the most part they all stayed. We could... We made a living here! We
weren’t set out to be rich or... you know and every once in a while we might have a
kid that might gonna away and became a doctor, oh Grand Isle was so proud of that!
We had somebody that was a doctor, or a lawyer, or whatever. You know, and that
was good, but for most part, most of the kids stayed here... then a lot of them leave
because there’s nothing... you know here... there’s nothing to keep them here. So my
wish is that after they go out and do what they have to do and they’re ready to retire,
they come back home. But FEMA has put so many rules and regulations on these
buildings that is almost impossible for a young couple to get started. Really, it really
is and FEMA changes its mind like we change our underwear. You know, they’re
constantly changing their minds about things and there’s people that live in Michigan
and Illinois that take decisions for down here.
S: So what is FEMA?
L: FEMA is the Federal Emergency Management (Agency)... It’s the Government that
tells you how to live. The more money we get from the government, the more they’re
gonna tell us how to live.
S: Hahahaha!
L: Is that not true?
S: Yeah.
L: It is true. So I just don’t care for FEMA, some of the things that they do, and I think
that I know a lot of the rules and regulations they set upon us are good, but there are
some others that... they might come two weeks later and say: “Oh, that’s ok, you can do this now”. I just don’t get it... Whatever… that’s just how I feel... Grand Isle is ours.

S: Yeah.
L: Oh, yeah.
S: So your life is changed after BP?
L: Yeah, somewhat it has. It has because I watch… I watch all the effects that it has caused. You know, just a person cannot go and... I don’t know... I’m worried that when a hurricane would come, if the water would come over the island again, how much oil is coming with that water? Are they gonna let us back on here? We have people that refuse to leave now because of that. Is the oil gonna be... If there’s oil on the ground you know they’re not gonna want us home, that’s bullshit, too! We’re coming home whether we gotta come by boat, by air, I don’t care, we’re coming home! We try to get our people home the next day if we can, because people want to be home! I mean, like I said I could live without lights, it doesn’t bother me one bit! It’s just… it was an inconvenience and it still is, we just try to make the best of it. That’s all we can do. So BP means Bad People to me.

S: Hahahaa.
L: Black Poison. Hahaha, what else can I say?
S: Hahahah.
L: That’s how I feel about them. And... Like I said I don’t know if there’s going to be anything... it just seems like they’re not compassionate enough. I don’t know, maybe I expected somebody to come and say: “Look, we gotta do what we have to do to make Grand Isle right again” and show us something. I don’t see anything. I don’t see anything. Cleaning that up? That’s bullshit, that’s just a show. That, what they’re doing now, it’s just a show. So...

S: What about somebody from BP comes and tell you all the things going on?
L: No. And another thing that upset me a lot too? The people of Grand Isle. Some people made money, yes, but you had to be... you had to have the boat, or whatever. And those people took advantage, they went up and made money, but everybody should have made money. Everybody should have. We should have a chance to get out and work, or whatever. I don’t know what happened there, I just can’t... The rich got richer and the poorer got poorer. You know, and some of the... I have... I have family members that did well working for BP and tried to do the right thing, but BP wouldn’t allow them to do it. If they saw oil over here, they’d send them ten miles the other way. Why? ‘Cos they want to shoot dispersants and let them go on, and they don’t want them to pick it up. I just... it’s just the whole concept of it, for me it was concealing... I don’t know. I just don’t trust them. I don’t trust any of those people like that.

S: So BP couldn’t stop the dispersants and try to see another way?
L: I think they’d been better, had they picked that stuff up, the dispersants is what made the people sick, what killed the fish, what killed the shrimps. I believe that...
mean... And it's the stuff they didn't want to spray in Britain over there, because it was too poisonous, but yet they're gonna come here... That's another thing: everybody thinks that Louisiana is the dumping gulf for everybody's shit. That's what we get. But Louisiana needs to secede from the United States, become it's own country and let me tell you: we're self sufficient.

S: Yeah.
L: Louisiana... State of Louisiana is very self-sufficient. We grow cattle, we grow vegetables, we grow this and we grow that, we have oil, we have this... we can do it!
S: You have all you need.
L: We can do it... We can do it. I mean when they'd blow off that bridge in some ten years [audio poco chiaro] We've got to do it! But Louisiana is a self-sufficient state. I think we would do fine on our own.
S: So it's different from the other states?
L: Yes. They're always picking on us, it's always us that gets the s-end of the deal, you know? Everybody shoots their stuff, all their poison, chemicals come down the river. Where does it come? The mouth of the river, it's only a few miles to the east of us.
S: Yeah.
L: You know what I'm saying? But, in the end, we will prevail. I promise you that, I will. We have to keep believing that. We have to. And if we do, it will happen: if you believe something hard enough, it's going to happen. You just gotta keep believing and don't... Don't doubt yourself, don't doubt the words of the Good Lord. Don't doubt, just keep... persistence!
S: Persistence.
L: Calvin Coolidge wrote a poem “Persistence”, and a very good friend of mine, Walter Maples told me one time: “Be persistent”. He and an old man named Jack [audio poco chiaro] told me that. Persistence! He's the one who showed me the poem “Persistence” by Calvin Coolidge. I was like: “Wow! Got it, I got it!”
S: So it's with the persistence that you opened this?
L: Exactly, persistence. Walter Maples told me that: “Leoda, you remember, you have to be persistent!”. And I did. So when I got this place, the day we signed the papers I called him, he was in Kentucky. I said: “Mr Maples?” “Yeah?” I said: “This is Leoda, I wanna thank you for that word, ‘persistent’”.
S: Hehehe.
L: I said: “I just signed my life away at the bank” and [audio poco chiaro] he said:
“Congratulations!” I worked for him for so many years, many years at that store. Yes, indeed.
S: You worked at the school, like a teacher?
L: I retired... I retired in September. I had twenty years there, I was in Physical Education for a while, then I moved in the cafeteria, then back to the Physical Education, then back to the cafeteria. That's when I retired. Twenty years! It's been fun, but I was ready for this. I think I'm ready for this. Anyway, this has been a challenge for me, because I've been trying to keep my overhead down, so I kinda work
for it myself. And it gets tiring, it gets annoying sometimes that I’m here everyday, that’s why I close two days a week. So I can get away.

S: Yeah.
L: And I’ve been close since the Sunday before Thanksgiving and I’ll be opening again on Wednesday, so I gave myself a good rest.
S: Hahahah.
L: So I’ll do the same for Christmas, I guess I’ll stay closed a couple of days. Well, it’s a special place, this is a place my mum and dad worked in for over forty years.
S: Really?
L: It was the ballroom. Mum and dad was in here for twenty years… For twenty plus I should say. So it has good spirits in it.
S: Yeah.
L: Yeah.
S: So it was a bar before?
L: Always a bar. The first bar we had here was here all the way to that street back there. That’s how big it was. It was long, long and had a café. It was a restaurant, a bar, a casino and… yeah, and a restaurant, three things. And dancehall.
S: Dancehall? Wow!
L: And back then you’d bring your kids with you.
S: So what kind of music you danced?
L: It was mostly Cajun music.
S: Cajun?
L: Yeah, Cajun. But everybody used to get together back then. It was so neat! Oh, it was so neat. I’d give anything just to have two [audio poco chiaro] back then. I mean, in our neighborhood, where we live everybody watched out for everybody else. And if there was time for watching you… if I were at my aunt’s house I could go eat there. You know their kids at our house, they would come in there, ’cos everybody shared everything. Nobody was greedy, you know? Everybody took care of everybody. It was good. Good days.
S: So when the thing is changed about it?
L: Well, through the years, you know, Betsy came and… we started to get more and more [audio poco chiaro] down here, things like this. So way back then it started changing a little by little, by little and now it seems like things are moving fast, I guess the older you get, the faster it gets… But it’s good, I mean, the BP oil just put a big kick in our [audio poco chiaro] You know, they… they came and rented these people’s camps and ruined them. [audio poco chiaro] Yeah, people that have camps have been here for forty and fifty years, you know, like the camp would go to their children, to their children. You know, things like that. Oh yeah.
S: So the house is for a rent, for the summer camp?
L: A lot of those campers rent their places out in the summer.
S: They’re still… they’re building another places?
L: Oh yeah.
S: Or is it enough?
L: We have a lot of new places coming up. Back in the back, they have added new subdivisions [audio poco chiaro]. We have a new restaurant that it’s going to be opened in the spring. And they’re planning to build twenty-one condos there and boats slips… That’s what worries me: what happens to the little people? You know, the original Grand Isle people? How long is it going to be before there’s none of us left?
S: Yeah.
L: That’s hard to swallow. It’s… it’s… The cost of living here is pretty high.
S: Yeah, it’s really high. It was always… no?
L: No, not always like that. Not always like that at all.
S: So when starts to be more high?
L: Well, I would say back about… I guess… I don’t know how many years back but… Real estate came in and started putting these high prices at outrageous amounts. I mean, an unbelievable amounts, it’s still unbelievable. I mean you can look at the brochures, they’ve got camps and [audio poco chiaro] It’s unbelievable, they’ve got… some of them are over a million. We can’t, we’ll never afford that. I’m willing to sell my house that I live in right now… about 12 hundred square feet… to sell it and live in a camper because we will not be able to afford the insurance. It’s coming… So I’m just making it easier on myself. They can put me in a tent with a bed and be comfortable. My husband won’t do that.
S: Hahahaha, he wants the house!
L: Yeah. He won’t.
S: So do you know the… how… how makes higher value of the house?
L: No, I don’t. I don’t know what’s happening. I really can’t say, I don’t know. But I know a house cost 400,000 here, you can go and build the same house somewhere else for less than 200,000 probably.
S: Oh, so it’s like twice?
L: Yes, and we… this little place I would love to have it upraised and see what the upraised [audio poco chiaro] It’s the perfect location! [audio poco chiaro]
S: Ok… So, I forgot to ask you if with the council you do something for the people affected with the BP?
L: We’re in that process right now. Yeah, we’ve hired a lawyer and we’re trying to see what… what’s in for Grand Isle as a whole, you know. We’ll see. And it’s a long shot but we’re willing to take it.
S: Yeah.
L: Hopefully, things will work out. I mean, you have… you have someone that was willing to work for you… till they can’t work anymore. But when it’s not here, in reference to a [audio poco chiaro] When it’s not here anymore how can you put a price on what you would have made from then, ‘till the time he’s seventy or eighty years old? Some people still work at that age, you know that’s what they’re used to. They’re used to working. How can you put a price? You’re going to tell me that you’re going to give
them 40 or 50,000 and that’s it? That’s bullshit. They outta get them a damn million dollar each. [audio poco chiaro] my aunt [audio poco chiaro] “A million dollar each, that’s what we should get!” I bet you there’s not… Based on the kids at school back then, I think we had… when the hospital hit I think we probably had a hundred forty something kids in that school. If every parents… if every set of parents for those hundred and forty something kids that’s what? Right at seventy something families, you would say? Let’s say cut them in half. You’d get each one of those families a million dollars. Is that a deadly piece of pocket? No, no. They made billions and billions and billions upon billions. It’s never going to be enough. Never.

S: No.
L: Never, never, never!
S: So this disaster was totally unexpected?
L: Oh definitely. Definitely.
S: Ok.
Nome | Ray (pescatore) e Penny (moglie)
---|---
Età | Entrambi circa quarant'anni
Luogo e data dell'intervista | Il 5 novembre 2012, Grand Isle, Louisiana.
Durata dell'intervista | 35'46''
Condizioni di rilevamento | Intervista effettuata all'interno della chiesa Battista
Registratore | Sì

Sara: Ok. If you want to talk about your work before and after the disaster.
Ray: Ok. Before I was shrimping as usual, this... heavy commercial fishery and... that was all I did, [audio poco chiaro] how to work in a oil spill, and... then when the oil spill came, I think they closed a lot of the waters down and hired us on... which was a blessing that they hired us on, so we could keep working throughout the oil spill, and... myself... I know it was bad... I was all over the Gulf and I didn’t see a high concentration of oil for... four months? Five months?
Penny: Maybe six, ‘til August, I mean [audio poco chiaro] 15<sup>th</sup>, so... June, July, August, September, October, five and a half months.
R: Five and a half months, six months I might have seen the oil... two weeks, you know, like... in that whole period of time. Other than that, it didn’t look like it was as bad as... we were here and not where... sent me to go at... I think more the heavy concentrations were for the offshore, and somewhere along the coast. And what type of question are you gonna ask me?
S: So you helped the BP to clean the beach?
R: Yeah... well, yeah, not the beach itself, but... the waters off the beach, you know... Yeah they hired me on... I think for the first three months... we didn’t really touch no oil, or mess with no oil. I think they didn’t have enough equipment to pick up the oil, and then later on... then we finally got the equipment so that we could pick up the oil, but at the beginning they wanted us to look for oil, and just ride through it with the boats.
S: Ok.
R: ‘Cos I think what they did was spraying dispersants on it.
S: Yes.
R: So they wanted us just to drive through it, and I think we agency dispersant trying to make it sink. But like I said, the amount of time we look for oil and then see a lot of oil. But it wasn’t until… probably three months after I started the job that they started giving us equipment, that when we found someone that could actually pick it up.

S: Yeah. And the Corexit make you sick?

R: Excuse me?

S: The Corexit made you sick?

P: Did the chemicals make you sick?

R: Well, I didn’t think they did, but lately I’ve seen like I’ve been having more… congestion than… than I’ve ever had before.

S: Ok.

R: I see like some [audio poco chiaro] on my chest. And it comes and goes, sometimes I think it’s gone, and then it seems like it comes back, so I don’t know if that could be something from the sea, I’m sure it didn’t help.

S: Yeah.

R: And… but… well, most of the time I feel good, but every now and then I feel something on my chest pretty heavy.

S: And your work has changed after the BP, the oil spill?

R: For shrimping?

S: Yeah.

R: Well, it seems like it’s… I’m having to go more to the West… away from where the spill happened, more… well… before the oil spill I used to work a lot by the Mississippi river.

S: Ok.

R: And then… it seems like now I’m having to go more… West of Grand Isle… away from the spill to catch the amount of shrimp…

S: Because there is more shrimp there?

