

The University of Southern Mississippi
Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage

Deepwater Horizon Oil Disaster–Gulf Coast Fisheries
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

John Philip Falterman Jr.

Interviewer: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

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An Oral History with John Philip Falterman Jr., Volume 1043

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Biography

Captain John Philip Falterman Jr. was born November 25, 1974, in Fairbanks, Alaska, to Mr. John P. Falterman Sr. (born September 29, 1952, in New Orleans, Louisiana) and Mrs. Deborah Bays Falterman (born October 17, 1952, in New Orleans, Louisiana). His father is the owner of Johnny's Welding Service in Kenner, Louisiana. His father's parents were Helen Mayer Falterman, from New Orleans, Louisiana, and Arthur Falterman from Napoleonville, Louisiana. His mother is executive assistant for the Frito-Lay Company. His mother's parents were Gene W. Bays from Summerfield, Louisiana, and Glenda Bordelon Bays from Melville, Louisiana.

Captain Falterman attended St. Rita's Elementary School, St. Matthew's High School, and Delgado College. He earned a captain's license from Houston Marine in Kenner, Louisiana. He is the owner of Therapy Charters LLC, located in Slidell, Louisiana. He is a charter captain for inland fishing in Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, and the Biloxi Marsh. At the time of this interview he was a board member of the Louisiana Coastal Conservation Association, and a St. Tammany Parish Ambassador. From 2010 to 2012 he served as president of the Slidell Chapter of the Louisiana Coastal Conservation Association.

On June 6, 1998, Captain Falterman married Kelle O'Berry at St. Matthew's in River Ridge. They have two children, Jacob Patrick Falterman (born September 18, 2001, in New Orleans, Louisiana) and Kevin Michael Falterman (born on August 23, 2006, in New Orleans, Louisiana). The family owns and operates Therapy Charters LLC, which was established in Slidell, Louisiana. The name was originated by Mrs. Kelle Falterman; by virtue of being a counselor for St. Tammany School of Honey Island, Louisiana, she realizes that fishing is a powerful form of therapy for some illnesses, as well as a way to relax.

Captain Falterman enjoys hunting, including deer, ducks, squirrels, and rabbits, as well as camping and traveling and enjoying the great outdoors with family and friends. Captain Falterman invites you to come relax on his charter boat and let him cater to your every need.

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AN ORAL HISTORY

with

JOHN PHILIP FALTERMAN JR.

This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage. The interview is with John Philip Falterman Jr. and is taking place on April 10, 2012. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArmey.

Scull-DeArmey: This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Project of The University of Southern Mississippi done in conjunction with the NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] Voices from the Fisheries Project. The interview is with John Falterman Jr., and it is taking place on April 10, 2012, at three p.m. in Slidell, Louisiana. The interviewer is Stephanie Scull-DeArmey. And first I'd like to thank you.

Falterman: Thank you.

Scull-DeArmey: Barbara Hester said that I could refer to you as Captain John?

Falterman: Whatever you want to call me.

Scull-DeArmey: Is that correct.

Falterman: That's fine.

Scull-DeArmey: Thank you for taking time to talk with us today and just get a little bit of background information about you. So I'll ask you for the record to state your name.

Falterman: John [P.] Falterman Jr.

Scull-DeArmey: And for the record how do you spell it?

Falterman: J-O-H-N, middle initial is P, as in Philip, Falterman, F as in Frank, A-L-T-E-R-M-A-N Jr.

Scull-DeArmey: And when were you born? (0:01:14.2)

Falterman: I was born November 25, 1974.

Scull-DeArmey: And where were you born?

Falterman: I was born in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow. You're a long way from Alaska.

Falterman: My dad was in the military.

Scull-DeArmey: Where did you grow up?

Falterman: I grew up in Harahan, [Louisiana].

Scull-DeArmey: What age did you leave Fairbanks?

Falterman: About six months of age.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Falterman: Yeah.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. And did you go directly to Harahan from—

Falterman: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: —Alaska?

Falterman: Yes. I lived in Harahan for practically all my life until I got married, and then from there, then I moved away.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, tell me a little bit about your childhood in Harahan, Louisiana.

Falterman: I grew up, public education, went to college, became an electrician, and [I am] still [an] electrician to this day. Went to Delgado for college, did about two years of Delgado, majoring in electrical and HVAC [heating, ventilation, and air conditioning]. Then got married and moved away and started working for myself as [an] electrician.

Scull-DeArmey: And how did you get into fishing? (0:02:50.7)

Falterman: My family, on my dad's side, his sister [Janet Galpin], they've had a [family] camp in Grand Isle and also [one] on Lake Pontchartrain since we were kids, and we would always fish Lake Pontchartrain or Grand Isle. And so we grew up on the water every weekend, and my father and my grandfather used to fish in Manchac, [Louisiana].

Scull-DeArmey: How do you spell that?

Falterman: M-A-N-C-H-A-C.

Scull-DeArmey: OK, Manchac area. (0:03:29.2)

Falterman: [Located] right there by LaPlace off of Old 51, Highway 51.

Scull-DeArmey: What is the area like there? Can you just kind of paint a picture for the record?

Falterman: Manchac is an area, predominantly freshwater, and known for catfish and crawfish and crabbing, home of Middendorf's Restaurant; a lot of people have heard

of that restaurant. And so that area right there [we] predominantly fished. Grew up fly-fishing (0:04:16.6) at the age of five years old.

Scull-DeArme y: Tell us for the record what fly-fishing is.

Falterman: [It's] basically a [nine-foot to] ten-foot rod, [a three- to four-piece rod]. [It uses a special line that floats], tapered with a little piece of monofilament, approximately three foot long and had some little bugs that used to be made by Accardo, that [float] on the water, and you'd pop them, and the bream or bass or sac-a-lait [crappie] would hit those. So that's how we always fished. So I learned really early how to do this because it was one of those things, either I didn't know how and didn't catch fish, or I'd learned how, and I caught fish!

Scull-DeArme y: When you were five, were you catching fish?

Falterman: Yes. (laughter) And to this day, you know, I have two kids, a five- and a ten-year-old, and my [ten]-year-old fishes a lot, so he's a [great] fisherman. [Jacob, my oldest, started fishing tournaments with me at the age of nine.]

Scull-DeArme y: Fabulous. Do you make them clean their fish?

Falterman: No, not yet, but that time's coming.

Scull-DeArme y: You said that you caught bream, bass and what? (0:05:38.7)

Falterman: Sac-a-lait.

Scull-DeArme y: How do you spell that?

Falterman: S-A-C, I think it's [A-L-A-I-T].

Scull-DeArme y: I have never heard of that fish.

Falterman: Yeah.

Scull-DeArme y: Ever before. Wow.

Falterman: Yep.

Scull-DeArme y: Are bream, bass, and sac-a-lait all good to eat?

Falterman: [All three are] very good [to eat].

Scull-DeArme y: What do you usually do with your catch? (0:06:07.8)

Falterman: Feed the family. At that age and that period of my life, that's what we did, was just feed family with the fish [we caught].

Scull-DeArme y: OK. Who actually taught you to fish? (0:06:29.5)

Falterman: My dad and my grandfather were probably my two mentors on fishing when I grew up, my dad, John Sr., known as Johnny, and my grandfather, Gene Bays, G-E-N-E, W. Bays.

Scull-DeArmey: A-S-S?

Falterman: B-A-Y-S.

Scull-DeArmey: Are they both still with you?

Falterman: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: Great.

Falterman: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: So they probably teach your children, also.

Falterman: Oh, yeah. That's my sons' great-grandfather and their grandfather, [and yes, they do still take both Jacob and Kevin fishing, to this day].

Scull-DeArmey: Did either of them fish commercially?

Falterman: No. They did not. We just fished recreationally, [all] of our lives.

Scull-DeArmey: Are there any other species around the Manchac area that you remember?

Falterman: [The area has catfish, gar, and other species found in freshwater, but] that was predominantly the only things we caught out that way, but that was what we [targeted]. Depending on what you want to catch, [you would use different rods and tackle to catch that species of fish].

Scull-DeArmey: Well, where would you fish here? (0:07:59.5)

Falterman: I fish Lake Pontchartrain, Lake Borgne, Biloxi Marsh area, all the way down to Hopedale, [and I also help other captains in Lafitte and DuLarge waters as well. I am very versatile and learn different waters pretty easy].

