

John Crane:

Okay, so I'm going to start out. So today is August the 10th, 2025, and it's Sunday afternoon. And I'm John Crane with the Old Mandeville Historic Association. And this afternoon, we are going to do an oral history with Tommy Parks. And so, Tommy, one of the things I want to start out by telling you is that do you agree to let us to use this?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, sure.

John Crane:

We don't know what we're going to do it for or anything like that.

Tommy Parks:

Yes.

John Crane:

But just so we have your permission. But hopefully, the main purpose of it will be to capture some of the ideas about Mandeville, and particularly you. So start out by giving me your full name.

Tommy Parks:

Oh, it's Thomas Carlton Parks.

John Crane:

Okay. And Tommy, how long have you lived here in Mandeville?

Tommy Parks:

Well, I was just born in Covington in 1963, and my parents moved here in 1957.

John Crane:

Okay. And where did your parents come from?

Tommy Parks:

They came from Houston, Texas.

John Crane:

Okay. And what brought them to this area?

Tommy Parks:

My dad was a Wildcat oil driller. He had his own drilling rig, and his brothers would go around doing oil leases and drilling for wells. And he came to Lacombe, Louisiana. And he drilled a well, and he would get fuel. He would need fuel for the drilling rig. And Mr. George Stokes had a bulk company here in town, and he bought him fuel. And he told him about a job that they were looking for someone to drive the crew boat in Lake Pontchartrain to the Shell Dredges.

And I think his name was Pops Bickham. He had had a heart attack and he would bring the crews out at six in the morning then six in the evening. So my dad decided to stop doing the drilling rig company, and he went back to Galveston, Texas. And his dad had an old yacht. In World War II, he was in the Coast Guard and would do the submarine patrols. So he took this old yacht and he brought it all the way back to Mandeville. And he started working for Louisiana Materials.

John Crane:

What was that yacht called? Do you know the name of it?

Tommy Parks:

I don't know. But his first crew boat, I think he went down to Buras. All the boats were wooden, and I'm sure in that era there were twin-screw boats. They wanted fast boats. So he purchased a single-screw with a 6-71 Detroit. And it was called the Kenneth J. And it was probably 40-foot long, a wooden boat. And it came from Buras. And he started running that into the lake, bringing the crews in and out.

John Crane:

But he started with a yacht?

Tommy Parks:

They started with a yacht. Now, I don't know how long he used the yacht, but it was just a temporary thing. And then he went and purchased his own crew boat.

John Crane:

So when your dad came over to drill, was he drilling for oil or water or what was he?

Tommy Parks:

No, it was oil, but I think it was gas. In Lacombe they had a gas field. And I don't know how far the rig could drill down, but it wasn't 2,500 feet or whatever. I don't know who he was working for, but I looked in St. Tammany, and they have a record of all the permits to drill. And the only one I found that might've been applied to him was off of Anchorage Road.

John Crane:

Okay.

Tommy Parks:

So I'm not sure if that's-

John Crane:

But they actually had an active gas field here that they were drilling-

Tommy Parks:

Oh, yeah. The big Lake field was right off of green... Not Goose Point. There's another point-

John Crane:
Green Point.

Tommy Parks:
No, it's not green, it's off of Lacombe. When you come out of Bayou Lacombe, there's another point right to the left, but it's between Goose Point and Slidell. And just two miles offshore, Southern Natural Gas had a gas field there, and they were probably from the '30s they drilled the wells.

John Crane:
Oh, wow.

Tommy Parks:
It was natural gas and condensate. So it was a lot of liquid and you didn't have to refine it much. That field was there probably till the '70s. And then Mosbacher Oil came from Houston and drilled two more wells in the old field, and they produced for probably 25 or 30 years. And they're all gone. Gone, gone.

John Crane:
So did they pull up all the old stuff?

Tommy Parks:
Yeah, everything's pulled up and-

John Crane:
There's nothing?

Tommy Parks:
Yeah. They took the pipelines up. And the pipeline, they ran a pipeline all the way up to the Wildlife Refuge. And on the right of way, they had a tank battery, so the trucks would come there and pick up the distillate.

John Crane:
Okay.

Tommy Parks:
Maybe it's called distillate and not condensate. But distillate I think.

John Crane:
Yeah,

Tommy Parks:
That's where they would pick it up. And then they were hooked up to the gas pipeline.

John Crane:

So tell me about, do you have any stories of your family, how they got to Texas or where they came from before that?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. I mean, I can go way back on my mother's side is they're Blackwells. And you want me to go there?

John Crane:

Sure. Yeah, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. Well, they settled right below Chattanooga. Along the... Is it Chad? Chickamauga Creek?

John Crane:

Chickamauga.

Tommy Parks:

Chickamauga Creek. And when the Indians, when they pushed the Indians out, they came in behind the Indians, but they still had Indians there. But they lived there till the Civil War. Well, I guess I don't know what year it was. I guess it's 1864. But their ranch or their farm was the first one that Sherman burnt down.

And my, I guess great-great-great-great grandfather, he was in the Confederate Calvary. And so he was injured. And what he did, he trained the horses. And somehow they left there after the farm was burned. And on the other side of the river is another Blackwell family. And they're still there today. And because their cemetery is still, it's a subdivision now, and there's a golf course there. But right in the middle of the golf course is the cemetery where they're buried at.

But they went to the Suwannee River. And then maybe in the late 1800s, they went to Walnut Springs in Texas, and they were cotton farmers. And then I guess at the end, the kids would get older and everybody moved to Houston and got regular jobs instead of farming and stuff. And on my father's side, they were from Illinois and they worked on the Illinois Central, and they would go to Galveston. So that's where that he came to Texas via the railroad.

John Crane:

Working on... What part of Illinois were they from? Do you-

Tommy Parks:

From Crab Orchard. There's one town there. That's where all the Parks are from. There are Parks is everywhere. There's Crab Orchard, Illinois.

John Crane:

Was it Southern Illinois somewhere?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I think it's Southern Illinois. It's off the interstate near Marion and stuff.

John Crane:

So your dad came here. How old was he when he came to-

Tommy Parks:

He was born in 1927.

John Crane:

Was he in the military during the Second World War?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. At the end of World War II, he was in Pearl Harbor. And I guess that's where he learned how to deploy boats-

John Crane:

He was in the Navy?

Tommy Parks:

... and take care of boats. He was in the Navy. He used to drive the Admiral's Barge, that's what they called it. But it was just a boat that would bring the Admirals out to the ships and stuff. He had a younger brother. This is what it really changed his life. But in Galveston, they had shrimp boats and they shrimped. And his younger brother had a boat and he had a boat. And they would go out into the gulf and shrimp. And my dad came back in to Sabine Pass because his winch had broken, and he went back to find his brother and he never did find him again. He was lost at sea.

John Crane:

Really?

Tommy Parks:

And nobody ever found him.

John Crane:

So his boat sank or something?

Tommy Parks:

Well, they don't know. He didn't know if a deckhand did something and sailed off, but they searched and searched and-

John Crane:

Could never-

Tommy Parks:

... they never did find anything.

John Crane:

How many brothers and sisters did your dad have?

Tommy Parks:

He had one sister, and she was a mathematician at Rice University.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

And then one brother that he eventually moved here and he worked for, I guess, the Bureau of Mines that would do the inspections on the... And their background was with the drill and oil field-

John Crane:

Work.

Tommy Parks:

... work, stuff like that.

John Crane:

Was your mom's family's background the same type of background? Is that how they met and everything like that?

Tommy Parks:

No, I guess no. My grandfather, or my mom's dad was a carpenter. And he worked for a big company in Texas, develop and subdivisions or whatever they called them back then.

John Crane:

Was he a World War II veteran as well?

Tommy Parks:

He was a World War I. He didn't actually serve... He didn't get deployed, but we went to the camps. I have all the letters. He's got a lot of letters that he wrote back to my grandmother, which is pretty neat. And so he never did deploy, but he talked about drilling four hours a day. And then they didn't have anything to do, and they would play baseball. And they would move around to camp, to camp, to camp. And then I guess he got relieved and he came to Houston and married my grandmother.

John Crane:

So he knew your grandmother before? He-

Tommy Parks:

I don't know where they met at, but it must have been in where they lived at in Walnut Springs because her last name was Owens, but he was writing the letters to her, and they still lived in Walnut Springs at that time. So I guess they moved to Houston maybe after they were married. They were born in 1898.

John Crane:

Okay. And her parents were your mom's parents?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, my mom's parents. Yeah.

John Crane:

Have y'all preserved or saved any of those letters or anything?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I have a whole box. Yeah. It's interesting because you get to know what kind of people, they were hard workers. And they talk about their animals, the farm animals, and they talk about the dogs they owned. And it was his sister wrote the stories down. And then we have some letters from his brother that he talked about that he got a job on a drilling rig. And this is in the 1918s, that era. And I don't know how much he made today, but he said, "It sure beats picking cotton," in the book. But then they talk about the weather because there's not a lot. When you write a letter, they don't talk about the Saints or whatever, but it is pretty neat to see-

John Crane:

What they were doing.

Tommy Parks:

... what they were doing and stuff.

John Crane:

So your dad and mom moved here in 1957.

Tommy Parks:

Mm-hmm.

John Crane:

And how many brothers and sister did you have?

Tommy Parks:

My older brother and sister were born in Houston, and then my dad moved the family here. And they lived in the Ozone Motel for a while.

John Crane:

In Covington?

Tommy Parks:

No, no, in Mandeville. Right on Marigny Street. Yeah.

John Crane:

Oh, really? Marigny and Florida?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, Marigny and Florida.

John Crane:

The Ozone Motel.

Tommy Parks:

It's a little court villa like from the 1940s.

John Crane:

Oh, where they had little separate buildings?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Well, that's one. It was all connected in the back. They were separated and stuff.

John Crane:

When did that get torn down? Do you know?

Tommy Parks:

The bank moved there... The last owner was a Mr. Navarre. Mr. Navarre sold it to his son, Michael. And then at the end, the bank approached him and they bought it out.

John Crane:

But that whole property was the Ozone Motel?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, the Ozone Motel. Yeah. But we used to go, I remember going there and we would go there and eat breakfast there. They would cook. I don't remember where it was because I remember when I was older, and I don't know where they would cook at, but I do remember that.

John Crane:

But you were actually born in Covington?

Tommy Parks:

Well, at St. Tammany Hospital.

John Crane:

But your parents were living in Covington?

Tommy Parks:

I have a twin brother, Mike.

John Crane:

Okay.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Is he still living here too?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, he lives in New Orleans, but we grew up on Lamarque Street. My dad moved in the second house off of the lakefront. That's where they rented a house. And well, I guess when we came along, they needed a bigger house, so they moved right next door. And my dad's best friend, Mr. Deano, Eddie Deano, was the real estate man. And he lined up to find him a house or whatever. And it was a little concrete... a house in Pensacola with a tall roof with the rocks on top, cinder block house.

John Crane:

That's where that new house is?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Right next door to our house.

John Crane:

Right next door to your house?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

But you-

Tommy Parks:

After Katrina a tree fell on it and Mr. Gibson moved out and they tore it down and sold it.

John Crane:

Okay. But you were actually living in the one that's raised that the Deanos owned, which is the second house in was the original house in?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. I didn't live there, though my mom and dad and the two... Billy and Lori lived there. Then when we were born we lived next door. And now we live... We used to rent from Hacker Marone... Well, Miss Marone. Hacker was her son, and they owned a property that where I live now. And my dad purchased that from Miss Marone.

John Crane:

Okay. Did they have a house on that property as well?

Tommy Parks:

Yes. The old house was there. It was probably built in the 1920s. And it had a side porch that was in the middle of the house. It was like a shotgun house with the side porch, like little houses in Mandeville today.

John Crane:

right, right

Tommy Parks:

But they added onto it a whole nother side of the house.

John Crane:

So it was one of those side-

Tommy Parks:

Like a hallway was the porch.

John Crane:

Right, right.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And the kids would come to our house and spend the night. And they would go back to school and they would say, "It was like camping out at Mike and Tommy's house." We just had window units. It was cold and it was hot. But it was a good house to grow up in.

John Crane:

So what do you remember from the early days of growing up in Mandeville?

