

Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage 5/13/93

Henry Clayton Adams - Oral History "Vanishing Culture Project" Pauline Adams Funded in part by the Florida Humanities Council

Interviewers: Mike Jepson

I 1: Mr. Adams is commonly known as Jap and we're going to ask him how he ever got that nickname. But before we do that, Mr. Adams would you please state your full name and date of birth.

R: Henry Clayton Adams. Born August 27, 1921.

I 1: What were your parents' names?

R: Willis Adams and Dora Jean Adams.

I 1: What was your mother's maiden name?

R: Fulford.

I 1: Do you have any brothers and sisters?

R: Well, two of my brothers are dead. But there were six of us boys. I had five brothers and three sisters.

I 1: Can you name them?

R: Yeah, Oldest brother is Hugh Adams, next was Leon Adams and then Howard Adams, Cleve Adams ... C.D. Adams ...

I 1: And your sisters?

R: Pauline Adams, Doris Adams and Mabel Adams.

I 1: You say Hugh and Leon passed away?

R: Yes.

I 1: And are your sisters ...

R: They're all livin'.

I 1: Tell us your wife's name.

R: Pauline Adams.

I 1: How long have you been married?

R: 42 years.

I 1: How many children do you have?

R: Well, she has one. We adopted him. So one son.

I 1: I want to talk a little bit about the early days in Cortez, what you remember about that. Usually I start out asking you about your father. Could you tell us a little bit about him, what type of person he was and what his occupation was?

R: Well, he came here from Georgia and he started fishin'. Worked all his life fishin' in Cortez or workin' at the fish house off and on. He was a fine man. I don't know what I can say about him. He worked hard all his life.

I 1: Do you remember fishing with him when you were young?

R: No. When I started I didn't fish very long. After I got up grown I fished a little bit off and on in the summer time. Then I went off in the service and when I came back he was workin' at the fish house. He worked there until he died.

I 1: What type of a person was he? Was he stern, was he a strict father?

R: He was a good man. He taught us right and wrong. I don't know much more to say about him. He was a good man.

I 1: Was he a good fisherman?

R: Yeah, he was a good fisherman. He was a hard worker. He worked at the fish house for about \$15.00 a week before the War and after that I don't think he made much more. He might have made \$20.00 or \$25.00 a week. I worked at the fish house about a year before I went into the service and I was makin' \$20.00 a week.

I 1: Do you think he liked working at the fish house more than fishing, or was it the other way around?

R: I don't know. It was more of a steady job. He knew what he was gonna make. Fishin' back in them times you might make \$5.00 for the week or you might not make anything. So he knew what he had comin' in. And of course, as the boys grew up they all worked. We all worked and helped each other out.

I 1: Tell me a little bit about your mother. What type of a woman was she?

R: She was a good woman. She raised nine of us kids, stayed home and done all the cookin' and washin' the clothes. Of course, back in them days they washed the clothes out in the yard in a big iron pot. Put 'em on the line to dry 'em. There weren't no washin' machines or dryers at that time.

I 1: Did the boys have to help with that or was that mainly the girls' job?

R: As the girls got older they helped too. Of course, all of 'em was older than I was and I don't remember too much about 'em. We all helped each other. Everybody had to work. Of course, they raised their own chickens and sometimes had a little garden. Ate a lot of fish and grits. But we got along good.

I 1: Did you have any specific chores around the house that you had to do when you were young?

R: No. I mowed a yard quite a bit. I didn't have too much to do around there. Wasn't too much to do at the time.

I 1: What house did you grow up in? Where's the house located now?

R: Well, I was born in that old house there right across from the church. I don't know what street it is. You know where the church here in Cortez is? I was born in the old school house.

I 1: You were born in the old school house?

R: Not the old school house down on the corner. It's right as you turn to go down to the fishing docks.

I 1: The old one-room school house?

R: Right. Earl Guthrie lived there and he died. And then we lived in the house where Paul Taylor lives now. What street is that?

R 2: It's on 45th Avenue I think.

I 1: Right.

R: Lived there for quite a few years and then we moved over to the old Fulford house. My Daddy bought that and my Granddaddy was still livin'. We bought that and we lived in that until '45 or '46. It was '51 when we got married wasn't it? Captain Billy's house. He was my Granddad. He was still livin' at the time. My mother took care of him till he died.

I 1: Do you remember much about living in that one-room school- house?

R: No, I was born there and I guess I was about two months old when the '21 storm hit. And the tide was real high and they came up in a boat and got my mother and me and by that time it washed off the blocks and went on down the street. And they went up to as far as that old Palma Sola Road, goes

around Palma Sola Bay, the water was that high. That's where I was born though.

I 1: I was going to say, it would seem like it would be pretty crowded in that house with nine of you.

R: There was seven at the time. My youngest brother and youngest sister wasn't in there at the time. They were born in the other house.