Scull-DeArmey: Biloxi Marsh, you have to travel quite a way to get to the Biloxi Marsh, don't you?

Falterman: It's about seven to ten miles across Lake Borgne to the Biloxi Marsh area, [depending on where you want to fish].

Scull-DeArmey: OK. That's not as far as I thought.

Falterman: No, [not] really. They call it Biloxi Marsh, but it actually has a Hopedale address.

Scull-DeArmey: I wonder if it's because of the Indians being there.

Falterman: I don't know [the history of the Biloxi Marsh].

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Are there different species there?

Falterman: That's more [an] all saltwater [area], although Lake Pontchartrain (0:08:49.2) [and Lake Borgne] we do have areas that [you can] still can catch bass, bream and also crawfish. Most of [Lake Pontchartrain] is known for its [big] trout. The speckled trout [are] mostly what we [target, but we also catch flounder, drum, redfish, and sheephead on the structures from bridges to wellheads].

Scull-DeArmey: Do you eat all of those species?

Falterman: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Have you seen any change in these species over your lifetime of fishing for them? (0:09:31.4)

Falterman: I've seen them increase [in] the size. I don't remember the species of trout being as large as they [are now], but history goes back and shows me that they do, but I don't remember catching any [speckled trout in the five to twelve pound range as a kid until I started fishing for a living].

Scull-DeArmey: Do you have any theories on why there might be a size increase in your experience?

Falterman: I think just more rules, regulations, (0:10:18.3) the creel limits on the species itself [as well as the amount of nutrients that we have in our waters today].

Scull-DeArmey: How do you know what the rules and regulations are as a fisherman?

Falterman: Well, as a captain I have to know [all the different species we catch], every species that's brought [in], and what the size limits [are], and how many we [are allowed of every species per day]. But I also tag (0:10:54.9) fish for Wildlife and Fisheries. We tag redfish and trout, and I work with the biologists, and they come [where I am] filleting all my clients' fish. And [the biologists] take the ear bone out. They take them back to the labs, and they're able to tell how old they are by the amount of rings that are [on the ear bone]. So I learned a lot about [the age of fish]. And with us tagging them, I may tag four hundred fish [to] five hundred fish a year for them. So being that I've tagged these fish, I can find out how long these fish have lived before they've gotten caught again and released, or caught and kept, and watch the size difference and how much they grow. And I'm also the Slidell CCA president, (Coastal Conservation Association). I've been for the last two and a half years. I'm very interested in obtaining information on [aging and growth of fish, and I have gone to Louisiana State University to] sit through classes to learn more about coastal erosion and what age the fish are and the size and the population, and how they grow. And I teach the kids [about what I have learned, and I also do seminars on fishing, how to catch them, and what to look for to make people better fishermen or ladies]. (0:12:56.2)

Scull-DeArmeY: Your kids?

Falterman: Everybody. I fish a lot of husband, wife, kids. I fish a lot of younger kids and [teach them things like] flounders were not born with two eyes on one side of the head. They actually were born with one on each side, and as they grow, [both eyes move to one side of the head]. I teach some of this stuff at the local school here, in St. Tammany [Parish, Louisiana]; give them some coastal erosion and fisheries and hatchery information. [I try to get everyone knowing about erosion and prevention, and also about fish and how they grow.]

Scull-DeArmeY: Lots of follow-up questions here. For people who don't know, say a hundred years from now, can you just paint us a picture of what happens when you tag fish? (0:13:56.1)

Falterman: Basically, we tag fish to see [how much they grow], what kind of movement they have as far as are they tagged and released and caught in the same spot, or are they tagged and released and caught in different areas. They've had fish that were tagged in Louisiana that were caught in Florida, so we know that these fish move. And so it just gives us a little bit of history of what these fish, how they acclimate, how they move around, where they go, at what point of year. A lot of it has to do with [seasons], winter and summer, and different spawning times and [the salinity and temperature of the waters.]

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you catch them with the—

Falterman: The tags.

Scull-DeArmeY: Oh, I should know the name of this. It's right on the tip of my tongue. The fly, do you catch them by the fly-fishing method?

Falterman: No. We actually [target redfish using the fly-fishing]. We catch them on [rods and reels, using] spoons, (0:15:25.8) chatter baits, spinner blades, plastics, or live bait. And we also catch trout and flounder, [drum, etcetera, using] live bait, Carolina rigs, or plastics with just regular jig heads [on the bottom or under a popping cork]. That's mostly how we catch them. Fly-fishing nowadays is (0:15:58.2) [used in saltwater and freshwater applications], but I don't do as much freshwater [fishing] anymore. I do it on saltwater, and it's [mostly] after redfish. And [we use what] they call clousers now. Instead of basically having a little bug that floats, either you have a hand-tied lure that would look like a shrimp or a crab, and there's people who hand-tie these [flies] for a living. We fish redfish with those. It's [mostly] a sight-cast kind of thing. You basically work an area that's got some clean water, see the redfish, and get somebody to throw [the clouser or popping bug] in front of their nose, and get them to eat it. So it's pretty fun. It's interesting just to watch. They'll either take it, or they'll turn their head up against it, so very interesting.

Scull-DeArmeY: You said something about clowers, is that C-L—

Falterman: Clouser.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Do you know how to spell it?

Falterman: C-L-O-U-S-E-R.

Scull-DeArmey: And is that a kind of lure?

Falterman: That's actually a hand-tied, [lure that either floats or sinks, used in freshwater or] saltwater. [It's used in all waters in the world, not just here in Louisiana.]

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What's the name of your charter business?

Falterman: Therapy Charters. (0:17:48.1)

Scull-DeArmey: So how much electrical work are you doing as opposed to making a living as a charter boat captain?

Falterman: I stopped my electrical business in 2008 and went full-time as a charter captain in 2008, early 2008, and I still fall back a little bit on electrical here and there. But for the most part, I'm on the water a hundred and eighty to two hundred days a year, so it gets pretty busy.

Scull-DeArmey: Is there any season that you can't fish?

Falterman: Not really. You could fish year round. Winter months are kind of harder than your summer months. But like [around] February or whenever it's really cold or freezing, people don't want to get out on the water, so it's one of those things; it kind of shuts down for a while. And then it picks back up [when the weather warms back up. Wintertime fishing, when tolerable, is great.]

Scull-DeArmey: OK. What if you tag a fish, do you then release it? (0:19:09.8)

Falterman: Yeah. I tag it, release it, and record the length, the weight, where it was caught, what date, the water clarity, different information [on a card]. There's a tag number on [the tag itself], and that tag number matches the number that's on the card. Wildlife and Fisheries [process the data off the card into a computer], and when that fish is caught, they recall the tag [data, and it tells] the Wildlife and Fisheries [biologist] when it was tagged, where it was tagged, who tagged it. And then I get a report back, stating that so-and-so caught this fish on this day, and it was X amount of inches long and X amount of weight, so I have a little history of [the growth and whereabouts of that fish].

Scull-DeArmey: So anyone who might catch the fish would know when they see the tag that they should report it, like just your average—

Falterman: Yeah. [The tag has] the Wildlife and Fisheries' [phone number on it. It asks you to report the tagged fish to them so they can get the number for data related to the fish].

Scull-DeArmey: What if they catch it, and it's not big enough to keep?

Falterman: They can call the number, and they can just tell them they caught that number, and they released it again. We've seen that happen several times. Most of the time we [tag and] release smaller trout to see [how they grow]. If they're eleven and a half inches, and our limits are twelve inches, how long does it take [to reach twelve inches or more]? That's usually how it goes is, we tagging them undersized, so [biologists can track] the growth spurt. It could be a couple of months, whatever, before they're caught. It might never be caught again. So it's kind of crazy just to see how many you do tag and how many tags you get back. [The data we have on the species allows the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to adjust the creel limit to maintain a healthy population.]

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you often catch them again on the charter boat with folks?

Falterman: We have caught several. I probably caught maybe forty or fifty tagged fish out of maybe fifteen hundred-[plus], that we've tagged. So the percentages is not as high as people would think they would be.

