

**Johnny Halili**  
**Prestige Oysters - San Leon, TX**

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**Interviewer: Rien Fertel**  
**Transcription: Linda K. Carr**  
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[BEGIN INTERVIEW]

[00:00:00.00]

**JOHNNY HALILI (JH):** —so, then I went to New Orleans.

**JIM GOSSEN (JS):** How did you get down to Plaquemines Parish? How did you find out that they were—?

**JH:** I had a cousin, he came for a new year, I think, I don't know where he came from in Chicago. But they told him, "New Orleans, Empire, Louisiana. Empire." So, that's all I heard, "Empire." I didn't even know what Empire was, but that's what they called this little town, Empire. And you could make thirty dollars a day. I said, "Thirty dollars a day!" It was a hard job, but I said, "I don't care what I have to do." [Laughter] For thirty dollars, I would work twenty-four hours, yeah, because we was making, I think eighty dollars, seventy dollars, every two weeks.

**JG:** Oh, wow.

**JH:** Yeah, that how we got paid, it's not much. Couldn't even afford the rent, you know, and that's how it went, and the first time I went over there and live in a boat.

**JG:** You lived on a boat?

**JH:** On a boat. Getting sea sick—

**JG:** Who were you working for then, who hired you?

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**JH:** First time I started working for this guy in Texas City.

**JG:** Ivo?

**JH:** —Ivovich. First time I stepped foot in a boat, it was his boat.

**JG:** I'll be darn.

**JH:** He was holding me from four in the morning to eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock at night, sometimes one in the morning. It was always the—thirty dollars a day.

**JG:** For like eighteen, twenty hours a day.

**JH:** Yeah, and finally I told him, then, “Hey, look, man.” you know, “You need to pay me a little bit more.” Because everyone told me, “Hey, this man is going to kill you, he is gonna kill you.” Everybody was coming in early. And he called, and said, “No, no, no, no I can’t.” so he called Misho in Texas. Misho told me after. He told Misho, “Man I got one guy, but he wants more money.” He said, “Well, he’s a good worker.” He said, “Yeah, but did you give him more?” He said, “No, because everybody that I pay wants,—everybody's gonna raise the price, and they

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gonna want more.” So, he wouldn’t do it, so, I went and talked to—I don’t know if you heard of M. J. Fruge?

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** I went to M.J. I say, “M. J. you need a workers?” He said, “Yeah.” “How much you paying me?” It was five dollar less. “But what time we coming home?” “Seven, eight o’clock you finish.” “What?” I said, “I’m coming.” I said, “What those tables are?” He said, “Those tables—the oysters come on table.” But on Ivo’s boat, you have to stay, and sit on your knees all day long. They didn’t have no tables.

**JG:** They would have to stoop down like on—on and go like that.

**JH:** All day.

**JG:** Now the boats have the tables, so, they can—

**JH:** —stand up, yeah, it was easy, and I said, “Shhh, that’s what I want.” He said less money. I said, “Who cares?” You got four people. It was me and Ivo working by ourselves, sometime we had two guys, we’d trade. We eat—one guy go eat, two working—two guys working. When it was just me and him, he didn’t have no choice but to stop it. And when we go in, you know, we put, ten on this side, ten on that side. And I’d clean them. Turn the lights on. Do another lease. Dump the shell. Then I’d have to sack them by myself, nobody would do that now days.

[00:02:51]

**JG:** No. So, you had to fill up your basket—then dump it by—

**JH:** —myself. They’re coming by the time, we’re always the last one to unload. Always the last boats, so. And sometime eighteen wheelers, you know, they didn’t have no pallet jack, they didn’t have no fork lifts. You—he just put a gonna—got to grab the sack, and I have to run to the eighteen wheeler, all the way to the front. Sometime you’d get lucky and be at the back, but sometime all the way to the front, 150, 200 sacks you got to run with the sacks, hundred pounds.

**JG:** Running. [Laughter]

**JH:** Running. Not walking, you walk, and you fall on the floor, and you have to pick it up. It's not easy when they're coming that hard at you. And little by little I work over there for a long time, you know, with M.J., and he really likes me, then I heard my cousin working for Misho, over in Texas. There's nine of us, we were living in a one bedroom apartment, and working for Misho, taking turns. Little by little, then I worked for Misho for a long time then.