Tommy Parks:

Well, I remember the shell dredge people would park their cars at the parking lot, down at the harbor. And so some people would steal the gas out of it or take things off. So some of the... Like a welding truck that my dad would let them bring it to his house, and we would park it there. And I remember my brother, Mike, went out there and we cranked up the welding truck. We were probably four or five years old, and we started this thing up and we took off running. And it was just the welding machine on the back of the truck. But-

John Crane:

Somehow you got it going?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. My brother, Mike and I, we'd sneak out the gate and the crabbers would bring us home. They'd be out on the lakefront doing the crab boxes, and then they would see us. And it was a small town. Everybody knew everybody. But we-

John Crane:

The were Glockners and (inaudible)?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, the Glockners and the Maranges, they would bring us home. Like I always said today, I said, "Man, my mom would probably go to jail today if she let the kids out the way things are today," but we had a good time.

John Crane:

Did you grow up fishing and that sort of thing?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Well, my dad would go in the lake. It was funny, in my adult years, I would meet someone at Pelican Park and they said, "Yeah, we used to come over here to my grandparents and we would ride the crew boat. This man would take us out in the crew boat to the lake, and we'd go eat lunch out there." And I said, "Oh, that was my dad." He goes, "No kidding." So my dad was always eager to take someone along with him if he had to bring a radar man out in the middle of the day, or a mechanic. And he had some young kids there. He's like, "Come on, boys, come take a ride with me." And he would bring them out to the dredge, and then he would bring them back in.

John Crane:

So he was always a crew boat operator?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

He never actually worked on the dredges or anything?

Tommy Parks:

No, no. He just drove the crew boat. My dad, he was the harbor master for the harbor. And he was like the search and rescue. So if anyone was missing, they would call Bill Parks to come, to go look for them in the lake. Or if they broke down in the lake, or they ran aground, he would pull them off the ground and bring them back to Mandeville. But he was kind of a search and rescue. And later on the Sheriff's department, he had radios for the St. Tammany Parish Sheriff's Department on the boat, so you could communicate with them.

John Crane:

Okay. So was he deputized? Was he working?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, probably so. I would say so, but I think... I don't know exactly was the Del Real was a family that was traveling, I think to New Orleans, and they ran out of fuel. And the dad was a doctor with his family, and they crashed off of Lakefront Airport. And I don't know if it was in '70. It was in the '70s, maybe '74. And so everyone in the lake was looking for them.

John Crane:

Like a small private plane or something like that?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, it was a small private plane. One crabber approached my dad, saw my dad. And he came over to him and he stopped. He goes, "I found one of the boys, and I think he's dead." And my dad looked at him and he covered him up with the palmettos they would put over the crab to keep the sun off of him. And he saw him breathe a little bit, and he was the only survivor.

John Crane:

Oh, wow.

Tommy Parks:

But the gentleman that found him was Fred Stout. And then they sent the National Guard to the army down to look for them along the beach. And they-

John Crane:

This was on the South Shore or on the-

Tommy Parks:

No, this was on the North Shore. They moved, they floated all the way across the lake.

John Crane:

Oh, wow.

Tommy Parks:

And they were scattered everywhere. And it was one son survived, and they found everybody, but they were all over the lake. But I remember the National Guard came there with track units that were amphib. And they were down on Green Point, and they got stuck. And so I remember Pre-stress, the concrete company had a fleet of tugboats. And so my dad, he went down and he talked to Mr. Goodyear. And they brought one of the tugboats down, and we brought a line into the tank. And we tied it off to the tank and the tugboat pulled.

John Crane:

Were you on the boat?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I was on the crew boat. Yeah, we were like the boat ferry and the line then. So my dad was... I remember the-

John Crane:

And you were 10 years old or something like?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, probably so, yeah. But I remember my dad talking about whoever was in charge was mad about the whole deal to them getting stuck. But the tugboat pulled them off the ground, and I guess they didn't go back there.

John Crane:

And they got, once they were in the lake, they were okay, I guess.

Tommy Parks:

Then I could back up. I know back to Mr. Stokes at the gasoline station, my dad and him were always good friends.

John Crane:

Where was the gasoline station?

Tommy Parks:

It was right where PJ's Coffee is.

John Crane:

Okay. Right on the corner?

Tommy Parks:

On 59 and Florida. It was behind the Shell Station, but the Eastern plane crashed, that crashed in the lake.

John Crane:

And that was in '64 or '65?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I'm not sure, but I know my dad... I found a picture of my dad. My dad wasn't in it, but Mr. Stokes was. And they had found the baby doll. And Mr. Stokes was always, he was the truck driver, but he looked like he went to play golf. He always dressed really good, and he had a nice sweater on. But there was a picture, and I never found the picture was on the internet, but my dad brought the crew out to the dredge. And then he went back and got Mr. Stokes and went back out to the lake, and they searched for bodies and stuff. And then the Coast Guard was out there and stuff. And eventually no one survived or anything, but they hired one of the dredges to go over there and try to pump as much material up to put it back together in the hanger.

John Crane:

Okay. And so the dredge actually pumped up the parts of the-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, it was just parts and pieces and stuff. And this is just him telling me all this. I wasn't around, but that was another big deal in the lake.

John Crane:

So where did you go to school? You went to elementary school?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. The elementary school just opened up on Monroe Street. We went to kindergarten at Our Lady of the Lake, because it was no schools that had kindergartens. And the only kindergarten they had was Miss Champagne on Galvez and North Street, and it was a half a day. So my mom wanted to get rid of my brother and I, I guess for the day. So we went to the Catholic school for kindergarten. And I can still remember everybody. It was a good experience-

John Crane:

Did-

Tommy Parks:

And we went to the elementary school.

John Crane:

On Monroe Street?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

You didn't grow up Catholic?

Tommy Parks:

No, no, no. We were Methodists. And so we would go to the Protestant church.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

On-

John Crane:

Carroll Street?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And Julian Burke was the reverend there. And he was a really nice man. We'd go to Sunday school there, and I got married at the church.

John Crane:

Right. Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

At the Protestant church?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Yeah. Union Protestant church. And Reverend-

John Crane:

What year did you get married?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I think in 1983.

John Crane:

Okay.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And he was an older man. He lived on Monroe Street. And maybe five years ago, I was Googling his name. And they were from Fort Worth, Texas. And I found a Christian Julian Burke, and he was 105 years old in a nursing home. And I wanted to write a letter, but I never did do it. But his son, I don't know his name, but I just went to the Vietnam wall-

John Crane:

In Washington.

Tommy Parks:

... in Washington. And I found his name on the wall, but I think he's the only person from Mandeville that died in the Vietnam War. And his name was Chuck.

John Crane:

Yeah, Charles.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And so they had a memorial in the church in one of the windows. And I don't remember that. I just remember the Dobson's told me about that. Because I didn't really know-

John Crane:

Yeah, you wouldn't.

Tommy Parks:

I didn't even know he lost or had a son or anything.

John Crane:

I think he had only one child.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. It was a big sacrifice for him and stuff. But yeah, we enjoyed going to the Union, Protestant. Then later on when the Methodist church would meet on a house on the lakefront, and then it turned into St. Timothy's. But everyone in town would go to the... He'd always have the sunrise service on the lakefront, Reverend Burke. So that was a big deal. Everybody looked forward to that. He started it.

John Crane:

Where did they have that?

Tommy Parks:

It was underneath the oak trees, down towards where the shack is in the lake, right up in there.

John Crane:

Claiborne and down in that area?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Down by Wilkinson Street, down that way.

John Crane:

Wilkinson. Yeah, Carondelet Street, in that area.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Yeah.

John Crane:

Interesting.

Tommy Parks:

And stuff. But we played baseball at Father John's field at the Catholic Church. And my dad's friends, they were mostly Catholic. But everyone, the father, John Leblanc was the priest at that time. And did you want me to keep going?

John Crane:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I'm just making sure.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, he was like a man of the whole town. He would go see anybody. He didn't-

John Crane:

He didn't care what you were.

Tommy Parks:

... make a difference who he was. And he would build things. He would get dirty. He would make the swing sets at the school. And he built the bleachers. And he volunteered. When he worked, he was from the St. Benedicts, he was there and he had connections there. So when he came to Mandeville, he was able to secure a water tank. And the people of Mandeville put money in to buy a fire truck.

So they built the fire truck at Sharp Ford and put it all together there. They had a new truck, like a 1955 Ford. And Father John was able to get the tank. It was like a World War II surplus thing. And I know he was a Chaplain that would... People from World War II, he would help them get through the tough times. A counselor, I think that was his job. Yeah.

John Crane:

So during the war, he was a counselor?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. Yes. I had his obituary, and that's where I got a lot of that stuff from. But I'm pretty sure, it's been a while since I read it. But he was a really-

John Crane:

Do you remember him as a-

Tommy Parks:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah. He was a strong man. Yeah. Everybody looked up to him. And he loved to fish, and he didn't own anything. He lived in this old house, and he would ask for help from the archdiocese because Mandeville was growing. And so they came to his house and he had a hole in the floor in his bathroom, and they were appalled because he's running around trying to keep the church and the school and keep everything going. He didn't care about himself. He was there for the community. And I don't even know if he had air-conditioning in the house and stuff. So they brought in new people, and they pushed him out. And he retired at the St. Benedict's at the abbey.

John Crane:

At St. Joseph.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. He's buried at the abbey.

John Crane:

Do you remember where his house was?

Tommy Parks:

His house was where the brick house is now. It's kind of funny. They took the house out. They moved, and they built this giant brick house with air-condition and jacuzzis, and a bar, and a really fancy place.

John Crane:

Well, I'm trying to think of where that is on-

Tommy Parks:

Well, the original house was on Madison Street.

John Crane:

Okay.

Tommy Parks:

Okay. That's where the kindergarten is now, but it's a brick house there now. But the house faced Madison Street, and it was like a rectangle house. And it's up in the air-

John Crane:

It was right Madison and Lafitte Street between-

Tommy Parks:

Well, no, no. It was right at the end of left field of the ballpark, was where the house was.

John Crane:

Okay.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And then right behind that was where the-

John Crane:

Oh, so it was right where that one-story brick house is?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, that's it. They built a Brick House. The brick house is faces... Is wider on Madison Street. That's Madison Street?

John Crane:

No, I think it's Jefferson.

Tommy Parks:

Jefferson Street. Okay, I'm sorry.

John Crane:

Yeah. Yeah. I was trying to think of what house was on, but then I realized it was the administration building for the lake.

Tommy Parks:

That's the new house, but the old house is by Mandeville High School. So I've met the two owners one time, cutting grass. I said, "Man, this house is holy. This is where Father John lived at."

John Crane:

Oh, that's where-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. So his house moved to Aurora Street and Villere Street.

John Crane:

Oh, really? And so it's still there?

Tommy Parks:

It's still there, yeah. The house is still there.

John Crane:

Is it a little shotgun or-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Yeah, I guess so. Yeah.

John Crane:

Wow. So they didn't tear it down? They just moved it.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, they just moved it. Yeah. Yeah, they moved it. Yeah. Yeah. But everybody loved Father John. He was an amazing man for sure.

John Crane:

Who were some of the other people when you were growing up that were interesting people here in Mandeville?

Tommy Parks:

Well, they had a lot of characters. They were good people. One man's name was CJ, and he was an author. And I think he was a bricklayer or a painter. And he fell off and he hit his head. And he was just a nice man, and he never did work anymore. And he would go around and feed the cats. And he lived in Mandeville with his mom. And he might've lived to be 80 years old, but his job was to go all the way around town and he fed all the cats. And he'd come to the baseball games and he'd watch the baseball games and stuff.

John Crane:

So tell me - you were at Mandeville Elementary, which had just been built at that point.

Tommy Parks:

It was a few years old. Yeah. Mr. Ferrer was our principal. He was a good man, an awesome Principal and stuff. Everybody loved him.

John Crane:

How big a school was it?

Tommy Parks:

I think it went to fourth grade, and then we went to the middle school, and they just opened that up. And that was the Rosenwald School.

John Crane:

So, that was Woodlake.

Tommy Parks:

Woodlake, yes.

John Crane:

Did you still call it Rosenwald, or?

Tommy Parks:

No, it was just Mandeville Middle School and Mr...

