



“I HOPE...”: VISIONS FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE IN COASTAL LOUISIANA
A PORTRAIT AND INTERVIEW SERIES FEATURING LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS IN COASTAL
PROTECTION AND RESTORATION

Narrator: VICTORIA SAGRERA BOURQUE

Interviewer: LAUREN LEONPACHER

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00;00;00;18 - 00;00;25;26

LAUREN: My name is Lauren Leonpacher interviewing Victoria Sagrera Bourque concerning her memories and experiences in Louisiana wetlands as well as her hopes for a sustainable future for coastal Louisiana. This interview is being conducted on the banks of the Vermilion River in Abbeville, Louisiana, on the afternoon of October 28th, 2021. Do you understand that portions of the taped interview and pictures taken during the interview will be used in publications and a variety of media?

00;00;26;06 - 00;00;26;18

VICTORIA: Yes.

00;00;27;00 - 00;00;28;27

LAUREN: Please state your full name and spell it.

00;00;29;11 - 00;00;41;27

VICTORIA: Victoria V-I-C-T-O-R-I-A Sagrera S-A-G-R-E-R-A Bourque B-O-U-R-Q-U-E

00;00;42;14 - 00;00;44;28

LAUREN: If you like, you could tell us your birth date and where you were born.

00;00;46;16 - 00;00;54;25

VICTORIA: I was born in Lafayette, Louisiana, and my birth date is December 31st, 1990. (chuckles) I had to think about that!

00;00;55;16 - 00;00;56;23

LAUREN: Where did you grow up, Victoria?

00;00;57;10 - 00;01;06;09

VICTORIA: I grew up, um just south of where we are right now, of Abbeville, Louisiana, just north of Intracoastal City in a small little area called Mouton Cove.

00;01;06;19 - 00;01;09;08

LAUREN: Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood in Mouton Cove?

00;01;09;23 - 00;01;44;22

VICTORIA: Sure. My family is a very strong, agriculturally based family. So most of my childhood memories revolve around following my grandfather around the farm, kicking my boots over the cattle shoots, and hitting them as they go by to get their shots. A lot of rice fields, a lot of crawfish boats, very coastal, structured and direct though. I had a lot of experience testing the soil for salinity, especially after a storm.

00;01;45;14 - 00;01;54;12

VICTORIA: Um, a lot of learning of the wildlife and how that affects agriculture, and just all the different things in between. I've had a very outdoor-based upbringing.

00;01;55;18 - 00;02;04;22

LAUREN: So we're interviewing you today because you have been a huge advocate for coastal restoration of Louisiana. Can you talk to us a little bit about how you got involved in that work?

00;02;05;19 - 00;02;34;01

VICTORIA: Sure. So as I said, my agriculturally-rooted childhood and coastal upbringing, really fueled my passion for coastal restoration. My grandfather has always been like an idol to me, and he was my hunting and fishing buddy. And so something that always struck me at a very young age, was going out to our hot red fishing spots and knowing exactly where they were going to be on those grassy points.

00;02;34;25 - 00;03;11;21

VICTORIA: And in the short amount of time that I was able to do those experiences with him, in about 20 maybe years, I was able to witness for myself the coastal changes that we've had on our coast. Um, seeing those grassy spots that we knew were hotspots for fishing just completely wiped off. Um, it definitely made me curious, and it also made me concerned about the future with what kind of implications would that make for our coast and communities on a wider scale.

00;03;12;28 - 00;03;18;17

LAUREN: So professionally, what is your relationship to the wetlands? What do you do currently?

00;03;18;26 - 00;03;35;08

VICTORIA: I'm the executive director of Restore or Retreat. Restore or Retreat is a nonprofit coastal advocacy group. We work to implement large-scale, long-term restoration solutions in the Barataria and Terrebone Basins of Louisiana, which is the bayou region.

00;03;38;02 - 00;03;50;28

LAUREN: In your professional experiences with this organization and in previous professional experiences, do you have a memory of feeling hopeful that what you were doing is making a difference in the long term?

00;03;51;16 - 00;04;20;08

VICTORIA: Absolutely. So through Restore or Retreat, we have a program called Working for Our Coast where we engage ninth grade students in both Lafourche and Terrebone in ways that they can get involved in our coast in a professional aspect. So we bus them into Fletcher Technical Community College. We bring in an array of different coastal related careers, educate them on what's at stake of our coast, how they can get involved, and where those careers can take them.

00;04;20;20 - 00;04;34;26

VICTORIA: So knowing that we're actively implementing some coastal education in these younger generations gives me hope for the future, that they'll stay within our state and stay working on our working coast and those issues.

00;04;35;09 - 00;04;52;13

LAUREN: Is there something specific that you communicate to those groups of younger people that you want them to take into the future, something that you want them to know about Louisiana's coast and why it's important that they participate in these kinds of restoration practices?