R: Yeah, more shrimp over there.

S: Oh.

R: But… yeah, it seems to be an improvement, because… my last trip I went to the East on the Mississippi river and we caught a lot of shrimp. But… for whatever reason, I noticed this year we had more sharks.

S: More sharks?

R: More sharks than we’ve ever had. So I don’t know if there is lack of food… well, deeper water and the sharks are coming to more shallow… but everybody this year has caught… they bite the trawls, you know, a little fish gets stuck in the trawl and then they bite the little fish and they make big holes in your net, and this year has been really bad, I’ve been seeing a lot… more sharks, much trawls got bitten more times this year than in my whole life to put together.

S: Ah.
R: So we just... I don’t know if it has anything to do with... you know, whatever they used to eat in deeper water than... now they’ve started to come more to the shallow waters. So I don’t know, it could be anything to do with the spill, but it’s just unusual and I’ve never... had so many sharks... shark bites on our nets as we did this year.

S: So it has changed the ecological...?

R: It could have!

S: Ah.

R: You know... and then I know the restrictions... they got high restrictions on shark fishing... so maybe that could have something to do with it. Well, in the past years there was only a few boats that was fishing the sharks, and they could catch a whole lot, while now, that they’ve really limited how many they can catch so they have something to do with it also, but, you know, I really don’t know.

S: Oh.

R: But... but... it seems like it’s coming back slow, but at first... like I said in the East there wasn’t good fishing at all. This year there seems to be improvement, a little better this year. Last year it was... it was pretty... not too much over there.

S: So there was a big damage for the shrimper, or?

R: Over there?

S: Yeah.

R: Like for the land or just the fisheries?

S: Fisheries.

R: I think last year it was... yeah, I think it was affected last year more soil than this year, but... most the last year. This year is making a little comeback, but it’s still not like it was before the oil spill... I don’t think it’s nothing like it was before.

S: So the quantity of the shrimp is the same, or is it low?

R: No it’s... it’s still lower... it’s...quite a bit better than last year I think, but still lower than it was before the oil spill.

S: Yeah. And it was scaring the black... the oil? When you go to the beach for clean, you was scared?

R: Well, we don’t go on the beaches over there, so I really don’t know, but... I really don’t know, I don’t see... I don’t see no cling rules... you know, nobody cleaning the beaches over there, they do have beaches, but you know we’re working and we don’t go on the beach. So I really can’t tell you how the beaches look.

P: When I was on the beach in April when our youth group from here at church went help cleaning at the State Department, we found a lot of tarballs and I was really surprised about that, you know...

S: This year?

P: A-ha, this year.

R: I talked to some workers cleaning the beaches around this area... and I asked how some other beaches look and changed... and they said a lot better now, but I think after the hurricane they had a lot of tarballs, a lot of...

S: After Isaac?
R: ‘Cos he told me... He said... he said it looks a lot better now after what they did... it must... maybe with the storms and rough waters probably... brought more of it onto the beach, but... after, you know, spending three or four weeks, more than that... when was the storm?

P: Isaac was August 29th, so it’s been two months...

R: Two months of cleaning and they said it’s looking a lot better.

S: Ah, ok.

R: But you never know, maybe with the next storm you’ll have more, it’s... 

S: It returns?

R: Yeah. I think that... you know, the water gets real rough, it turns it off the bottom, so...

S: Yeah, and you don’t know how long it will be this process.

P: The whole clean up process like ‘til they get off it?

S: How many times the tarballs came to the beach?

P: I’d say... well... it’s been... I guess every time the water gets stirred up real good, like the hurricane Isaac, but also there was another time, just after... rough water, I remember they were talking about the ES&H people, you know, that got to clean the beach, they go to the Bridge Side and Elizabeth talks to them a lot, she’s got... getting information about that, but I know that they’ve mentioned different times there would be more tarballs than others, but I don’t know what the reason is.

S: Ok. You never thought to change the work? If the BP oil spill damaged too much to be... to thought to change your work?

R: I don’t...

P: If you would change from shrimping...

S: Yeah.

P: Because of the oil spill, do some other type of work?

S: Yeah.

R: No, I’m not interested in... like I said I can... go away from the oil spill, you know, there’s still a lot of area in Louisiana that didn’t get affected, but... I think, I think things are coming back and... it’s gonna take some time, but I think eventually we’ll get back to what it used to be, it’s just... you know, something... I think it’s gonna take the time, because it did... it does better this year than it did last year.

S: Oh.

R: That’s encouraging. It might be better next year hopefully.

S: Ok. Before it happened you never think that it was possible this disaster?

R: Well, I guess we never gave it much thought, but a lot of areas where I work over there is... lots and lots of oil rigs, and... Yeah I guess nobody thought that it would be that serious, you know, the oil spill, but... plenty, plenty of oil rigs in that area where I like to work, so... yeah, that was... that was a new experience that we’ve, you know... never experienced that before.

S: So it was the first big oil spill?
R: Yeah, we’ve seen little ones from time to time, but then they’re gone pretty quick. Yeah, I’ve never seen… you know, what we saw on tv was just kinda… you know, more than we could imagine.

S: Yeah.

R: Yeah, but I guess… I think maybe most of it stayed offshore, only a few places it came close enough to… you know, hit the beach, and… and really do some damage to the land and all… but… then… I think they should have never sunk it, I think it was bad. I think they had to let it float, everybody could have cleaned it up…

S: Ok.

R: But they sunk it, it went to the bottom and I don’t think that was a good idea, I think… if they would have just let it float, it would have taken some time, but we could have cleaned it, because it was floating, and now it’s… they sank it with the dispersants, so it’s…probably not good for marine life, for the bottom.

S: Yeah. So the chemicals changed the fish?

R: Well… I know last year it did, this year it’s… we’re starting seeing an improvement… you know, it might take years to get back to how it once was, but we are seeing some improvement… And, but I just don’t know, after a hurricane, you know, that it might… it might get all stirred up again and be bad again. So, but… I just hope and pray that it will get back to how it used to be, it’s just gonna take some time.

S: Yeah. And the offshore changed the fish too, or not?

R: Yeah, I had a friend that… he just catches commercial fish. I do shrimp, he does fish, and… I think the same thing for him, I know last year… places where he used to catch a lot of red snappers, he couldn’t catch any. I think this year he started to… started to improve… somewhat.

S: Ok.

R: But last year it was… it was… I think that everything was affected a lot worse last year than this year.

S: So maybe the things are going better?

R: It looks like… it looks like it’s getting better, you know… But I really don’t know what it’s gonna happen if you start getting hurricanes or storms, you know… I don’t know it stops on the bottom… just on the bottom waiting to, you know… But what is strange is we don’t catch enough shrimp trawls.

S: Oh.

R: You know, and it’s… unless it’s underground or something… but you know, we drag shrimp trawls and we don’t catch tarballs, like they show up on the beach, so I don’t know where they come from, it must be underneath the sand, and then… I guess they [audio poco chiaro]

S: So the problem is that the chemicals put the oil at the bottom of the sea?

R: Yeah I think… I think the sand kinda goes over it. ‘Cos we drag trawls and we don’t catch it again… I guess, you know, real rough and then they show up on the beach, so… I’m sure there’s plenty a whole lot out there.

S: Yeah. It’s a big problem.
P: What were you saying?
S: It’s a big problem!
R: Yeah. And they shouldn’t… I really think that they shouldn’t all the dispersants… too much… too much…
S: Yes.
R: Dispersants to sink it. Probably not healthy for us.
S: But why did they put it?
R: They did it to sink it, because they didn’t want it to come into the land, so they sprayed, while it was in the deeper water, they kept spraying it and spraying it, ’cos they didn’t want to take it to the land, I guess that’s why.
S: Ok.
R: So they sunk it. But I think they used way too much of it, they shouldn’t… you know, I think everybody kinda panicked and they didn’t know how to do… it was such a big oil spill, you know… I think that now they can look back and they: “We should have done this, we should have done that”, but at that time… I think they just were really worried that it would come into the land, so they kept sinking it.
S: It is legal to put all this dispersant?
R: I guess it was, I don’t know who regulated it, but our Government regulated it, how much that they could spray, but I know they sprayed a lot and then… you know, and then it became a big concern, it’s like… and I think after a while they said: “No more”, but that was after, you know, many many planes and… of dispersants.
S: And how long they put it?
R: How long what?
S: How long they put the chemicals?
R: How long they sprayed the chemicals?
S: Yeah.
R: Probably… probably about four or five months.
S: A long time!
R: Yeah. I think it wasn’t until the very end that they stopped them. And… but… and then we really don’t know, because I think they sprayed it at night… I think a lot of the time they sprayed at night… ’cos you’d see the plane at night.
S: At night?
R: And…’cos I think there was… you know, they sprayed in the day, too, but you know, they were trying to stop them from spraying so much, but I think they would even spray at night, and then the next day they would send us out to go stir up the waters with the boat, to make it sink.
S: The air you smelled the dispersant?
R: About the smell?
S: Yeah.
R: Well, I think I didn’t know how much was being sprayed… later on, you know, we started realizing and the media, you know, would find out and kinda see on tv how much they were spraying and… and it was… you know, that it was too much, too late
by the time you hear about it it’s kinda… a lot has been sprayed and, you know… I don’t know what kind of chemical it was, but, you know, you get a lot of people that… that’s getting sick, and… you know, some people are strong and they can handle it, some people [audio poco chiaro] as well, you know, but… I don’t know.

S: There was a doctor that helped you, helped the people?
R: They got sick, no one has helped them… well, I don’t think Troy mentioned it, no… there’s a few times that my eyes burt when I was working, you know, I can’t remember, but we didn’t know it was from the oil on the water, or if it was this dispersant, but… I don’t know, I don’t think too bad, but I don’t know what the future’s gonna be, you know?

S: Yeah.
R: But I never really got too sick where I knew it was from that, you know, I mean, it might be affecting me, but I don’t… I didn’t know.

S: Because here there is no doctors.
R: Right.
S: I don’t know if in that period…
R: Right, doctors that would look for that, treat for that, yeah that’s something new to, kinda to everybody, so… that’s right.

P: Of course now they have doctor studying all that, with that health evaluation that you can do, and they keep studying, and see how it has affected your breathing and your senses and…so they do have people doing that now, which of course it’s quite a bit later.

S: They make a study?
P: Right, it’s called the Gulf Study Programme.
R: Yeah, I was supposed to do one a few weeks ago, and I canceled it, because [audio poco chiaro] have had a lot of things going on, [audio poco chiaro] Yes, I think once we talk to them we will find out more. I have some friends that claimed it, they’re really sick and… you know, but I think they kinda had some health problems before, and I think it just made it a lot worse. I just, you know, we don’t know in the long term, you know, in the short term right now I feel pretty good, but sometimes my breathing is kinda heavy and… I think I’m getting a cold or something, then I think it goes away and a few weeks later I feel it again and it’s like it didn’t go away, you know? I don’t know, it could be from that, I don’t know what it is. It’s kinda strange, it’s… just when I think it’s over…then a few weeks later I feel it again, the same thing, so…

S: It’s strange.
R&P: Mmm.

S: And you have any kind of help?
R: A kind of what?
S: Of help. If you have help, economical help or…?
R: Help? No, I haven’t gone to the doctor to get treated, but I guess [audio poco chiaro] an appointment, where I might meet up with… they’re gonna do a study and they’re gonna check pretty soon, and then… I think they’re gonna finally to keep track and kinda monitor me, last time it goes on to see if it gets worse or what.

S: By the BP?

R: No, I think it’s funded probably by BP, I think… I don’t know if it’s State-funded, I don’t know it’s probably funded by BP.

P: I think [audio poco chiaro] the paperwork you can see it’s the Gulf Study Health Programme.

S: Ok. And the government was… helped you or not?

P: The government helped?

S: Yeah.

P: Well, BP gave us money, which was very much a blessing, but the government…

R: You know… I really… it’s hard for me to say, I think… I don’t want to say anything bad about BP or… it was an accident, but… I mean they really really tried to… to make good out of something bad…. You know, they helped us with jobs and paid us good, you know, plus we are collecting like a settlement, you know.

S: Ok.

R: For fishing… being bad, so… I think they’re really trying to do the right thing. But I think the dispersants is one thing that I think they should have… maybe, sprayed less dispersants, but to let it float, have the people clean it up, and get it out of the Gulf, rather than sink it. [audio poco chiaro] I mean, she’s recording! Ok. Put it on the ground or something, ok?

P: Or you can just sit here with us.

R: Ok.

S: Ok. And you are worried about your future?

R: Well, there’s a concern, I think… I think it’s gonna heal, so, you know… it’s not looking great with the shrimp prices, just… I think imports are the biggest… that works against us, the hardest… the oil spill… I think it’s… it’s gonna hurt us a little while, but I think it will come back, and I think the Gulf also will be fine. I hope… So I hope, but you know…

S: Yes.

R: That’s… you know, from last year and this year we’re seeing an improvement, we’ll see that next year it will improve even more. But… I just hope that it repairs itself, you know, Mother Nature has a way of repairing itself. That’s what we… that’s what I hope it’s gonna happen. And it’s gonna be alright in the future. It might take a while.

S: Yeah, because nobody knows how…

R: Nobody knows… [audio poco chiaro] he knows, but… but like I say, you know, if it’s bad in the East, there’s still plenty of Louisiana coast that I can go work. You know, and I did last year, but this year, you know, I’m kinda going back to the East, closer to where the oil spill happened. And it’s… it’s looking better.