John Crane:

But it had been the Rosenwald School, and then they...

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, we just knew it was a Rosenwald School because of the books. They had the books that was stamped on the side of the books.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

In the library or?

Tommy Parks:

Well, in the library. Yeah, in the library. Yeah. They still had the old books there. And so, that's how... Because we were just kids. We didn't know about history. Mr. Simmons was the principal, and Ms. Grinnell was the secretary. And Mr. Johnson, he was the Custodian there. And he was always a nice man. They'd have a vending machine there, and you could go get those little cherry bombs. And I think we didn't have Cokes or anything like Lance Cookies. The Lance man would bring them.

John Crane:

And so, that went through seventh grade?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, we went to high school in eighth grade at Mandeville High.

John Crane:

And that was the high school over on-

Tommy Parks:

Wilkinson Street.

John Crane:

... on Wilkinson Street?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

What was that like? What was it like going to that school?

Tommy Parks:

We never had blue jeans. We always wore just regular pants and button-up shirts, whatever. But we went to high school. I remember we got blue jeans.

John Crane:

For the first time?

Tommy Parks:

And then, we were with the older kids, so we thought we were doing good.

John Crane:

Do you have any fun memories from high school?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, yeah. Can I?

John Crane:

No, that's fine. Yeah, whatever you need to do.

Tommy Parks:

Hey, Ryan, go ahead.

Ryan:

Hey, Tommy. The gate won't close.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, we'll close it later.

Ryan:

Okay.

Tommy Parks:

All right. Bye-bye.

John Crane:

Is that's your...

Tommy Parks:

The driver. So, my brother did track, and I did track and football, and I played football in ninth grade, and the wood shop was really good. They had some really good woods, industrial arts teachers, Mr. Abel and Mr. Chelina and Mr. Cronin.

John Crane:

So, this would've been '77?

Tommy Parks:

Yes. Well, yeah. Well, in eighth grade I couldn't take that. You couldn't take it until ninth grade and stuff. But it was a lot of kids at the school. The school was cramped. It was small. They called it a sippy stand in the back. And at lunchtime, you could get these little drinks. They call them sippy drinks, and they were icee or something.

John Crane:

It was on Wilkinson Street?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Wilkinson and Carondelet. In between Wilkinson and Carondelet. But the sippy stand was way in the back by the woods, and it was just a little wooden shack. The school would do it, but that was just one of the things to remember. And Coach Theriot was the Football Coach, and he was one of the Junction Boys at Texas A&M, and he was the Driver's Ed Teacher. He didn't say a lot, but he taught it at St. Paul's as the Football Coach or maybe the Assistant Coach. I think Coach Salter taught at St. Paul's, too. And Mandeville started their Football Program in 1967. So, they got Coach Theriot to transfer to Mandeville and to start the football team.

John Crane:

So, before '67, they didn't have a football team?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. I think that's the correct year and stuff. So, it was like big tradition. My brother played on the football team, and then I played ninth grade, and then I just decided that I needed to work to make extra money to help the family and stuff out.

John Crane:

Where did you start working at?

Tommy Parks:

I started working at the Mobil Station on North Causeway Approach, and then we always went to Chitter's Garage in town. It was located on Jefferson Street behind Nuvolari's, and then he built a new shop on Monroe and Lafitte. So, then I worked at the Mobil Station in the mornings, and then in the evenings I'd come to work at Chitter's.

John Crane:

Were you actually doing mechanic work at that?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I would take the clutches out, and I would do tire repair. I would pump gas, do water pumps, and do head jobs. And I learned a lot of stuff. That was... Bubba was his name, Bubba Earl West, and his dad's name was Chitter. So, he just took the name to Chitter, and his son, Rodney, worked for him.

John Crane:

And so, basically, you were on the job training, they would show you?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, definitely on-the-job training.

John Crane:

Did they give you tools, or did you have...

Tommy Parks:

No, no. They had all the tools. Yeah, I used all their old tools and stuff, and I learned that a lot of that helped me out later on in life, learning how to do all that stuff, and doing mechanical work and engine. So, that was a good start. And I never would get flustered. I would keep trying to do it. Bubba would get mad, and I'd tell, "Let me try to go do it." And it was a pilot bearing on an old forestry truck on the clutch, and I got it out, and I put the clutch back in. That was my first clutch job. But that was fun. I enjoyed working for Bubba and Rodney.

John Crane:

So, what time in the morning did you start working?

Tommy Parks:

Well, I would open up the station at 5:00 in the morning, and then I would leave there and go to school.

John Crane:

So, leave 5:00 to 8:00 or something?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And then I would get out of school at...

John Crane:

At what? 3:00 or something?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And then I'd go work at Chitter's till 5:00. And then on the weekends, I would work at Chitter's just on Saturday.

John Crane:

Do you remember how much they were paying you at that time?

Tommy Parks:

I don't know, probably, probably, \$2.50 an hour. At the Mobil Station, I made more money there, but I decided to learn more of... Bubba's philosophy was that he should be paying me... I should be paying him because he was teaching me everything, so he would twist it around. But at the Mobil Station, I was 15, I think you had to be 15. You could start working at 15, maybe. And so, we would get paid commission on selling things. So, we would sell JB Products.

So, if we sold a quart of oil, you would get 25 cents, so I'm sure... I don't know exactly how much it was, but I made more money at the Mobil Station because we got paid selling the different products. The JB Products was STP oil, and they had a token in the can. So, you'd put the oil in it and you'd keep that token with you. And when the man would come around to sell more stuff, he would pay you the money.

John Crane:

So, you would keep the token, and that was the proof that you...

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, that was my proof with my commission. And they had Mobil 1, it just came out Mobil 1 oil. And back then, I would say it was \$4 a quart, which was phenomenal. And I think we would get a 50-cent commission if we sold a quart of Mobil 1.

John Crane:

Wow.

Tommy Parks:

I remember there, they wouldn't change their oil for 40,000 miles. I don't know how all that worked out, but that's what they were trying to sell.

John Crane:

They might not have been as tight of tolerance or something like that.

Tommy Parks:

It would change the oil filter, maybe every 10,000 miles, and add a quart to it. But that was back in the day, everyone drove across the lake, lots of people coming through the gas station, and then it was full service, and then later on, half of it was self-serving and full service and stuff.

John Crane:

So, when did you get out of high school? What year?

Tommy Parks:

In 1981.

John Crane:

1981. And did you keep working?

Tommy Parks:

Well, by that time, my dad was ready for us to come work with him, and my brother Billy had already started working for him.

John Crane:

And so, tell me your dad was working...

Tommy Parks:

Well, we always had what my dad had the one in 1978. Well, let me back up. The Kenneth J was the first wooden crew boat, and it might've went 12 miles an hour. So, then the next crew boat, he was just saving his money, wasn't making a lot of money, and he bought another boat called the Eddie, and it was a twin screw boat.

John Crane:

So, he didn't name the boats, he just...

Tommy Parks:

No, the boats were already named. Yeah, he kept the name. So, the first boat he bought was in 1967, and it was built by Breaux's Bay Craft in Loreauville. And I don't know how he knew, but they were one of the best boat builders of aluminum crew boats in Louisiana, and they're still in business today. And so, the first boat he built was in 1967, and it was aluminum boat, and it was like night and day. And my dad would go out in the fog, and he would know where the dredge was. So, he would run a course, and he knew he had to run at that speed to go through the, we called it the four-mile hump, but it was the 20-mile hump, but it was four miles off of the Causeway. He would go through that, and he would find the dredge, load the people up, and come back in and then we would...

And then sometimes we would go to the harbor, and he put a foghorn on one of the pilings down there on the telephone pole, the creosote pole, and we would turn this horn on. But he knew he would come in and he would run so many feet, and then he would draft, take a stick, and he would draft to know how deep of water he was in, and he would pass the harbor up, and then he would head back. He would turn and come back in, and he would come up to the seawall. That's how he did it back then. But it was pretty amazing. They didn't have any boat traffic. He just had to watch out for... They'd have anchors where the dredge... Where the barges were tied up to. You just had to watch those.

John Crane:

So, the barges were tied up on Castine Bayou?

Tommy Parks:

No, no, they were just out in the lake. They would just, wherever they were dredging, they would have an anchor. Anchor barge, and they'd have empties on it and loads on it, and then the tugboats would swap them out.

John Crane:

But when you brought the crew boat in, you came into Castine Bayou?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, Castine Bayou. Yes, sir.

John Crane:

Did you all have a shack or a building there at all, or just came in?

Tommy Parks:

No, no. He just tied up at the harbor. We just live right down the street. So, he would just drive the car down. He would park the cypress tree still there today, but he would park underneath the cypress tree every time in the 1974.

John Crane:

This cypress tree is by the kiddie...

Tommy Parks:

Right by the left, the gazebo. And that's where he would park. You could drive through that between the tree and the dock, you could pass through there. But in 1974, he got a radar, which was a big deal. So, he decided to build more crew boats. And that's when my brother Billy started working. And when I graduated, I started running the crew boats.

John Crane:

So, did you all have to man the crew boats 24 hours a day in case they needed something or they would...

Tommy Parks:

The two outside boats, one boat always worked for the shell dredges. So, it worked from 1957 to like 1989, the same boat. We had the same job servicing the dredges. And then the other two boats worked for drill, like for drilling rigs, for pipeline crossings, or maintenance dredging. And then...

John Crane:

Did they get involved in the building of the causeway at all, or that was all?

Tommy Parks:

No, I had pictures of where my dad would go. He might do work for pre-stress. My dad used to have the contract that he would drive from Mandeville to the South Shore, maybe once a month, and he'd have to document, if anything, hit the bridge. And so, he would do that. And then it got to be too much for him, and he quit doing it. And a man in Lacombe, Al Masters, he started doing it. But I found some invoices when they had a bomb threat at the old turnaround. And my dad, he would do salvage work, like diving. They had a sunk barge, he would go down and seal it up.

John Crane:

He'd scuba-dived with the tank and everything?

Tommy Parks:

He scuba dive, and he would move the barges around with his boat and stuff. But I found an invoice where he charged the causeway, I think it's \$75, and he went and checked all the pilings to make sure they didn't have any bombs on it. It was funny. I remember him telling the story about it and stuff.

John Crane:

So, he's down there looking for bombs?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, looking for bombs in the piling. Yeah.

John Crane:

So, tell me about this shell dredging a little bit. What do you know about the history of the shell dredging? Because that was a big deal here, but it's forgotten by most people.

Tommy Parks:

Well, all along the coast, people all over here from Florida to Texas are looking for aggregates to fill in or to put on the grounds so you could build things. But just in New Orleans was a dredging start, not dredging, but the shell dredging or the shell industry started in the corner of Lake Pontchartrain and Tangipahoa Parish. They had a giant pile of shells that it was humongous, and a man owned it. So, people from New Orleans would take schooners and they would sail to this place, and they would load up barrels of clam shells in barrels with wheelbarrows.

John Crane:

Was it an Indian mound?

Tommy Parks:

Well, I'm sure it was, but it was just... No, no, it was from the lake. The lake washed the shells. It just kept over thousands of years. It just became a giant shell pile from southeast winds blowing in the corner of the lake.

John Crane:

So, when did you think that started?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, that was in the 1840s or something. Probably the 1850s. But I know that the one company that my dad worked for was Jahncke Services, and he was a German immigrant that came to New Orleans in the 18 at that period of time to build sidewalks in New Orleans. And so, I don't know if he started it. He was the first one to start it with hydraulic dredging. But his company eventually bought the pile of shells that were there, and they would sell them to people. They had a person that lived there, and they would come pick up... The schooners, would come get the shells to bring back, but that's what they built in New Orleans on with clam shells.

John Crane:

So, they would go over there and basically just by hand, they would dig it, load the schooners up, bring them back to the west?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, just piles of saying they had wharfs going out, and they would take wheelbarrows, fill the wheelbarrows up, and they would put them in those barrels. But I know Jahncke he went to the Chicago World's Fair, and he bought a tugboat and bought a dredge and brought it to Lake Pontchartrain.

John Crane:

When do you think that was, roughly? Do you have any idea?