Scull-DeArmeY: For people who don't know how charter boats work, can you tell us for the record how does it work? (0:22:05.5)

Falterman: Basically we have to have a charter captain's license [to have a charter boat. You must] go to school and [obtain] a captain's license. Then we're required by Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries to obtain a commercial fishing license. And from that point you are able to take passengers, with whatever [tonnage or passenger] allowance your charter license allows you to take out and where it allows you to go. [With a] six-pack license, you are able to take out up to six people in the boat. And from there, then you would have to increase your license to a hundred ton, which'll allow you to take more people and [operate larger vessels. More schooling is required along with vessel time, needed to increase your license. From that point then we [can take] clients fishing. [We return to the marina or dock to] clean their fish, bag their fish, and then send them home. [People always say it's the greatest job, but most don't see all the hours we really work. Morning usually starts around three a.m., and then from the time the client arrives to the time we return to clean fish, clean the boat, and replenish tackle and supplies, it gets to be very long hours involved.]

Scull-DeArmeY: They get to keep the fish?

Falterman: Yep.

Scull-DeArmeY: Somebody told me in Mississippi they don't get to keep the fish. I'm not sure if that's true. (laughter)

Falterman: Ah, no. Our clients get all their fish.

Scull-DeArmeY: What do you give to your clients? What do you provide for them? (0:23:50.5)

Falterman: We provide everything from the bait to lures to rod and reels, everything they need for that day, except for like their lunch, whatever they want to bring for a

snack or whatever. We [supply nonalcoholic beverages] on board. And having sponsors, that allows me to have the lures and the rods and everything else on board, [which is a big plus. It not only allows me to have very nice gear, but allows clients to use and see the gear, which in turn leads to the sale of items they used with me. It's a win-win for all.]

Scull-DeArmeY: Nice.

Falterman: That kind of helps to absorb some of the cost.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah.

Falterman: And put their names out there, so that's a good part.

Scull-DeArmeY: Are people disappointed when they have to return a fish because it is under the limit? (0:24:45.6)

Falterman: No. Usually we catch a lot of fish. I had a client ask me the other day, "Have you ever not caught a fish on the charter?" And I was like, "No. I have not." I offer a no-fish/no-pay guarantee on my charters, so my clients, if they don't catch fish, they don't pay for the trip. So I have to be on top of my game, and how I do that is I keep records (0:25:25.9) of every single charter, tide movement, the moon phases, different scenarios, so I can go back. And I could be not on the water for five days and then get back on the water, knowing what the water temperatures are and the pressures and everything that's supposed to be, quote, unquote, "I know where those fish are." So I have four years of records, and it's just amazing to be able to see that these fish are pretty much patterned.

Scull-DeArmeY: They have habits?

Falterman: They are habits. And this year since we've had almost no winter, it seems like they're almost about twenty to forty days ahead of time, ahead of schedule. So we're actually catching them where we'd be catching them in [months to come, as far as log books and time is concerned]. (0:26:46.2) And it seems like the shrimp's the same way, too. We seeing a lot of shrimp out in the Biloxi Marsh area right now, that usually we don't see as many shrimp this time of year, but as May comes around and shrimp season opens, then we really start seeing shrimp, hitting the water. It seems like it's going to be a [great] year, [once again!]

Scull-DeArmeY: Do you ever catch shrimp with nets from your boat?

Falterman: No. I just rely on the marinas since I fish so much. Some days I'll fish twenty-eight out of thirty days, so being on the water that much, I don't want to be having to throw a cast net and try to catch [my clients] live shrimp [for their charter trip]. It's easier for me to rely on the commercial [shrimpers], and that also is a way of giving back to them, also. So we kind of work together, and it's kind of a nice thing.

Scull-DeArmeY: What is the live bait that you use? (0:28:06.6)

Falterman: We use minnows, croakers, but May [is usually the opening of] shrimp season, and that's an exclusive—[shrimp is] what we'll use from now until November [or when the season ends. When live bait is not available, we go back to the plastic lures to catch fish again.]

Scull-DeArmey: What's the typical length of a charter boat adventure? (0:28:41.7)

Falterman: They usually range anywhere from about six to eight hours. We start right before daylight, and then we get off the water maybe one, two o'clock, sometimes three, four o'clock. It just depends on how the fish are cooperating that day. If we caught our limits early, then we're back. But if we're not, and we're kind of struggling and trying to fill the boxes, then we're going to do what we have to do and stay out and work and try to make the clients happy. That's what it's about.

Scull-DeArmey: What do you do about weather?

Falterman: I watch it. I try to predict it myself more than relying on the weather man because I've never seen a weather man fishing, because you can change the channels, and you can get four or five different forecasts and go out there that morning, and it's totally opposite of what they say it's going to be. So if the chances of rain are high, and I know it's high because the pressure's dropping, and I can see the lows and the highs, and the front's moving, then I'll go ahead and reschedule my clients. But when they say, "We got a 30 percent chance of rain," or whatever, I take that as pretty much a hit-and-miss. It's one of those things you kind of got to know that April [is] a windy month, so you're going to have to pick and choose your days and pick where you go. But wind we can avoid. As far as where we fish, we can fish different areas to stay out the wind and stay out of open water and beating ourselves to death, but rain and lightning is a totally different thing, so. Some clients, they don't care if they fish in the rain. It's not that bad, but lightning is a different story, so we'll move some clients around. It's going to really depend on that day, and what I really think is going to happen.

Scull-DeArmey: Tell me about how lightning affects boats on the water. (0:31:25.9)

Falterman: Well, you got all electronics running, and you have all this electrifying stuff, and antennas and I just don't like to mix up. [Lightning kills, so I cut out that percentage of someone getting killed. I'll reschedule. Safety first. Always!]

Scull-DeArmey: Does lightning want to ground to like the antennas that are sticking up?

Falterman: They will hit the boats. I know a couple of captains that have had their boats hit with lightning. And so we try to avoid it all costs.

Scull-DeArmey: What effect does it have when it hits the boat?

Falterman: It just depends. Lightning can strike different ways, different strengths. I've heard of it to where the boat can catch on fire, to where it could just knock you off the steering wheel. It could go from like the center console to the leaning post on

the metal and come across that area. So it just depends on the lightning intensification.

Scull-DeArmey: So if anybody happened to be standing between those points, they'd get cooked.

Falterman: They could. I have weather [radar] on my boat so I'm able to watch the weather [at all times and make choices based on weather and unforeseen weather that could be a danger. I am a believer in keeping my clients and myself safe at all times.].

Scull-DeArmey: Would you lose your electrical equipment? Would it knock it out? You think?

Falterman: Yes.

Scull-DeArmey: So that's a big monetary loss for you.

Falterman: Yeah. It could be. We still rely on handheld units and also the true compass. (0:33:13.6) So even though you can have the latest and greatest stuff, which I have on my boat from my sponsors, I still rely on the true compass that we've learned through captain's school and used for many years when we didn't have all these different things, [that we have now. Sometimes it can be just an electronic failure, so you must know the manual things, that are tried and true, to always use.]

Scull-DeArmey: The kind of compass that was used, really I guess hundreds of years ago—

Falterman: Yep.

Scull-DeArmey: —before electricity.

Falterman: You know, just the old compass, the one that gets you out of the woods, out of the water and stuff like that.

Scull-DeArmey: So if all your equipment went down, that'd be your backup? You could make it back home?

Falterman: Right. That and knowing the area. I mean, that's one of my greatest things is knowing the area that I fish and everything about that area (0:34:12.5) because you can be so far away and have something happen to where you have a failure onboard, and people rely on electronics, but you need to rely on knowledge of the water and the maps and what the land structure looks like. And going back to when my dad used to teach me when we walked through the woods at daylight, and you're looking up at the trees and you'd be able to—you'd come back and you'd be like, "Where we at?" And he's like, "You don't remember passing that crooked tree right there when we come through the woods that morning?" And it's like, "Oh, yeah." So you kind of put things in the back of your brain, and I'm always looking and kind of glancing off and just trying to make sure I know what my surroundings are and everything else. And that way if something happens, I know in my brain where I'm at, and what's going on.

Scull-DeArme y: Do you have some landmarks on the shore that you're familiar with?

Falterman: Oh, yeah, definitely. [There are] landmarks throughout the marsh [I use], and they do change. They change yearly, due to coastal erosion, everything, hurricanes. (0:35:40.8) So keeping yourself informed and up-to-date on the different areas and what's eroded away that could still be underwater that could be a boat hazard is something that you really need to know. So being a charter captain is not just filling the boat up with fuel and throwing some people in there and just going to go catch fish. (0:36:13.4) It has a lot of liabilities. You rely on a lot of knowledge and information [to keep everyone safe and coming back year after year].