I 1: Do you remember it as a hard life growing up in Cortez at that time?

R: Well, I don't know. Everybody had to work hard. Wasn't much to do. Didn't make any money. But like I say, we got along good. Nobody ever did starve. I imagine we fared lots better than a lot of people durin' the depression. We always had fish and grits to eat and like I said, we had a little garden. Raised our own chickens. Buy a sack of flour and Mother would make biscuits. Didn't know what a loaf of bread was.

R 2: No money or shoes, but plenty to eat.

R: Old dirt roads there. I remember when they first topped 'em. Of course, back in them days we had old kerosene heaters. Get ready to go to bed we'd have to take a kerosene rag and wash the tar off our feet, walkin' on old hot top roads.

I 1: You called them hot top?

R: Yeah. Hard roads or hot top roads.

I 1: What do you remember about growing up in Cortez as a youngster? What did you do for entertainment or was there any?

R: Wasn't any entertainment, just entertained yourself I guess. Get out and we'd play marbles and then sometimes at the old sand flat we'd play baseball. I know Saturday come I always wanted to come to Bradenton to the movie. You could walk all the way to Bradenton and wouldn't see a car. There was only two cars in Cortez at the time I think. Judge Millis had one and Mr. Parrot who run the grocery store, he had one. They usually went to town on Saturday and sometimes you'd catch them on the way back and stand on the fender all the way home. If you didn't catch them you'd walk all the way home.

I 1: That was quite a walk back then wasn't it?

R: Yeah, about ten miles I imagine. But you could take a quarter and go to the theater and buy a bag of popcorn and a cold drink and have change left over.

I 1: For next week's movie. Did you work around the Village as a child? I know a lot of the kids used to go down to the fish houses and help cut mackerel.

R: Yeah, we'd stay there at night and gut mackerel and then go to school. We smelled like an old mackerel in school. Then in the summer time we'd try to go fishin' with some of the crew and they'd

give us a dollar or two maybe if they made any.

I 1: What would you do when you were young and they would take you out? What would be your tasks on the boats then?

R: Well, sometimes we'd go seine-fishin' and you'd haul the nets to the beach. Other times if they was gill-nettin' they'd pole the boats and at times they would stay behind and we'd start the old boat up and run it up to 'em.

I 1: They let you run the boat?

R: Yeah, of course there wouldn't be much. Just a little ways.

I 1: But they didn't pay you much.

R: No, then I worked at the fish house quite a bit. I was workin' at the fish house before the Army called me.

I 1: Your father was running what fish house at the time?

R: He was workin' for Judge Millis' Star Fish Company. That's the Star Company that's there now.

I 1: And prior to that he worked at several didn't he on that waterfront?

R: No. I don't know as he worked for any fish company except the Star. Of course, the Star was an old fish house where Bell Fish Company is now. Judge Millis built the one that is there now and he worked there until he died.

I 1: I thought he might have worked for Fulford at one time, but he didn't?

R: Not as I know of. I worked for Fulford, Ralph's dad.

I 1: You ran the fish house that's there today?

R: Well, at the time the fish house was offshore and Woodrow Green, my brother-in-law, and Paul Taylor and myself worked there. At the time they started buildin' the fish house that's there now, Walter Taylor and Earl Guthrie, there wasn't anything to do and we'd go ashore and help 'em work on that old fish house, to build that one. I guess I worked there about a year before I went off in the service.

I 1: Who did you fish with when you first started? Who taught you how to fish?

R: Well, I fished some with Albert Fugh. That's the first job I had to make a straight salary. Then I fished some with Mr. Bell. Walter Bell's dad.

I 1: Aaron?

R: Yeah, I fished with him. Then my brother-in-law come to see me, Woodrow, and wanted me to work with him at the fish house so I worked with him till I went off in the service.

I 1: When you fished, what type of fishing did you do?

R: Well, stop-nettin' and seine-fishin' and gill-nettin'. Some of all of it.

I 1: You weren't doing any particular type of fishing then?

R: No.

I 1: Who were some of the better fishermen that you remember at that time?

R: I don't know, all of 'em were good fishermen. Albert Fugh and Millard Brown and Tink Fulford, my Uncle, he was a good one. I guess all the old timers around, Jess Williams was a good fisherman. I don't know that any of 'em was any better than the other. They was all about the same as far as I know.

I 1: How many fish houses were there in Cortez when you were growing up?

R: Well, there was Star and Fulford and Jess Williams had one also. Mr. Green had one. So I guess about four.

I 1: About like it is today. There weren't many fish houses. You said that early on most of them were built out over the water.

R: Yeah, they were. All of 'em was over the water and then the trucks would have to back out to 'em on wooden planks and they'd get 'em loaded. Trucks mostly come from Georgia and they'd rev the motor up and get her warm so they could ahead on real fast and those old planks were rattlin'. They didn't want to have to stop cause maybe it would break through. Just old wooden pilin'.