Tommy Parks:

That was in mid-18... 1900. You could look up the Chicago World's Fair. But he went to the Tchefuncte River, and he started pumping sand. And his dredge was called the Pelican.

John Crane:

The Pelican?

Tommy Parks:

The Pelican. And the tugboat's name was the Clarabelle.

John Crane:

Clarabelle?

Tommy Parks:

Clarabelle. And they always had a Clarabelle. It was only two Clarabelles, but that was like his favorite tug or whatever.

John Crane:

Was that the same Jahncke that built the shipyard and-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, correct, the same family. Yeah.

John Crane:

... in Madisonville?

Tommy Parks:

Correct.

John Crane:

And then...

Tommy Parks:

That's where they built the dredges. They built dredges, like to build the Morganza Spillway. They built all kinds of different construction jobs all over. They had sand and gravel from Highway 16 by north of...

John Crane:

Amite river?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. All up in there. They had them in Roseland. They had shells in the lake. They had all kinds of operations.

John Crane:

So, by the time that you came along to Mandeville, how many companies were still doing the shell dredging?

Tommy Parks:

They had Louisiana Materials, Jahncke services, Ayers Materials, and then they had Radcliff. Radcliff was from Mobile, and they used to have other people, like independent people had their own lease, and they would dredge shells, but I don't know their names. And then they tried to regulate things and get it all up to par, and then they consolidated.

John Crane:

So, it went continuously, pretty much starting in the 1840s or '50s?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I think they started dredging with hydraulic dredging in the lake in the 1830s... I mean 1930s.

John Crane:

1930s?

Tommy Parks:

1930s. Yeah.

John Crane:

So, before that, it was mostly working off of these piles of...

Tommy Parks:

Schooners going along the bank and picking shells up.

John Crane:

Off the banks of the...

Tommy Parks:

Off the banks. Correct.

John Crane:

Interesting.

Tommy Parks:

And the first dredges were just spuds. They didn't move. They would just walk back and forth. Because I'm sure that they had so many shells they didn't need to. And then, eventually, they were self-propelled dredges.

John Crane:

Were these dinner buckets, or were people on them for...

Tommy Parks:

Jahncke always worked six days on and three days off. And then you'd switch over to night shift. And then Ayers Material was seven and seven. And I don't know what Louisiana Materials was always lunch bucket. They worked lunch bucket. And the man that was... Durant was his name. And he owned, he was like a Marine Architect and owned the shipyard in New Orleans, the Alexander Shipyard, I think.

John Crane:

Did most of the people who worked on the dredges live in Mandeville, or did they come from...

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, a lot of them lived in Mandeville. They lived in Madisonville, and a lot of people from Madisonville and Louisiana Material people had to be close by-

John Crane:

because they were dinner bucket

Tommy Parks:

... and the people for Radcliff, they were from... A lot of them were from Mobile, and they would work like seven days on and seven days off.

John Crane:

So, they would have accommodations on the dredge?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. They would have a cook, and they would...

John Crane:

So, they were taking shells from here to Mobile, basically?

Tommy Parks:

No, they would be bringing them to New Orleans. They just had an office here. They pumped shells in Mobile, too. Oyster shells over there.

John Crane:

Where did they dump the shells in New Orleans?

Tommy Parks:

Jahncke had where the interstate is now in New Orleans by the Superdome to the right, that building's still there, but that was their yard.

John Crane:

So, they would bring it in the New Basin Canal?

Tommy Parks:

New Basin Canal.

John Crane:

So, the barges would come there, they would unload there, and then they would distribute the shells from there?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And then they opened up the industrial canal, and then they backfilled the New Basin Canal, and then everything went to Slip 4. Louisiana Materials had a yard between the Danzinger Bridge and the L&N Railroad. And then Radcliff had the first yard on the right coming into the yard.

John Crane:

So, they were coming through the Seabrook.

Tommy Parks:

And Ayers was on the West Bank. They would bring their shells back to the West Bank.

John Crane:

So, they would go through St. Claude Bridge and go across to the Algiers?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. But a lot of the jobs, the barges would go straight to the jobs in the '60s, in the '70s, they would make Ayers Materials. That was a lot of things. They would make shell pads for the drilling rigs. So, if they were going to drill a well in Lake Bourne, they would go out there and survey it, and all of them did it. Radcliff in Pontchartrain, then Jahncke was sold to OKC and Pontchartrain Materials, but they all did the making shell pads for the drilling rigs and stuff.

John Crane:

What would you consider the "Heyday" of that industry?

Tommy Parks:

That's up to the '70s. And it was the decline because of the amount of shells. It was depleted in Lake Pontchartrain. And then all the other places, they shut down the oyster shells, like in Morgan City and Mobile Bay. And then they opened up by Ruddock behind the power lines. They let them go back there, and they had so many shells, and that would keep them going. And then later on, they lobbied to go in Lake Maurepas, and they would dredge for two months in Lake Maurepas. And that would get them through the whole year. They would pump enough shells to last them. You could load a barge in Lake Maurepas in four and a half hours, and it would take 24 hours to load one in Lake Pontchartrain.

John Crane:

How deep were the shell beds in Lake Pontchartrain?

Tommy Parks:

They were just underneath two or three feet, and they could go down deeper, but it was just so much. But you remember, they've been dredging since 1930. So, that's a lot of clamshells they took out of the lake. I have a survey book from 1969 on the projected forecast. I could let you see it one day. It's got a lot of facts in it on how many tonnage and yards and stuff like that.

John Crane:

Did they ever dredge up any interesting artifacts or anything like that?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. I remember one time they pumped up a 30-pound Parrott shell that was off of maybe Lewisburg, between Madisonville, and the...

John Crane:

From the Civil War?

Tommy Parks:

From the Civil War. Yeah, Civil War. It had 1864 on it, I think, or 1863 on it. And then they would pump up, and the one dredge Jahncke had would go to Fort Pike, and they would have glass companies there, and they would want certain kind of sand. And right at Fort Pike, I'm trying to think... Sawmill Pass is what it's called, goes into Lake Catherine. And I don't know how they knew to go there to dredge, but they would go there and dredge sand. And this dredge had a cutterhead on it so they could dig the sand, and they pumped up a sword. We have the sword today.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

And it came out, it's not bent or anything, but I think it's before maybe the Civil War.

John Crane:

Have you ever had somebody look at it?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, my dad bought it, somebody on Chartre Street one time and looked at it, and I can't remember what he said, But they would pump up 50 caliber shells from World War II or the Vietnam War target practice. And one time we were on standby for Amoco Oil Company that was going to drill a Tuscaloosa well. So, we stood by with the tugboat, and they had the pylons out there, but it wasn't marked.

So, we were just there for a light, but nobody would run into it, and that was off of Lacombe. And I lost the anchor for the tugboat, the line chafed, and eventually, I lost it. And maybe six years later, the dredges were dredging there, and they picked it up, and they bought the anchor on the back of the crew boat. And I'm like, "Wait a minute that that's my anchor." So, I got the anchor back from them, and I still got it today.

John Crane:

So, did you start working the crew boats full-time after high school?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. I didn't have enough sea time or whatever, but we ran the boats, and we didn't have Coast Guard licenses, so it was probably within eight months I got my license, maybe when I was... It was 20 years old. I might've been a year or so we would run in. But I remember we were working for Phillips 66, and I had to bring some Coast Guard people out because they said they had oil in the oyster reefs, this is down in Buras. And man, I was nervous bringing them on board. My dad's like, "Just calm down." I said, "Just act like you know what you're doing, and you'll be fine." And then right after that, I went and got my Coast Guard License. My first Coast Guard license.

John Crane:

You guys had to take the exam and that sort of thing?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. You'd go to a school; they had a hostar. It's called Hostar Marine. And it was just a seven-day class. Well, not... A five-day class. And then at the end, you would... I think you would go to the Coast Guard and take the test.

John Crane:

And then that would give you a 100 Ton License?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Well, I just started out with a 50 Ton License.

John Crane:

50 Ton?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. It depends on what boats you ran. The crew boats were like 18 net tons. So, they would just round it off and give you a 50 Ton License and stuff.

John Crane:

Interesting. So, what was your dad's company's called? What were the...

Tommy Parks:

It used to be William M. Parks Crew Boat Service. And then when me and Billy came along, we just changed it to Parks Marine. But he was always William M. Parks and a lot of the Football Programs, he would have the crew boat take a picture of it and go on by the Causeway. And he would do diving work or anything to do with marine stuff, towing, or...

John Crane:

Would he do repairs? Marine repairs?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. No, not much repairs. But if they had a barge sunk or if they wanted him to pull a small barge. It was funny, the crew boats, all our crew boats had tow bits on them and we never... And you don't see crew boats with tow bits. But my dad had them on his boat in case you had to tow something. And it was funny, one time I was going to bring the crew out. I brought the crew out to Lake Pontchartrain, and one of pre-stresses barges floated out in the middle of the lake, and it was 200 feet long by 35 feet wide, and it was loaded down with cement mixers and stuff.

John Crane:

It was a deck barge?

Tommy Parks:

Just someone had cut it loose, and it was just floating out in the lake. And so, on the way back, I saw it. So, I called my dad up, he goes, "Man, bring that thing to Lacombe. Hook onto it." So, I towed it all the way to Lacombe. And then the pre-stressed, I think they ended up giving it to us. So, we made our boat dock. That's what my dad always ran in Mandeville. The dock was in Mandeville, but the yacht club people didn't like the dredge people and the sailboat people. And the new mayor that came in, he didn't get along with the new mayor. And he was always welcome there.

John Crane:

Who was the mayor?

Tommy Parks:

Bernard Smith. And so, he wanted to charge my dad to park the boat there. And so, my dad finally just... He left, and we outgrew it. It was time to go. So, we went to Lacombe, and we had a really big dock down there. Plenty of parking and things.

John Crane:

So, when did the company quit working? Did it go out of business, or did you all sell it?

Tommy Parks:

Well, the oil field in 1983, it was like a light cut off. We stayed working... We worked for the Superior Oil Company. And what you would do? You would get a job from Crew Boats Incorporated. They would be the broker. So, they didn't have enough boats, so they would hire us. So, they would make... If we were getting 475 a day, he would be getting \$500 a day. So, he would get \$25. But... So, what would happen is that when things got bad, they kept cutting the prices, and then he would eventually, "Look, I can't do this anymore." And the... But that really devastated Louisiana was in 19, and the whole oil field, when you look back on it on the inland side, it was over with. Everything was going to be deep water.

John Crane:

So, how did you all shut the company down? Did you sell-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Yeah, well, we had tugboats. We had a couple tugboats and-

John Crane:

What were their names? Do you remember?

Tommy Parks:

The Pelican and we had an old boat called the Dixie Scow. It was a Dixie carriers model of that boat and the Pelican was a little single-screw boat. And we would work for the dredges in the summertime in Lake Maurepas. And we would do the ship, we would ship ... We would bring an empty over and take the load back to the fleet. And then the other tugboats ... The big boats would bring them all the way back to New Orleans. So you were just going back and forth, back and forth. And that's where over the years a couple incidences where they knocked the bridge down, but it was always-

John Crane:

Knocked which bridge down?

Tommy Parks:

The lake Pontchartrain Causeway.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

So they would hit a piling and-

Tommy Parks:

Well, no, they just would fall asleep. It was Louisiana materials, the boats that worked for them. So the Coast Guard may be not did as good a job, having good licenses or people didn't have a license that were running the boats and I don't know, but they would fall asleep and they knocked the bridge down a couple times. But I know Jahnce knocked it down once in the fall, but I think it might've been the bridge wasn't even completed. But a couple of them would like ... A lot of people died. I know a Trailways bus went off on one and another time, maybe a Winn-Dixie truck went off. And there's a man, Jackie Church, he lives here in Mandeville. He rescued one of the people out the cars. He dove in the water and rescued them and he got some kind of award, citizen award and he was like 18 years old. This might have been in the '60s.