(A portion of the interview has not been included in this transcript at the request of the interviewee.)

Scull-DeArme y: How do you find out about hazards that are underwater? (0:37:45.9)

Falterman: There's a list that you can [access]. We got maps that, of areas that would say like obstructions and also buoys and different things that [are] aids of navigation basically called, letting us know what channels and what areas to stay away from, what are pipelines, what are danger areas. There's different signs and signals, and just like at night with fog, there's different foghorns that blow at night with boats to let them know that they're in the area. So there's a lot of stuff that's taught that we have to obtain as a captain and know what these things mean and everything so we can stay away from the hazardous areas or be able to navigate the boats in the proper areas.

Scull-DeArme y: Could you just put into words what your business means to you and your family? (0:38:56.5)

Falterman: I would say my business is basically a way of keeping my family close-knit. I always teach in seminars that, "Take a kid fishing, and you won't be fishing him out of jail." And that's the main thing nowadays is these kids, all they want to do is play these games, and they never want to leave the house. Take your kids hunting and fishing, and you'll know where they are. They're not on the streets and everything. And that's how I was raised. I never ran the streets; I was hunting and fishing. I played my football and baseball, but after the games, I remember years that I packed my stuff up at the end of a football game and drove six hours to a hunting camp with my dad. So those traits, I'm teaching my kids. And my kids, they want to fish and hunt. And my wife, being that she's been around fishing all of her life, that we do it as a family. It's a family thing. So a lot of people say, like, the family that fish together stay together, and stuff like that. Well, we hunt, and we fish, so it's more of a knit thing. It's not just a job. It's me teaching other people, getting to know other people, fishing generations. I've fished three, four generations, and [I keep] making memories [for them]. You can never take away the memories. How many memories do you get of your kid playing a play station nowadays? Or do you take your kids fishing? And they catching fish and you able to take pictures and taking them hunting.

And that's the stuff that sticks. So my thing is just make the memories with your kids and family, and they'll be there forever. You can't take the memories away. You can always take the games away.

Scull-DeArmeY: Do your kids enjoy eating what they catch?

Falterman: Oh, yes, yeah. We don't kill anything we don't eat.

Scull-DeArmeY: Excellent.

Falterman: So that's how I've been raised, and that's how they are raised. If they want to kill ducks, we'll duck hunt. We have the dogs, and we can duck hunt. But if you kill it, you going to eat it.

Scull-DeArmeY: That's fabulous. I interviewed a man who started as a private in the Air Force in World War II. He was a paratrooper, and he grew up in Wiggins, Mississippi, which is about halfway between Hattiesburg—

Falterman: I know exactly where it's at. Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmeY: And he just grew up in the woods. He—

Falterman: Lived off the land.

Scull-DeArmeY: He did; they did.

Falterman: Yep.

Scull-DeArmeY: And his father took him hunting once. This was in the [19]20s, you know, [19]30s. And they would usually separate, go away from each other and hunt, and then they would meet again. And they met after dark, and his father said, "What did you get?" And he shared with his father what he got, and his father said, "OK. Well, that accounts for all but two of the shots I heard. What were those two shots?" And it was after dark now and kind of cold.

Falterman: Right.

Scull-DeArmeY: And General Bell said, "Oh, two ducks but they went in the pond, and I didn't get them." His father said—

Falterman: Let's go check.

Scull-DeArmeY: "Go get those ducks."

Falterman: Yep.

Scull-DeArmeY: "I'll be waiting right here. Don't come back without them." And he did. He went and found those ducks. (laughter)

Falterman: Yep.

Scull-DeArmeY: He had to get wet.

Falterman: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmeY: And cold.

Falterman: Yeah. If you shoot it, you're going to find it. I'm not saying that you don't have a cripple that may get away or something that you made a bad shot on or something like that. But predominantly 90 percent of my freezer or probably about 99 percent of my freezer is wildlife.

Scull-DeArmeY: That's great.

Falterman: It's deer and ducks and fish, and that's what we eat. We live off the land, basically, so.

Scull-DeArmeY: That is just fabulous. How do you get clients? How do you market your business? (0:44:11.3)

Falterman: Word of mouth. Word of mouth is everything. It can make you or break you. And you can either have a good clientele based on being good at what you do or in succeeding and growing your business or basically you can run a business in the ground by people not referring clients back to you. But 90 percent of my business is ran by word of mouth. I have more referrals from clients that get off my boat and say, "I'll be back in this many months." I had a client yesterday, that I fished yesterday, and they said, "We will see you after May first." And you know that's basically what it is. It's just word of mouth is the name of the game. And you can advertise. It's like insurance. You can advertise four, five, six hundred, a thousand, two, three, four thousand dollars a month in advertisement, and it could get you nowhere except for a one-inch-by-two-inch square in a magazine somewhere that you can get lost in. (0:45:36.2) Or you can guarantee fish, clean their fish, bag their fish, have everything included, try to just accommodate their every need from lodging on down to a preference in drinks, and stuff like that, and have that onboard. So that's mostly how I run my business is word of mouth. Everything's word of mouth. We do a lot of charity donations. (0:46:13.0) We do a lot of donating of trips and stuff. But you have to give to get. I've always been told that. And it always comes back to you. There are clients that I charter, and they got this trip off of a donation from a cancer [event]; 90 percent of the time, they're going to come back, or one of the people onboard are going to be referred back. So your business can really grow from word of mouth. And I truly believe this; that's the whole name of the game.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Do your clients come from a wide variety of geographic areas? Where do they come from?

Falterman: I've fished clients from Kentucky that actually found myself on the Web site, so I do do some Web, my Web site. But Virginia, California, China, I've fished a lot of the restaurant chefs in the area, for TV shows, and so we get a lot of clients from out of town that it's truly amazing, I mean, where they come from. And the media can hurt you or help you. And [Hurricane] Katrina, (0:47:58.7) they would say that things were happening, and they weren't. The same thing with BP, everything was full of oil, and the fish, and this and that, and they couldn't justify it. I sat there with many

Wildlife and Fishery agents and been at Baton Rouge, fighting to get waters open that they couldn't put anything together to say that these fish had any kind of oil or anything else in them. So you need a good media. You need good advertisement as far as word of mouth, and from there it's just the game.

Scull-DeArmeY: What does it cost for a charter that you run? (0:48:52.4)

Falterman: Depending on the amount of people, our charters start at [four hundred and fifty dollars]. That's our minimum; that's a one or two-person. And then it's usually a hundred fifty dollars a person after that.

Scull-DeArmeY: Now, you referred to bagging your clients' fish. For the record, could you just tell us how you do that? What's the process? (0:49:25.0)

Falterman: Basically it's just taking the whole fish and filleting them, and just put them in Ziploc bags, and have them to where that when they get home they can do what they want with them, freeze them, whatever, so. And that's just something that I do, [complimentary, for] my clients because what's the worst thing you have to do after fishing all day? Is go home and clean fish. So if I can clean their fish, and they don't have boats to clean, everything else. I fish clients, millionaires [who] got boats, on down to the regular blue-collar people who have boats that they don't want to buy them anymore. It's getting too expensive with fuel and everything else, so I tell them; it's cheaper to take a charter; one, because I guarantee them fish. They have all the drinks onboard. They don't have to wash the boat; don't have to have the insurance; don't have to worry about anything that day except for where they're going to put the amount of fish that they catch in their house, in their freezer. (laughter) So I [would think] that's the greatest feeling is to just be able to walk away from everything, all the dirty boat and leftover ice chests and everything, and just get in the car. That's the relaxation part about it. That's one of the reasons why we've named the company Therapy Charters. And we always say, "Come relax with us," because we try to [accommodate the client] market basically on everything that we can give to the people.

Scull-DeArmeY: OK. Well, we're going to move into how things have changed. In your lifetime of fishing, what comes to mind if I ask you how has fishing changed, how has equipment changed? (0:51:33.2)

Falterman: Equipment, I mean it's amazing to know what we used to fish with years ago, and now, there's so much out there. There are so many lures out there and so many rods and reels, and it can be really overwhelming. But knowing the water clarities and what fish respond to can kind of take all that and kind of break it down into what kind of lure colors you really need. I truly believe that the flavors, as I call it, of lures out on the market today is just for eye appeal.