S: How far is the offshore of the BP?
R: The what?
P: Where the oil spill happened?
S: Yeah.
P: How far is it, where the oil spill happened?
R: I think it’s 53 miles… like… East… on the East side of Louisiana. I think it’s like 50-
something miles offshore.
S: Ok, so it’s near …
R: Yeah, so it is. You know, pretty near the shore, but still good ways offshore, you know,
in a lot of deep water. All in all we’re all thankful that not plenty of it came to land.
You know, just a few places, it could have been way worse, but it was… it only
touched the land in… you know, just a few places.
S: Ah, ok.
R: So that’s good.
S: So in Grand Isle it never come?
R: It came here to Grand Isle… a few times?
P: A-ha.
R: Two or three times. It kinda came into… into the [audio poco chiaro] and stuff, about
two or three times.
S: Ok.
R: It was, you know, it was bad, but it could have been a lot worse.
S: Yeah.
R: Is this kinda what you’re hearing from everybody else, too? Ok.
P: Yeah I remember they had the beach closed… I remember when it first happened, like
in May, right after the oil spill had happened in April we weren’t allowed to go walk
on beach or anything, ‘cos they had it all wrapped up and they said it was a disaster
zone, we weren’t allowed to be there, but I don’t remember how long that lasted. It
seems like it was too, too long…
S: So nobody can go to the beach?
P: Back then, but now you can. Now you can go anywhere on the beach.
S: Yeah. It was very strange to live here?
P: Without being able to go to the beach, yeah! But I had always… you know, used to go
walking on the beach.
S: Yeah.
P: So I’m glad it’s back up.
S: So it was after the chemicals that you… can…[audio poco chiaro] Go back to the
beach?
P: How long it’s…?
R: That’s the chemicals… They sprayed the chemicals…
P: The chemicals. I can’t remember how long it was, I think it’s…
R: It was after the summer?
P: Yeah, well let’s say I remember being on the beach on July, that year at the night with
the fireworks. So I think that they had it…
R: [audio poco chiaro]
P: They had them at the fire station, that year, instead of the bridge, but I remember walking on the beach from Mary Jackson’s house to the fire station, to watch fireworks with the missionaries.
S: Ok.
P: Yeah, so it must have been the back of July. [audio poco chiaro] Walk on the beach, can’t swim or anything, but you can at least walk.
S: And now you can go to swim?
P: I think so… that happened in July and you could walk on the beach.
R: Yeah.
P: From the oil? No…. But would you like to move away?
S: Yeah.
P: No, I don’t think we did.
S: But a lot of people go away after this?
P: You know, people that have moved away because of the oil spill I can’t think of any really.
R: Well, I think more so for the hurricanes…
P: Yeah.
R: Than for the oil spill… But maybe so, you know, after… our rent is really high… because… for the oil spill… workers come over here, and… and they rent a whole lot of homes, so… for high money and then after the work is over, they still got high… you know, rent’s are very high, so… there’s a lot of people I know that’s looking to rent a house, but… because when the oil spill came, they needed all the room. And they went up on the rig…
S: Ok.
R: And now… The workers are gone, but the rents are still high. I know that… a guy that works with me right now, it’s been looking and looking to try and rent a house… but… like before Katrina, before the hurricane and before the oil spill, you could rent for 500 or 600 dollars.
S: Oh.
R: Right now it’s 1200 – 1500 dollars a month.
S: Yeah? It’s very expensive!
R: Yeah. So…. Yeah… so now I think it’s… they made it hard… harder for people to live here.
S: So they made some kind of business after this?
R: Yes, yes you know, it was… oil spill.
S: Yeah.
R: And not everybody did have a place to rent, and so many workers had come here, that everything was rented. You know, like…. You know? It’s really expensive you know, 12-15 hundreds a month, maybe a little more than that… after the workers left they still… still want the same amount of money.
S: And it came a lot of people here for work?
R: No, no more. You know, some… not like… not like when the oil spill happened, we still
got… we still see some people working on the beaches, cleaning the beaches and all,
but…
S: Like volunteer?
R: Like the ES&H, it’s kinda… I guess it’s like an oil clean-up company, you know. And
they’re not hiring like the fishermen no more, and I don’t think… I think it’s just
mainly the oil clean up company that stays [audio poco chiaro] here.
S: And the journalist was a lot?
R: Uhm?
S: The journalist for the newspaper?
P: The journalists from the newspaper?
S: They came to talk a lot with the people?
P: Yeah. Yeah, a lot of media attention back then, yeah.
S: So only in the first period, or for a long time?
P: More so at the beginning, still some later.
R: Yeah. Sure for the first year, and then maybe an half after another year, but then not
so much anymore. Some… I know some… a British newspaper.
S: British?
R: It was down here for a while, and… British media, but not so much no more.
S: And now you are worried that it would happen again?
R: Well, I’m not so much worried… I can, but we didn’t worry before about it and… you
know, I think the government’s gonna put… other restrictions on the oil companies,
so I think they’re gonna be more careful. So, I hope so.
S: Yeah, because before there wasn’t the restriction? It was more free the offshore?
R: I think so, yeah, but I think now it’s… well, it was restricted, but I think it’s gonna
be… you know, closely… more closely watched.
S: Ok.
R: They had the restrictions, but I don’t think they watched it as close as they could have.
S: Ok. Good, thank you!
R: Ok.
P: You’re welcome.
Sabrina: Ok... So, what do we need to know?
Sara: When you moved here... in Grand Isle?
S: I’ve been coming to Grand Isle all of my life, you know. I moved here full time about eleven years ago. Twelve, twelve years ago now. But we always came in the summertime we came... always just... you know, Grand Isle is where we... we only lived about fifty miles off the road, so coming to Grand Isle was just something you did in the summer. You know, we came down, enjoyed the beach, fish, whatever, so we’ve been coming for a long time.
S: Wow.
S: A long time
S: And why did you decide to live here?
S: Primarily because my husband’s work was here, he’s worked down here for about thirty years and... after that our youngest child graduated from high school up in Cut Off, we decided to just move here full time, so we did.
S: Ok.
S: So it was just kinda easier that way, he wouldn’t have to make trips back and forth, driving back and forth... Harry, the needy poodle there.
S: So did you see the change... the island changing these years?
S: From the first time I came, you mean?
S: Yes.
S: Well, I think what’s really changed the most has been… there’s been… there’s been a lot of changes that… have really… overtime they fall into three categories: one is the economic category where all the industry goes up and goes down, and goes up and goes down. All industry’s needs have changed, you know, overtime. There’s the ecological factors that affect the island, you know with the weather, and then there’s the… the kind of the vacation, the entertainment, when people come down to the island to come to fish and to hunt… well not really to hunt, but to fish mainly. And to relax, just to come to the beach. So I’ve seen all that kinda progress over time that… the island industry right now… oil… When Exxon moved here many years ago, back in the ‘40s they created the offshore oil industry as we know it now, and they did a lot of work hard, a lot of people, put lots of people to work on that island, then… Economically, they really helped the island, because it gave it an economical boost that it didn’t have. The fishing industry that’s here is enough, but not everybody can fish, not everybody can make money doing that. And not everybody wants to do that, that’s the other deal, not everybody wants to do that. Second thing, with the weather, of course we… every time we get a storm we get banged and crashed around. People here are very resilient, they love the island, they’re always going to come back, generally. If they leave it’s just because of health reasons, or they’re just getting too old and really handle going up and down the stairs, you know, living up in the air like we do… on the raised houses. Primarily the weather… everybody kinda… it’s not… it’s hard, but the hurricane season’s… you know, I mean about half a year you worry about it, it’s only once in a while you get a really bad storm that creates us the problems, but people as I said are very resilient. They love the island, they love being here, so they come back in, fix it up, and start all over. So… And most of the time it’s just a clean up and fix up, it’s very [audio poco chiaro]... We’ve never had like a total annihilation of everything in the island, it’s always in spots, you know, that sort of thing. And the other thing is with the tourism, vacationing people coming in and then out. They generally… they’re people that camps on the island for years and years and years, you know the vacation people that come in. They will… even if they don’t have camps anymore they’d come down and they’re campers, or just come in for the day. So it’s just [audio poco chiaro] of people that just love the island.
S: Yeah.
S: That are going to come, you know, no matter what. But it’s a nice little boost for the economic part of the island, especially in the summer when, you know, fishing is good. So... that’s kind of how can break down the island, you know, the people on it, who’s involved with it.
S: So people come here on vacation for relaxing?
S: Oh yeah, they come to relax.
S: Fishing.
S: It’s... It’s... the island is sort of like any island anywhere around the world. Anywhere around the world where there’s an island, there’s always somebody coming to the island, coming to relax. I’m sure there’s islands all over the world running into the same thing, there are people who can’t live there, but they love vacationing there.
S: Ah, ok. But they don’t want to live here.
S: Not necessarily, no. They can’t, a lot of the time. You know their jobs and their work is some place else, but this is where they come when they want to relax, take it easy... the fishing, you know, the sport fishing, or just fishing.
S: And they come from all the parts of America, or...
S: All over. You can go out on some of the fishing piers out, like at the State Park. I’ve been out there, one end was speaking Japanese, the other end was speaking Chinese. And then another day I went out there you had... I saw the Germans, they drove here from New Orleans, they were there, then there was a lady in the middle who happened to be from Sweden or some place like that, I just can’t... I had some friends that wanted to go see the pier so we walked out down there. And they were from Sweden which kinda surprises me, but then when people get to the United States and they want to see Louisiana in general... they go to New Orleans generally first, because that’s where all the tourism advertisement is. But then about two days or three days of that they’re kinda... They’ve done the French Quarter and they’re looking to do something else.
S: Like I, hahah!
S: As you well know!
S: Yeah.
S: So what happens is they look at a map and go: “Oh, look at that! There’s an island down there!” And Grand Isle is the only inhabited barrier island in Louisiana. So they rent a car and they take a ride. It’s a beautiful ride from out of New Orleans, because once you leave New Orleans and you get on Highway 90 you’re looking basically at... you know, little communities along 90 and when you get closer to Raceland you see all the cane fields, which is very pretty, and then you head south on Highway 1 and you’re following Lafourche bayou and along that bayou you’re gonna see boats... and you know, little towns, everybody’s yard is perfect, you know, everybody lives in south Louisiana for the most part is very proud of their property. They take very good care of it. So it’s a beautiful ride, and as you come down Highway 1 you go through little towns... you know just... they hardly have names, I mean... they don’t, you know, there’s not like city limits, they’re just small areas but everyone from those areas knows everybody else and they’re all, you know... just lovely little places to go through. Then when you finally get to Leeville you cross... you take the elevated highway and the New Leeville bridge and then you get to see the saltwater marsh out there, which is again a beautiful sight. I have to tell you, the first time I crossed that bridge was probably... that I really realized, you know when I was driving... When I first started driving and that was back in the ‘60s and it was just one big sea of salt marsh grass, I mean as far as you could see. Now with the coastal
erosion we've lost quite a bit of that, but it was very…it was stunning then. Then as you get a little bit further down the road you get to the big industrial section which is Fourchon… Port Fourchon and that's a whole another bottle of wax, that's, you know, big industrial oil production, support service area. Then you turn and you hit… you know, keep coming East towards Grand Isle and you see more and more of that saltwater marsh, but closer and closer to it, because it’s right there at the end of the road, you know? Then when you finally get to Grand Isle, and you cross over our New Bridge, and you get to see the island as well as the… you know the... Can I get this? Can you stop it?

Seconda parte

Sara: Ok.

Sabrina: As you cross the bridge to come on to the island it’s a very very bridge and it’s just great, 'cos you get a beautiful panoramic view: the island, and you can see way out into the Gulf, you can see all the oil platforms out there, and the boats that are fishing, and dolphins if they’re in the water, you know. It’s a great… you know it’s a great… view from the top of the bridge. And when you come on to the island what you really notice basically is this… there’s a whole lot of camps, or houses sitting up on these pilings, which is kind of unusual, 'cos you know, people don’t normally build that way, unless you’re living in an area like this. And It’s done to keep the occasional time comes across the island after a storm, something like that, it’s just to keep the houses from getting wet, you know.

S: So, how much elevated should be the houses?

S: Right now FEMA is requiring… FEMA is emergency… federal emergency… something. The standard they’re requesting I think is 14 feet.

S: Ok.

S: Most people who are raising houses or building houses right now are doing it actually to 16 feet.

S: Oh.

S: Because I guess an extra foot or two, in case they decide to raise that… I mean at some point you can’t keep raising a house, because I mean… you know it… that becomes just too high.

S: Yeah.

S: You know, I think fourteen… this house sits… the one I have is 13.6 and this is [audio poco chiaro] to me, you know. Any higher than this you almost need an elevator… So basically… I would think that that’s, you know we’ve almost reached the max of that, I can’t imagine going much higher than that. It’s all according to… there’s a floodplain map that the Corps of Engineers… and they look to see over historical flooding times. I’ve never seen… for Katrina we had about five and a half feet of water downstairs.

S: Oh.
S: Which was... you know, a lot of water!
S: Yeah.
S: But I've never heard of water higher than that coming up. And, Katrina was just a huge, massive... huge, huge storm, I mean, it filled up the whole Gulf of Mexico when, you know, you saw it on the radar. So it was very unusual to have something that big going on... in the Gulf, so the... the... your elevation really depends on where you fall on that floodplain map. Some places don’t have to build that high, it’s just here, we’re pretty much at sea level.
S: Ok.
S: The island... you know the island’s at the sea level. This particular... where I’m at, I’m about... about five feet, five or six feet above sea level. Because when they built the house they put the door here first and then went the pilings: it makes it a little higher. But not everybody here on the island has built that way, you know.
S: So it was... ever there was elevated the houses here?
S: Pretty much everybody this... has always elevated the houses, they’re very few that are built on concrete slab, you know like you see constructions like that now, they’ve always built up because there’s always in low-line areas anywhere you stand the chance of having a little seasonal floodings, you know just like high tides, or something like that. So people traditionally... I would say most people built at least two or three feet up. There’s some very old houses on the island, a hundred-year-old houses and they’re... most of those are about three feet... three feet off the ground. And quite honestly they’re probably located in very high areas on the island where they don’t need to be much higher because they’re still sitting here so obviously... you know, it was ok for them. They did ok in the last...
S: Yeah.
S: You know in the last storms.
S: And the L.e... Leve?  
S: The Levee!
S: The Levee on the beach?
S: Yes.
S: Is... ever been there?
S: No, the Levee was built... I’m not exactly sure the dates the first Levee was built. When I was a kid in the '60s you didn’t have a Levee. You drove on the island and you could see the beach right off the highway.
S: Ah, ok.
S: But if you had a little storm, that meant that... the water would come crashing across the road.
S: Oh, yeah.
S: Yeah, so they started the Levee project... I would say probably in the '70s, or maybe the '80s, I’m not sure. '70s, probably, and they’ve just made it bigger and bigger according to what the Court said it was... the Court of Engineers. Right now it’s pretty tall. It’s a good thing and it’s a bad thing: when the storm comes in from the
Gulf side it’s great, because it stops the water from, you know, running. And it also…it protects us that way, but if the storm happens to come in and storms have a clockwise rotation, you see, and so if it comes in to our… to our East and it comes… and the water comes into the back.