John Crane:

So in '83, pretty much your business was over?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Well, no, maybe '85. We would work pipeline jobs and we would go all over. It was really neat to see working in the oil field, learning all this stuff and they drilled ... It wasn't all over, but most of it, a majority of it. We was just fortunate to get jobs. They drilled a bunch of wells off of the Blind River and

we did a lot of those. And then in Lake Catherine, they drilled some, but it was really interesting to work on the rigs, to see how they did everything. And we had a couple tugboats that worked there and Port Manchac came along. In Manchac, they were going to export plywood and Lykes steamship in New Orleans had lash ships that would go to Europe, and the lash ships, they had individual barges. So we started pushing those to bring like four to Port Manchac and they'd load them up with plywood and then we'd bring four back and we'd pick up four more empties and go back to Port Manchac and load more plywood. And then eventually the lash ships went away because the containers and so we quit doing that.

In 1987, my brother-in-law was murdered and I stopped doing the boats. And my brother Billy went to Venice and he worked ... We still had one boat left. We sold all the boats. And Billy went to Venice and he worked down there for Bud's Boat Rentals, just doing ... People would call up needing a crew boat for the day, or one time, he went out for one day and he worked on it for a year. So he was pretty cool, pretty good job for him.

John Crane:

So what did you do at that point?

Tommy Parks:

That's how I just started running the tow truck service. Keith's Towing Service.

John Crane:

So did you start Keith's Towing or-

Tommy Parks:

No, no, that was my brother-in-law and my wife's brother. They were brothers and sisters.

John Crane:

So before you get ... How did you meet your wife?

Tommy Parks:

Okay, yeah, let's go back to that. Working at the gas stations, working at the Mobil station, my dad always said I was in the gasoline alley gang. And so I met Keith, my wife's brother, and he worked for Knight's Wrecker Service on Causeway Boulevard. It was a Phillips 66 gas station and so he worked there. So I became friends with Keith and then I became friends with Carla and fell in love and married her.

John Crane:

And what year did you get married?

Tommy Parks:

I think in '83. Yeah.

John Crane:

So what year did you start working with Keith's?

Tommy Parks:

Just in 1987. Yeah, I would just help him part time and I did the tugboats and the crew boats. And in 1987, I just quit all together and I just went to work, doing the tow truck business.

John Crane:

So how many trucks did Keith's have when you started?

Tommy Parks:

He had two trucks. He had one tow truck with the wheel lift, which was a revolutionary thing to have a wheel lift to pick the car up by the tires and not by the sling where they would damage the cars. And then eventually, he bought a rollback or a flatbed truck. And so he had two trucks.

John Crane:

Now he was murdered, is that right or-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. He went to go tow a real estate lady's car by Tire World and he-

John Crane:

Right here in Mandeville?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, right here in Mandeville. He went to pick up the car at 4:00-4:30 in the evening and the lady ... No one ever told us any of this. We just figured it out, but the real estate lady evicted this man named Michael Ondek, evicted him and he lived in Greenleaves. And Michael Ondek had a wife and a little baby and so he was evicted. So I think he was there wanting to harm the real estate lady. So Keith picked up the car to tow it to Pat's Automotive and the man followed him and he started running into the car that he was towing.

John Crane:

Oh, wow.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And so he called my wife on the phone, not on the phone, on the radio. They had two-way radios in the truck and he said, "This guy keeps running into me. Call the police and get them to come out here." And so he was at the Greenleaves light and he ran the light at Greenleaves and I don't know if he was trying to get to the police station. So the guy hit him again. And I've met people, I don't know who their names or what they all, but they were there and they saw Keith run the red light and they said, "Man, look at Keith running a red light. What's he doing?" I don't know if they knew ... They knew after why he did it. So he hit him again and he stopped and he went back and he said, "You wait here. The police are on the way." And so he walked back up to the truck and he put his leg up on the step and he called on the radio and the man backed into a car behind him and then he pulled alongside of the tow truck and shot him.

John Crane:

Really?

Tommy Parks:

And then Keith goes, "This man just shot me five times. I love you all," and I stopped and I was at home and I rushed down there and I stayed with him to the police. But it was so-

John Crane:

What year was that, Tommy?

Tommy Parks:

1987, November 30th.

John Crane:

What happened to the man? Was he convicted and all that?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, it took three years. He fled the scene and another tow truck man in town, Jimmy, we called him Junkyard Jimmy, his daughter saw it and she goes, "Someone just killed Keith or shot Keith." When Jimmy got in his truck and started out looking for him and the man was then driving, this is the 1983, I mean, 1987, was like a '85 500 Mercedes convertible.

John Crane:

Oh, wow.

Tommy Parks:

And I don't know, maybe it was a hard top, but it was-

John Crane:

A fancy car.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, he shot through the window of his car. So Jimmy saw him and started chasing him. And then I don't know if he called the police or the police saw him and I guess they didn't have phones then. So James Kindler was one of the policemen, was in chase, chase him and they went through the Baptist Church on 190 and they went into Tanglewood and all these people's yards and knocking mailboxes over. And finally, James Kindler rammed him and flipped him over up against a tree. And then Jimmy Campbell got out with his gun and was going over there and Tom Buell, the police chief, pulled up, told Jimmy to get back in his truck, "We're handling this."

And so he was hanging upside down in the car and he was talking all kinds of stuff and the Sheriff's Department was there and they arrested him and brought him to St. Tammany. And I think he came in after because we were there at St. Tammany with Keith. Keith went to St. Tammany. We all thought he was going to live and he was just so muddled up. It was awful.

John Crane:

What was Keith's last name?

Tommy Parks:

William Keith Mackey.

John Crane:

William Keith Mackey.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Wow, what a story. Wow. That's really tragic.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Wow. So-

Tommy Parks:

Usually, I always cry when I say it.

John Crane:

Yeah. So you're currently the owner of Keith's towing?

Tommy Parks:

Correct, yeah.

John Crane:

When did you become-

Tommy Parks:

My wife, yeah. And I have a business partner now.

John Crane:

So there were just two of them in that family, two children?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

So when he died, she inherited the-

Tommy Parks:

I guess, well, no, he had two sisters and they just signed their shares over or whatever.

John Crane:

Over to you all?

Tommy Parks:

And then Keith was married for six months and so they had to buy-

John Crane:

His wife out?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

But no children?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, no children or anything. Yeah. And I guess today we look at as we keep him alive with us.

John Crane:

Right, with the name.

Tommy Parks:

With the memory or whatever, with the tow truck business now.

John Crane:

So it seems like you all have really grown that business. How did that happen?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

How did you all-

Tommy Parks:

Well, over the years, it's like we worked for motor clubs and we did whatever we had to do. And I guess things didn't cost as much as they do now compared to the rates that you get and the money that you take in to buy new equipment and stuff. And so we just steadily just got bigger and bigger and bigger.

John Crane:

So when did you start getting the big trucks for the semi work?

Tommy Parks:

I guess in the 1990s. Maybe '93 or '94, we bought our first medium-duty truck. Maybe '92, we bought a 16-ton medium-duty truck. And then in '94, we bought a 35-ton tow truck and it was so big, when you saw it, it was unbelievable how big it was, but when you look at it today, it's like a little bitty truck.

John Crane:

What is your biggest truck today?

Tommy Parks:

Today, we have a 50-ton tow truck and 35-ton tow truck and these are like stick trucks where the boom goes out and they're designed for towing and recovery.

John Crane:

So you have two heavy-duty trucks.

Tommy Parks:

Two heavy duty trucks.

John Crane:

How many trucks do you have altogether?

Tommy Parks:

We have I think 16 trucks and we have Landoll trailers that we work for the rental companies, hauling equipment and we have a lowboy truck to haul big excavators or machinery that's high and then small rollbacks. A lot of times, you'll go work an accident and there's two cars and you'll put one car on top and tow the other one back and bring them back to the towing-

John Crane:

How many employees do you have?

Tommy Parks:

Probably 12 drivers all together, part-time too.

John Crane:

Plus office people as well?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

John Crane:

So you still do towboat work too?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I'll go work ... I have a 1,600-ton master's license and then a master of towing and then ... So I still work part-time at ENB, so I'll bring the boats back and forth from Gulfport to the shipyard and I'll fill in at Gulfport, at the state port there.

John Crane:

Do you do ship work over-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, ship assist work and then I'll work part-time on one of the fleets doing fleet boat work because they don't see too many ... The push boat guys do push boats and the tug assists do tug assistance.

John Crane:

Not too many people that can do both.

Tommy Parks:

Do both. But in Gulfport, you'll move barges and ships, so it works out good over there.

John Crane:

So do they just use one tug to-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, to move the ship, barges and stuff.

John Crane:

But the same tug?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

You land the ships with the same tug?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

What horsepower is that tug?

Tommy Parks:

They're like 3,600 and 2,200.

John Crane:

Oh, that's so big.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, they're like 110-foot long.

John Crane:

Wow. A crew of four or-

Tommy Parks:

Just two engines. Yeah, two Cat engines.

John Crane:

But a crew of four basically?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, yeah, yeah. They'll have an engineer, a deckhand and a captain and it's like a lunch bucket boat too because you plug the boat in, but now at Bisso, a deckhand stays on board with it. So they work seven days. Seven and seven.

John Crane:

Have you always worked ... I know you worked for Weber for a while, but mostly for Bisso-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, at Edwin N Bisso on Walnut Street and-

John Crane:

How did you get to know them?

Tommy Parks:

I towed one of them ... Mr. McDonald was the president and ... He was the vice president at that time and his wife got into a wreck and I asked him if they ever look for pilots or captains or mates or whatever and he goes, "Oh, we're always looking for somebody." He goes, "Go fill out this application." And so I went over there and I filled out the application and I just started when I could to go do the jobs on the ... It was real critical because of the Coast Guard testing and a lot of people were retiring from the oil field in '85 and '83. A lot of people just quit doing it in the marine business and so there was just a big shortage of captains. They were looking for captains all the time.

John Crane:

So you really started working with E.N. Bisso in '85 timeframe?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. No, no, no, no, no, no, it was much later after Katrina, after we ... I think we stayed really busy, maybe for two years after Katrina and then my license, you had to have so many sea days to keep you license up. So I needed sea time and I couldn't get the sea time anymore and-

John Crane:

Because you were too busy with Keith's?

Tommy Parks:

Well, yeah, trying to find a company to work for and stuff. And after we didn't have our own crew boats, I would go help my brother Billy do that. So I needed to do it the right way, so it was a good fit.

John Crane:

So your son Tommy is a Federal pilot?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, he's a Federal pilot.

John Crane:

How long has he been a Federal pilot?

Tommy Parks:

I think since 2018, 2018. He worked on drilling rigs. He was a DP officer. I'm trying to think. It's on position, keeping the rig on location.

John Crane:

Right, using GPS-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Where did he get his training? Where did he go to school?

Tommy Parks:

He went to Texas A&M.

John Crane:

In Galveston?

Tommy Parks:

In Galveston. And he worked on supply boats and started off and then he worked on construction boats. And then he got a job in the Ensco and he went to Brazil and he was working down in Brazil. And then he

moved back into the Gulf and then a position where they put his application into the pilots and they accepted him. So he came back to E.N. Bisso and worked there to get to know the river and know how the tug work and then they took his application.

John Crane:

How many children do you and Paula have?

Tommy Parks:

What?

John Crane:

How many children do you all have?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, kids?

John Crane:

Yeah.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah, just I have Tommy and Timmy and my youngest son, Timmy went to Texas A&M too.

John Crane:

What does he do?

Tommy Parks:

And he worked ... He was able at ... It was really great for E.N. Bisso to have connections and it's like a family like you call them up and he says, "Look, I need to get," it's called the billet. So at Texas A&M, you go to school there and you have to get your sea time. You sail on the school ship.

John Crane:

In the state of Texas?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. And then you go to commercial. So it was really hard then trying to get a job on a commercial, or if you can't get the job, you have to sail on the state ship again and then it costs you more money, but it's not good training. So at E.N. Bisso, one of the salesmen got my son Timmy, a job on a tanker, which it was called Uni-Tankers and they're from Denmark. It was a Danish company. And so they lined everything up and they told Timmy what he needed. So I dropped him off in Houston and the ship was only 350-feet long. And I was really proud of him because most kids, this was a big deal, to drop your kid off on a foreign flag ship and it was 350-feet long. They had a Polish crew and then the Filipino deck crew officers with the Polish. But man, they all took him underneath his wing, and he really enjoyed working there.