00;04;52;25 - 00;05;16;26

VICTORIA: Sure. So our coast is vital, not only to actually being the ground beneath our feet, but it drives the economy on a nationwide level. And so the engagements of these students have a direct impact not only on the ground with which they live, or their parents livelihoods, but it could be implications for the future, for their career and where they live,

00;05;17;04 - 00;05;45;19

VICTORIA: the efforts that they get engaged in. So we truly want them to understand what's at stake and how they can get involved in changing that. Because regardless if they live in Louisiana or outside of the state, everyone feels what's happening in Louisiana, the landloss crisis that we're experiencing. So if we can get them engaged and going forth in their own way on our restoration solutions, I think that's going to give us better hope for the future and continued efforts for our coast.

00;05;46;14 - 00;05;59;29

LAUREN: Can you describe what your vision is for sustainability for Louisiana's coast? Who is participating? How we're moving toward sustainability and what that looks like in the long term?

00;06;00;13 - 00;06;28;16

VICTORIA: Sure. So I've lived in coastal Louisiana for almost 31 years, and I've worked in the coastal industry for the last seven years now. And in that amount of time I've seen and experienced for myself the serious land loss we have here, but also in that amount of time, I've been able to see and experience what's being done to combat those issues.

00;06;29;24 - 00;07;00;13

VICTORIA: Um, I think we have industry leading experts working day in and day out on these issues. We have a science-backed guide with the state's Coastal Master Plan of innovative solutions to drive us in the right direction. We have, we have schools that are implementing and sewing into their curriculum, coastal education. We have that even further, with universities and colleges providing degrees for these students to get involved in our coastal efforts through a career.

00;07;00;27 - 00;07;26;20

VICTORIA: We have organizations like the one I work for, Restore or Retreat, who are advocating for these efforts, but also giving citizens an avenue for their voice to be heard and letting them pick their ways that they can get involved in whatever resources best fits their lifestyle. I think things are being done every single day to move that ball forward and take steps toward a sustainable future.

00;07;26;29 - 00;07;51;10

VICTORIA: And to me, that looks like resiliency. I think resiliency is so important, and it's something that resonates with so many people here in Louisiana. We have nearly, I believe it's 2.3 million people that live just along our coast. So over time, I know that each one of those people have had to learn resiliency in their own way, just as my family has.

00;07;51;20 - 00;08;17;03

VICTORIA: Whether that's through your career or your livelihood, where you live, I think resiliency needs to be something that's taken into the future, and that's going to look different. We have to evolve with the challenges we're being faced with. But I think I think resiliency will get us to where we need to be. I think the coastal solutions and the leading experts, the leadership we have in this state, is going to get us where we need to be, as well as those younger generations kicking in.

00;08;17;25 - 00;08;19;13

VICTORIA: I'm very hopeful for our future.

00;08;20;13 - 00;08;36;18

LAUREN: I heard you talk a little bit about some community voices and giving them a platform to be heard. What are some of the ways that you or that the folks at Restore or Retreat work to ensure that the under-represented members of our community have their voices heard?

00;08;36;28 - 00;08;59;21

VICTORIA: Sure. So, like I said, we have that Working for Our Coast program where it is open to all ninth grade students in both parishes. So we like to try to start young in getting all cultural backgrounds, all communities, all diversities, engage in coastal efforts, whether picking a career in coastal or just learning what's at stake here and why you should care.

00;09;00;07 - 00;09;38;06

VICTORIA: But then going forward, I think having various opportunities for folks to get involved, public opportunities for volunteer efforts, having any community background be able to plant some smooth cord grass on our marshes, some mangroves to directly effect and impact the pelican population. We have Queen Bess Island right off the coast of the Bayou region. I mean, there's all kind of different ways, but the kicker is that you have to find different avenues for different backgrounds. Not everyone has the same type of resource, transportation, you name it.

00;09;38;06 - 00;09;49;03

VICTORIA: Everyone has different access. So I think providing various ways to do that is going to be the best solution to be able to impact as many people as you can and get them to care in whatever way that they can.

00;09;49;03 - 00;10;02;16

LAUREN: Thank you for talking today. We really appreciate your time. Is there anything else that you would like us to know about your experience or your, your vision for this place that you call home?

00;10;05;12 - 00;10;37;28

VICTORIA: The only thing I would say is that, you know, looking back, I've always had a very strong sense of coastal significance in my life. Every career, every school move, I've always had some kind of tie back to our coast. And it's always been, " I want to honor the people who came before me. I want to give back to our coast who has given so much to my family and the different natural resources that we have."

00;10;38;15 - 00;11;00;26

VICTORIA: It's always been me looking back. And now I think I've gotten to a point, and a lot of that's due to having a baby now, I'm looking forward. I'm looking... What can I do to make sure he has a place to live? Hopefully the same place I live where my family has been for generations. I want him to have that same coastal upbringing.

00;11;00;27 - 00;11;26;23

VICTORIA: I want him to have the same type of coastal opportunities to hunt and fish in our thriving marshes, to be able to raise thriving agricultural stock, whether that's crops or cattle or whatever it may be. Having sound salinity to be able to do that. I think providing him, and all future generations, with a place to call home, the home that we love here in Louisiana, our working coast,

00;11;27;15 - 00;11;34;14

VICTORIA: I think that is now my driver. So looking back, I'm now looking forward, and I think our future is bright and I'm hopeful for it.

00;11;35;00 - 00;11;35;15

LAUREN: Thank you again.