Scull-DeArmeY: To people? (laughter)

Falterman: To people, it really is. [If] you look at the old sparkle beetles, the old tandem shad rigs, stuff like that they used to use—and I still have those to this day, and you can still catch fish on them. And I always tell everybody, "How many times

can you really invent the shrimp, reinvent it with a mold? And how many times can you do it with a cocahoe, a croaker, [a mullet, a poggy, a bug], a worm or anything [else]?”. So I guess it’s pretty much a market nowadays of who wants to buy what, and the latest and greatest, lightest, and with the best action, and the best casting, the overall value, stuff like that. It’s a big, big market. It’s a billion-dollar market. There’s just so much out there that it’s just overwhelming to know what’s available. And even like I have lure sponsors and rod sponsors and reel sponsors and boat sponsors, and there’s no perfect bay boat. There’s no perfect motor. There’s no perfect lure. There’s no perfect rod. There’s nothing that’s perfect. And I just feel that everything that’s on the shelves nowadays, it’s just for the eye appeal. It’s a buyer’s market; that’s what it is.

Scull-DeArmeY: It’s the want-to-get-some-money-out-of-somebody’s-pocket. So they make a pretty lure, that *people* think are—

Falterman: Yeah. I mean, you see the lure, and you’re like, “Whoa! I don’t have that color in my tackle box.” (laughter) I mean, I’ve seen them make them where they’re real, real soft plastic, and you can catch maybe two fish off of them, and they’re totally ruined. And I’ve seen them made out of such hard plastic that you can catch fifty fish off of them, and they’re still usable, so. But those are the people who they want more money for the lures. But then again, does the end justify the means? It’s going to be up to the person who’s buying the product, so you get what you pay for. I’ve always been a believer in that, not buying anything cheap. But as far as rods and reels, you would almost have to be a scientist to know exactly what goes on, and I’ve actually worked with scientists that made lures, and went out and tested lures (0:55:37.3) for months. And they would come back, and we would go through different things, and I still do it to this day, going out with these [scientists] and testing these lures and testing these baits, and the owners of different lure manufacturers and stuff like that just to see what these baits are going to do, how they hold up, everything else. And that’s how we, as sponsored people, how we give back the knowledge to them. It’s not just a give; it’s a give-and-take for me. They give me the product, and I take it and use it and give them feedback on it and [help them work out problems or express my professional opinion on what works well and what needs to be looked at so the product doesn’t fail or get a bad reputation. A great professional-staffer helps a company. A bad one never gives back information, and I feel that that is not what sponsors need.]

Scull-DeArmeY: You’re part of the change, actually.

Falterman: Yep, yep.

Scull-DeArmeY: Yeah.

Falterman: I’ve seen fifty-dollar rods never break, and I’ve seen five-hundred-dollar rods that I’ve snapped in the first three hours I’ve had them on the boat. So like I said, I mean it’s just, it’s a buyer’s market. It really is.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. How have state and federal regulations changed over your lifetime in fishing? (0:56:56.8)

Falterman: I see a lot more of the offshore industry getting affected more than the inshore side. That really hasn't changed as much. But the snapper seasons, mostly the snapper seasons, [we listen to government officials] say that the snapper [population is low and that these fish need to keep being regulated], but you talk to any given captain [or] go out [offshore fishing], and you can get snapper after snapper after snapper. And it's just amazing how many snapper you have to release. [This is one reason feedback and more people need to get involved to fight for or against regulations].

Scull-DeArmey: You can't keep [the snapper]?

Falterman: You can keep two per person, now. And there's a snapper season. I think this year it's like forty days long, [this year]. So you can only [fish] them for X amount of time [a year]. So I think really and truly, it's a biology thing, and also the fishermen got to come together to kind of get these numbers [looked at] and do more data to overcome these regulations and the size [limits] and everything else that they got going on [with fish and federal regulations]. So I [feel, in my opinion, that] offshore [has taken] the most hits so far.

Scull-DeArmey: Just for the record, [for] people who don't know, what is the difference between offshore and inshore waters in fishing? (0:58:41.4)

Falterman: Inshore is like trout, redfish, flounder. Offshore is like tuna, amberjack, snapper.

Scull-DeArmey: Is there a mileage definition for it of what constitutes offshore water and what constitutes the inshore waters, like a closeness to shore?

Falterman: Well, I mean you can go out, right out of Grand Isle, and Grand Isle has inshore fishing, and then on the other side of the island are the beaches, the Gulf of Mexico [side], which is all offshore water. [There are grid lines, which tell fishermen what are state and federal waters and the rules and regulations about what can be brought across the lines in any given state.]

Scull-DeArmey: So it just depends on a map?

Falterman: Yep. It just depends on the [area] map, really. I mean, it could vary from shoreline to three miles out to whatever. So we've actually caught lemon fish, which are ling; they're also known as. Mostly everybody calls them lemon fish, three miles offshore, which is really not a far distance considering that crossing Lake Pontchartrain is more than three miles. So running out into the Gulf three miles is nothing. But that's offshore, so it's just a different type of fishing, too. [You have] different rods and reels and lures, and it goes all back to the whole industry thing. Everybody has different baits for different things, [such as freshwater inshore as well as offshore lures and equipment used for different applications].

Scull-DeArme y: How have the wetlands changed in your experience of being in the wetlands? (1:00:32.2)

Falterman: It's phenomenal to be able to just look back and be able to know how much has changed. I remember when Eden Isles, a subdivision that [is located in Slidell] was not [completely] developed. And they used to have a little canal that ran along Rat Nest Road, as they used to call it years ago. And it had bass, and we could fish bass and bream, and everything back in Eden Isles. And now we're catching trout and redfish. And there's no little canal between the road and Lake Pontchartrain anymore. That's just eroded [away and is now all part of the lake]. I mean, you look at the Chandeleur Islands, the marsh; it's amazing just to know how much wetlands we've lost. Looking at maps, I mean, year after year, and going to different classes [held by] Wildlife and Fisheries and LSU [Louisiana State University] and NOAA, [Coastal Conservation Association] and working with everybody, I see all that. And [2012] is actually the first year that NOAA has come out with a Category Zero hurricane standard, so [people can truly see the damaging effects of a slow-moving, sustained-wind storm].

Scull-DeArme y: I thought it was One to Five. So now it's Category Zero to Five?

Falterman: There's a Category Zero now.

Scull-DeArme y: What is a Category Zero? (1:02:25.3)

Falterman: It's basically a sustainable wind that people really take for granted that it's less than a Category One, [which] is seventy-[four]-miles-an-hour winds [up to ninety-five-miles-an-hour winds]. But a sustained sixty-[three]-mile-an-hour wind, that's not listed as a Category One, could easily affect you as much as that Category One or what [we call just a tropical storm can be deadly!] So this is the first year, like I said, that I've seen the Category Zero standard come out. And it's amazing—it really is—to see the change in just the amount of marsh and everything we've lost, and how NOAA, [CCA], and everybody is working [to stop erosion by rebuilding wetlands] and adding reefs, [sand and rock barriers, etcetera] to try to save wetlands.

Scull-DeArme y: What are the effects, that you can think of, of erosion (1:03:42.3) on your life, on anything?

Falterman: I see the marsh depleting every day. I mean, [it happens on] a daily basis. It's not a year-to-year thing; it's a day-by-day thing. You can literally know the marsh like the back of your hand this month and have it change, a little bit; I mean not drastically to where you wouldn't know exactly what it was. But after Katrina, (1:04:14.0) I mean we had areas that you'd look back, and you were like mesmerized because you're like, "This used to be much bigger." And that hurricane has just wiped everything away, or you see all the mud erode from underneath the grass, and the grass is actually flipped on top of the grass that was living before, so now all that dead grass is laying on top the living grass. Now that's getting eroded, and that's just getting depleted. So I mean, it's a give-and-take every day. I mean, as much as they try to fix the erosion problem, it happens so much every day that people just don't

understand. I mean, there's football fields a day being lost [daily that people just don't see unless you are truly aware of the situation].

(A short portion of the interview has not been included in this transcript at the request of the interviewee.)