**JG:** That was down in Plaquemines Parish?

**JH:** No, here in Texas.

**JG:** Oh, in Texas.

**JH:** Misho was in Texas.

[00:03:53]

**RIEN FERTEL (RF):** Misho only had one boat?

**JH:** Misho have two boats, two boats. That's how I started with Misho—the later on. I started running his boat, then after awhile he decided to sell me the boat, and that's how I started.

**JG:** And you didn't have any leases at the time?

**JH:** I didn't have nothing. I was a deck hand.

**JG:** But I mean, when you got the boat, you would just work from other peoples leases.

**JH:** Yeah, I was working most in the season. And then—another boat, a shrimp boat. It was shrimping, in the winter—in the summertime. And in the wintertime we would go oystering, and then little by little I bought Gaston's leases. The old man. I don't know—do you remember Gaston, the old man?

**JG:** No.

**JH:** Lloyd Gaston?

**JG:** No, I don't remember him.

**JH:** Yeah, I bought his leases then I bought—Louis Maker's

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leases, me and Misho we bought them, three of them. Then I bought some of Helma's leases. Then a bunch of Childress' in Fisherman Harbor a—long way.

**JG:** Well, in fact, these guys don't know that, but—Johnny and his company is the largest—I guess, I take it, it's still the largest lease holder on the—

**JH:** Yeah.

**JG:** On the Gulf Coast, right?

**JH:** Yeah.

**JG:** How many acreage y'all have, you have any idea?

**JH:** A little over 18,000 acres.

**JG:** 18,000 acres.

**JH:** A little over.

**JG:** Along the Gulf Coast

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**RF:** What states are those?

**JH:** Mostly Louisiana and Texas, some of them, a couple in Florida too, you know, a few in Florida, but majority—.

**JG:** And that's, that's pretty, a big accomplishment in itself, because it's hard to get these people to sell leases, huh?

**JH:** Oh, yeah, and well, it was, that hard to start, you know, start the beginning, starting and I come from nowhere, and finally I met Lisa, and she started working as a deck hand, working oysters in my boat. The sack was so heavy, I know she couldn't even pick up a sack, you know, she'd drag them to the conveyer belt. Coming down, put them on the conveyer, run over there, take them to the eighteen wheeler. She turn the switch on. The sacks she—weighed, I think her weight was about eighty-five, ninety pounds. She was so skinny. I swear. I mean—.

**JG:** Carrying a 100 pound sack?

**JH:** Yeah, she was a dragging it, and that poor, most of the time she would do it backwards, instead of forwards.

**RF:** How did you convince her to come on the boat, to be a deck hand?

**JH:** Well, that's a long story, I guess. She was working as a waitress, and that's how we sort of met, and seeing each other, and little by little. She decided to come on the boat. We really didn't have no people, nobody wants to work shoveling oyster all day long making twenty sacks. It's just me and her, as a matter of fact, if you were making fifteen, twenty sacks, you were doing good, you know. Then we started shrimping, and that was fun, went in the Gulf over there. I was dying of sea sick, she drive at night and cawl the shrimp

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same time, and it's hell, and I say "Lisa, just follow the lights." And I was dying of sea sick. I don't know, I still get sea sick with those big waves.

**JG:** Oh, yeah, me too.

**JH:** And I say, "Lisa, follow those lights." And I get up in the night, you know, and she's lost, God knows, if could follow the light you don't know at night where you at. The lights sometimes feel close and, God knows, but probably miles away, you know. One light, fourteen windows, no glass on them. The waves hit us right and left, and the boat was going like this, and we—we could not harvest the shrimp, and I'd get up and I'd see a, like, "What the hell is that?" And I look, and the ship and I say "Lisa, what—rush." "Rush!" I said, "What happen? Put the boat full speed." And I put 1,800 RPM on it, put it into gear it could flip over. "No, we can put the doors on it." And we hear those people in the vicinity, we fixing to run over a shrimp boat.

**JG:** —Big ships.

**JH:** We ended up in the middle of the ship channel, where those grave yards, where the ships anchor, and drive—what the hell I know? Jim, honest to God, it took all night long, the waves hitting right and left, because of the cabin small boat. Light was on the bow, on the boat, with no windows, you know. We came to Galveston—we was, we were docking in Texas City Dock, you know, where Texas City Dock?