S: Ok.

S: So the backside of the island will flood first, but the Levee holds the water on to the island, that’s how come we had so much water for Katrina. The water couldn’t get past the Levee to go back into the Gulf. So the water just piled up behind, you know, behind the Levee. The Levee worked, I mean, kept the water in, but it wasn’t supposed to.

S: But you can’t protect the back?

S: It’s very difficult to do that because then you’ve created… you’d have to levee the whole island… you’d have to put a Levee around the whole island, which is not always a good thing. There’s… there’s some small leveed areas, you know, to protect some little areas, but generally it’s very seldom one will cause that to… to happen. Usually they come right up on, you know right to the front of the… on the front of the island. We have a draining system here, there’s canals and pumps to pump it out… but the worst… I mean, that storm was very unusual. It pumped… it threw water into placer that normally don’t have water.

S: Ok.

S: I mean, it was just one of those odd coincidences that it came in that way, I’m not saying it couldn’t happen again, but you know, it was… different… for us.

S: So the islanders are prepared for the storm?

S: Pretty much… Yes we… you know, after a while… most of the houses are elevated now. Most people have… they don’t keep anything really important downstairs, I mean, that you gotta replace. Most of the time everybody evacuates, a few people stay. The police, the firemen, they stay. Everybody knows what the hurricane drill is. You know, you empty your refrigerator… and you leave. You know, it’s that simple!

S: So it’s not a… it’s not a complicated thing for us, ‘cos we are accustomed to it, you know. [parla del cane]. So basically… the… the… the people here are pretty resilient, they know how to handle that, you know, and they know that coming back they’ll have some damage, so they’re prepared to fix it. You know, clean up and fix up.

S: So every day… every year you have to evacuate, return, clean up your stuff?

S: Well not every year. I mean we’ve got a couple of years. In fact since Katrina we’ve only left… I’ve only left twice I think… in about seven years. The storms for the last couple of years have been kinda turning toward… you know they’re kinda gone toward Florida, or up the East Coast. It all depends on where the “Jet” stream is. You know the Jet stream that is in the Gulf of Mexico? It all depends on where it’s at.

S: What is the Jet stream?

S: The Jet stream is… the Gulf Stream, I’m sorry, not the Jet stream, Gulf Stream. The Gulf stream is… it’s like an underwater river of hotter water that comes above the Equator and it runs around, you can’t see it from the naked eye, but it’s… It
creates... this river of hot water and the storms tend to kinda follow it, wherever it is. So if it’s way up high close to us, well then, you know, it’s gonna hit somewhere along the coast, a lot of times sometimes it’ll drop down and it’ll be between Cuba and Florida, or, you know...

S: Yeah.
S: It’s all over, it just travels wherever it wants to. And that generally... Or at least that’s what I saw on tv one night, “the how”, you know. I guess it depends on what the general weather is around the United States. If there’s a big front coming down to push the storm away, getting a low front or things like that... but that’s kinda the luck of the draw.

S: Yeah.
S: But for the last couple of years, it’s only been about twice I think I’ve really left. But now we call those “evac-uations”.

S: Yeah.
S: And go to visit the family up the road or whatever and... you know... after you’ve left your paradise island you don’t want to go too far, and you go and stay a couple of days, then you come back.

S: Yeah.
S: You know, when the road’s clear.
S: So it’s like a vacation.

S: Yeah, it’s like a vacation, “evac-uation”, yeah... “evac-uation”. But anyway we... we’re all kinda prepared for, you know what to do, you know to clean your refrigerator so nothing spoils in it, 'cos the power will be off for a couple of days. and if the power is going to be off for more than two or three days, you bring your generator, whatever... Most people have generators... to generate power. What you’re really looking for is just something so you can see the weather on tv and maybe cool one room of your house off, a little one you need, so you get out of the heat 'cos most storms really happen in the hardest part of the year. And you really... it is nice to have cool...

S: It is stressful this?
S: Stress?
S: Yeah.
S: I think... I think because we go through it every once in a while, and we’re generally kinda mentally prepared for, we know what’s gonna happen, we know what’s gonna... basically what’s gonna look like when you come back...

S: So it’s like normal for you.
S: It’s almost like normal, I mean, it’s not fun to do it, but it’s not like the storm that just passed up in New York, in that area. Those folks had never gone through that. They’ve never had that much damage before. So they’re, quite understandably, very stressed out.

S: And scared.
S: And very afraid, and they don’t know what’s gonna happen next, and… I feel for them, because they really don’t know what’s coming next. They… they… you know, they’ll work the… they’ll get it worked out, and in five years from now it’ll be like us, you know, like… “Ok, it’s not the worst that has ever happened to us”. Some storms… you know, just need more habits than others. Some storms create lots and lots of damage, lots and lots of structural damage. And some storms don’t! Sometimes it’s just a big rain event, so you just never know. You just, you just don’t… we’re kinda like… let’s say we’re kinda “geared” to… we know what’s coming and… you know we’re… it’s easier for us to prepare for it. I know, they weren’t prepared… I mean they were prepared to some extent, but not for that aftermath.

S: Ah ok.

S: They are complaining about not having power now for maybe two weeks. Well, it’s gonna be six or eight weeks before the power comes back.

S: Eight weeks?!

S: Oh, eight weeks, they’re gonna have to… when a system goes down like that, a whole grid system goes down, it’s a lot of work. Somebody’s gotta… they gotta get all the poles, the poles have to be brought in… [Excuse me, I’m going to let my dog out one more time]. It’s not as easy as it looks. It takes a while to get all of that stuff back in place. The biggest… the biggest problem for them is… when you get thrown out of your comfort zone, what you’re comfortable with… and when you get kicked out of that, you gotta learn a new behavior. It’s amazing what you can do, and how much you can put up with, and how tolerant you become because you have to. They… the people who are up are trying to help them… for the most part, as soon as power can be re-established, the whole world looks better, once you get your power back on. Water is another issue, gas is another issue. We didn’t have water here on the island for about six weeks. Six [audio poco chiaro] weeks. Same thing, ‘cos the water line got damaged. We didn’t have gas, natural gas for, wow, a couple of months, because they had to change all of the regulators that are in the ground or, you know, like on the little… gas thing, gas meter out there. They had to change all of those, and guess where the regulators had to come from? Italy.

S: Really?

S: They were manufactured in Italy and it was taking forever, you know, having them imported back from Italy!

S: Wow!

S: That was the story, you know something about these gas things are made in Italy. So, you know, just the logistics of getting things down here. Now, the United States is very fortunate in that… we donate to things like the Red Cross, and their volunteer groups that come in to help. The Red Cross feeds hundreds of people daily. You know, they have the Red Cross truck, and things like that. And at first people are like: “Oh, but I don’t need their food!” But if you can’t cook, and you can’t go to the grocery store and you can’t get what you need, then the Red Cross becomes your new best friend.
S: Oh, wow!
S: And they have food trucks, and they feed people, that’s what they... that’s why America donates to those... those groups. Then there’s volunteer groups that come in, and one group that immensely helped here and I’m sure they’re gonna be up there, they... they’re the first people practically that show off for disasters like that, because it’s part of their tradition to do that: it’s the Mennonite Church. And the Mennonites come and they help... you know they start helping. They help people fix houses, and fix roofs, and things like that. And when the Mennonites got here after Katrina, they went to the churches first, and said: “What can we do to help your church?” Because they’re a religious group. And in fact at our church... our roof held very well! My little church didn’t have much of a problem, except our stairs that got pulled down. So they helped me get the stairs back up, and clean up... they helped us clean up the yard. And they come down in big groups, big big groups, and it’s part of their mission I guess... mission... ministry to do this. And they stayed here for several months, I mean, several several months. And they helped... mainly helped people roof their houses, ‘cos you always lose shingles, and, you know, roofing... and they did a great job. And I hope the Mennonites, you know, are appreciated if they go up there... to help, ‘cos they were wonderful here, and we really, really appreciated them during Katrina, so... the... those guys... you know, there’s a lot of volunteer groups. Here in Grand Isle, I’m just speaking of Katrina, we became a place where they brought people in who were working in New Orleans... like the National Guard and those people, and it was very stressful for them, because there was a lot, a lot of damage over there, well they bring them here for two or three days, so that they kinda get a little [audio poco chiaro] they rest and can relax. You know, of course we were cleaning up all the stuff we had going on, but... it wasn’t as stressful as the New Orleans deal.

S: So here the people lost the control, like in New Orleans?
S: Well... any time you have... a situation where people take advantage of a disaster like that, and there’s always an element that’s going to do that. You know, that’s always gonna do that. And there was a time, right at the beginning, where there were some pretty... some pretty bad guys that were doing some pretty awful things. Mainly they were looting and stealing, and things like that, and it really was until the National Guard got there, because the Police Forces were overwhelmed. I mean, they just, you know, they just could not... handle it. There was not enough of them compared to the... people, you know, who were looting. That sort of thing, and there was water everywhere in the city and they were trying to pump the city down, it was just a mess! So, when the National Guard got there, and General Honore, who I’ve the most appreciation of, you know, he was the commander then, he came in and just, you know, got it started, and did the right thing, you know, he was really really good. And he’s from Louisiana, so he understood the people, and he... and he knew how to work out a system to get law and order back in place. Not that they didn’t have problems after that, I’m sure they did, but it wasn’t as bad as what it got to be right at first.
And you had some people that got trapped in the city and couldn’t get out and... there’s always gonna be that... problem. I mean, there’s... the way the storm hit, came in on August 29th, I believe, which was two or three days before people who live on... you know... who is like on social security and things like that, they didn’t have their money, they didn’t have any money to live with. And a lot of people didn’t have cars, I mean, there’s plenty of people living in cities that never buy a car because they use...

S: In this case, what did they do?
S: They were stuck, they couldn’t leave! They were in their homes or out of them, a lot of elderly people didn’t leave... You know, they had problems... getting out of town, because they didn’t have anybody to... a) come and get them, or b) public transportation was not really there, too, for them to go to take. Now after the storm they... you know there was public transportation out, they arranged it for that. But it was... it was very... no one realized how bad the storm was going to be... and you could plan forever and always for a deal like that, but until it really happens, you just don’t have an appreciation of what it’s gonna be like. And when you consider 80% of the city was underwater.

S: 80%?
S: 80%. I mean, it’s like Venice, you know, the high tide they have. The Venetians are used to that, obviously! You know, they have that what, maybe once a year? You all go to that or something?
S: Or more.
S: Yeah, yeah! But it’s doesn’t like flood five feet up! Or twelve feet, so that’s the difference. This was one... that was the... the... the hundred-year storm that everybody has been predicting forever and ever. Well, it hit, and no matter how much you say: “We’ going to be prepared, we’re gonna do this, we’re gonna do that”, it’s still very, very hard to... to... be prepared for that. It’s just more than what the services could handle at that time. It’s no secret that the mayor of the town was ill prepared for this, he really... I don’t think he realized, as did any... no one else did... the extent of the damage. They just didn’t have the emergency services available to handle everything. And there were people who... you know, who are always gonna exploit the situation and take advantage of it, and... most of those... people who... do that kind of thing, took advantage of it! But after the National Guard got there, it got it straightened out, it got much better.

S: Yeah.
S: They helped people back... from going back to their homes, until they [audio poco chiaro] neighborhoods and made sure it was safe, the power lines were dead, they were laying in the road, not like kind of that thing... Because you can’t have... you can’t have people walking over locked power lines... it’s the, you know, once the lines are down, and there’s... you can still get electrocuted by walking around them. Or [audio poco chiaro] in the water they were laying in. So there was a lot of danger, you had to be very careful, and that’s what they’re having a problem with up there, I’m sure,
where Sandy hit. It just takes a while to make sure that you don’t hurt people, or allow people to get hurt while they’re trying to repair, so they try to get the service teams in, and the electrical service group in, to get it all under control. And thank goodness that other States send their emergency units down and their high-lines crews to come in and check those power lines out, ‘cos otherwise they’d still be waiting to get that fixed. I mean, our little group can handle it, but one State…

S: Yeah.

S: It takes many many States. I saw trucks from everywhere: Missouri, New York… everywhere! You know, when we go into the city, these people are all from a long, long… you know, away. And it just takes a while, because once the power… if your house is damaged and the power gets pulled off the side of the building, you know the power line has been pulled off, well chances are it probably pulled it off three or four other houses.

S: Yeah.

S: And the pole went down or whatever. It’s just… it just takes time, and these people are trained to do that and you should not try it yourself. You know, people shouldn’t be out there messing around with that. So as soon as the neighborhoods got cleared up and straightened up, and they had to do a physical search in everybody’s house! They went house to house to make sure that… you know, that there were no animals… there were a lot of animals left into the houses.

S: Yeah?

S: ‘Cos people thought they’d just be gone for the weekend. You know, they didn’t… they left the animals there, so they had animals that ended up… nobody could get back in for… I think they kept people out for about six weeks. Well they rounded up the animals and put them… and took them to different locations, so they would be cared for, otherwise the animals would have starved to death in the houses!

S: Yeah.

S: ‘Cos there were no people, you know. A lot of times, if people stayed and they ended up going up higher into their attics, it was so hot in August, that several… many people died of just… dehydration… in the attics… it was a mess! It was really a mess.

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Sabrina: Of course, that was all in New Orleans. Here in Grand Isle it wasn’t quite as bad. We had to wait about… an extra… I guess a week and a half before we could get back down here, because that’s exactly what they did. They fixed all the power lines… all up and down the island. And coming down from Highway 1, it connects, you know all the way from… I guess Fourchon.

Sara: Ok.