Scull-DeArmey: Have you noticed any changes in species over your lifetime fishing? (1:05:32.7)

Falterman: Not so much. The species, I mean, we've had the same species when I was a kid as now, but the way we fish them in different ways, that stuff's changed, but the species themselves they have not changed.

Scull-DeArmey: How has the way they're fished changed? (1:06:02.1)

Falterman: You just go back to years ago with the old cane poles, and then Zebco thirty-threes. And now you got spinning rods and bait casters, and now they trolling out in the Gulf with kites. They call it kite fishing. And you got outriggers, and it's amazing. It's just amazing what [the] industry [has now], and where it's going.

Scull-DeArmey: Have you noticed a difference in the numbers of fish? (1:06:40.6)

Falterman: Yes. It really depends on the year that you have with the spawning, but as far as like the amount of trout and stuff like that, this year I see a lot more younger trout than I have in the past. (A short portion of the interview has not been included in this transcript at the request of the interviewee.) But the trout, I don't know if that's the effects of the loss of maybe a hatchery, a hatch of fish that was lost from BP (1:07:29.6) or just the whole scenario that went on. But I mean, really nobody knows. It's pretty much a guessing game [in my opinion].

Scull-DeArmey: OK. How did Hurricane Katrina affect you and your family? (1:07:56.8)

Falterman: It put me closer to the water. Actually I lived in Covington before I lived here in Slidell. This house, actually I had twenty-eight inches of water in it for Katrina.

Scull-DeArmey: You weren't living here during it?

Falterman: I was not living here. I was living in Covington, which I had no water. I had damage to a roof and [other things], but we, as a family, wanting to get closer to my wife's work as well as me being closer on the water, we decided to make this move. But Katrina kind of brought both businesses—my fishing business, I really wasn't in full swing then, which was, I guess, a good thing. The electrical business was phenomenal, and I guess that's what was able to kind of put me in the financial state that [enabled me] to make my switch when I did and pretty much rely on what I wanted to do for a living and have fun at doing what I do.

Scull-DeArmey: Everything lined up for you.

Falterman: It did.

Sculp-DeArmev: Well, good. What were your thoughts when you learned about the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill? (1:09:38.3)

Falterman: About the BP [Deepwater] Horizon oil spill, my thoughts about it were, I mean, there's a lot of—there's still to this day things that people don't understand or don't know exactly what happened, and why things happened. Were there ways to prevent it? There probably were. But I mean, we live and learn, and I think a lot of people look at it as a downfall. We found a lot of the charter captains were actually working for BP full-time. Myself, I did not work for BP full-time until August. (1:10:35.3) August I was working for BP. I didn't go to work for BP till August, and I only worked for them for a month. But I've seen people to this day still working for them, and they're making a lot of money. I think there's a lot of wasteful money out there. I think things are done wrong, but it's politics and big-business-owner games and stuff that it's just—I don't even want to get into it. It's one of those crazy things. It hurt [the local commercial people like fishermen, crabbers, oyster farmers, shrimpers, etcetera] because of the fact that they were telling everybody that the [seafood, altogether] was filled with oil, but then you could look back at the media situation. (1:11:41.9) The media sat there and said and was telling the whole US that Louisiana seafood was good to eat, but they were also telling us at Wildlife and Fisheries (1:11:53.9) that we were on a catch-and-release program where you could catch a fish and release him, but we couldn't keep him. And I was like, "Well, that's kind of like being two-faced because of the fact that you're telling the whole United States [the seafood is] safe to eat, but then you're telling me I got to tell my clients that, "Well, we don't know if it's really that safe to eat yet, so we have to release them." So it goes back to the whole [media] game thing, and like I said, I mean, the media can help you or hurt you, and the media was [doing both]. And a sense of what the opening of the spillway (1:12:47.2) with the muddy water that came through, I mean we fished that every day, and the media was like tearing us apart to where I actually [fished] businesses that own magazines and did web videos with editors and stuff that showed that, "Hey, we're still catching fish down here. Don't believe everything you see. If you want to see what's going on and hear what's going on, talk to someone in the industry. Don't rely on this guy or that person to say that this is good or bad." And that's the same thing with BP. So I mean, it's a media game.

Sculp-DeArmev: Do you remember about how long Wildlife and Fisheries told you you'd have to catch and release?

Falterman: Well, they actually tried to shut our lakes down, Lake Pontchartrain down. They shut us down for I think approximately a week. (1:14:01.1) They looked at doing it longer, but we went to Wildlife and Fisheries. We talked with them, and they had no justification and no [proof] that the fish that we were catching—we were giving fish to Wildlife and Fisheries for them to test, and all their testing were coming back negative. So why close our lake, and why tell the people that they can only play the catch-and-release game when you're telling the whole world that [the seafood is] safe to eat and that you have data that's backing it up, stating that you cannot find oil

in any of these fish? Why do you want to close my waters? Because that affected my whole business.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you have any clients who would pay to go and catch and release?

Falterman: No. No. [I would say about] 99 percent of my clients, they come to catch, and they want to bring home food. They're not going to come and spend a thousand dollars or whatever it's going to cost to lodge and fish and everything else. I mean, you could spend almost two thousand dollars a day, doing a charter, with lodging and food and the boat charter itself and tips and everything else. People want the [fish] that they're here for. Louisiana's known for its seafood, and I think that they need to stand behind it. I mean, if it's good, it's good. If it's bad, it's bad. And that's just the way I felt, and I was real strong on that. It was like, "Show me the evidence, and I'd back off of you, but until you show me hard-proof evidence that state that we have oil in these fish, then I'm fishing them. So I'll die." I mean, that's what I eat, and I'm not dead yet. (laughter)

Scull-DeArme y: Did you ever see any oil? (1:16:24.6)

Falterman: I've seen oil when I worked for BP. There was a lot of dispersant being flown at night. A lot of people probably don't know how much was dispersed out there because of the fact that being so close to the water we can hear the planes. And we knew what they were doing. And we have people on the water who actually could visualize and see the stuff being sprayed. So there's a lot of unknown facts that people to this day are not aware of.

Scull-DeArme y: Do you have concerns about the dispersant?

Falterman: Sooner or later it's going to, this oil's going to pop up. It's got to. I mean, there's no way around it. It's going to sink down; it's going to keep it down for so long, and then as we saw after the last storm we had that kicked up some oil on the Mississippi shoreline and stuff like that, that was actually, wasn't there before. All of sudden, *bam*, it's showing up. Well, that's the dispersant holding it down, and there's a big difference in the reason why you finding more oil on the beaches and not in the marsh because of the fact that the beach is more flat, and it tapers down, whereas marsh, it's eroded so it may have a three-foot drop right off the edge of that marsh line. (1:18:29.0) So the dispersant would have to be pushed up and into the marsh, whereas on a beach, it's able to gradually just be pushed up. And that's what happened like in Grand Isle and all of the Mississippi area. So that's why I believe that there's still oil down there, and I think another storm's going to come and show more of it. I really do.

Scull-DeArme y: If oil's on the bottom—crabs are bottom dwellers—would you have concerns about eating crabs?

Falterman: All the scientists and all the research say that crabs are safe to eat, so it goes back to data and research. They say they are fine; then let's stick behind it until they say otherwise. That's more of a biologist's kind of thing. You could talk to one

person, and they'll tell you that, "Oh, these oysters or these crabs are not good to eat." And then you'll find other people that, like Drago's [Restaurant] that sells them day after day, thousands and thousands of oysters. How many people get sick off of BP oysters after BP? So I really think, it's all in the biologists' hands as far as doing the research and knowing everything about this that we rely on. So until there's hard evidence shown, it goes back to the fish. Show me the hard evidence, and then I'll stop eating it, but until then, [I'm fishing]. (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Did you participate in the Vessels of Opportunity program?
(1:20:34.2)

Falterman: Yes, I did.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Tell me about that.

Falterman: VOO, as it was called, we had two stations, locally, right out of this area. I only worked for them for a month. We did more checkups because we didn't have the oil here. We would check for oil and just checked areas and booms and make sure booms were in place. But I was working with safety. I was on a safety boat, so I didn't fool with none of the oil or none of the marsh grass that had oil in it or absorbents or anything. I just made sure that people were in life vests, and [I performed safety checks on vessels for safety gear and helped people stay safe while working for the VOO program].

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Why did you only work for a month?