I 1: That's what I always wondered about. Backing those trucks out there, it would seen awful dangerous. Did trucks ever run off?

R: No, they was pretty good with the straight jobs. Then about at the last they started with tractor trailers and most of them fellas couldn't back 'em out of there. I know there was one old fella there, Frank Smith, he was pretty good at it. I know one time he got into it and backed it out cause the driver couldn't do it. I don't know the driver's name. I don't know if they just couldn't back 'em out or if they was just scared.

I 1: That would be a lot of weight on those planks too.

R: Yeah, they'd put 8,000 to 10,000 pounds of fish on there and ice, plus the weight of the truck and all and trailer. So they were always scared but they never did break in. Always kept good pilin', enough

to hold 'em up.

I 1: What did you do at the fish house? What was your job when you first started?

R: As fish would come in we'd weigh 'em, wash 'em and we'd stack 'em in a room. You don't put 'em in there like they today in boxes. Put a layer of ice on the floor and stack the fish, head up.

I 1: Individual fish?

R: Yeah, we'd stack each one up like that and had a bulk head across there and we'd stack the fish up to the bulk head and then put a layer of ice and then a layer of fish and a layer of ice like that. Then when the trucks came down to pick 'em up, we'd have to go through it again. We'd have to wash 'em. We had a vat there with two handles on each side and we'd put the fish in there and wash 'em and dump 'em up on a table. We'd weigh 'em off and stack 'em in the truck the same way.

I 1: On their tails, head-up?

R: Yeah. On their tails. And then of course, there were no ice machines and we had old ice picks and we had to pick all the ice, chisel it. Then you finished, you didn't have a water hose to wash the dock down, you had an old deck bucket. Get the water from overboard and throw it and get an old broom and wash it. It was hard doin' back in them days.

I 1: Things moved at a much different pace than they do today.

R: Then they finally came along and had an old ice grinder where you'd lay your block of ice over and break it up in about 25, 30 pound pieces and throw them over in the old ice grinder and that would grind it up.

I 1: Where would you get the ice?

R: They made it in Bradenton and then they had a lay-house in Cortez. The place behind Paul Taylor's house. They had trucks bring it down and they'd put it in there and then as the fish houses wanted it, well a fella would bring it down to 'em.

I 1: The fish weren't iced on the boats at that time. They didn't carry ice out on the boats did they?

R: No, not too much. They didn't stay out very long. They'd catch 'em and bring 'em in. They'd have a few fish. They'd go up to an Island, take their old pocket knife or somethin' and break the mango limbs off and just shade 'em and bring 'em in like that. They could keep 'em all day long. They'd stay good. Wouldn't spoil. You throw one in a boat now and leave it there an hour without ice, he's rotten. But they'd keep 'em just about all day long if they shaded 'em.

I 1: Were the fish gutted or ... when they brought them in, did you gut the fish right away?

R: Well, mullet you never did gut 'em. But of course, back in them days they never caught much of

anything except mullet. We'd just throw 'em in the boats and bring 'em back to the fish house. We'd have to gut 'em ourselves after we got 'em to the docks.

I 1: But were they sold that way to the markets?

R: Yeah, they were sold fresh.

I 1: What is ... they call it in the round? They don't gut them or ...?

R: I think they still gut all fish except mackerel. Sometimes they don't want the mackerel gutted. I think that's on account of the machines the way they filet 'em out so they will have an even side. But back in them days we gutted 'em all. Then they used to ship fish to New York in 200 pound barrels. They'd put fish in 'em like that and then they had an old crooker top to go over it and a round stave to go over that. They would take 'em to Tamp and put 'em on trains. Sent a lot of fish to New York that way.

I 1: So those were put on railroad cars and then at the same time you were shipping fish out in trucks.

R: Yeah, them Georgia trucks would come down.

I 1: Georgia trucks ... were those mainly fresh markets where they sold the fish?

R: Yeah, they'd peddle 'em out. They'd go from market to market all over. Sell 200 or 300 here and 200 or 300 there.

I 1: So is that what you did then while you worked at the fish house most of the time, help pack the fish and things like that?

R: Yeah, weighed fish, ice 'em down and help put 'em on the truck.

I 1: Did you prefer doing that than being out there on the water?

R: Well, I didn't have too much time before I went into the service. I fished a little bit. I don't know. One is about as good as another. The reason I started at the fish house, like I say my brother-in-law wanted me to come to work with him, so I went to work with him. I don't think I worked there a year before I went in the service.

I 1: What happened when the War broke out? A few people have told me ... I get the feeling people from Cortez were very patriotic and there were quite a few people from Cortez that joined the services.

R: I think there was 40 some boys went in. Seemed to me like it was about that many. One of my brothers was in Pearl Harbor when they bombed that. He and a boy from Bradenton went in and his pal got killed. Then Hugh was gone and I think he got some shrapnel in him. He pulled through it ok. He served 20 some years.