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** Fifteen minutes—we could not make it. So, we can come home. We just put one rope on the bow, and then we was out. That's when we heard the boats. The guys say, "Cap, get up, get up, if not I'm going to drag you to New Orleans." "New Orleans?" [Laughter]

[00:08:30]

**JG:** Did you go to New Orleans after that?

**JH:** No, finally they woke us up, you know, the boat was just hanging one line, it was just hanging in the middle of the channel. We was out for days. We had a really rough, rough, rough time. And people don't know, you know?

**JG:** No.

**JH:** People don't know how—how hard this—you got to work to make it somewhere. Nothing comes easy, you know.

**JG:** No, and like when you were shrimping that, that wasn't—I mean, evidently—you better than oystering—

**JH:** Jim, I didn't even speak the language, people was making fun of me. I was embarrassed to go collect the tickets.

**JG:** Wow.

**JH:** And then—they said, “Hey, Johnny you going to make it one of these days.” They say we don't go less than 500 dollars to make it, and we was making good money.

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** And one time, Misho called me, and said, “Johnny, did you do good yesterday?” I said, “Yeah, man I did two boxes.” “Man,” he said, “Joe Gonzales have the twenty boxes.” He was bragging. He was telling me he had twenty boxes of shrimp. Misho really makes me feel like shit, you know.

[00:09:27]

[Laughter] I thought, I did good, I was proud of myself, two boxes.

**JG:** Yeah, Right. Yeah, but you had never shrimped before.

[Talking Over Each Other]

**JH:** Never. Jim—

**JG:** He knew the secrets and everything, you know.

**JH:** I never saw no water, man— [Laughter]

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** —To swim, forget about the fishing, lot of people tell me, do that and they come. I never step foot there in my boat. Yeah, I did there one time in Turkey, I was on a ferry, first time I saw.

**JG:** Really?

**JH:** Yeah—and I was just—.

**RF:** So you didn't grow up near the water?

**JH:** Huh?

[00:09:56]

**RF:** You didn't grow up near the water?

**JH:** No, in the mountains. I'm a mountains person.

**JG:** Yeah, and you just came because of work? That was your—?

**JH:** Yeah.

**JG:** And to make a living, you know.

**JH:** And we did, believe me, and that's what I try to tell my boy. "Hey, it's not easy, but you need to really try to hold on, because—."

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** Get up three, four in the morning, and really, my wife would feel bad, because she really worked the hardest, you know. Most of the time, I got up—and one time in the morning, she get up she's slapping her face. I say, "What's wrong with you?" She said, "I am trying to stay awake." And she was driving me, boy always: "Let's go, let's go, let's go." And you have to go. And a ship channel, we draw so much water, I tied the boat to a beacon in the middle of the ship channel. Not in the middle, but on the side, because the boat would draw so much water, we cannot get in the shallow water. Ships coming, hollering horns. Sometimes we drifted when weren't tied, we put an anchor, we drifted and, God knows, miles away. One morning she get up, and she said, she looking in the morning, she said, "Johnny, Johnny"—well, you know. I say, "What?" I don't remember we have all those lights last night when we anchored the boat. I looked and, "Oh, shit." We drift about four miles away—I mean. [Laughter]

[00:11:03]

**JG:** Matter of fact, I was telling them that your success had just as much to do with you and Lisa being a team.

**JH:** Yeah, that's what it was.

**JG:** Because I remember when ya'll first started selling oysters, you know, and Lisa was selling  
—

**JH:** Yeah.

**JG:** —and you were running the boat, and all that there—that they had been a great team together, and had stuck it out through thick and thin, and had really taken a lot of steps forward, and not very many back.

**JH:** Yeah.

**JG:** —kept on buying leases.

**JH:** You just cannot give up, you got to continue it. And now really all the time I invest, I invest all the time, you know, I took chances that's—that's how I am, you know, lot of time, man, I was just—.

**JG:** And, as it turns out, good thing you have all those leases.

**JH:** Yeah, everybody was laughing at me. My cousin, way in Louisiana said, “Man, what'd you buy, mud over here, mussels?” My wife say, “What you buy mussels?”