So he obtained his tankerman's license because of that job. So when he graduated, he had his tankerman's license and he got a job with US Shipping and he worked on the Chemical Pioneer and the Chemical Pioneer was the last steam ship and it was a ship that had stainless steel tanks in. It was all made out of stainless steel and it was ... Originally, the rear of the ship was called the Sea Witch and it was involved in an accident in New York Harbor where it hit an Exxon ship and it burnt up. So the ship just sat there for a long time and they came up with a plan to use the engine room of the Sea Witch and they built the new tanker called the Chemical Pioneer. And I guess this must've been in the '70s.

And so Timmy was on this ship and it would go from Corpus Christi all the way to New York, Philadelphia and it would go 16 knots back and forth. It never stopped. And so he worked there for maybe three years and then they decided to scrap the ship. So he stayed on it until the end and an Indian crew picked it up and Timmy came back and he just started helping me in the tow business. And one of the gentlemen on the Chemical Pioneer told him to put his application in at the bar pilots and he was accepted.

John Crane:

So Timmy's a bar pilot now?

Tommy Parks:

Well, he's an apprentice and so it's just a long program.

John Crane:

Wow.

Tommy Parks:

So he really liked the tow truck business and he brought a lot of new things to help me out, the upgrade with cameras and a crew room and parts and organized everything. He really liked it and I tried to talk him out of it because it's a 24-hour day job.

John Crane:

Bar pilot, excellent job.

Tommy Parks:

So he likes it down there. He works 20 days on and 10 days off.

John Crane:

When will he become a full pilot?

Tommy Parks:

I don't ... They'll let him know. They'll-

John Crane:

When they feel like he's got it?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, when they feel like it, I guess. Yeah. So I don't know, but at least, he's there and he's doing a good job and everything.

John Crane:

So let me ask you something. Back on Keith's Towing, was it always there on Lafayette Street or-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, it was always there on Lafayette Street. Well, he started out on Monroe Street in a little house right across where the cows are, and he would just keep one car there, but he ran out of there and he'd keep the cars down at the Mobil station where I used to work at.

John Crane:

Was there a towing company before him or do-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, they had the Knight's Towing and Keith had worked for Knight's Towing. And him and Carla worked there and the people there, the one lady, her name was Rosie and she was a real hardworking lady and she taught her a lot, organization of books and how to keep everything straight in the towing business. So that went a long ways with my wife learning the stuff that she does today.

John Crane:

So Carla still works for-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah, she still. Yeah, she runs the office and everything.

John Crane:

Was her family a long-time Mandeville family?

Tommy Parks:

They moved from Shreveport. Her dad was a salesman and he moved here for a job. They were from Shreveport. So I always look back at all the times we went back to Shreveport to see her grandparents. They were nice people that lived in the town like a 1940 little industrial house area. And they were just nice, simple people. And we go to church. And it's sad. Today, it's all gone. The church is gone, the house is gone and it's all rundown and just not a good neighborhood anymore.

John Crane:

So I don't want to keep you forever because I know you got stuff going on.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, keep going on.

John Crane:

But let me ask you just a couple more questions. When you think about growing up here and living here, what were the best memories that you had?

Tommy Parks:

I don't know, I guess all our kids, the families we grew up with ... We never ... If they had the Olympics, we would have the Olympics in the neighborhoods, or when Evil Knievel was jumping, we would jump in with our banana bikes. And we'd swam in the lake all the time. We would live ... We'd spearfish in the lake and we would go out to the shack and we would spend all day at the shack playing it, chasing each other, but it was a really good place to grow up.

John Crane:

How deep is the water at the shack?

Tommy Parks:

It's like maybe seven feet, maybe, maybe yeah. On low tide, you might better walk almost out to it. You couldn't go ... We would dive off the shack and you can only dive off three sides. The other side, there's just rumors, but when you swim underneath it, you could see all the-

John Crane:

Pilings.

Tommy Parks:

... pilings from the wharf that was there. The shack, all it was, was a tidal gauge and they built it next to a wharf and the wharf got washed away, but it was built by the government, so it was built really good. And so lots of good memories at the shack. And we would shrimp in the lake. We would trawl, trawl up and down the causeway for shrimp. And my brother, he used to crab, but we would go to the yacht club and swim and it was a good place to grow up. I always said, I'm glad my mom and dad moved to Mandeville and not Bogalusa.

John Crane:

So tell me about storms. Do you remember storms growing up?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Well, I remember-

John Crane:

Or anytime?

Tommy Parks:

Camille ... a little bit. We had a little bit of water in our house at Camille, but I remember we would take the crew boat and bring it up to bayou and we would tie ... He'd bring it all the way at the end and we'd tie it off to four cypress trees and he would put a lot of slack out, so it would ride up in the air. But really, I don't remember any bad, just flooding waters, but nothing like Katrina.

John Crane:

So the house that you currently live in, you built that house?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah, I built it in 1998.

John Crane:

So it went through Katrina and everything?

Tommy Parks:

Katrina. Then I didn't have any damage other than the garage doors if I'd have opened them up quicker from the flood.

John Crane:

The pressure?

Tommy Parks:

against the doors.

John Crane:

Or did you stay for Katrina or did you-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah, we stayed for Katrina. Yeah, my mom lived with us and I knew, if they went to Gulfport, it'd be northwest winds and all the trees were on the east side of the house, so they were going to fall away from the house. And then we had all the tow trucks up. I brought all the tow trucks up to the A&P, which is the Walmart and it was abandoned. And I put them all in the circle and I parked all the trucks in the circle to protect them all. And then all these other people brought all their boats out there. I was so mad because they would've hit the trucks if they would have blown, but really, if you went inside, you didn't even know it was happening. But if you went out on the porch, you knew it was, but the water.

And I remember seeing twisters. You could hear them in Fontainebleau State Park. That was scary hearing the twisters, knocking all the trees down and stuff. So we were fortunate not to have that. And the trees, it was funny, you could watch them and the pine trees would get stiff. They wouldn't bow and you knew it's fixing up. It was loose in the ground and they fell over before the water came in and the trees-

John Crane:

So you would see them waving back and forth?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah.

John Crane:

And when they quit waving, you knew they were coming down?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, some of them just leaned over and some of them just went down like-

John Crane:

A knife.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, like, "Boom," straight down. But I filmed a lot of it. I got some taped videos of it.

John Crane:

So you were telling me about Lenny Frosch's video that he did.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah.

John Crane:

I look forward again about-

Tommy Parks:

I'm going to look forward at the tow yard and I'll text it to your phone.

John Crane:

Who are some of the people that are on that? Do you think?

Tommy Parks:

Man, all the people. You think you know everybody, but I don't know anybody. You just keep finding so many people, but it was an interesting tape.

John Crane:

So we're getting to the end because you got to go, but any other things you think about that you say, "Man, I wish ..."

Tommy Parks:

I was all over the place.

John Crane:

Oh, no. It's interesting though.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah, it is. Yeah, but yeah, I'll get you that.

John Crane:

So what's the future of Keith's Towing? You've got a partner now?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. '96, I got Mark to buy in with me. His family-

John Crane:

Who's Mark?

Tommy Parks:

... had Bear's Restaurant.

John Crane:

Okay. What's Mark's last name?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, Watson.

John Crane:

Watson.

Tommy Parks:

And they had a ... Their dad came over here and opened up a hardware store. The grandpa and the dad opened it up. It was called Big Bear Hardware and they had Big Bear Sandwiches and everybody knows them from the late '70s. And then they just worked real hard. They needed some vacation time and they sold the business. And then Mark's brother went ahead and opened up a new business up in Covington and it's still there today.

John Crane:

Bear's?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

And then they've got one down here on America Street.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. That was, yeah, the brother. And then so Mark, he did the hardware store. So he came in as my business partner and we've been partners ever since then.

John Crane:

Since '96 or something like that?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. We just purchased ... We bought a new tow truck.

John Crane:

Do you name your tow trucks?

Tommy Parks:

No, we just put numbers. We put numbers. We don't have a 13 and we don't have a number one. Keith was number one.

John Crane:

Keith was number one.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah.

John Crane:

Is there things that you wish that people who were new to Mandeville knew that you-

Tommy Parks:

Wait, wait, sorry-

John Crane:

Are there things that you wish that people, Lots of people move like us, move in Mandeville, that you wish people that moved here knew that they don't know? You've talked about the shell dredging. I think that's really-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. It's fun to hear the history of the Union Protestant Church, all the community. If you weren't Catholic, everyone went to the Union Protestant Church.

John Crane:

Are you all members?

Tommy Parks:

Because they had Jewish people who might have went to church there, but everyone, it was like a community church, but-

John Crane:

And that was all the way up into the '80s or something like that?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. I know, at the end, they had one. When you first walk in, they kept that as Union Protestant Church, but when you went in, there was the new name of the church, but I don't know what it is now.

John Crane:
Mandeville Bible Church?

Tommy Parks:
Yeah.

John Crane:
Are you all members of St. Timothy or-

Tommy Parks:
No, we go to at Covington at First Baptist with Dr. Bailey. Yeah. And it's just funny, my old-

John Crane:
We go church right across the street.

Tommy Parks:
Let me tell you, my dad, when he was dying of cancer, and he was only 57, so the one Gene, Reverend Gene, I can't think of his name, but I don't know if you've seen him. His daughter lives down here by the trace and he walks down here and he walks like he's got a disability.

John Crane:
Okay.

Tommy Parks:
Gene? Man, I don't know, but he was the reverend at St. Timothy. So he was coming by and my dad told him to come over there and have a drink with him. He was drinking whiskey or something and he drank with him. So my dad always called him Spider, because when he would run, he looked like a spider. But I still see him, and remember, I see him, I stop and talk to him and tell him hello and stuff, but he lives in Tennessee now, but he was the reverend there for a long time at St. Timothy.

John Crane:
At St. Timothy. Was he the first one sort of?

Tommy Parks:
Probably the first one, yeah. Yeah. My mom, we never did ... We got baptized. He baptized me and my brother. Yeah.

John Crane:
Tell me about Lamarque Street when you were growing up. It was all white on this end, but it was Black on that end?

Tommy Parks:
Yeah, yeah. Just when you come up to Madison, right here at Madison, you turn left, that was Jenkin's Superette

John Crane:

It was still the store was there?

Tommy Parks:

There was a store, so everybody would go to Jenkins, or then the next door by Monroe was Corner Pack. But all the way up to Madison, and then it was all black to the-

John Crane:

To the highway?

Tommy Parks:

To the trace.

John Crane:

Oh, to the trace?

John Crane:

Yeah, to the trace, yeah.

John Crane:

And then what was it beyond?

Tommy Parks:

Back, back, but it was mixed because they had, on the corner was Buck's Bar. There was a black bar on the corner, which is Ruby's today.

John Crane:

Right.

Tommy Parks:

So the train tracks used to have a big incline to go up over, and I would jump it. I could hit it, come in this way, and I could fly in the air-

John Crane:

Really?

Tommy Parks:

And go over the train tracks.

John Crane:

You're talking about the [inaudible 01:36:49]?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I could ramp it. Yeah, I could ramp it. Yeah, and on Coffee Street, they had a major one over there on Coffee Street. I mean, you could go all the way up in the air.

John Crane:

When did those little corner grocery stores shut down?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, well, Jenkins moved the old store. It was really old, just an old house with a store and wooden floors.

John Crane:

And they were selling groceries in it?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, groceries. They had a butcher there.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

And then they built this new facility where the town hall is, right next to the jail, and it was like state-of-the-art grocery store. And everybody had charge accounts, and you would just tell them your name and they would write it down and people would come pay when they got their paycheck.

John Crane:

When you were a kid, the first store was still there?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, oh, yeah, yeah. They had Jenkins, Jenkins here, then Corner Pack, and then Band's was over Lafitte Street, and that was Ms. Lily Band. And that was where the bus station was.

John Crane:

And the ones that had Jenkins were?

Tommy Parks:

Their last name was Jenkins, but they were-

John Crane:

Wasn't there the, what-

Tommy Parks:

I know they were, her maiden name was Weisheit

John Crane:

Weisheit, that's what I was going to, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

So that's what I said, they, so I don't know where they got the Jenkins from, because I think the Jenkins were all from Lee Road. But I don't know, I know they called it Jenkins Superette and stuff. And then the Corner Pack was Mr. Morgan's daughter, was Ms. Marie, and she met a man in pre-stress from Livonia. And then I guess she saw how hard he had to work in pre-stress, and so he talked when they got married, goes, "Let's just open the grocery store back up." So that's how Corner Pack came around.