I 1: You said all of your brothers served. You were all in the service at the same time.

R: Yeah, I had four brothers in the Navy and I was in the Army and then my youngest brother was in the Air Force.

R 2: Did Doris show you the Congressional ...?

I 1: No, she didn't. She mentioned that though.

R: My youngest brother flew 15 missions over Germany and then got shot down. He was a prisoner of war for about nine months I think. But he came out alright. We all got back ok.

I 1: What was the feeling at that time when the War broke out? How did people feel about that?

R: Oh, I guess they just didn't like the idea of the way Pearl Harbor was bombed and they wanted revenge, I guess.

I 1: I think it was Ralph Fulford who told me that he remembers Smiley Guthrie coming in and taking off his boots and said he was going to join up and he walked right down and joined up.

R: Yeah. All my brothers, the three oldest joined up right away. The youngest brother was still in school so he joined the Air Force as soon as he got out.

I 1: Where did you serve?

R: I went into Africa with Patton. Went through Africa and Sicily and then they sent us back to Africa. I was in the 7th Army and the 7th Army didn't exist for about a year. We stayed in Sicily and sent us back to Africa. Then from Africa we went into Italy. At Italy they loaded us on ships and we went into Southern France. Went into France and Germany.

I 1: Did you see quite a bit of action?

R: Oh, not a whole lot. Got a lot of bombing. Had a lot of bombs dropped on us.

I 1: What did you do in the service?

R: I was in a Car Company. We stayed right along with 7th Army Headquarters. Pickin' up officers and runnin' them back and forth wherever they wanted to go. I don't know, I don't like to talk too much about it.

I 1: How long were you in?

R: About three years.

I 1: When you came back, did you come back to Cortez?

R: Yeah, I came back to Cortez.

I 1: Were you glad to be back?

R: Oh, yeah. I was glad to get back, see all our old buddies.

I 1: Had Cortez changed any?

R: No, not too much at the time. It hadn't changed much. A lot of the kids were grewed up when I come back, but it hadn't changed any.

I 1: Did you go back to fishing or working in the fish house?

R: I went back fishin'. I fished all the time. Then after a couple years I went to Texas and fished, shrimp-fished, over there for not a whole year, for about 4 months.

I 1: Was this Gulf shrimping?

R: Yeah, there in the Gulf.

I 1: How did you get on a Gulf shrimp boat?

R: My sister lived in Texas. There was three boys over there, three brothers and each of 'em had shrimp boats. So I went over and fished with them.

I 1: Where in Texas?

R: Freeport, Texas.

I 1: That's a big shrimping town.

R: Yes. A lot of shrimp boats there.

I 1: So when you came back and started fishing, you were fishing on your own? Did you have your own boats then?

R: No, I fished with several different ones. I fished with Burr Lewis and Dan Mora and Joe Capo and Walter Bell. And then I finally got my own boat and fished the rest of the time till I retired.

I 1: What was the first boat that you had?

R: Just a kicker boat like they have around the area.

R 2: No, it was a scooter, dear.

R: Oh, that's right. We had an old wooden scooter.

R 2: Alcee Taylor's brother built it.

R: Had a jeep engine in it.

I 1: Did it have a name?

R: No, I didn't have any name on it. Then I got the first fiber boat, kicker boat, that was around. I got the first one of those.

I 1: Oh, you did?

R: Yeah, I named that Miss Rhonda. That was my Granddaughter.

I 1: Where did you find that boat?

R: There was a fella buildin' 'em down here at the Sarasota Airport. He was buildin' 'em in there.

I 1: Now that was quite a change when they got kicker boats. About that same time, or a little prior to that, you started getting nylon nets and then finally monofilament came in. So you were somewhat of an innovator, bringing in a kicker boat.

R: Well, I didn't have the first kicker boat. There were several who had kicker boats before I did, but that was the first fiberglass one. They had wooden boats.

I 1: And that was another thing that happened. When fiberglass came out because that reduced a lot of the maintenance that you had.

R: Yeah, didn't have to worry about the worms eatin' 'em up. But you pretty well had to keep the copper on 'em the same as you would a wooden boat to keep the growth off. Barnacles and sow dugs, grass.

I 1: At that time how did people view kicker boats?

R: Well, as far as I'm concerned it made it a lot easier for fishin'. We'd have been better off if we'd never got 'em as far as that goes.

I 1: You think so?

R: Oh, yeah. You can take half the fishermen in Cortez now and I doubt if he could even pole a boat like we had to. See, we'd take these other boats, scooters we called 'em, and we'd pull our skiffs behind 'em. When we'd see fish, we'd just untie and go up and shove and take 'em in. Now you run around with a kicker boat and all you've got to do is throw the net overboard and take 'em in. If half

the fishermen in Cortez had to shove a skiff, I don't believe they'd be there.