**JG:** BP don't know that though.

[00:11:56]

**JH:** And we end up—we end up selling so many oysters there—there were those making 200 sacks—the mussels fell off.

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** When the salt water hit the other and, yeah.

**JG:** And the mussels went away—

**JH:** We was only the person with oysters, two or three years ago. And to be honest, I was keeping Jeri's [Seafood, owned by Ben Nelson]—in the business, you know.

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** We had a falling out, but—that's all.

**JG:** You did have a falling out?

**JH:** Yeah—though—

**JG:** Y'all can fix that though, huh?

**JH:** Probably.

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** To be honest—.

**[00:12:21]**

**JG:** Yeah, life's too short.

**JH:** Yeah, to be honest, that's why I bought the machine. I really didn't want to buy it, you know.

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** The high pressure machine. I tried to make—but as long as they buy the oysters, I didn't care, but—well. That's a long story, I'll explain it to you one day.

**JG:** Yeah, yeah.

**JH:** We need to go over lunch.

**JG:** Yeah, we do. Well—well—what changed your mind to get from the shrimping to the oystering?

**JH:** What really—what really would change me, you know, I was working really for Misho, you know.

**JG:** Yeah—and—you, you were about oysters.

**JH:** Yeah, and my boat was kind of old boat, and was a big boat, [Phone ringing] and came on a good season. Because I was working for Emory White.

**[00:12:59]**

Do you remember Emory White?

**JG:** I didn't know him, but I know the name, I remember the name, Emory Seafood.

**JH:** Yeah, right then Misho come, and beg me to come work for him, you know, because he bought a dock in San Leon, and he couldn't fill up the truck. So, we go and put the oysters in his Mercedes by hands. Load the Mercedes. When we had enough, then he tell the guy, Eddie from Louisiana, send the truck, then we go grab them one sack at a time. Carry them to the eighteen wheeler, that's a hard—work.

**JG:** Golly.

**JH:** Oh, yeah. We went through hell. It was just me and Misho, two boats, and I think he had another boat, three boats sometimes. But most the times, it was just me and him. Then come in season, I wanted to plant oysters, the guy Emory had some leases but Misho told me, but, “Come, come, I let you turn my leases.” But—but when it comes time to plan, he had a cousin came and this guy, Ivo, and he insist to claim, and Misho said, “I am sorry Johnny, I feel bad, but it's a family” you know. And I feel like shit, you know. I didn't want to stay there no more; I was heartbroken. I never told Misho, but that really hurt my feeling.

**JG:** Really.

[00:14:02]

**JH:** And then we went to looking for dock. I found a dock, and that's when I started shrimping. I turned the oyster boat—I turned the oyster boat to shrimp boat. Then we start shrimping, and little by little, you know, I make some money. Then Gaston, I was talking to Gaston, the old man, every day, and finally he decided to sell the lease. I was scared to death. He grabbed the pen, and he wouldn't sign the paper, and he keep talking. I said, “Man, sign the paper.” [Laughter] My heart was just going—.

**JG:** You know, I, I have told people in the, in, if anybody would ever go and be an oysterman for a week, they would think oysters are worth 150 dollars a sack.

**JH:** At least.

**JG:** You know, really. What goes in to making a sack of oysters, it unbelievable for what you get out of it. I mean, you know, today, I mean, you got to handle that oyster a bunch a times. You got, you know, even on the boat, you're handling every oyster.

**JH:** And then there's the weather, it's a miserable way out there, you know. Really, it's tough, you know. It's really hard.

**JG:** Really, if people really knew what went into making a sack of oysters, it's—it's—it's one of the greatest bargains today, and one of the finest seafood's to me—that's one of my favorites.

[00:15:16]

**JH:** [Aside:] How ya doing, man?

**MALE:** Happy New Year, young man. What's going on so far? I didn't even see you—.

**JH:** Happy New Year. [Laughter]

**JG:** Well, Johnny—.

**Male:** Happy New Year.

**JG:** —I know that the—I know that y'all have been really successful in the business, and you and Lisa's name, you know, when people speak of you and Lisa, it's nothing but—everything, everybody has been nothing but great things, to say about ya. From the time I first met y'all, before you even knew who I was, you know, I always respected—he and Lisa, because, they stuck it out. Like he's saying: you can't give up.