John Crane:

Okay, interesting.

Tommy Parks:

And one of the signs of Ms. Marie's daughter, Desiree, when you come down West Beach Parkway, north of Monroe on the left-hand side, it says Corner Pack in her carport.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. That's pretty cool. Yeah.

John Crane:

Huh, so she kept the sign?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. Yeah, she's still got the sign.

John Crane:

Because that was originally on Madison here between Marigny and Lamarque Street.

Tommy Parks:

Wait, what's that? No, no, the Corner Pack was where the Rusty Pelican is.

John Crane:

Oh, where the Rusty Pelican is?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, that's where, yeah.

John Crane:

Okay.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Okay, wow.

Tommy Parks:

But their family is still here, the Taylors. Darryl was the, what was the guy that serves papers?

John Crane:

Oh, Sheriff's Deputy.

Tommy Parks:

No, no, what's he-

John Crane:

I mean, Constable.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, Constable or Justice of the Peace. I don't think he's one now but, yeah.

John Crane:

Interesting. Well, Tommy, this has been really interesting. I love the fact that, you know. I'll be honest with you, nobody's talked about shell dredging or the maritime side of Mandeville.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, the lake. Yeah, yeah.

John Crane:

And I don't think too many people-

Tommy Parks:

But you know what's interesting? If you talk to the Prieto's, because they had a fleet of schooners, and you could talk to Bob Doolittle. He's still around, and he married Joan, which was Clay's daughter. But have you ever talked to him?

John Crane:

I've talked to Joan, and she promised to do one of these with me, but I hadn't thought of that.

Tommy Parks:

Because that'd be interesting to find out about the-

John Crane:

They had schooners that would take in the-

Tommy Parks:

Schooners, they would go to Ship Island. They would bring stuff back and forth to Ship Island.

John Crane:

Really?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

And were they using the schooners for the shell dredging too?

Tommy Parks:

No, no, no. I think they were just hauling-

John Crane:

Oh, people?

Tommy Parks:

... wood or alcohol. They might've been, I don't know what they hauled. Maybe cattle stuff, feed, I don't know. But Ernie, he's my age, and Clay was his grandfather. And I got his phone. I could ask him if he wanted to do it.

John Crane:

Yeah.

Tommy Parks:

He might be able know some.

John Crane:

Let me ask you something, in politics in Mandeville?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, my dad, he was the City Councilman at one time.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

Yes.

John Crane:

Because it seemed like there was the Prieto-

Tommy Parks:

he ran for mayor.

John Crane:

... side and then the Deano side.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

And they were kind of-

Tommy Parks:

I don't know, politics, I think they all got along.

John Crane:

Oh, I think they got along, but it seemed like they were maybe different.

Tommy Parks:

But I remember that my dad, I think he ran. Mr. Dobson was a councilman. And I guess Clay might've been, maybe it was the Prieto package or whatever he called it. But that was in, I don't know why my dad did, but he ran for mayor once, but he didn't win, yeah.

John Crane:

But he was a councilman for a while?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, he was a councilman, yeah, in the sixties. Yeah, that's pretty good for being an outsider, because he said when he came to town it took him like a year to start knowing people.

John Crane:

Nobody would even talk to him?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. One of the men down the street, his name was AG Anderson, and he was a black man, and he was my dad's good friend, and he would help him do different jobs and everything.

John Crane:

Growing up as Methodists, did y'all ever do anything with Newell or anything like that, or not really?

Tommy Parks:

No, no, I probably didn't even know it was a Methodist church, yeah.

John Crane:

It was just there.

Tommy Parks:

I just always remember on Sundays, we played in the woods across the street. It was all the woods so we had-

John Crane:

They owned that too at one time?

Tommy Parks:

No, no, no, that was Mr. Maylie, the Maylies from New Orleans owned all that. And they're related to the Deanos. Mr. Maylie married Ms. Deano, and so they owned all that land there. And he would see us. He never did say nothing, Mr. Maley, Willie Maylie, and we played in those woods. We had the best time in those woods. But I just remember on Sundays, all the black people that went to church there.

John Crane:

Okay, they would park at [inaudible 01:42:45].

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. It was always packed.

John Crane:

Was it always brick from your memory? Or do you-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, it was always brick, yeah.

John Crane:

So you don't remember when they put the brick on?

Tommy Parks:

No, but I know that bell, I looked up the history of that bell, and that's from a black foundry?

John Crane:

Okay, really?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, because Demetrius, one of the people that worked for me, his grandmother lived right here, and Demetrius lives next to the bridge. So his grandmother was named Gladys, and she used to take care of us when we were kids.

John Crane:

What were their last names?

Tommy Parks:

I don't know what it was, because it wouldn't be Johnson. I don't know. I could ask him and see, but I just remember her name was Gladys. And she would go out in the yard and get a chicken and cut the head off and pluck it out and go cook it. She was old school. Hey, Mark. Wait, let me finish with this interview real quick. I'll call you right back. Give me a minute. Bye-bye.

John Crane:

So, that's pretty interesting though. That's [inaudible 01:43:53]. But do you know where that foundry was?

Tommy Parks:

Oh, no, I just looked it up. Well, I was telling Demetrius about the bell. I said, "Man, y'all need," because I didn't know what was going to happen to church, but I said, "Man, if y'all keep it, they could bring it down to the other church or whatever." But that's good it stays there.

John Crane:

I think when we looked at it, they used to have a bell tower, I think, way back.

Tommy Parks:

Well, didn't they have a fire? Didn't y'all look up the history?

John Crane:

I haven't seen a fire or evidence of a fire.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, but didn't they build a new church? The brick one in the 60s?

John Crane:

The old one is still there. They just covered it with bricks.

Tommy Parks:

They just covered it with brick, yeah.

John Crane:

And someday I'm hoping to put it back and put the bell back in the bell tower.

Tommy Parks:

You think it was up in the bell tower at one time?

John Crane:

That's what someone

Tommy Parks:

I just remember-

John Crane:

Well, it would've been way... I don't know how long ago it was.

Tommy Parks:

This would've been in the seventies when we were kids playing in the woods.

John Crane:

Well, they put the brick around in 1971, I think.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I can't remember.

John Crane:

Yeah, so you would've just been a little guy.

Tommy Parks:

I remember the house with Tom and that lived in the white house on Marigny Street.

John Crane:

Oh, not the Kellers.

Tommy Parks:

The attorney.

John Crane:

She owns the Candy Bank.

Tommy Parks:

They would always say that was Mr. Dershay's house. He was a builder, and he always had the lions out front. But he had a Santa Claus upstairs so everybody in town would drive by and go see Santa Claus, because nobody did decorations.

John Crane:

Were you here when the house on the corner of Lamarque, the new house that the guy that works for CGB lives in now?

Tommy Parks:

Oh yeah, that one. Yeah, the Norbrings lived in that house.

John Crane:

Do you remember when that burned? Or was that before you?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, that was in the late seventies. Keith Frosch set it on fire.

John Crane:

Keith?

Tommy Parks:

Keith Frosch, a local crazy guy.

John Crane:

Oh, yeah, pyromania.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, he burnt the Baptist church down, and he burnt that house down. I think he burnt a couple more down. But I was at that fire and I was helping them, and the fireman was like, "You can't help us. You're not a fireman." And Lenny Frosch was the fire chief, and he goes, "No, he can help us. He needs to stay and help us." But I became a fireman. I was a fireman, a volunteer for 10 years-

John Crane:

Oh, really? For 10 years?

Tommy Parks:

... at Mandeville, and they kind of phased the volunteer out.

John Crane:

And the fire station was where the-

Tommy Parks:

On Gerard Street, that was the main station.

John Crane:

Where it currently is right now?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, yeah. When we were kids, we would go to the firehouse and they would give us drinks, and then we'd play on the fire trucks. It was a big deal. Mr. Mooney, he worked there, so he might've been one of the first paid people. But they had a siren on top, so they would sound the siren, they would get in the fire trucks and go to the fire. So you would go to the fire station and they'd have a clipboard, 1814 Claiborne Street, so then you knew where to go, the volunteers.

John Crane:

I wonder who's got that clipboard and stuff?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I don't know. It's really interesting, Billy Esquinance, he might be a couple years older than me, 67, and he did a history. It's on the Mandeville Fire Department's web page. But it was a really interesting history, I mean a detailed history that he put together. It's really, really good. You can look that up.

John Crane:

I'll have to look that up.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, he did a great job with that.

John Crane:

Tommy, this has been great.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

It's exactly what I was hoping for because you brought a whole-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, well, I'm just all over the place.

John Crane:

Yeah, but you brought a whole bunch of-

Tommy Parks:

But I've missed things, but yeah.

John Crane:

But if you think we can do more, if you think about some things and say, "Hey, I wish you"-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I'll get you those tapes. They're on the computer at home, and I'll send them those. Those are really interesting to learn those.

John Crane:

Yeah, those would be interesting, because we could probably transcribe those too and get them written down.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, because there's two of them, I think. Are we still recording now?

John Crane:

Yeah. You want me to cut it off?

Tommy Parks:

No, it don't make a difference.

John Crane:

Yeah, just in case something pops up or something.

Tommy Parks:

But yeah, that's good. I like the history part of it and learning.

John Crane:

Well, there's a lot of history here, and part of what we're trying to do is to catch it before people get too old and forget and all that kind.

Tommy Parks:

That's what Lenny would like, Lenny Frosch. Him and his dad would drive. Newell would drive the car and Lenny would get a camera, and he would film the whole going down the highway of what Mandeville looked like.

John Crane:

Oh, really?

Tommy Parks:

He was like you back then trying to preserve the history.

John Crane:

In the sixties or seventies or something?

Tommy Parks:

Well, this was in the seventies, they were doing that. Maybe the eighties they did it, but I don't know. I think maybe Bryan said he didn't know where the tapes were.

John Crane:

Yeah, he didn't. He knew about them, but he didn't know where.

Tommy Parks:

When he was dying, he had all kinds of artifacts in this house. And someone came there and they bid on everything, and they took it away.

John Crane:

Really? That's too bad.

Tommy Parks:

They were crabbers. That was Mandeville, it was the softshell crab capital or whatever.

John Crane:

Yeah, because he was saying that they, I guess them and the Glockners, had crab boxes and things like that.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, and Jerome Marange, he was... And that's why, because they would just scoop crabs. They didn't have crab traps. They would just go scoop crabs.

John Crane:

They were doing a lot of soft shells too.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, but they knew where they were in their stages. It was funny to watch. Russell was a Glockner, but when were kids, he would just going down there and stick his hands in there and they wouldn't bite him, and he would just take them all out and throw them away, or put them in this box and move them around and stuff. But when we swam in the lake, the crab boxes were all out there, and we were always swim in underneath them or whatever.

John Crane:

What kind of fish did y'all catch mostly?

Tommy Parks:

You'd catch croakers, and then before the interstate opened, my dad, at a certain time of year, we'd go up Bayou Castine and then we'd just catch one speckled trout after the other speckled trout.

John Crane:

Really?

Tommy Parks:

And then they dug the canal.

John Crane:

Why did the-

Tommy Parks:

They dug this canal from the interstate to Bayou Castine, and that was it. They never came back in.

John Crane:

Really?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, because there's like a spoil canal. I don't know what it looks like now.

John Crane:

Is that just to drain the water from the interstate?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, to get the water, to hook everything up, I guess. But when they built the interstate, that was it for speckled trout.

John Crane:

Wow.

Tommy Parks:

But that's when in September the white trout come in and lay the eggs, and then the croakers eat the eggs. They eat the eggs, so usually in August you could always catch white trout, and-

John Crane:

In September.

Tommy Parks:

And then not many people fooled with redfish and stuff, but everything was like speckled trout. I remember that Al Masters lived in Lacombe, and he was the one that took over the job inspecting the bridge, and he brought us a speckled trout. It was like four foot long. I'd never seen a speckled trout that big before.