I 1: How far would you have to pole then, to pole those skiffs?

R: Sometimes if it was night time we'd untie from a scooter and we'd shuttle for 2 or 3 miles. We'd make a strike and then we might shove again and make a strike and the skipper would send one fella back to bring the boat up. But sometimes you'd shove all night long just tryin' to find fish.

I 1: Tell me a little bit about how you find fish at night.

R: You'd hear 'em jumpin' and sometimes you'd hear 'em what we called rattlin' up. Breakin' the water. The captain would be up ahead and there'd be two or three or four guys and he'd be ahead of us a couple hundred yards. He's say keep shovin' about 50 yards and let go. One would go out that way and then one would go back and meet him and one would go around the other way and meet him. And sometimes you'd hear catfish. You could tell the difference between catfish and mullet. You'd hear 'em smackin' the water.

I 1: You can tell the difference between a mullet and a catfish just by the sound it makes?

R: Just by the sound. Sometimes you'd take in mullet and you wouldn't know the catfish was there and you'd take in a load of catfish too. I've done that many a time.

I 1: What happens then?

R: Well, you just rope 'em in your boat and then you'd get overboard somewhere and clear 'em. Take a pair of pliers and you'd have to break each one of 'em. They've got three fins and you'd have to break each fin to get him out.

I 1: Catfish pose quite a problem in a net.

R: Oh, yeah. Earl Taylor and I, one night we struck a bunch and I don't know. I imagine we had nine or ten thousand pounds, the two of us. We just went back to that big Key out in Cortez and just threw 'em overboard and just let 'em stay there till it rotted out. We just went back and got our lines.

I 1: It would take you so long to get those fish out of there.

R: Oh, you would never clear that many. You'd just lose your net is all.

I 1: Does that happen very often?

R: No, not too often. Most of the time you can hear the cats are there. But sometimes they'd be quiet and you wouldn't know they were there until you got 'em in.

I 1: What other types of fishing did you do? Other types of fish that you would fish for other than mullet.

R: Well, we fished for mackerel and pompano.

I 1: Let's talk about mullet first. When do you fish for mullet? What's the best time of year to fish for mullet?

R: Fall of the year is the best time to fish for 'em, but you usually can fish for 'em the year round except maybe a month or month and a half when you fished for pompano. Then sometimes the mackerel would come along and you could, of course, fish for them at night. I never did have a mackerel net, I usually just fished with somebody else.

I 1: You'd have to have a specific type of net to fish for mackerel?

R: Yeah. 150 mesh. They'd be an inch and a half for 5/8 net to fish for mackerel.

I 1: Would you encircle mackerel like you do mullet? Would you set a compass?

R: See there's phosphorous in the water and you'd run into a bunch of 'em and just flare up. You'd see 'em like that and then run on through 'em. There's a lot of phosphorous in the water makin' the water sparkle and you can see 'em.

I 1: That's what they call fish by fire?

R: Yeah. You see 'em firin'.

I 1: What time of year do mackerel usually run?

R: I guess around March and April. Sometimes there's a good many. I understand there's a good few around this year. Then other years you don't find any.

I 1: What about pompano. When do pompano come around?

R: They usually start about March and April. About the same time the mackerel's around.

I 1: Mackerel and pompano are seasonal. You can't catch them year-round like mullet.

R: Yeah, they're season fish.

I 1: Did you fish for red fish much?

R: Well, very little. They had what they call a trammel net to fish for those and I never did have one. But I've fished with a couple boys several different times for red fish. Not very long. But we'd catch quite a few red fish with what they call stop-nettin'. They don't do that any more.

I 1: What is a trammel net? Explain to me why a trammel net is different than a seine?

R: A trammel net is the same as a gill net except it's got a trammel on each side of it. In other words, the net itself may have an inch and a half mesh and the trammel will probably be up four inch or six inch mesh.

I 1: So it's got a larger mesh net on each side of the main net.

R: Yeah, and the fish can go in and they can't get out. That's what they call a trammel. Then you'd catch red fish, sheephead, trout.

I 1: And trout's another fish that you catch. It's more seasonal too? Or can you catch trout year-round?

R: Well, they are here year-round but you usually catch more in the winter time. Of course, they don't even trammel net anymore. They'd do that in the winter time, fish for trout.

I 1: Why don't they use trammel nets any longer? I mean, some may but you don't see them very much.

R: No, a lot of 'em quit using them on account of the red fish. You can't save the red fish and sometimes you strike trout and you get in a bunch of red fish and if they go to your nets, you can't hardly get 'em out and keep 'em. Well, you can but it's hard to get the things out and you couldn't throw them back overboard. If you did they'd get back in the nets again and you'd have to throw 'em in the boat and kill 'em. So they just give it up I guess.