**JG:** And I am sure there was a lot of times, that it was.

**JH:** No.

**JG:** Giving up was the—the, you know, the easy way out, you know, and—but today, and—and in this business, you have good times and bad times. And you have seen the good and the bad.

**JH:** I have seen them all, believe me, I have seen them.

[00:16:13]

**JG:** Yeah, you have been in it long enough. But—

**JH:** And really—that's—I mean, that's one of the—I need some time off.

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** I have been doing this for so long. I did, I think nobody ever see in the United States, do what I did when it coming to shipping oysters. Sometime I ship twenty loads a day, twenty-five loads a day, you know, it's hard.

**JG:** Especially coming from nothing, and not having anybody in the family.

**JH:** Yeah, from nothing. Nobody ever did it.

**JG:** From being a foreigner, not knowing anybody, not even being in the business. And to being where he is, he and Lisa, and they both just as important to each other—you know, without Johnny, there would be no Lisa; no Lisa, no Johnny. I mean, it's like a team that they put together.

**JH:** Yeah, there really would.

**JG:** And it has been a beautiful thing—it has been an honor, for me to meet and to know them, and know their stories.

[00:17:08]

**JG:** Because that's the type of people that make America great, in my book, anyway.

**JH:** I talked to the guy, Al Sunsari. You know, Al?

**JG:** Yeah.

**JH:** At one time, he wants to buy oysters from me. I say Al, "Don't, because those people in Louisiana, they find out, they gonna blackmail you, they won't sell you oysters." "You know what, Johnny, I don't give a damn who those people are. I don't give a damn. If they ever sell my oysters, or not." He said, you know, he said, "I, matter of fact," he said, "I'm proud enough to tell somebody you're my friend." He said, "I know only son of a bitch come in this country, make it on his own, without having help from nobody. And it's you."

**JG:** And it's—yeah.

**JH:** He said, "And I don't care to tell them all off." He said, "I don't mind to tell anybody that I buying old Johnny's oysters. The hell with them."

**JG:** Wow.

**JH:** He said, "Because all those guys came, they start, they have somewhere start, a grandfather, a father, a start something, and he's the only man I know you

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came with nothing, and I'm proud." He said, "I—I'm happy to say, to say I am your friend." It really is, he kind of admire me, you know.

**JG:** Well, and, and here too, I mean, I, I—admire both of them, and—and what they [the Sunsari brothers] have done, and how they have left a good name for the industry and that’s—that’s important.

**JH:** I work—I work for everybody. I work for Ivo, I work for Misho, I work for Hellman’s, I work for Louis Maker, I work for—Nelson’s, I work for all of them, I did it all. So,—

**JG:** Yep.

**JH:** And now I am the biggest competition out there, they don’t like it too much, but there nothing they can do, you know, I didn’t steal it from nobody, and I just hard work.

**JG:** And—and you know, and, as Raz [Halili, Johnny’s son] being the next generation that takes over, you know, if he has all the tools that you—

**JH:** If he wanted to, or perhaps he just want to look good. He don’t care. [Laughter]

[00:19:02]

**JG:** And he’s gonna do it.

**JH:** You think so?

**JG:** You know I was, I was in the same thing with him, at one time, and, and the same thing you know, and it’s hard coming from—it’s hard to, him to place himself in the same place you were, when you were eleven, because he, you know, and it was the same thing with my grandfather—I can’t put myself where he was, but, you know, but you can take what he did, and make it better. That’s all you can do.

**JH:** I know, I—I—I do feel bad some days, and sometimes I bitch about, and say, “What did you sell, and where did he go?” And when he does. And I said, “No, well don’t, this is just Misho’s customers, or Ben Nelson’s, Jeri’s Seafood, customers and where you gonna go, there’s only two people, the two biggest here anyway.

**JG:** Well—I think you—I think you have to—to be your own business—.

**JH:** No, no. We never did, we really never did. But we start doing that now, we started doing that a little bit now, you know. Mostly I didn’t want to bother; I didn’t want to rock the boat. I’d been friends with everybody, try to stay away from everybody’s way, but nobody cared in the end, you know, so.

**JG:** But there is nothing better than good competition, it makes everybody better, if there is only one man, you get what the one man wants to give you. But if there's five men, you have a choice, you know, and that's—that's really the American way.

