

This oil field roughneck led a hard life. Then it got even rougher, until [Allsup](#) stepped in.

Oil Rigs, Twisters and [SSDI](#)

At age 44, Lewis Merritt III has already lived a full life. He was an Alabama roughneck in years past, working on oil rigs 12 hours a day. He spent years as a painter and laborer, slapping on thousands upon thousands of gallons of paint and finishing countless hardwood floors. He survived hurricanes, twisters, and a house fire that he didn't think he'd survive. But when his body failed to keep up with his work ethic, he almost met his match. Almost.

Born in Pensacola, Fla., Lewis lived on the area's famous white sand beaches for 13 years. Then he moved to southern Alabama, and quickly fell in love with his new home. After surviving a near deadly house fire, he quickly settled into the Alabama way of doing things. And he worked, sometimes excessively hard.

Lewis' family had a strong work ethic that was instilled in him from a young age. His father worked for Monsanto, his grandfather worked in the Navy yard and both did painting on the side. So when Lewis started his first business while still in high school, it was a painting company and Lewis went into it at full speed. He was good at manual labor, and he soon branched out and landed a job in the oil fields of southern Alabama.

His official job title was "roughneck," and he spent 12 hours a day, for seven days at a time, pushing and pulling pipe in and out of drill holes. Working with 15,000-17,000 feet

of pipe at a time, Lewis' job was to pull out the pipe, in 90 foot pieces, with huge hydraulic tongs. Once out, he would change the attachment on the bottom of the pipe and put it back into the ground. Every foot of it. It was hard work that had him squatting most of the time.

After 10 years of hard work, Lewis' body was feeling the pain. His back problems began while in the oil fields, and the painting and flooring work soon took their toll on his knees. Working with thousands of gallons of paint containing ammonia and Clorox eventually damaged his lungs and eyes.

After being in serious pain for over a year, he had to stop working. Diagnosed with severe rheumatoid arthritis, he didn't know how he was going to survive. He didn't want to collect food stamps from the government or be a burden to others, so Lewis and his wife became reliant on what they could hunt or fish. It was always a struggle to get money together to pay for the trips to his doctor. His life finally changed for the better when a friend, who was familiar with Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and also with Allsup Inc., urged Lewis to [contact Allsup](#).

Allsup Inc. is the nation's leading Social Security disability representation firm. Founded in 1984 and headquartered near St. Louis, [Allsup has helped tens of thousands of people from across the nation receive their entitled disability benefits.](#)

Mr. Merritt learned that [SSDI is different from other government aid](#). Instead of being a handout, which he didn't want to accept, SSDI is an insurance program that everyone pays into through FICA taxes. [He called Allsup Inc.](#) because he had no desire to deal with the Social Security Administration (SSA) by himself.

[Even with Allsup's professional disability representation, receiving SSDI benefits is still a battle](#). Mr. Merritt's initial application was denied, as was his first appeal. However, Allsup's disability professionals compiled so much detailed medical information that an administrative law judge approved the application without Mr. Merritt having to attend an oral hearing.

"It was pretty amazing," Mr. Merritt commented. "I wouldn't change a thing if I had to apply for SSDI again. Allsup kept me up to date on what was going on with my application, and everyone was always very encouraging to me. Michael Laurent, my representative, and every person at Allsup was great to deal with."

Mr. Laurent remembers the case well.

"Mr. Merritt had a very credible claim and it was unfortunate that he had to wait as long as he did," he said. "But because he stayed in the process and didn't drop out after the first two denials, we were able to secure those benefits for him at the third level of the process, only 16 months after the initial application."

The SSDI application process was lengthy, but a working man's life had given Lewis the character he needed to keep pushing forward.

“Some days are still unbearable, usually depending on the weather. I can't sleep, the pain is extreme, and if I get a whiff of paint I can barely breathe and my eyes start watering uncontrollably,” Mr. Merritt said. “I'm always so tired, but I'm still here. I'm very grateful to Allsup because I was worried about how I was going to survive. Allsup made a difficult process as easy as possible and helped me get the insurance benefits I paid for.”

Today Mr. Merritt is receiving SSDI and he's grateful that he paid his FICA taxes over the years. Without SSDI he doesn't know where he would be today.