I 1: You had a specific type of net that you fished for red fish with and once it was made a game fish you had to more or less give up using that one.

R: Yeah.

I 1: Did you ever do any beach-seining or haul-seining?

R: Oh, yeah. I done a lot of that.

I 1: When would you do that type of fishing?

R: That was mostly in the Fall of the year. And I also done fishin' they called sea monkeys. Whities is the name of 'em but we called 'em sea monkeys. We'd do that some time around January. I used to do quite a bit of it in January and February. You'd go out and just go along the sloughs along the beach and just put the end up on the beach and run the full length of net overboard and put the other end and go back and forth. Punch the bottom with your polin' oar and sometimes you'd catch two or three hundred pound like that.

R: I've caught as high as seven and eight thousand pound of 'em.

I 1: So those fish would sit down in those sloughs and then you could set your net and when you beat the pole down you'd stir them up.

R: Back and forth and you'd beat 'em into the net.

I 1: I want to ask you about women fishing because we don't find very many women who fished in Cortez. I wonder why.

R: Well, I don't know. My wife fished with me for five or six years. She was just about as good at shuckin' a mullet as a man was.

R 2: Thank you dear. First time you ever told me that. It's on tape and I'm copyin' it.

R: If we happened to strike with somebody else, she'd draw a share same as anybody else would.

R 2: Mada Culbreath fished just as good as any man there was.

I 1: That's right. Mada was one of the few women who fished.

R: She fished with her husband, panamain'. We called it panamain'. That's pompano fishin'. But the other kind of fish she'd just fish with a hook and line catchin' trout. She never did fish with a net unless it was with her husband.

I 1: Did she do what they called splatter-poling?

R: I guess you'd call it that. Throw it out and let their pole hit the water sometimes. They'd do that. I didn't know just what it was called.

I 1: I've heard it referred to as that. I had wondered because we wondered if there were superstitions about having women on boats or being out on the water.

R: No, they just never did do it.

R 2: Probably we were so busy with all our kids and everything they didn't have time.

R: Dan Mora, his wife fished with him quite a bit. And Mada. That's about the only three I know around here who fished.

I 1: Did you ever scallop in the Kitchen? Did you ever get scallops out there?

R: Oh, yeah. I done that. I never did do it too much for a livin', but a lot of people did. I'd go out a lot of times to get somethin' to eat. I didn't do it to sell any.

I 1: I wondered because whether people were out there doing it to make a living or if it was just to gather food for themselves.

R: No, most of them would do it for a livin'. They'd sell 'em. Take an old number 3 wash tub and go out there and pick 'em up and come in. Some of 'em ... Dick Posey worked at the fish house. His wife would go get 'em and they'd put 'em in the cooler overnight. That would make 'em open up a little better so they could cut 'em out easier. And there was a lot of people who'd come down from Bradenton and they'd just come down to get some to eat. But a lot of people in Cortez did it for a livin' in the summer time.

I 1: When did you get married?

R: Oh, '51.

R 2: September 16, 1951.

I 1: So you'd been back from the War for several years.

R: Yeah, I got back in '45.

I 1: How did you meet your wife?

R: I knew her sister and husband which would come to Florida. They were from Massachusetts. I knew them for several years and then one year after she finished school I think, they brought her down and I met her then. Then I lost contact with her while I was in the service and after I got back out of the service she finally come down here and we got together again.

I 1: Well, it sounds as if she's made a pretty good adjustment to being a fisherman's wife if she used to fish with you.

R: Yes. She's a pretty good old gal.

R 2: First thing you had to learn about bein' a fisherman's wife was when you made some money you'd better save some of that money cause there was many times when you'd go as long as 16 days without makin' a dime. So you had to adjust. I mean, you knew that if you had a good week you saved part of it back. When we first got married he was makin' like a penny and a half a pound on fish.

I 1: A cent and a half a pound.

R 2: I think the first year we were married he made \$2,200 if I remember right. So that you had to adjust. It's up to you what you do with it. He'd say he couldn't guarantee when he'd get more. Of course, I was a good thrifty Yankee.

I 1: When you came back from the War were there fish here?

R: Yeah, there was quite a few fish. Seemed like the fish showed up durin' the War. I don't know why, but durin' the War they was catchin' a lot of fish.

R 2: The Good Lord provided 'em.

R: Oh, there was ten times as many fish when I came back than there was when I left.

I 1: That's strange.

R 2: Those that fished said they'd never seen anything like it.

R: There'd be a lot of times we'd go down to Beans' Point and there'd be five or six crews. But we caught 50,000, 75,000 or 80,000 pound. And before the War I don't believe all of Cortez would catch 100,000 pounds the whole year.

I 1: That's quite a change really.

R: I don't know what made those fish show up but they seemed to show up durin' the War.

I 1: You said there'd be several crews together that would catch that many fish. How would that work? Would you just set all the nets together in a big circle or would they just work the one net?