**JH:** We in competition with Misho, but really—we are like brother, we never cross—we never have cross word with each other. Or “Why you did that?” Or, “Why you do that?” Whatever I need, he give; whatever I got, he get it—so, I wish everybody was like him, you know.

[00:20:40]

**JG:** Friendly competition. Each—

**JH:** Always, yes, exactly, we never had falling out, between us never, never, never. No, and always we didn't—stand in each other's way, you know. Selling to the same people, and running into each other, but we never, never had one disagreement. Oh, no.

**JG:** Never tried to hurt each other—.

**JH:** No, I wouldn't hurt the man, for the world. I would not want to hurt nobody, to be honest, but it's just business sometimes, you know, you're right.

**JG:** Sometime you have to do what you have to do—.

**JH:** You make enemies out of your friends, you don't want to, you know, but—.

**JG:** Right. Well, this has been, you know, in general, a great business for you and Lisa that y'all got into it, I know that's hard times, and, and—.

**JH:** You forget those eventually.

**JG:** Yeah, you forget, you live for the good times, and—but—do you plan to keep buying up leases? No? You have enough.

**JH:** I got too many, I probably never get to work them all, Mr. Jim. But we might, I never say never. I don't know what I am going to do.

**JG:** You have to find a good one I guess—.

[00:21:42]

**JH:** But I don't know this—what he's [Raz Halili] going to do, he's pretty much fixing to be in charge.

**RF:** How are you preparing your son to be in charge?

**JH:** I hope he's preparing himself, you know. We take it by footsteps, because—well, he's, he's very well educated, he—finished college, he doing really good, right now. He's really a good kid, you know. Matter of a fact, one time I went in a club over there, and I like to drink mixed drinks, once in a while, you know. He brought party singer from our country, and I thought people gonna give him problems, so, I go over there, and so, just to be there in case. [Phone ringing] And I ordered a drink, a Seven and Seven, the guy, his friends, I didn't know the owner of the club run to me, and he said, "Is—Raz is your son?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Man, that's—." He said, "It's hard to find kids like this nowadays." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, he's a good kid." He said, "I have been watching him for two, three years coming in, and he never smoke, never drink." "Shit!" I got a drink in front of me, and I start—. [Laughter]

**JG:** You thought that's what he needed?

[00:22:52]

**JH:** I know. He said—and as matter of fact, we met a girl in Galveston, and she looked at Lisa, and she said, "Are you Raz's mom?" And she said, "Yeah, how do you know me?" She said, "Oh, I know you." And we start talking, and we ask—and I said, "I want to ask you a question. I don't know you, you don't have to tell me your name. I want to know: Does my son drink? Because he told me he never drink?" He said, "We cannot understand." He said, "All night long, he working and—Red Bull, he never touched a drink. We don't understand how a person can own a club, and never touch a drink." I say, "He don't own no club." He said, "Well, he tell everybody to get in and out." He said, "I thought he owned the club." I said, "No, but he's kind of, you know, his friends, they like him, so, he can bring anybody he wants." He's really a good kid, you know.

**JG:** Yeah, well, that said, you ought to be proud of him too, I mean, he's—kind of great.

**JH:** Ah, yeah. I, I pretty much, achieve something, to be honest. I hate to say that in front of him, but I never hear—never brought bad things in this place, never have nobody knock on the door, and say, "Your son did that." Or when—for questioning for a police station, or anybody. No, thank God, and there's the main thing, with the drugs in this country are very bad.

**JG:** Yeah, it ruin's peoples' lives. Yeah, that's for sure, and changes the whole person.

**JH:** Yeah, really does, you know. He's not very aggressive, but he got there, and he don't like to bug people too much, you know, he say—he stand, what he'd have to say,

[00:24:16]

like salesman, they are really. I want him to be hired as a salesman probably, you know, but there is so much push, you know, and like he's not this type of person, that's how he is, you know, I don't want him to be like this either, you know.

[00:24:28]

**JG:** Well, you come with what you've got. [Phone ringing] I don't like to go collect money either—the fact is, they wanted me to—see if I could be on the board of selling Foodways [Texas]—and, you know, financial thing. I said, “That's not something I”—even when people owe me money, I hate to call to collect the money. That's not—I'd rather get somebody else to do it, you know, I guess you have to figure, what you would love to do and what you good at—.