S: They had to change all those poles. So we were out for a while, too, which was not the end of the world. I mean, it’s a mess already, you had to wait for the water to recede, which receded fairly fast, but the electrical service getting that back in place it was
really... an important thing, you know... important thing, because you can't go back in the business, 'cos you need the power just to be... just to operate, you kinda most need electric, we've gotten really spoiled with electricity. Now we didn't get power right here on the island for probably... the big power. 'Cos once they did the big power poles coming down the center of the island they had to come in all the streets, and repair all the lines coming into all the houses. So it was probably six... six weeks, six [audio poco chiaro] weeks and so we rented a generator, you know, at nights, so to have... a little bit air conditioning, and, you know, see what in the rest of the world was going on, too.

S: So you were here during Katrina?
S: I left and came back about two weeks afterwards. And... we were here. And you just... you know, you're just cleaning and doing what you had to do to get your house back together: cleaning it up, straightening it up, and...
S: Was it an economical problem for the business?
S: It wasn't... they were very busy... where my husband works at the... Exxon base down there... because they were trying to fix everything that was broken down there.
S: Yeah.
S: They had their own big sets of generator... generators... they're huge generators, but had... water had gone over to them too, so they had to get power from lots of places and... a big company like Exxon had the [audio poco chiaro] to... you know, bring in like a quarter harge, so that people could live on the harge while they were working on the base. And it was... it was a little easier on them, just because they've got the... the means. Everybody else, normal people, you know, the rest of us... just took our time, cleaned up, did what we had to do, you know... you got your house started, then you start helping your neighbor, whatever they needed and...
S: Yeah.
S: You know, that sort of thing. The Red Cross was here, they fed people, which was wonderful, and FEMA was there, you know... do FEMA claims, so you could see if you could get help from whomever... the Federal Government Emergency Management Programme, that's what it is. And... the Government was able to help a lot of people. The one thing they did... immediately, which was wonderful, the United States Government under George Bush... they gave everybody a thousand dollars. If you had a checking account that they could deposit the money directly into, they gave you a thousand dollars.
S: Ah, ok.
S: Which was very helpful, because there was... the banks were closed... banks in New Orleans were closed... and they couldn't operate, I mean they had no electricity to operate on. So, if you had a checking account, they put a thousand dollars in there and that was very helpful because I was feeding... I had about 6, 7 people with me. And when I left for the storm I might have had 200 dollars cash. But you can't just... you can't feed that many people very long or 200 dollars, and we had gone to Texas, which is the next State over from us, and I was very happy to see that thousand
dollars, you know, in my checking account. 'Cos I mean, we could… you know, buy gas and…

S: So they did it just for Katrina?

S: They did it… I don’t know what they’ve done for the people… you know, in the… for the Sandy people, I don’t know. Sandy, the Hurricane Sandy, I don’t know… They may have… but that was under that administration did that, you know, George Bush and all… they did that and… which helped immensely, because people’s social security checks hadn’t gotten there yet, and… the… the banks were operating within 50 miles off New Orleans… No maybe… let’s say more than that… maybe 100 miles away from New Orleans. They were operating fine, but right in town they weren’t. And then, outside, here where we are, out in the country, you know, our banks were… didn’t have power either.

S: Yeah.

S: So it was a tough call, so if you were away from… away from… there… if you like we had gone Texas, I could check my bank account and see how much money I had. So that worked out really well for me. And the credit cards, everybody had to deal with… you know you had a credit card, so you had to use your card.

S: And it was Bush who did it?

S: Yeah, George Bush, when George Bush was president, right.

S: So, not the State of Louisiana.

S: Not the State of Louisiana, no. It’s the Federal Government, they put that programme together… they basically… and it was a smart thing to do, because it put some money back out into the economy instantly. So all these people who’d been transported out to other places, they had money to spend in the local economy… which was very nice. Which was super-dooper nice! And… and a lot of times… of course America is the [audio poco chiaro] about helping other Americans. For instance, we were in Texas, and my friend and I just went to go and get a Starbucks one day, a Starbucks coffee. We were in this little, small camp with all these people and five dogs and…

S: Wow, really?

S: Yeah, it was kinda crazy! So, she and I decided we would go get a Starbucks, so we’re sitting in line, you know, the drive-through, and the little girl asked me: “You are from Louisiana?” I said: “Yes, madam, we are!” And she goes: “Well, here! These… These are on us!” And then just gave us the coffee, which was wonderful! You know, that was very nice of them. We had money to pay for it, but, you know, they were [audio poco chiaro] their kindness to people who had been evacuated. So there was a lot of things that… people did for each other, you know, nice things, and… people hosted families for months and months! A lot of the people that left New Orleans, who lost basically everything, they were kinda… not adopted, but they were sponsored by families in other places. And they had a chance to… you know, be somewhere else, live some place else, and see how the rest of the world lives, which is really nice, you know, for them, and I’m sure someone came back, but a lot of them stayed, because
they re-established themselves. And their kids were in school, they put their kids back in the school, which was great, because it was just at the beginning of the school when this happened, you know.

S: Yeah.

S: The beginning of September. And once the kids are in school, your whole life kinda settles back down and, you know, they were able to find jobs, and things like that which was very good. But they had sponsorship, a lot of churches did that for people. Here on the island... because we have a very small population compared to... you know, New Orleans... our school got back in pretty quick, 'cos we have only about 150 kids, 175 kids, so our teachers... as soon as the teachers got back, they started the school up and normal...

S: Oh, this is good.

S: Yeah. Got started...

S: So people want to start...

S: Oh yeah!

S: As quick as possible.

S: Quick as possible, you wanna get normal back going again, and that’s what’s gonna happen up there. As soon as the teachers... you know, in New York... they’ll start the school up and... you can generally get a generator, you know...

S: Yes, it’s bad. And they don’t have any way to heat their houses, and I’m sure they’re figuring it out, ‘cos they’re all... you know, sturdy people. You know, they’ll get it, but it’s just tough and a lot of aid is going there. In fact Louisiana has just... has sent truck loads of things up there for people. I talked to a lady who owns a trucking company this weekend, in fact and they sent two semis. Semi-trucks, big, eighteen-wheeler trucks...

S: Full of like blankets and household things, cleaning items and things like that. Just to give... you know, to those folks... ‘cos they know what they’re going through. We know, what they’re going through, so hopefully that helps... you know, a few people.

S: It’s good.

S: Very good.

S: And when happened BP there was the same helpful things that?

S: When BP hit, it was a little different. When the BP spill happened, it was a little different situation. A natural disaster is one thing, but a man-made disaster is a little
different. I think… we were all kinda… it… I think the spill happened in April, and… it took it about… three weeks… to oil before it got to Grand Isle.

S: Ok.

S: Andy’s birthday is 6th May, and we walked down the beach that morning about… and we went to see the sunrise… at about 5:30 we… the beach was still clean, and we saw the first globs of oil come in. Just the first ones starting to come in. And you could see it was really thick, heavy-duty crude, and when it got here it just… you know, just started piling up on the beach! And as soon as that happened… you know they sent… started sending crews out to clean it, to… scoop it up and do whatever they did with it, you know, they cleaned the beach, but the… mainly the people who came were paid to work. It wasn’t volunteers.

S: Ok.

S: It was… at first. Now volunteers tried to come, but… ‘cos I had a lot of people calling me, they wanted to volunteer to help: “How do I help? What can I do?” And unfortunately, because there was so much liability involved, you had to be… you had to be hired by somebody, you know, they did… they… they had to make sure you knew what you were doing to help.

S: Ah, ok.

S: Now where volunteers did a lot of work was with animal rescues and bird… when they cleaned the birds that had oil on them and that sort of thing, that’s where they really… used volunteers. The rest of those folks basically were hired by companies, because they had to teach you how to… properly pick up the oil and to dispose of it.

‘Cos they had to pick it all up and take it somewhere.

S: So there was a procedure to follow?

S: Yes, there was a huge procedure they had to go through, and they… and they had to be protected, they had to wear protective clothing, and they and to wear boots, and gloves… you know, there was a whole lot of… pre-training they had to go through before they let them come in.

S: Yeah.

S: So, that… that probably… took… I would say the majority of the… the people that were actually working on the spill, the clean-up of the spill. Most of those were people who were hired by companies who came in to do that. So they did have problems with housing those people, ‘cos once they got here, what do you do with them?

S: Yeah.

S: Where… How do you feed them? Where do they sleep? You know, so… there were big areas… the Community Centre was used, they put up a big tent area to feed people, but then again… people here, after working with hurricanes and things like that, they knew kinds how to handle masses of people. So it was a little easier, I would think… than some disasters. The… the hardest… the hardest part was, I guess, finding the people to come to that, to hire people.

S: Ok.
S: Some… when they finally started doing really big background checks, because there
were some people running around the island kinda strange looking, you know. Coming
to find out they shouldn’t have been hired to begin with. And they started doing
better and better background checks, because… they really didn’t have the talent to
do that, or they were actually criminals who were just trying to make money really
quick.
S: Oh really?
S: Oh, it was bad, it was bad at first! But the companies… I mean people, I, we all
complained! You know: “Have you checked those people?” “Do you know who these
people are?”
S: Yeah.
S: I mean, who are they? You know, it’s like they—they’re on our island, they’re living
with us. You know, I mean, I’m not trying to be ugly, but… there were people
walking around in your yard! You know, like: “Who are these folks? What are they
doing?”
S: So you were like invaded by the other people?
S: I… yes, we were invaded, yes, sort of. But they were… the… the companies were trying
to control the situation, and they just went on hiring anybody on the street who
looked like they wanted to work, and they just… you know, had big open calls “If you
wanna work, come here, and we’ll give you a job”. But in any situation like that,
when you’re doing it with a big mass of people, the bad element is going to figure it
out and they’ll come in, you know, they’ll try to get in. But they started running
background checks and they came, and they arrested a whole bunch of them and took
them away, so it worked out okay.
S: Hheche.
S: They got ‘em out of here. They did… they did a pretty good job, I guess… There’s oil
still floating around… it’s coming up in some places. Then again, it was a brand
new… what a lot of people don’t realize, too, is that it was… it was… They were
pioneering this clean-up business, because nobody really knew how to do it. In the
past, if you had oil… you know, if oil hit the top of the water for whatever reason,
they were generally… had big bombs and kinda boom it up, and then the oil would
dissipate in the sun, the sun would break it down pretty quick and it just dissipates.
S: Oh, the sun breaks the oil?
S: Yeah, the sun would generally break up the oil.
S: Oh.
S: You know, small little slicks like that, it would do that. This was so big, and there was
so much of it, and then they were trying to use that Corexit, but what the Corexit did
is… instead of letting the oil just come up and be on the surface, they could have
scooped it up, they could have sucked it up with big… some kind of pumps or
whatever. In fact the Dutch sent a huge ship over here that could do that! And they
wouldn’t let it operate. I don’t know why, maybe it was an international kind of deal,
I don’t know. But because they used the Corexit, the Coreexit broke it up into little
globs, like this, which are hard to pick up. And it didn’t break it anymore than that… and the… the problem really… became… it almost had to hit the beach before you could clean it up. There was… it was hard to scoop it up, you know… you couldn’t pick it out of the water!

S: So it goes down, on the bottom of the sea?

S: There’s a lot of it laying there, I’m sure… I’m sure there’s, you know… I don’t know, they… I don’t… you know, I can’t speak to that, ‘cos I’m not there, I’ve never been down to 5,000 feet of water… and I’m sure there’s some laying there, I’m sure there some everywhere, you know, out there, as far as it goes. The… it was a massive amount of oil… It just wasn’t a little oil spill, we’re talking a massive quantity of oil.

S: Yeah.

S: It was… it was… then again it was a huge, huge disaster, much much bigger than what they realized, and the pressures were so intense at the drill site, where the oil was coming up… that… I don’t know if anybody’s prepared for that. You know, to try and fix… to fix it. There was obviously some liability, and at this point in time, and we’re November 24th today, right? Something, November 24th today, or the 26th, what it is… you know, BP is taking the… you know, in court the judge says: “No, you’re at fault, you… you screwed it up!” And quite honestly they’ve been drilling out there for a long, long time and they’ve had no big problems in the past, not that size of a problem. So… and it’s been determined that they… pushed them issues that should not have been pushed on the ring. They… they made some very unwise decisions, and… and caused the accident basically. And they’re having to take responsibility for it.

S: Yes.

S: As they should. I mean, they killed 11 people!

S: Yes.

S: And… the only reason my son wasn’t out there, ‘cos he works for Transocean, is that he works 30 and 30, out in Africa, on a big trans-ocean well there. And… or a floating rig, actually, and they had asked him if he wanted to work on this, because it’s closer to where he lives, but he was trying to finish up a project over there and he didn’t really wanna change, because he needed to finish whatever he was doing on that well. But he could have been one of those people that was killed! I’ve a very good friend whose son was on the rig.

S: Oh…

S: When it happened, and… it was, you know… everybody knows somebody.

S: Yes.

S: ‘Cos it all feels very small, you know, as far as for knowing people. And everybody knew somebody that was out there. And when you kill eleven people in an explosion of that size, that’s terrible. I wouldn’t say terrible, that’s not just a little accident, that’s a big accident, and…

S: And is he still alive?

S: Oh yeah, he’s fine.
Sara: I forgot!

Sabrina: I don't know, I don't know either! We were basically talking about the spill, you know, the damage that was done. I think probably, the... the... you know, aside from losing eleven people, a lot of coastal damage. The toll from this... you know, the... the residual damage is going to go on for a long time. Because it keeps washing up, oil keeps coming up in places... there was a lot of damage to nesting areas for birds, and things like that. They tried to clean it up as best as they could... quite honestly the... you don't know 'til it's over, you know like... it'll be three, four or five years before they really decide what the complete damage was. I think that... all in all... it was a huge... incalculable amount of damage.

S: So, you think that BP have... did a good job with the clean-up?