R: Well, they'd work one net and ... this is haul-seinin' we was talkin' about ... then they'd back 'em up. Sometimes they'd put in three seines. They'd back up one and they'd put one back of that. Sometimes they had three seines. Of course, they just had those straight bunts we called 'em. Now they have pockets for 'em to go into. At the time they just had a straight net and called it a bunt. You couldn't catch as much in that straight bunt as you could in them pockets. The fish would get out of 'em.

I 1: There are different parts to a haul seine or a stop net. The bunt is one of them. What are the outer nets called?

R: Called the wings. Use that and the bunt.

I 1: They were constructed of different size mesh?

R: Well, yeah the pockets or the bunts would have a smaller mesh than the wings. Then these pockets they had, of course, they had quite a bit smaller than the wings. Mostly stop-nettin' they'd have 'em to keep from gillin' the small fish.

I 1: How far down south or up north would you fish?

R: Oh, we'd go across Tampa Bay around Hillsborough and Pinellas County. And we never did go far south stop- nettin', but just go down in Sarasota County. Down in what they called _____ Keys. That's about as far south as we'd go.

I 1: How long would that take you to go up north across Tampa Bay?

R: Oh, I don't know. We'd leave out of here on the afternoon, go over and run a stop and be gone all night and all day. Sometimes two nights.

I 1: So these weren't just daily trips that you were making.

R: Sometimes they'd bring the fish in and send somebody home. A lot of times two crews would go over together. One would stay over there and run the nets again.

I 1: At that time you were using cotton nets usually, and they had to be limed?

R: Yeah, every day when you come in. Especially haul net. You'd lime it and spread it.

I 1: So if you were making a several-day trip on the other side of the Bay what would you do?

R: A lot of times they'd lime 'em and pull 'em out on the marsh on an Island.

I 1: You'd dry them out on the marsh. Did you ever build temporary spreads?

R: They did. Some of 'em had some spreads over there for gill nets but not for the stop nets. They never did keep the stop nets over there that long. Usually they'd come home. We could stay there all week with the gill nets. Just send the fish home and stay over there.

I 1: What would you eat while you were there?

R: Oh, the cook would always buy canned stuff. We'd have eggs and pork chops and rice and grits. Steak.

I 1: So you didn't always eat fish and grits.

R: Oh, no. This was after the War. We ate pretty good. We'd get up in the mornin' and some mornings have eggs and grits and ham or pork chops or steak or whatever. Then they'd bring along a little lunch cause we'd work all day long. Sometimes you'd take a break and eat a sandwich.

I 1: Did you have to have ice for your food?

R: Yeah. Take a little ice along. A box of it.

I 1: Let's kind of go through your oral history some more. You came back from the War and you started fishing and you met your wife. You were married in '52. Did you continue fishing then until you retired?

R: Yeah.

I 1: And how long ago was that? When did you finally retire.

R: About five or six years ago.

I 1: In that time you've seen quite a few changes because when you started fishing they were probably using cotton nets. What would you say is the greatest change in fishing that you've seen?

R: Well, I guess this glass net. That's about the best thing that's come along for fishin'.

I 1: Why is that?

R: Well, you don't have to worry about 'em rotting and also the lines they had, the polyethylene lines which used to be hemp. That stuff would rot too if you didn't dry that. This line now all you have to do is throw a cover over it cause the sun will burn it if you don't cover it up. But that makes it mighty nice. You don't have to worry about spreadin' it, limin' it. Makes it a lot easier.

I 1: It made fishermen's lives a lot easier. There was less maintenance on the nets with the glass nets. Then like you said before, when fiberglass boats came in you had less maintenance there. And kicker boats made it easier to get in the shallow areas. But it also allowed you to fish individually. You didn't have to have crews.

R: Well, before the kicker boats, when we had our scooters, we'd fish by ourselves in the winter time because the fish would bunch up more. All the net we ever used was 400 yards of net and we'd catch fish. And of course everybody would meet up. We'd be down around the Pass and we all shared the same. But then in the summer time there was quite a few boys who fished by themselves. In the summer time we'd make up a crew. Take my boat one week and next week use his and about three of us would go together like that to strike fish because it's hard to catch fish in the summer time with just one net.

I 1: Has there always been a cycle to fishing? Have there always been slow times, good times? Every year, it's sort of cyclical or seasonal.

R: Yeah, you'd have good years and bad years.

I 1: Do you remember any of the bad years? Were there any particularly bad years in Cortez that you remember?

R: Well, when I came back from the service I fished with Joe Capo. He and Dan Mora was mated together. That winter or fall of the year we went down to New Pass and it seems like it was the only place with any fish. There was around a hundred thousand fish around the bridge there. We'd come home and night and go back in the daytime. We stayed there that whole fall and never did catch a fish. Back in them days we had closed seasons on mullet. The 15th of December I think till the 20th of January I think.