Falterman: Because I was too busy fishing the rest of the time. (laughter) And also they were trying to—there are so many commercial fishermen that they were actually trying to cycle people out, and other people went to work for different, in different areas all the way down to Dauphin Island and stuff like that, and [there are people] still working down there. But as far as here, VOO has pretty much stopped here. It's over with, and it's another day.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. How did you find out about VOO?

Falterman: I was actually called to participate in the program and actually went and trained in Chalmette. Because I fish the Biloxi Marsh area, I wanted to have the opportunity to help with the Biloxi Marsh area to find out that I was not going to be allowed to participate down there because I was not a resident of that area. So I had to wait for the time for it to come around up in this area; then I went to work for them.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Do you think it was implemented fairly, the BP hiring?

Falterman: I'm going to leave that one unanswered.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. No problem at all. Were you affected that summer, your income? How did you make it through the summer of the BP oil spill, financially?
(1:23:36.8)

Falterman: We relied on money that we had saved, and we ran charters as much as we could. And then when I went to work with VOO, we made some money there. But it goes back to the whole media thing, that if the media does not tell the world that fishing's good down here, then it would just destroy us. And it was one of those things that you had to prove, and that's why I had media people onboard my boat and we would go catch fish, and I was showing people that, "We have safe fish. They have no evidence and stuff." So that's how I financially kept us and the business floating.

Scull-DeArmey: Is your business back now to its pre-oil-spill strength? (1:24:48.5)

Falterman: I think we lost some potential clients. I wouldn't say it's back. [We] have so much growth every year [that it's hard to say]. What percentage of growth did I lose because of BP? I probably will never know. I have clients that I don't fish anymore because they moved out of the area; they relocated; didn't want to fool with down here and moved up north or whatever. So I've lost some clients. I've gained some clients over the years. The word-of-mouth thing, like I said, I'm a true believer of that, and I think that's what's keeping my books filled. But to say and give a percentage of how much, I couldn't put a number on it. I really couldn't. I could put a number of how many cancellations I had the first year of BP, but from that point on I won't know.

(A portion of the interview has not been included in this transcript at the request of the interviewee).

Scull-DeArmey: How long do you think you can stay in the industry?

Falterman: I'm going to be here till I die.

Scull-DeArmey: You see a good future then. (1:29:27.7)

Falterman: I do. Like I said it all goes back to the word-of-mouth thing, and we have great clients, and we try to give a great service to them at a fair price, and I just think, you keep doing that, business will be around here for as long as I need it to be.

Scull-DeArmey: What do the waters look like? You've been looking at these waters for quite a number of years now. (1:29:53.4)

Falterman: I can tell you, yesterday the water was like beach water. It was gorgeous, [and] you could see six foot down in Lake Pontchartrain. And then I'll go and get into Lake Borgne, and it's chocolaty brown, river water and everything else. So areas fluctuate so much that it's hard to really put a clarity or something like that on a specific area because it can change from day to day. But yesterday was phenomenal as far as the amount of fish we caught. The water clarity, it was like crystal green, greenish like offshore water. But today it could be chocolate-milk-looking, so it varies day from day, [depending on the wind and the river stage level. A west wind dirties Lake Pontchartrain up very quickly!].

Scull-DeArme y: Does the chocolaty brown water, river water make for worse fishing?

Falterman: People have stuck in their brain, just like when they opened up the spillway (1:31:15.1) that it affects the fishing and everything else. In fact, it does affect it to a certain point, but saltwater is dense, so it's actually that river water stays up on the very top. So you can actually—once you get past a certain point—and that point could range from a foot to nine foot or ten foot or whatever it is of river water—you have such a salinity level that you can actually still fish. And we did fish. We fished almost every day that the river was open. And that's when I was begging media people to come and come out on the boat and check it out because it affected—these things were happening and the media was—I mean people in Baton Rouge thought we were just gone; we were wiped out, and you would never see another fish in Lake Pontchartrain. And we [are] catching bigger trout now than I've seen in a long time, this early, because we never had a cold winter, either. So it goes back to that whole water temperature and the records [that] I've kept over the years. So I see these fish; I don't think they're affected. I think sometimes a flushing, as I call it, can hurt or help it.

Scull-DeArme y: Where does the Gulf Coast seafood industry stand now in your view? (1:32:54.2)

Falterman: I think the oil has really affected more of the commercial offshore, the oyster, and the crabbers, and the shrimpers, really, too, but the scientific facts are coming back that they don't have the evidence to back that they have any kind of oil in them. (1:33:34.0) You have to have a strong media to be able to get past this. And I still believe to this day that we still have great shrimp. Our seafood's still safe, and I don't see it really being affected. I see, like I said, [the] fish are here.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. What do you see for the future? (1:34:03.3)

Falterman: It all just depends on what this year brings. It's scary to sit back and watch; like last year they predicted like thirty-one named storms and eleven majors and whatever it was, whatever numbers were. And then this year we had, we're in the eighty-degree weather. The water temperature is almost in the nineties already, and then they only predicting four storms and two majors. I kind of worry about this year with hurricanes, and if this year we don't have a really strong hurricane like Katrina, I would say that I don't think that we're going to be affected. As long as we don't have any more Katrina incidents, I think the industry will still grow. I don't think fishing and hunting are going to go away, by any means, no matter if we have a storm or not. It's just the delay and the financials and the businesses and everything else that are going to be hurting. So I think that's what it boils down to, is what the [2012] weather [forecast brings and the severity of, or what we are dealt].

Scull-DeArme y: If there were a lot of new drilling for oil in the Gulf of Mexico, and let's say we had ten BP accidents, would it change your opinion about drilling for oil in the Gulf, or about regulating the drilling for oil, making it safer, less likely to have a spill?

Falterman: Well, it's just like anything else; everybody wanting to do stuff, and they coming out with the latest and greatest things [to prevent future spills, but] some things go wrong, and you may have failures. I don't think that drilling offshore and having more rigs is a good thing or a bad thing. If it gets to where we're jeopardized because of negligence on the parts of businesses, (1:36:52.8) then they need to held accountable, and they need to do what's right and go back to the safety issues and everything else. But I've been saying for years; we have the best offshore fishing in the world right here in Louisiana. But Florida doesn't even want to look at oil rigs, but they want oil, and they want fuel, and they don't pay much more than we pay down here for oil and gas over there. And I just feel if we're producing it here, and we have to send it down there, then, "If we've got to look at it, y'all got to look at." And truly I think that it's politics. I think they want to see these all beautiful beaches and everything else, but they don't look at the part of the recreational fishing that can be out in Florida. It's not the peacock bass and the little fish here and there; it could be substantial on what they could be doing. I think there's an industry that it's just not marketed down there, and I just think if they had drilling of rigs over that way, then I think people would look at in a different perspective. After they were bitter about it for a while, they would see that their market changes. [Fishing] is a billion-dollar industry. Why would a person want to go down to Florida to fish offshore if they can fish the greatest waters right here?

Scull-DeArmeY: The Gulf of Mexico is a very rich—

Falterman: Oh, yeah.

Scull-DeArmeY: —nursery for all kinds of sea life.

Falterman: And like I said, I think Florida has not come to the conclusion that they just can't get away from them little, pretty beaches to be able to see the beautiful oil rig (1:39:25.6) that may be sitting out there that four or five boats are tied up to it, that are bringing them billions of dollars and money down there that can affect their whole industry; I mean their whole community, their whole ways of living.

Scull-DeArmeY: Is that because the fish like to live around the oil rigs?

Falterman: Yeah. [Fish love] structure. Fish are known to hang around structure. And that's why I always say: we fish points, pockets, rigs, wellheads, bridges, and everything we have here. But Florida has nothing to fish [except reefs]. So it's just totally different [fishing than Louisiana], whereas if they looked at it in a different perspective, then I think that industry's untapped. It's just an untapped industry.

Scull-DeArmeY: You've got a million-dollar idea. I mean, it wouldn't even have to be an oil rig. All throughout the Gulf of Mexico, people could be building structures that have—

Falterman: Reefs, artificial reefs.