S: I don't know. Then again, I don't think they were prepared... nobody... really nobody was prepared for the... the amount... nobody was really prepared for the amount of damage that happened. I think the psychological damage... more than a lot of people who normally come down here didn’t come because they were... very concerned about... oil on the beach, and that sort of thing. It was a lot of that...whether... whether they’ll come back, or something else, I know that tourism suffered greatly, 'cos you came here on the beach as it was being cleaned. There’s also that... that thought on people’s minds that, you know, that seafood’s been contaminated because there was... but, you know that’s a perception. They’ve run... they’ve run lots of ads on TV... they’ve put tremendous amounts of money into advertising programmes, to... encourage people to come, and some people are coming, you know, fishing is pretty good. I... I really haven’t seen... horrible things with fish. You know, people talk about different things they’ve seen, I personally didn’t see them, but I don’t fish much. I am in the water a lot on a boat, and... the dolphins look pretty good to me, although, you know, they find dead ones washing up on the beach and things like that. But you know there’s a natural [audio poco chiaro] that’s gonna happen in the population of dolphins, some of them are gonna get killed, that’s gonna happen. They’re gonna die naturally, so... to say it was oil related, I don’t know, they’d have to autopsy them and to see if they were... full of oil, or if their systems were compromised by the oil. I say it’s gonna take three or four years to really get all the information together. And digest all the information and right it up. It was not a good event, it did not help us... it did not help the island... I mean, when you kill eleven people and you create that much havoc...it is not good. I think the culture of the company, BP... needs to be looked at, they need to decide... to maybe... you know, look at how they run things, how they do things. And...that’s an internal situation: this is not their first disaster, they...they killed people in Texas... Texas City... explosion...

S: Another time?
S: Oh yes, yes... this is not their first, big accident.
S: Before this?
S: Before BP, yes. They've just [audio poco chiaro] happen.
S: Oh.
S: There was a big disaster there, there... there's been several, if you... I'm sure if you Google, I mean, just look at BP disasters, there's more than one.
S: So it's just a problem of the BP? Not the oil field?
S: Well, I don't think it's... I think it's their corporate culture. You know, either you decide you're gonna be safe and you're gonna work safe, and you're gonna [audio poco chiaro] and you're gonna do what it takes to stay safe, you don't wanna kill people, you don't wanna hurt anything, you don't wanna involve the environment... you know, you don't want to hurt whatever... whatever it is, you know, they're environment and people. You have to make that conscious decision. And... somewhere down the line... that got lost on that rig, that day. I don't know how far up the chain of command it came from, but obviously something went wrong. Human beings and equipment can only do so much... and they either... you know, they were expecting too much, too fast, and there was... there were problems. To be honest with you, everybody around knew something was wrong, because you could hear the boat chatter back and forth from the boats that serviced the well of the rig... the drilling rig... and then just people talking about it, you know they were... you know, people were saying, you know: "They're going really deep there, are they really prepared? Do they have to kinda blow up or whatever it is that takes to do that?" And... the oiling industry is an industry that there's no books sitting around, saying how do you drill down 5000 feet of water. You go out and you do it, you know, you try to be as safe as possible, and there's... they [audio poco chiaro] go along. Because there's... there's really nothing to tell you how to do it. And the oiling industry for the most part has had some ups and downs, I mean, as far as, but they... the ones that I'm involved with you know... For instance, we worked for years for Exxon: safety was paramount, you wanted... you wanted to make sure that everybody came home at the end of the day, you didn't wanna kill anybody! You know, you didn't wanna that kind of accident...
S: So the other companies are better than before?
S: I think... they've all come around, they... they were all... we are used to have a big clean-up down at the beach...
S: Yeah.
S: Once or twice a year because they threw stuff off the rigs, and then they made them paint their name on everything, so if it came off and it hit the beach, you knew who it came from. And you brought them to them and said: "Look, this fell off your rig, you need to pick it up!"
S: Yeah.
S: And it was small stuff, you know, it wasn't... I mean, but we created a big... you didn't see that anymore. The beaches are immaculate, because they don't do that anymore!
Occasionally what you see are shrimp boats that... they're like salt bags, for instance, which is what they use when they brining the shrimp. Well that might fly off, you may see one of those come upon to the beach, but for the most part you don't see anything anymore! People just don't do it! Or sports fishermen have a hat that blows off, you know, takes off and that might was upon the beach. But... you just don't have that anymore, 'cos people are very environmentally sensitive here. So... BP... you know, I guess they... either they didn't have the engineering right... for that, or they just didn't... realize what they had gotten into... until it was too late. So, I don't know, it could have been a little problem. They have had some serious problems, but again it's... you know... it's not something you can just call somebody up and say: "How do we do this?" They do it... you know, they... it's an industry that... works on every project, and they try to get as right as they can.

S: Yeah.

S: Not that the BP needs me to defend them, but I think they... really and truly... in this case they were doing more than the rig was set up to do. It was a little bit more... I mean, deep drilling like that has been done before, and it's very expensive, the day rate on a rig like that is very, very expensive, so... it was... you know, obviously they had some problems.

S: Yeah. And the people here expected a disaster like this, or was something new?

S: Did we expect it?

S: Yeah. Because there is a lot of rig in the Gulf?

S: No, I don't think... I don't really think so. I don't think... No, we don't sit around waiting for it to happen. Because there's... it's a very innovative industry, you know, they've done lots of things to... 'cos it cost him money! When a rig explodes like that, or they have a death out there, or something happens, I mean, it's... it's expensive for them! They don't want to see that. They just... you know, they don't want that to happen. Here... it happens so seldom now that it's... it's... it's very unusual. I mean things happen, you know, somebody gets hurt, and I'm sure it happens all the time, but it's little things, it's not like a big blow out like that one was.

S: Yeah.

S: I can't remember the last time a platform blew up and sank that way. They'll go down with hurricanes occasionally. You know, they get damaged really bad by the storm, but you know, you got... 30 feet, 30-foot waves coming across the top of one of those things, yeah you're gonna have some problems! They're made pretty, pretty heavy, I mean they can withstand a lot, but to have one explode and sink that's... we haven't seen that in a long time. I mean, I honestly cannot remember the last time I saw that... I can't remember the last time I saw that. I have a brother-in-law who worked for Trans... you know, when Transocean another company then, another one of the big drilling companies companies, and... he had helped... one of the rigs have been built somewhere... Scotland or somewhere... and they were bringing it across...back, over to the United States, they were gonna work a well up in the Eastern part of the United States, somewhere, and... it sank and... very unexpectedly, now he wasn't on
it at the time, ‘cos he was at home, he was at 30 and 30 rotation. But that was... it didn’t have anything to do with the drilling rig, it sank for some reason.

S: Yeah.

S: You know... well I can’t remember what the cause was now, but... it was very unusual. So the companies do try to be safe, they they... they don’t wanna lose employees, employees are very expensive to train, you know, you... you put a lot of money into your employees and you know, you don’t want to see him get hurt, or killed, or whatever. You know, that’s... that’s not productive. I think that probably... when it gets right down to it... there was probably multiple factors involved with that... that particular explosion.

S: Yeah.

S: And to be honest I read a lot of accounts, he said, she said, you know, all of a sudden it was in the paper and... like it or not, it comes down to the guy that was on the rig, who was in charge of the rig. I’m talking about BP’s company man, whose word is law there, whatever he says, goes, and unfortunately, I don’t know who was... who is next superior was, but it’s a corporate culture. And they obviously are suffering from bad... corporate culture.

S: Yeah. So after that the island is changed?

S: I don’t think the island has changed dramatically. We had a miserable year, when all those people were here cleaning it up and you had the newspaper people in your face constantly and that... you know, news crews from anywhere, you would walk out of the, you know, the post office and there was somebody sticking a microphone in your face going: “Tell me how bad it is” And it’s like: “I’m not having a bad day, ok? I’m ok!”

S: Yeah. The guy at the Claim center told me this.

S: Yeah, it was just tense, I mean... they were just everywhere! And, you know they... we had a... a huge meeting, right after the oil really started hitting the beach. We had a meeting at the First Baptist Church... and everybody could come and express concern, or ask questions. You had the Coast Guard, you had the Senator, you had... all kinds of people there, you know.

S: Ok.

S: Political people, and things like that. Well, there were news crews wrapped around the room, you know, you were famous for fifteen minutes!

S: Wow!

S: And they were everywhere and then... of course when the next disaster hits, they take off and they leave, you know. Now, a year after the storm we had a few of them that came back to see what had happened. And... there again by a year we saw a few clean crews after, they was still stuff being done, but... it was... it was just miserable having them here. Because you, you... the town was kinda locked down, you know we... they had... you couldn’t go on the beach, you were kind of... you know, you get always a bunch of people on the island that you don’t know, who they are or what is
going on and that had to be kind of... it was miserable, you know, it was like having Mardi Gras going on in your front yard for a year... just for the number of people.
S: Yeah.
S: So people didn’t come with their camps, we didn’t see the people we normally see, we visit with, you know, they didn’t come down and... business suffered, you know.
S: So now the things are going better? You can go to the beach?
S: Yeah! Oh, yeah! As soon as they got the beach cleaned up and at least they were sure that... it was, you know... clean for people to go back on it. You know, tourists started coming back, then people started visiting again, and things got back to normal, whatever normal is. So, I think that... but it took about two years, you know, for it to really kinda settle down again.
S: So now the things are going better? You can go to the beach?
S: Yeah.
S: And... but that’s... you know... disasters are like that. It just... it just takes a while for... for the people involved to kinda get back to normal, and then for the people who live away to realize everything’s ok, and you can come back.
S: So you was interested to go to the beach and take pictures and post it on Facebook? Because a lot of people do this, so... you do this also?
S: I didn’t really do that too much... there was so much there going on I... you know, didn’t really need mine... I really didn’t ... no, I really didn’t take pictures in particular, there were so many... there were good photographers here, they were really, you know, professional people doing it so... I didn’t really... I didn’t do it, you know, not personally.
S: Yeah.
S: ‘Cos, that’s... and they had... they had much better... outlets for those pictures than I would have had, so I didn’t... I didn’t bother! They were there, they could do it, you know?
S: And there was something here that takes care of the people that are sick?
S: Well, there’s been a lot of speculations to whether... what they were doing... was... what happened, you know, the oil washing up, that it caused people to get sick. I don’t know, you know, there’s a lot of people with respiratory problems, but South Louisiana is kinda known for respiratory problems, because everything in the world blooms here.
S: Oh.
S: We have a lot of pollen in the air... there’s... everybody’s got allergies because of the pollen around us. But if you add the... the... I guess fumes, benzene fumes or whatever... as the oil breaks down... maybe there’s something from that, you know, for that. I don’t know, I really don’t know. We’re gonna have rain down here, that usually washes the air out, you get a nice breeze, you’ve always got a breeze, but there was a time that you could smell it, you could smell the disulphur... well not the disulphur... you could smell the oil, the raw oil. You could smell it for, you know, a couple of days, three or four days, and it would go away. Then when it’s switched
back, you smell it again, but, I mean, you can expect that [audio poco chiaro] floating around on the top of the water.

S: So it was the smell of the oil, not the Corexit?
S: I don’t know what the Corexit smells like.
S: Ah, ok.
S: I don’t know. I mean, I don’t know what it smells like. The Corexit basically, they did fly over the island with it, from what I understand, I mean I didn’t see it, but that doesn’t mean it didn’t happen. I don’t know what it smells like. I know what oil smells like.
S: Yeah.
S: But I don’t know... what Corexit smells like.
S: Because it’s something new.
S: Something new, I’ve never smelled it, so I don’t know. I know it probably isn’t good for you... you know, if you breathe it in.
S: Yes.
S: So... I didn’t personally... I don’t think I got exposed to it, that I know of. So... but there are probably people who did... people, who were out there working, they may have been exposed to it.
S: Yeah. So the people work in the clean-up are more affected?
S: They probably... overtime... we’ll probably have more residual problems than other people. You know, even for us who live here full-time, because they’re close-up and personal. You know, they were right there. But I don’t know. That again... that’s one of those “time will tell” things. We’ll see out it all rolls out overtime. I don’t know.
S: So it’s just “Wait and see”.
S: It’s a “wait and see” proposition, it is, because it’s gonna take a while to get all of that information back together... and all of the... because it’s... you know it’s all analytical information that has to be analyzed.
S: Yeah.
S: And to see... tests have to be run and did this when you get sick, and you’ve got to look at all kinds of things. So... then again, you don’t know! You know, right at the thick of it, while it’s going on, yeah you can smell the oil and all that, but is it going to hurt you? I don’t know. People have been breathing oil fumes probably for a long time... working on the oil rigs. And to say that they have a higher death rate than anybody else... I don’t know. I don’t think so. You know, I mean...
S: So, you don’t have particular problems after this?
S: I don’t. No, I don’t. But then, they’re... but then I have allergies.
S: Yeah.
S: When certain things bloom, oh my Gosh, my nose will run... you know. So to say that... it’s... I don’t... I don’t think I have any respiratory problems from the... from the oil. But then I’m inside, most of the time, I don’t... I mean I get out on the boat, three or four hours at a time, you know when I’m out on the water, but I wasn’t
working on the beach during the cleaning. Those are the folks who are probably going
to have the problems.

S: Yeah?

S: And I’m sure they’re gonna file them, there’s probably an attorney, who they’ve
already gone to, to say: “Ok, add my name to the lawsuit” for that, ‘cos I’m sure
[ audio poco chiaro ] attorney is doing that. Which is a great thing, because then it’s all
being documented. And if something comes out of it, well then good! BP’s gonna…
have to pay a bunch of money!

S: Yeah.

S: But that’s the way it is [ audio poco chiaro ]

S: They have to pay four billion dollars?

S: Have to do what?

S: Four billion dollars, they have to pay?

S: It’s a lot! 4.2 billion, that’s what they’re liable for, 4.2 billion. And… that’s a lot of
money! That’s a lot, lot of money. It’s not going to fix the 11 people that died… it’s
not gonna help their families. I mean, their families are getting some sort of
compensation, I’m sure… but… and it’s not going to be easy on the people who
survived the sinking of the boat, you know, the drilling rig I mean.

S: So they gave it to the people here? The money?

S: I didn’t get any money.

S: Ah, you don’t…

S: No, did you get any money? No, I didn’t get any money! Hahahah! No, I didn’t apply
for any. I personally didn’t apply for any. I wasn’t on the rig, I didn’t… you know,
I’m not sick from it, I didn’t have any problems… If I were a fisherman, I would have
applied. You know, if was a commercial fisherman, because… you couldn’t fish for a
whole year! They would have made… you know, a lot of those people made some
serious money, you know?