John Crane:

That he caught out here?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, caught it in the lake. It was unbelievable. And we ate one piece of fish. It was so big. I don't know exactly how big it was, but I'd never seen a... It was like, I guess, from Chandeluer Island or something-

John Crane:

Wow, wow.

Tommy Parks:

... and stuff, but I don't know.

John Crane:

Wow. Well, this has been terrific.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

I mean, this is exactly what I was hoping, get some idea of you growing up and stuff.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

So, thank you very much.

Tommy Parks:

You hang out on the back porch?

John Crane:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

That's where y'all like to sit?

John Crane:

Yeah, we got nice fans out there.

Tommy Parks:

What did she paint? Which one did she paint, your wife? Did she paint all these?

John Crane:

No, no. This is my grandmother and my aunt. All this is my grandmother. That's my aunt.

Tommy Parks:

And she was from Louisiana too?

John Crane:

No, my grandmother, this grandmother was from Oxford, Mississippi. And my grandfather was from Yazoo City, Mississippi. And so my dad was actually born on the campus of Ole Miss. And then I guess when they retired-

Tommy Parks:

What year was that? That was in the 1900s?

John Crane:

Yeah. No, my dad was born in 1919. And then when they retired, they bought a house. Well, actually during the second World War, they were in Pascagoula. And when they were in Pascagoula, they bought a house in Gulfport. And so when they retired, they lived in Gulfport. And then my grandfather died in 1964, and they sold the house, and then it was destroyed in Camille, and it's still an empty lot. They never rebuilt it.

Tommy Parks:

Your dad, he was in World War Two?

John Crane:

My dad?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Yeah, yeah. He graduated from college in 1942, and he went into medical school, and he was what they call a three-year wonder. He did all his medical school in three years, and then he went active, I think in late '44. He never went overseas. He was stationed in this country. And then he got out in '45 because he wanted to be a missionary doctor. So then he went to Korea. The Korean War started. He was all there during the Korean War. And then in 1956, they said, "Well, you haven't done two years active," so they drafted him again.

Tommy Parks:

Oh, really?

John Crane:

So we never left Korea. He just went-

Tommy Parks:

Oh, so you were born in Korea?

John Crane:

No. Well, I was born in this country because of the war, because of the war. But then we'd gone back, and so he was actually the CO of the 4077, which is the one they made MASH about.

Tommy Parks:

Oh, really? Yeah, no kidding? Did you live in Korea too?

John Crane:

Oh, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

After the war?

John Crane:

Yeah, yeah. We went back in in 1954, and that was the soonest they would let dependents in.

Tommy Parks:

How long did y'all stay there?

John Crane:

Until '69.

Tommy Parks:

Was it like backwoods? It's like you would go there, and it's nicer than any city here, isn't it?

John Crane:

Oh, no, no, no, no, no. It was very poor.

Tommy Parks:

No, no, no, but today it's, yeah.

John Crane:

Oh, yeah, today. Oh, yeah, today it's-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, so back then it was very poor.

John Crane:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Yeah, a lot of war damage, a lot of destruction. And we still had Russian trucks that were still driving that hadn't had a factory-made part in 20 years that people were keeping going and stuff like that when I was a kid. But starting in the 1960s, they started developing, and we left in '69, which was sort of the beginning of it. But it was started then. You knew it was started. And man, now, it's just incredible. I've been back a couple of times. It's unbelievable. A trip that would take, when I went to high school, I had to go to boarding school, and it would take us eight hours to go on a train 150 miles. Now you can do it in two hours.

Tommy Parks:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

John Crane:

You know, by bus.

Tommy Parks:

You would go to school and stay there, yeah.

John Crane:

Right.

Tommy Parks:

Were you with other Americans?

John Crane:

Yeah, yeah. We had 144 kids, and I think 28 different countries or something.

Tommy Parks:

How'd you get to St. James?

John Crane:

Well, I started at Strachan Shipping in New Orleans, so my degree is in Chinese language.

Tommy Parks:

Wait, Storms?

John Crane:

Strachan.

Tommy Parks:

Strachan?

John Crane:

They were stevedores. And so I actually started working on the docks in New Orleans. Handing out paychecks to stevedores was my first job. And then I gradually moved up, and I worked for them. I got to be the operations manager.

Tommy Parks:

Who bought them? What's the name of that company?

John Crane:

It's gone away.

Tommy Parks:

It's gone, yeah.

John Crane:

Well, I think they still may be in Houston or in Savannah. They were from Savannah, but we were the biggest shipping company in New Orleans when I was here.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I didn't know. I don't know. I just remember it seemed like Cooper, Cooper has always been there.

John Crane:

Yeah, Cooper, and then Cooper and Strachan got together and they put together Baton Rouge Marine Contractors, which was in stevedores up there. And then I went to work at the coal terminal down in Myrtle Grove, IMT.

Tommy Parks:

That's the one on the west?

John Crane:

West Bank, that's right.

Tommy Parks:

West Bank, I went there the other day, yeah.

John Crane:

I worked there for five years, maybe six years, and then I went and worked across the river for 12 years with Devan, and then they moved me to Florida. So we lived in Florida for 11 years.

Tommy Parks:

That was like TECO?

John Crane:

Yeah, TECO. And we had a barge line, which was Mid-South Towing. We had an ocean-going barge line, which was Gulf Coast Truck Towing. And then we had two terminals in Tampa and one terminal here. And we were loading coal and unloading coal.

Tommy Parks:

The ones from on the East Bank, he said that tug-and-barge units still come there to go to Tampa.

John Crane:

Right.

Tommy Parks:

They're still burning coal, but they just keep it as a backup.

John Crane:

I think they've still got a couple of coal units, but they pretty well shut most, I mean, compared to what they had when I was working.

Tommy Parks:

Oh, yeah, yeah.

John Crane:

Because we were doing six million tons a year over to Tampa when I was there. And then I left. I worked for the church for a couple of years, and then a friend of mine came and found me, and I started working at, IC Rail. I worked there for a year-and-a-half, and I was-

Tommy Parks:

IC Rail, who was IC Rail?

John Crane:

Illinois Central.

Tommy Parks:

Okay, okay, that was Illinois Central.

John Crane:

It was a railroad. Yeah, it was a railroad.

Tommy Parks:

So they built that.

John Crane:

Right, because they built it for the iron plant, and then the iron plant shut down. And so we were trying to-

Tommy Parks:

Where was the iron plant at?

John Crane:

It was behind it where they were making-

Tommy Parks:

Okay, they dismantled it now? It's gone?

John Crane:

Right, they took it to Brazil. And while I was working there I got to know the people at St. James, and they offered me a job. And I really didn't like working for the railroad because we were trying to develop the terminal, and they would say, "Yeah, go do something." And then you would get it going. And then they would say, "No, we don't want to do that anymore." So, I can't do that. So then I started working for St. James in 2003, and then we bought the company in 2006.

Tommy Parks:

It was antiquated, and y'all brought it up to speed.

John Crane:

Yeah, we started bringing up the new cranes, and then we put the first one of the Gottwalds in the world.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, it was the first one. Yeah.

John Crane:

Yeah, we did that one, and we had a total of 10 by the time-

Tommy Parks:

I always liked the [inaudible 01:59:08], I mean the Clydes.

John Crane:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

Not the [inaudible 01:59:14].

John Crane:

The Clydes, [inaudible 01:59:17] Clydes.

Tommy Parks:

The Clyde cranes, Pontchartrain Materials, that's all they ever had was the [inaudible 01:59:18] series, the drag line. But, yeah, the Clyde cranes [inaudible 01:59:22].

John Crane:

I remember they were white, the old white one that Weber had.

Tommy Parks:

Weber, yeah.

John Crane:

Man, that was a bear.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Did y'all ever use that?

John Crane:

Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

Did y'all ever use it from them?

John Crane:

Yeah, sometimes we'd lose an anchor or lose a barge cover or something.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, that's what they did. So y'all started the anchor recovery?

John Crane:

Well, no, Weber did that themselves.

Tommy Parks:

They did.

John Crane:

But I mean we had ships that lost anchors and I think one time somebody drove a front-end loader off of one of our barges, so we had to find it and haul it up.

Tommy Parks:

Find it and go get it, get it out of there, yeah.

John Crane:

You know, stuff like that.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, I had a good time working over there for those guys, Paul Laval. I used to call him and check in with him and see. I know he had a heart attack, and they did a bypass on him, and he had back surgery, but he was a nice guy.

John Crane:

Yeah, they had really nice people working there.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

And my partner, his sister was married to-

Tommy Parks:

John Weber?

John Crane:

No, his dad. What's his name? Dennis? No, not Dennis. Oh, man, I can't remember anything. Anyway, his dad, and so the two companies were very close. The land we bought, we bought from Weber, because they needed money, so we bought their land. And they were-

Tommy Parks:

That's what you miss, having that real estate out there on the-

John Crane:

Well, we still got about 500 acres, so we got a lot. But I think Seacor bought all of it, I think.

Tommy Parks:

The frontage on the river? Did he buy that? Or did he lease that from the Corp?

John Crane:

Well, you can buy the batture, you can buy the batture.

Tommy Parks:

Okay, so that's your acreage, yeah.

John Crane:

Yeah. We have that where the Yara building is. We own that. And then we have about 600 foot down where our office is, and we lease it.

Tommy Parks:

Okay. Yeah, I remember I'd go down and pull them off of ground.

John Crane:

Right.

Tommy Parks:

Run aground and just bend down and try to get them from off the ground.

John Crane:

And we leased it to, well, when we were there, we used it as our crane storage. And then when we sold the company, we leased it to CGB and they just filled it up with their

Tommy Parks:

What were the name of the cranes? Was it the Matty?

John Crane:

Well, we had the Matty. The first cranes we had were the Bulk One and the Bulk Two and the Bulk Three, and then we had the Matty.

Tommy Parks:

And those were those Lima cranes.

John Crane:

Ashley, yeah. The Matty, the Ashley, and the-

Tommy Parks:

Weren't those Lima cranes?

John Crane:

They were Limas, yeah. No, the Bulks were all Americans, 999s, and then the Ashley and the Matty and the Leslie were all Limas.

Tommy Parks:

Were those efficient? Or they were?

John Crane:

The biggest bucket, I think we could use a 10-yard bucket on them.

Tommy Parks:

Oh, really? Yeah.

John Crane:

And then we went to the Gottwalds. The first one we named was Alex G, which was named after the founder, and we had a 20-yard bucket. And then we got the Don D, which was the other founder, and then we kept buying them. And the company that bought us was Associated Terminals, and they just bought, they're putting a crane into action. So the biggest bucket we ever had was a 55-yard bucket. They're putting a 90-yard bucket in.

Tommy Parks:

Geez, that's unbelievable.

John Crane:

But it makes sense. If you can lift it, why not?

Tommy Parks:

Yeah. Oh, no. I didn't realize how much damage they do to the ships.

John Crane:

They can if you're not careful.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, if you've got the wrong crane guy in there, and then they have to go. I remember I worked at Weber down at St. John's fleet, and I had to bring the guy and he had to go get cash to give to the Captain to sign off on the paperwork.

John Crane:

On the damage, yeah.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, and they were six-

John Crane:

Yeah, that was us. Yeah, Associated Terminal, they were using those [inaudible 02:03:17] and they were beating stuff to death.

Tommy Parks:

So the Gottwalds had-

John Crane:

They were much better because the Gottwalds-

Tommy Parks:

Yeah, there were those two cables. It was more stability, right?

John Crane:

Well, the mechanical, you got to be really good. With the Gottwald, you just have one joystick. And so it's much easier, and you can also set limits so it won't go below a certain level, and so the damage went way down and you could do it. But when you had those old mechanical cranes, whoa.

Tommy Parks:

You get the email or the phone call, "Oh, we put a hole in the ship last night."

John Crane:

No, it happens.

Tommy Parks:

Yeah.

John Crane:

Anyway.

Tommy Parks:

You miss any of that?

John Crane:

Yeah, I don't know. I can't remember if we ever put a hole in the ship. Well, we must have.

Tommy Parks:

No, no, you miss going to work over there?

John Crane:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, it was a lot of fun. It was interesting stuff. Okay.

Tommy Parks:

Well, that's good.