Scull-DeArmeY: —playgrounds on them (laughter) for kids to be—

Falterman: Artificial reefs, I mean—

Scull-DeArmey: —swimming. Yeah. They don't have to be oil rigs. They could be destinations for tourists and great fishing, and there's something going on on top of the structure that's fun, like swimming pools and—

Falterman: That's right, just don't fall off of it because (laughter)—

Scull-DeArmey: Or rock climbing. Yeah. (laughter)

Falterman: You may have some sharks down there but—

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Falterman: But, no. I meant, structure, everything's going to hold fish, and I mean, that's why we have the best fishing here. And you go to Costa Rica. We went to Costa Rica last year, and we're in the Pacific, and we're just out in open water, just like, "Really?"

Scull-DeArmey: No fish?

Falterman: We could go around the platform a couple of times and be on fish in no time. But it's just totally opposite. But they've got their own little, little reefs and different things over that way. And so I'm not for or against any more drilling of oil. I think we need to rely on our US for our own oil and not other countries. And I'm a true believer that we have so much oil out there and knowing offshore people who work offshore and know what the pipelines are about and gridding, what I've done in years past of the lakes and looking at pipelines and pipes that are there and knowing this, I mean it's just so much knowledge. And we rely on our oil from other countries because of the fact that we're scared that we're going to run out of oil, but I don't think that's true. I think the oil we have, we have enough oil here. We do, for many years, lifetimes.

Scull-DeArmey: Um-hm. Three more questions we've been asking everybody. What's your favorite seafood?

Falterman: Fried or grilled? (laughter)

Scull-DeArmey: Whatever.

Falterman: I love crawfish, but I do like fried speckled trout. And I do like raw tuna and [my oysters raw, charbroiled, or fried. I love seafood in general, no one specific way].

Scull-DeArmey: OK. Let's just take fried speckled trout. Well, actually, nobody's talked about crawfish before. So for the record, how would you prepare the greatest crawfish in the world?

Falterman: I have one of the greatest sponsors in the world for crawfish boil mix. Louisiana Fish Fry is one of my big sponsors. And so being raised, I, as kids, ran

crawfish nets using the melt and the hand nets and picking them up out of the spillway for many years and catching our own crawfish, and that's how we did it. We caught them; we ate them, and that was it. And we going back to those days now because crawfish are so expensive that we catch them ourselves now.

Scull-DeArme y: Did you say milk?

Falterman: Melt, M-E-L-T.

Scull-DeArme y: OK. For the record for people who, you know—

Falterman: It's [the pancreas of a cow, or the spleen, as some people say].

Scull-DeArme y: Just how do you use a crawfish net? Just paint a picture for us. (1:45:04.6)

Falterman: There's different types of crawfish nets. There's crawfish nets that are made for deep water, which are kind of like a crab net, square [or round, with] holes on the sides. And then that cylinder, they'll fill up with like dead pogies and stuff like melt, and the crawfish come in, and they'll eat on that. And then there's round nets that have [wire that form a triangle at the] top, and you take a piece of one of those fluorescent marker lines [and attach them to the top for spotting your net locations]. And they make them also in square, and they actually come up to a pyramid, and then in the bottom, in the middle, there's a little hook where you would—melt is sold in the store, and it's [very] bloody, meaty kind of texture. But you hook it on this little clip, and it sits in the middle, and every so often you run your crawfish lines, and you pick them up, and you dump them out. And the same way you would for your deepwater nets, you're not in knee-deep water walking around with snakes and everything else. You're in a pirogue and picking them up and then dumping them out like you would like crabs. There's different ways of catching them, and we use both.

Scull-DeArme y: For the record can you tell us what a pirogue is.

Falterman: Pirogues been made years and years ago. They used to make them out of wood. Basically, a flat-bottom boat They were just a little boat that floated in real shallow water. Now they're made out of fiberglass, and they still kept their flat bottom because they real shallow-drafting. They're a little bit on the unstable side just because they're small. They're not wide at all. I think some of them are [around] thirty-six inches at the most, but most of them are maybe twenty-eight to thirty inches wide. [They are made in different lengths], ten, eight, to twelve foot long. I'd say about eight foot long, eight to twelve foot long is normal. Now you have kayaks, which is the latest version of a pirogue, but you can kind of get around and stand up, and they're making them with like a tunnel bottom so they draft less water. They got a canoe front, so it's got that V in the front, but it also has the buoyancy of like a pontoon boat, so that's the latest and greatest thing, but that's marketing for you. Everybody still, who owns kayaks, they still know what pirogues are. They still use them [from] day to day for crawfishing. But I still rather my Native kayak.

Scull-DeArme y: Some things you just don't need to change too much.

Falterman: That's right. It goes back to just the lures. You only need a certain amount.

Scull-DeArmey: OK. So for a person who's from the Arctic, and they've never cooked crawfish, just take us through. How do you cook your favorite batch of crawfish?

Falterman: Basically, first of all you got to go catch them. I mean that's the first thing, and it's the most thrilling part. That's is the part to get your family involved in, gets the kids [away from the games and enjoying the outdoors!] Then you put them in the washtubs or some kind of holding tank or whatever. Fill it up with water and put salt to kind of clean the crawfish out.

Scull-DeArmey: Does that make them regurgitate?

Falterman: Yeah. And then by doing that, you're also rinsing off the mud. Then you take those; just wash them off in a hamper. And then you take them; boil your water (1:50:28.9) and add your seasonings and stuff like that. Get that hot. Dump your crawfish in. Bring it up to a boil. Boil for X amount of time, whatever, how much you boiling. Then you turn it off. Let it sit for X amount of time. Everybody's got their own little thing. And that's it. Just go ahead and eat as a family.

Scull-DeArmey: Have you ever like covered the table with newspaper?

Falterman: Oh, yeah. We've done that. We've actually had a trailer back here that we've cooked a thousand pounds in one sitting. My dad owns a welding business, and he makes the big trailers, the big boiling pots. And we've had fifty, sixty family members [and friends] over and do five, six, seven hundred, a thousand pounds of crawfish.

Scull-DeArmey: Wow.

Falterman: We don't catch that many [in nets], but that's [when] we [would] buy [them]. But just your little crawfish boils, after Easter, around Easter you really—I like to catch them more than buying them. I really do.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you ever put any vegetables in the boil with the crawfish?

Falterman: We do. Actually, a lot of people have just been stuck on the onions and the potatoes and sausage or hot dogs, [the “traditional boil.”]

Scull-DeArmey: Corn?

Falterman: And corn. We've been adding asparagus and mushrooms and oranges. Brussels sprouts do really well. We do a lot of deer sausage, stuff like that, so it's just, it's a preference thing. But there's always goodies in crawfish boils.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, that's amazing. I never would've thought of those things, oranges especially.

Falterman: We have celery. Yeah, the oranges.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah. Wow.

Falterman: Everybody cuts up lemons for the citrus. Now they're doing oranges?

Scull-DeArmey: Limes, I guess you could try.

Falterman: We do about anything nowadays.

Scull-DeArmey: Yeah.

Falterman: I'm sure if it's edible for one person in Louisiana, somebody else is going to try something new. So that's the good thing about [a crawfish boil]. Everybody boils different. Everybody seasons different, so some like them spicy-spicy. Some like them mild. Some don't like this in it. Some like that in it. So it's a tradition that it gets passed on from year to year and lifetime to lifetime, and with everything changing, we find that we add more things. And our grandparents or our parents, they kind of look at you kind of strange, like, "Why are you adding to this stuff?" (laughter) "Why you adding that." "You got to try this." And it's like, "Yeah, right." (laughter) It's like one of those things like, "God, this stinks. Here, smell this and see. Does this stink to you?" You're going to smell it just to make sure it stinks. So you're definitely going to have to try it. It's just one of those things.

Scull-DeArmey: Well, the last question we always ask is: is there anything that I have not asked you that you'd like to put on the record?

Falterman: Hm. Just pretty much I'd like to put my wife and kids' names down.

Scull-DeArmey: OK.

Falterman: For historic reasons.

Scull-DeArmey: Do you want to mention that now or put it in the biography?

Falterman: Yeah. I'll put it in the biography.

Scull-DeArmey: All right.

Falterman: That's fine.

Scull-DeArmey: Just be sure to send this back to us—

Falterman: That's fine.

Scull-DeArmey: —with their names spelled, and we'll do that.

Falterman: Good deal.

Scull-DeArmey: Thank you so much.

Falterman: Thank you.

Scull-DeArmy: I'm going to turn the recorder off.

(end of interview)