S: Oh, so they become rich after this disaster?

S: Well, they didn’t become rich, they just couldn’t work! They trade, they’re fishermen
by trade. So that everything that they would have caught that year they couldn’t go
fish. They could not fish. So… as long as they could prove how much they made the
year before… you could look and say: you know, they’d probably have made the same
amount that they made the year before. Well, they hired them to work, and to clean,
and to do things, and they probably made about the same amount of money. You
know, but they were… it’s not how they would have wanted to work, they would
have much rather fished. But they… you know, they were compensated, I have to say
they did try very hard to hire those people and… you know, to help for the clean-up.
They were ready work-force: they had a boat, they were ready to go out and do
things. So [ audio poco chiaro ] both of them, a) that BP was able to put them to work
and b) they were able to make money, ‘cos otherwise they wouldn’t have any money
for the year. The fishermen wouldn’t have had.

S: Oh.
S: So it was… that was a good thing.
S: Yeah.
S: That was a good thing. I mean, as good things go, that was good, well… not the best thing, you know, that could have happened to them, but at least they didn’t… at least they didn’t lose a whole year’s worth of work.
S: So, do you think that the people is resilient to this disaster, too?
S: Oh yeah, oh yeah! They’re out again, people… you know, tourists have come back, so our businesses are… you know, our restaurants have people in them now, people are coming camping again, you know, the camp runs at full… So yeah. I think… I think they’re… People in Louisiana are just very resilient to begin with… they… they’ve had disasters and they understand how to handle them and… you know, they’ve got the right mind set to deal with that.
S: Yeah.
S: And we’ve dealt with that, and now we’re moving on. And we’ve had a hurricane since then. You know, we’ve had a storm! We’ve all had to leave and come back, so the BP thing is kinda rolling down the road. We haven’t forgotten and we’re not gonna forget, and we won’t let them forget.
S: Yeah.
S: And… having said that, I think their corporate culture will have to improve… tremendously, and they… either that, or they… stop doing oil! One or the other!
S: Yes?
S: You know? And it sets a big precedent for anybody else that’s in that business… in the oil drilling business, they… when the judge said: “You’re gonna pay 4.2 billion dollars for the damage you created”, everybody else that’s in their business must have said: “Urgh!!”
S: Hahaha.
S: “Let’s really pay attention!”
S: Yeah.
S: And: “Not let our people have their problem” and “Let’s push safety harder”. And they have, so… I guess that’s… it’s helped all the corporate cultures.
S: Yeah.
S: So hopefully it was… some good will come out of it… you know, the environmentalists… you know… they’re very interested in how the animals are going to react, and the birds, fish, and all that, so there’s a lot of money that’s being spent to check that sort of thing out. You know, look at that and… how can we help nature get back the way it was, or… you know, at least get it back to… a little bit better than it was when it had all the oil sitting on the top of it. So there’s some good things coming out of it, you know, I mean, it’s… it’s… it wasn’t a good event for us, but… as we do here, we just try to find the best way to… to work our way out of it.
S: And start it again.
S: Yeah. Yeah! Yeah. 'Cos you won't get anywhere if you just sit and cry about it. You, you have to get in and do what it takes to... to move forward... which is what... I think most of us have done.
S: Yeah.
S: So... we're doing ok!
S: Yeah!
S: So we'll see.
S: Ok.
William: Ok!

Sara: So… I want to ask you what is your work, what about… you do here.

W: Ok. I’m Executive Director of the Grand Isle Port Commission, which entails safety and commerce.

S: Ok.

W: For the island and the waters around.

S: Is it a long time that you work here?

W: I’ve been working here about 12 years.

S: Oh. And you were born on the island?

W: No.

S: No.

W: No. My family’s from about… 50 miles from here… all my relatives, but I’ve lived in a bunch of different States.

S: Ah, ok.

W: New Jersey, Ohio, Texas.

S: And why you decided to move here?

W: Pardon?

S: Why you decided to move here?

W: Oh, ’cos I’ve always loved Grand Isle and I… was tired of the… cold up north, so… so I had to come down here.

S: Oh, good. And what about the BP oil spill when you were here, what… you did?
W: My main function was... I was very familiar with Elmer's Island, and... a lot of the waters here, and... when the Governor came down here about... two days after the... explosion... we had a group: the mayor... Parish president from Lafourche, and... some other officials and...the Governor's first concern was how to block the oil from coming into our estuaries. And since I was familiar with Elmer's Island and I did some work over there... I told them there was... two openings into the Gulf... that could be blocked... at least temporarily. And he asked what I needed to do that and I said I needed his help, the National Guard, and... six hours later I had 55 National Guard's people... from Louisiana National Guard, and they were fantastic! With all kinds of heavy equipment, lots and lots of heavy equipment and... so that was kinda my main job, was to... tell the National Guard what we needed to do on Elmer's Island.

S: So was like a coordinator?
W: Right, yeah. Exactly.
S: And the... this work that you did started after two days?
W: Uhm, pretty much, yeah. Because the oil was... coming here... and it took us about two weeks to block the passes... to a certain level. But... in fact we finished... the second opening... one hour before the oil came onto the island, you know, 'cos it was like thirty days after the explosion, before we found it.

S: Oh.
W: So I was the first one to see the oil on the island, 'cos I was at Elmer's, I was the first one to report it when it first started coming in.
S: You was scared?
W: Uh?
S: You was scared about it?
W: No, because when it first came in, it wasn’t very much.
S: Oh.
W: Just spots. And then it got worse, and worse, and worse, you know.
S: And the communication about the... the explosion was...immediately or not?
W: Oh yeah... yeah. We knew about it that day. Of course, no one expected it. You know, they said: “Well, they’ll fix it in a few days”... we thought, you know... thought wrong.
S: And the... and then the... when they finished the work they sprayed the Corexit after?
W: Uhm... most of the Corexit was... was put on East of the Mississippi river.
S: Oh, so not in the West.
W: Uhm, it depends on who you talk to. Someone says that it was sprayed... now, I think more towards the East, maybe 10 or 15 miles, like Bay Jimmy and all, I’m sure they did... probably spray some Corexit. There are reports locally that say that they were spraying... I never did see any spraying... on... on Grand Isle.
S: Oh, you’ve never seen?
W: No.
S: Oh.
W: We have people they say they did, but... you know, I’ve never seen any pictures, everybody say they saw, but... how come they didn’t take pictures from the phone right, I think, but...
S: And there was no strange smell?
W: The only time... Corexit didn’t really have much of a smell to begin with.
S: Ah, ok.
W: You know, they only time I... we had a lot of bad smell was when the oil came onto the island. Actually about... a week before it came onto the island... we had a strong South-East wind. And it got so bad that it was actually burning my eyes.
S: Ah, ok.
W: But some people were... didn’t smell it. They were... they were [audio poco chiaro] smell [audio poco chiaro] And that’s when we found out, that’s when it was right, you know, exactly where the wind was coming from. Of course, once it got onto the island... you could really smell it. But then what happened was... immediately... we had 2 or 3 days when it came in large quantities. And one was... really bad, and... most to the areas that... they’re going back to cock about the mats, they were cleaning the mats out, but what that was... when the oil would come up, it was laying in pools... ok? And... then when the tide would come in, it would wash sand over it.
S: Ok.
W: And then... so you come back the next day and you thought the oil was gone. ‘Cos you had fresh clean sand on top. And... I didn’t realize it was... about four or five inches beneath the sand, until one day I was on the telephone talking to somebody and I just happened to be scratching my finger around, and all of a sudden... So I started pulling the sand off, and the oil was underneath the sand.
S: Wow.
W: And so that’s what happened, a lot of people... a lot of people think that... that it went back out and is sitting in pools, but a lot of it was exactly where... where it stayed, but the sand covered it up. And that’s why now, after hurricane Isaac, we lost like a hundred to two hundred feet of beach.
S: Yeah?
W: So we took all the sand away, but left the oil, that’s why the people, that’s why we started right after the storm... started seeing tarballs everywhere. ‘Cos all the sand that was covering it... got uncovered and got started breaking up, and that’s why we’ve seen all the tarballs and the mats.
S: Ah ok, so it’s just because Elmer’s Island is closed?
W: Yeah.
S: Ah.
W: Part of the... initially... at the beginning it was closed because of the hurricane... that washed so much sand away... that you couldn’t go very far on Elmer’s Island, because it was under water. But the main reason it’s closed now is because they’re still finding lots of tarballs, and...
S: And you’re cleaning up the beach?
W: Oh, very slowly, they’re not using any machines, or anything else and it’s... at the rate they’re going right now... without using machines it will take them years... they’re gonna have to do something different.
S: So they use machine for cleaning... the?
W: They did before the storm.
S: Ok.
W: You know, last year and all were using some machines, but... they won’t... for some reason they’re not letting them using machines now.
S: So they catch it with the hand?
W: They just have these poles with a little screen on, like a... strainer?
S: Ok.
W: And, you know, it’s very very slow.
S: It takes a lot of time?
W: Yeah. And they’ve had some big equipment to... they’ve got the mats... but they... they didn’t stay long either, they’re gone too, so... I don’t know how long it’s gonna take to take the oil off Elmer’s.
S: So you think that the disaster... accelerated the erosion?
W: In some areas I... I believe it did, but... it didn’t have anything to do with the erosion... that we had here. There was... that’s what happens during the storm, you know.
S: So the storm...
W: They did have some areas where... it caused some damage to some plants, and... which accelerated the... the land loss, ‘cos plants weren’t there any more. Anyway...
S: So land loss is because of the hurricane?
W: Yeah, the majority... majority of it, because of hurricane.
S: It change every year?
W: Well, every time we have a storm.
S: Oh.
W: [audio poco chiaro] storm, a hurricane, it depends on what... direction hurricane came from, and... there’s a lot of variables there...
S: And so Grand Isle is changed in these last years? Or is perhaps the same?
W: It was... we lost a lot of beach everywhere.
S: Oh.
W: For Isaac. Every storm we lose a lot of beach.
S: And there is any program that... should contrast this loss?
W: Pardon?
S: If there is some program which controls the losses? If someone do something for maintaining the beach?
W: Well, there’s not a lot you can do.
S: Ah.
W: What we’ve done in the past, we actually get big dredges... and they pumped sand from offshore... to replace the sand that was lost. For Gustav... everything came in
from the Gulf, so... it pushed off all the levees and the sand... onto the island. But after Katrina... we had lost so much sand on the beach that they actually pumped it in the whole lot of it. A lot of sand. 'Cos we lost... you know, a tremendous amount...hundred feet or so of the beach, you know.

S: Wow. And the platform in the Gulf are safe with the hurricanes?
W: Uhm... majority are... yeah, I mean... Think about it, our biggest problem is not been during the storm, is just been... when somebody screwed up.

S: Oh.
W: You know, didn’t follow correct safety procedures... you'll get... you’ll get some damage, but... you know, I don’t recall any major problems from the storms on the rigs, other than they had to shut them down because they had to let the people off, you know. [parla al telefono].

S: So this is what Katrina expected this disaster?
W: Pardon?
S: Nobody knows that... the disaster could happen?
W: You mean, did they know that could happen? Oh, people know that they can happen... but the oil companies know that it can happen. They just... they didn’t... they didn’t go by the rules, you know. They’re too worried about spending a few extra dollars on... for safety issues and that’s what caused the problem.

S: You was prepared for this? For... the people was thinking about this could happen or not?
W: No. I mean... we have oil spill coordinators, ‘cos it’s always very small. Every day there’s probably... some small oil leak. They have about a thousand oil spills a year in the Gulf of Mexico. So two or three a day. But they’re very low, and they’re contained right away.

S: Ok.
W: Generally. But anything of this magnitude... nobody would ever expect it, knowing... you know... hadn’t prepared for what we had.

S: Ok. And the fish was changed?
W: The fish?
S: Yeah.
W: Uhm, I’m sure there were some changes, some people think it’s worse than others... it... nobody knows for sure yet. That’s the big problem, nobody really knows for sure. You know, we’ve... of course they closed... they... they had to close down some areas, and... most of them did reopen except... some spots where there is still a lot of oil... like on some islands in the East and all, but... You know, we’ve seen... we’ve seen a little change in... in some of the fisheries... but I mean right now fishing has been great here... you know. Shrimping has been... has not being great, but it hasn’t terrible, but I think something like this it takes years to... to know for sure.

S: Ok. And the [audio poco chiaro], too?
W: Pardon?
S: The people was sick after this?
W: I don’t know. I have relatives that all work around refineries... The one that just left here, they live right next to refineries that smell like hell, and he’s 85 years old, in perfect health, you know, so...
S: It’s difficult to say?
W: Yeah. And of course some people are more sensitive to things than others. I mean, I was walking in the oil for a month and a half. You know, every day I was out there, 16, 17, 18 hours a day. And... I’m coughing now, but that’s... I know what that is...it’s from smoking, you know?
S: Yeah.
W: So... I’m sure it affected some people, and particularly the people... particularly the people East to the river.
S: East to the river?
W: East of the Mississippi, where it was really bad.
S: So here is worse than...?
W: Oh, yes, uhm... Plaquemines Parish and all. Yeah, close to the spill it was...it was really bad, but...
S: And was the BP to decide to let you work for the cleaning?
W: No, I didn’t care about what the hell BP said.
S: Oh.
W: The Governor’s the one who told me what to do. I had some problems, but...
S: So was the Government?
W: Uh?
S: Was the Government to...?
W: Yeah. Oh, I had problems, but... one of the biggest problems that I had was... BP, the Coast Guard and its clean-up crews... they thought they were the law.
S: Oh.
W: You know, I think that was all wrong. I mean, they tried to stop me from going back there one day when I had the National Guard, 55 National Guard with me out there...
S: So was it difficult to coordinate all these...
W: Oh, exactly.
S: Oh.
W: And BP felt it owned the State, you know, once... once they’ve come to some area. And then the Coast Guard listened too much to BP, too.
S: Ok.
W: It was like BP was telling the Coast Guard what to do.
S: Oh.
W: Yeah, it... that situation wasn’t that good.
S: Wow, and how you resolved that problem?
W: How did I resolve it? I just didn’t listen to them.
S: Ah, ok.
W: I had... A couple of them... told me they’d put me in jail and I said: “Go ahead!” I said : “The Government will let me out in two minutes and your ass will be gone”...
you know. So yeah, we had a lot of problems with that. And then we had... you know, the... and the media, you know... so much media down there that... getting in the way a lot. I understood the work of the media is to get out, but... there was a problem, one day... one day I had 60 calls one day from... media and companies, you know.