**RAZ HALILI (RH):** I grew up around the business, [Inaudible] and try to keep—

**JG:** But you can be proud of him, I mean came to talk to Chris, you know, and he gave a good—the thing with us, you know, one day, we'll try to do more and more business with you, because we want to.

**JH:** I hope so.

**JG:** —Because y'all great people. You know, that's the whole thing, it's not like—and—but we—we can't just throw our other people to the—you know, that just how it is, you know, you try to, as you grow, you bring in more people, and sure if I would have been—you know, I started out doing business—with—Fuzzy LaFrance down in—in Point à la Hache, and Kenny Fox, and then I got with Dudley and Jimmy Guidry.

[00:25:56]

[Phone ringing.] And then when they closed down in [19]97, I jumped around from Parka, and all these people. You know, you never got what you paid for with those guys, the fights and all those guys. Then I ended up finding Ben Nelson. And Ben had thrown me off his lot, because I had “Louisiana Foods” on the truck, and he didn't want—he didn't want me to have—promote Louisiana. So, he said, “No, you can't.” And boy, I needed that 300 dollars to drive that truck back to Dudley, would pay the fuel, the everything for a round trip. And so, I didn't even want to talk to Ben for years.

**JH:** He's a hard—.

**JG:** He was tough. And then, of course, after—I jumped around to different oyster people and, you know, one thing that Ben does do, if you buy and sell a full, you know, if you buy and sell seven pound, you get seven pounds, you know, and I never had complaints from my customers, so I started doing more business with him, and that's how, kind of how—kind of we got—got involved with him.

**JH:** You do buy a lot of oysters, you know—.

**JG:** Yeah, yeah—I mean, it’s like anything else, we are not in the oyster business, you know, it’s not like—but we do supply a lot of restaurants. We are not in that business, we don’t have boats, we don’t have people, we don’t have shucking jobs.

[00:27:23]

**JH:** My whole office begging, when you gonna fry us some more of those oysters? Oh God, that was good. We never eat oysters, honest to God. Season open—. My wife, where ever we go, she’s got to have raw oysters in a restaurant. I don’t eat them raw.

**JG:** Yeah.

[00:27:38]

**JH:** But I love fried, the way you did it.

**JG:** Well, I’ll come anytime. All you got to do is—.

**JH:** Last year, and not this year, we never ate fresh oysters yet.

**JG:** No, you haven’t?

**JH:** Never.

**JG:** Wow.

**RF:** Do you like oysters, raw oysters?

**JH:** No, I don’t. My wife does, but not me. I love them fried.

**JG:** You like them fried. In fact he had given me a gallon, a couple of gallons, I guess a year or so ago. So, I fried the whole gallon of them, and gave it to my sales reps, and I took the other gallon, and I fried them, and I brought them—put them on a thing—and drove them over here, they were still good.

**JH:** They were the best oysters I ever ate in my life, honest to God. We didn’t know how to prepare them. I guess we don’t.

**JG:** Yeah, it’s got to be hot grease.

**JH:** All the time when we go to a restaurant.

**JG:** Not too many in the—in the thing, you know. Get them crisp on the outside, and still juicy on the inside.

**JH:** So, what's you put them, how you prepare them?

**RH:** The seasoning, the spices?

[00:28:27]

**JG:** Cornmeal, in fact, I can bring you that? I bring you a big sack of the seasoning spices, you just roll them in that, and I'll show you have to do it. And we will come make a big po'boy, see how think we can make it.

**JH:** I am trying to stay away, man, I am trying to lose some weight. Oh man, don't mention those fried.

**JG:** That's the hardest thing—.

**JH:** Guys, I am sorry my dad is waiting, I was supposed to be at lunch a long time ago, you know. Jim, I feel bad, you know— [Phone ringing.]

[RF asks for JH's name and birthdate.]

**JH:** It's a long name, a Turkish name, Hajrulla Halili. 10-11-53.

**RF:** Can you spell your name for us too?

**JH:** H, A, J—

**RH:** H, A, J, R, U, L, L, A.

**JH:** H, A, L, I, L, I.

**RF:** Thank you.

**JH:** You're very welcome.

[END INTERVIEW]

[00:29:26]