S: So there was too much media here?
W: Oh, it was unbelievable!
S: Everybody want to talk with the people?
W: Yeah. Yes, it... and then a few wouldn't let them in an area and they said you were trying to hide something.
S: Yeah.
W: You know? I said: "I'm not trying to hide, we're keeping you out of the oil! That's it."
But... but I'd say that... I understood we needed the media... to let... to let everybody know what the hell was going on. It was a bad situation, but... some of them got ridiculous. They just... you know, the whole lot of them just... for months. Workers and media.
S: They stayed here a lot of time?
W: Oh yeah. You couldn't find a place to live! Every... every place was rented on the island. For a lot of money.
S: Yeah. So it's just because people is tired to talk about it?
W: Uh?
S: People tired to talk about this problem?
W: Well, I imagine some of them, yeah.
S: Yeah?
W: I suppose it was a... during the spill I mean, it was... constant. And then I had reporters that wanted to go to Elmer's. Every day they'd be up... up here, and usually tried... at first they tried to find out what... what you're trying to say, and... If I talked, there was going to be a decent story and a bunch of bull. I might take one of them out there, but I had to sneak them off. 'Cos they would say: "BP said no media? That you had to have it clear?".
S: Oh, BP don't want to meet you?
W: Oh, no, absolutely!
S: Ok.
W: You've been... you interviewed people here, they didn't tell you that?
S: No, they don't tell me!
W: Oh, my god! Oh yeah, and... yeah, I would go back in the truck and "Who they're here with?" and I'd say: "They're with me". And... [parla con la segretaria]. Uhm... but I understand, if you just said: "Oh the media can come back here" it would have been like a circus... you know.
S: So the BP why didn't want the media? Because of the scoop?
W: Well, because of that and... how are you gonna work if you’ve got 200 reporters out there? Which that part I understand, but... to me if you have media coming with somebody... an official from the island or something... it should be fine.
S: Yeah.
W: And that’s the way I worked it, but...
S: And so you don’t know the... the BP claim that there is in the... in the civic center?
W: Uh?
S: Is... is not... is from the BP, is not from the Government?
W: Uhm... it’s from BP, but they were forced to do that.
S: Oh.
W: You know... and now you’ve got lawyers everywhere, too... you know.
S: For the claim?
W: Yeah.
S: So it’s like a business?
W: Oh, yeah.
S: Hahahaha.
W: Oh yeah, attorneys make a lot of fortune off the victims.
S: But they gave them real money, or is... just advertising?
W: Uhm... I think... I think there’s gonna be a fair amount of attorneys that’s gonna make a pretty... a lot of money out of it. Now, how many... how much the people are gonna get, I don’t know. You know... I mean, from the lawyers. I know some people did pretty good... from BP earlier.
S: Yeah.
W: But BP is trying to get out of everything... now, you know. They’re trying to pull the workers off... they’re trying to cut back every work, you know. But... it cost a lot of money, but at the same time BP made a hell lot of money.
S: Yeah.
W: So... they’re not going broke over this oil spill.
S: Now this platform is still open, or is closed?
W: Oh no, that platform was... it was gone.
S: Oh, it’s gone?
W: Yeah.
S: Ok. Wow. And you think... that something will change... after this?
W: Oh, yeah. Yeah, definitely... it has changed the... procedures, and... safety procedures, yeah. Yeah, no... nobody wants to be...
S: Another BP?
W: Yeah, the companies don’t wanna be. Especially people really [audio poco chiaro] now, you know.
S: Yeah.
W: Yeah. I think... there... there was a lot of change, I mean, from one thing they shut down all the rigs! For a long time, but that hurt us here... The moratorium. You know, and then you couldn’t get permits to do any new drilling. And this is where
most... this area you get, that’s the economy, you know. So... if you can’t drill new...new rigs, then... or get permits you got problems.

S: So the economy is going down after this?

W: Oh, yeah. From... yeah, the oil industry went... to nothing for a little while... especially from this stuff, you know?

S: Yeah.

W: You know, they sold the... it’s still much lower than it was, you get a permit, much much slower, but... at least they finally did... they have reopened permitting, so...But yeah, I believe it’s gonna be safer now, probably...

S: Before the... the law for the safety, it was less strictly?

W: Uhm... I wouldn’t necessarily say that it were less strict, but it was... companies that weren’t listening to the policies.

S: Oh.

W: And even to their own policies, that’s what happened here. You know, one... on the oil rig’s not just one company, you’ve got a company that might be doing the drilling, you got a company that might be operating the rig, you’ve got another company that owns the rig, you know... so you’ve got... So the people that... owns the rig pushing the people that are drilling...pushing their company, and...you... they... they didn’t go by the book. Obviously. You know, if you... if you see the transcript of what happened, they knew that there was a problem. And... they could have... could have done some things to prevent it. But they didn’t. So now...

S: It’s bad. Here comes people for asking help or information?

W: Pardon?

S: Here the people... came for ask you help or information about the... the oil spill?

W: Oh, yeah. Well, they didn’t have to come here, my phone never quit ringing.

S: Oh.

W: Never. I would run out of the room, and... the phone constantly rang... for about... three months during the spill. [audio poco chiaro]

S: What did you say to these people?

W: Well, what I had from... they just let voice mails... there was a lot of people trying to sell equipment and then... or... somebody think they did invent some great way to...pick it up, but... half of them was baloney. So... you know... and then each day I go through pa-pa-pa-pa-pa!

S: Hahaha.

W: You know.

S: So it was very hard for you to work about this?

W: Yes. Of course I was out at Elmer’s most of the time. I was out there many hours a day, and... the first couple of weeks I was there 16, 17 hours every day. The National Guard would work 27... 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

S: Wow.

W: We had lights and everything else... building the dams, but...

S: And you had a uniform? They give you...?
W: No.
S: No?
W: In fact... [parla con qualcun altro] I have a picture here from the National Guard
[parla con qualcun altro] Anyway...
S: And the... ecosystem here is resilient, or is...?
W: Yeah. It is... it's very resilient... except... the problem is we still have land loss. And
the more estuaries you lose... the more soft marsh you lose...the less resilient it gets.
That's the big problem.
S: Yeah.
W: And we're not building land like we used to, you know... 'cos this is a delta. Normally,
you'd be building land, but since... they put levees on the Mississippi river, you don't
get [audio poco chiaro] over there anymore, and... plus all the canals that all the oil
companies cut in the last... hundred years, you know... that didn't help. It brings in
salt water.
S: Ok.
W: Causes more problem... but, you know.... I think a lot was [audio poco chiaro] they
didn't realize... really the damage was being done. Plus it... it's economies, you know?
You need it all! You know, I get a lot of people that call down here... they raise an
[audio poco chiaro] “Shut down all the oil rigs and all the rest of the” you know and I
said “How did you get down here? With a car? You flew here?”
S: Yeah.
W: You know. I mean, I'd love to see lots... lots of alternate energy now myself, but...
right now it's... it's not... it's not economically reliable, yet.
S: Yes.
W: I think they're getting closer, but... in the meantime... what you're gonna do? I can't
afford the electric car myself, you know. So... fossil fuels are gonna be part of it for a
while anyway. And... this is where it goes... you know, this is where... this is where is
at, so what are you gonna tell the people, that the whole family that have... worked
for 3, 4, or 5 generations for the oil companies... and this is where all the oil is coming
from. And you get mad sometimes, like people in Florida and all said: “We don’t want
them drill here. We don’t wanna see all those oil rigs out there”, but they surely want
to use the oil. So... we go through the hardships with the... with the problems, and
the hurricanes, and... and all the problems of living on the coast.
S: Yeah.
W: But... you know... we get our share of problems. Too big a share of problems.
S: And so the offshore is since long time that is here in the Gulf?
W: Oh yeah... Many years.
S: And... the ecosystem is... is changed?
W: It’s always changing... because of land loss, and...
S: Oh. And there is a recovery program?
W: There's millions of recovery programs. It must be... I... I must know of... 40... 40
organizations just in Lousiana!
S: Wow!
W: You know, but… It takes lots, and lots, and lots, and lots of money. The main thing is that if you don’t have… Earth… if you can’t stop its urges, and you get the wet land loss, now [audio poco chiaro] it’s open water. When I was a kid, we would drive down… to Grand Isle… now you look on both sides you see mostly water. When I was a kid I saw mostly grain.
S: Wow!
W: And… I may be old, but not that old… I mean… a tremendous amount of difference!
S: So is very fast this…
W: It’s the fastest in the world.
S: Oh yeah.
W: The fastest land loss in the world.
S: The… the effect of the BP has changed also the… the migratory birds?
W: Uhm… oh, I’m sure it didn’t help… at the time, uhm… most of the migratory birds are… land in the trees… over here. And feed on the main part of the island, so… you know, that… that wasn’t the major… I mean, we had more problems with… with water birds, you know. Pelicans, cormorants… short birds, seagulls, and that sort of stuff. Uhm… but… the majority of migratory birds… I don’t think were that affected. [audio poco chiaro] oil didn’t cover the trees, you know?
S: Yeah. Do you think that this problem will… still exist since long time?
W: Oh, I think it always… I think… being here a long time… you know, nature works on things… the bacteria eats up the oil and all the rest, but it’s… yeah it’s gonna take a while. That’s recovering much quicker than, say, [audio poco chiaro] last, but it’s [audio poco chiaro]
S: Ok.
W: So the bacteria doesn’t [audio poco chiaro] the oil like it does air. And here we have more waters stirred at the time, eventually the bacteria will eat it all up, but… you know, the areas with the bury, and it’s hard for the bacteria, that’s a very very slow for the bacteria to react on it when it’s… when it’s buried and it can’t get oxygen, you know.
S: So here it will be for more time?
W: No, it’s gonna be less time [audio poco chiaro] this.
S: Less time?
W: Yes.
S: Ok.
W: Than in Alaska because of the warmth.
S: Oh so it’s because of that that in Alaska it still exists this problem?
W: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I have pictures of buddies that turns over rocks over there and it looks like fresh oil. You know…
S: Wow! Oh, good. And the Government helped the people, or… with the… the Government helped the people that lived here after the BP oil spill?
W: Uh, I wouldn’t say directly, no. I mean, they... BP... They said they’d pay for everything.
S: And for your... for the health?
W: Uhm, you’d get help promise they’d go to BP issue... you know... file the claims.
S: Oh. Also BP?
W: Yeah, we’ve had... we’ve had Government... there’s Government agencies that... are gathering data, you know. Doing surveys, and... trying to help in that way...but didn’t go back and say to BP: “Look, you’ve got problems here, you’ve got problems there”, but as far as directly [audio poco chiaro] on the Government, I mean the... the Government is billing BP for it.
S: Yeah. So it’s all about the BP. They have to pay.
W: Yeah. Now... The Government is getting involved with some reclamation, you know... efforts and all... however... that funding is gonna come from... from BP. I mean, we’ve already had some, but we’re expecting more.
S: Yeah.
W: I mean, and the Government would then... like... rebuilding Elmer’s Island, rebuilding these areas. They’re trying to use a lot of these funds... from BP to help restore them... you know, particularly for land loss problems, and that sort of thing, but... anyway...
S: There was other groups that... come here, like volunteer people?
W: Oh, there is a lot of them, one or two, but you can’t allow... just anybody to go out there and pick up the oil... you know, it would be mess and confusion. And people got very upset, they said: “Oh, I wanna help”! “Well... I understand, but...” you know, ‘cos you had... thousands of people that didn’t know anything in the world, run around on the beach. Especially with vehicles that... that would be a problem.
S: So a lot of people wasn’t allowed to clean?
W: Oh, yeah.
S: The local people?
W: It’s... some. The local people were having enough problems on their own, but... but... lot of outside people wanted... wanted to help. But... we told them: “If you wanna help, send the money”, but you can’t have them out there. Even with the birds, you know... you had to go through classes, you know, if you wanted to help rescue birds you had to know what you were doing.
S: Yeah.
W: And... there was a lot of people upset... because they did... I know, I was one of them, I got upset one day because there... you know, they had a hundred reports of... of oiled birds and I was down there in Elmer’s and I saw this pelican that was completely covered, and... I got mad. And I should have known better, but I still got mad when you see they keep waiting and waiting and I’m saying: “Where the hell are they? Get them over here”! and [audio poco chiaro] myself, which... wasn’t really the best way to handle it, but you get emotional when you see... a bird completely covered, you know, even his eyes completely covered in oil, you get emotional over it.
And the pelican kept looking at me, so I said: “I’m gonna pick this thing up”. [audio poco chiaro] that we were talking about out there... that’s... that is... when that happened that’s... part of that doesn’t look like... the one I got mad about it.

S: Oh. The people freaking out with the BP oil spill?

W: Oh yeah! Yeah, people were pretty upset, yeah. Well, you know, and you had people going around saying: “Well, this is it! Everybody’s gonna have to leave the island... forever. They’ll close the island” You heard a lot of people saying that sort of stuff. I know better now, but...

S: They organized some protest?

W: Oh they did, but that’s so much of... yeah, some of the locals did. But oh yeah, there were lots of... protestors and... crazy stuff happening in... on the island. People came down from all over the place...But...

S: So, you think that now the people have a little bit forget what happened?

W: No, not here.

S: No.

W: No, it’s pretty fresh for us. We’ve probably forgotten more hurricanes than we’ve forgot the oil spill. We’re... so used to getting hit by hurricanes, you know.

S: Yeah.

W: You know. I’m sure everybody’s gonna remember the oil spill.

S: Ok, thank you.

W: Alright, you got it?
MAPS

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Grand Isle e dintorni.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{4} GOOGLE: <https://maps.google.it/maps?hl=it&tab=ll>. Data ultima consultazione: 03.06.2013.
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\(^5\) **The Times Picayune:** [http://www.nola.com/]. Data ultima consultazione: 03.06.2013.
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