I 1: It was about a month they closed?

R: Yeah. But the last day before the season closed I was with Joe and we went up to Anna Maria Island and caught enough fish to pay our gas bill, grocery bill and stuff. But we never made a cent that whole fall.

I 1: Why couldn't you catch those fish?

R: Well, they'd just stay around that bridge and there was no way you could catch 'em. You can't catch around that bridge with a seine.

I 1: Could you tell us, for the tape, why you couldn't catch them around a bridge? People may not understand.

R: Well, with a seine you have to get 'em out on a beach or somewhere where you can haul 'em to the beach. Of course, if you had a gill net you could've struck 'em with a gill net around them bridges but I don't know if it was against the law. That place was closed for quite a few years, the City Limits of Sarasota. You couldn't fish with a gill net anyway. So you just had to wait till the fish left the bridge and go out on the beach to catch 'em and they never did move.

I 1: How about a particularly good year. Do you remember some particularly good catches?

R: Well, yeah. I've had some good catches. Of course, when I was fishin' in crews I never did make the money. Never was gettin' anything for a load. We'd get two or three cent a pound for 'em. In the fall you'd get seven or eight cent. But after I got my own boats I had some pretty good catches. I'd catch four or five or six thousand by myself. Of course, then we weren't makin' a whole lot of money either cause like I say, we wasn't gettin' anything for the fish.

I 1: Well, if you didn't make much money why did you keep doing it?

R: That's the only thing I knew how to do and I guess I was makin' about as much as anybody else was. Workin' people, as far as that goes.

I 1: Is there anything about fishing that you particularly enjoy? What is it about that occupation that makes you want to go out there and keep doing it?

R: Like I say, here in Cortez that was about the only thing there was to do. That's what I was born into. Didn't do anything else as far as that goes. I guess you could make about as good a livin' out of that as you could workin' anywhere else as far as labor.

R 2: It's an independent ...

R: You'd work for yourself. You could go and come as you wanted to. You weren't shut inside a building. You always had plenty of fresh air. I liked that pretty good. It was rough in the summertime, that hot sun.

I 1: You liked working out doors? You enjoy that?

R: Yeah, as far as I never have been workin' inside so I don't know what it's like workin' inside. I don't believe I'd like it.

I 1: Is summer a bad time of the year fishing? You say, first of all, that it gets pretty hot and you get sunburned out there.

R: Well, there's a lot of times boys make more fishin' in the summer time than they do in the winter time. In the fall of the year I've known here three or four years ago, two or three years straight there'd be some boys who'd go the whole fall and wouldn't make a penny. And in the summertime you can catch a few fish. It's hard work but you can catch a couple thousand, three thousand pound a week. Some weeks not that good. Like I say, in the summer it's pretty regular. If you want to go you can catch a few fish about every day. But in the fall of the year you can go for weeks and not even catch a fish. And others make a lot more money in the winter time. Some boys make \$25,000 in the winter time and you can go the whole summer and not make that much.

I 1: What's changed the most about fishing in Cortez? In the years that you've fished, other than the technology and equipment you use, is there anything else changed about it?

R: No, except the laws they've made. Cut us out of quite a few fishin' grounds to fish in. Then like I say, it's just about like dog eat dog out there. When you fish, you can let go and before you get back to your net somebody lowered your compass and got your fish circled. Before that we used to all work together.

I 1: You think that the competition is a little more fierce out there today? What you're sort of saying is that there used to be sort of unwritten rules about how to fish.

R: Well, there never was any rules. Just everybody worked together because one feller needed the money as bad as the other and everybody just tried to work together. This younger bunch, a lot of 'ems hoggish. They don't care. It's just him.

I 1: It's not so much that fishing has changed. But fishermen.

R: Yeah. Outside of fishin' it hasn't changed much except what ground they took away from ya where you can't fish.

I 1: Did you feel pressured by the increasing regulations before you quit?

R: No, it didn't bother me much. But the fishermen, the way they act is about the only thing. As far as the laws and things, they didn't bother me too much.

I 1: Do you think that fishermen have a good reputation or do they have a bad reputation with the general public?

R: I think they have a bad reputation.

R 2: Don't say Cortez fishermen because a lot of them are people you don't even know. People in Cortez don't even know 'em. They'll say, who's that? They've come from other places and right away you say they're from Cortez, well ...

I 1: They lump all of them.

R 2: Yeah, the lump 'em all together. A lot of 'em are people who are just drifters and people who have just come it. They're not the old family Cortez fishermen.

R: There's a place over on Longboat called Spanish Main. They built some houses up and this finger goes up into it and there's a deep hole on the outside of the seawall where fish get in at times. One day one of the boys struck in there and a woman come out raisin' sand and says you're catchin' all my fish. You catch my trout and red fish. He says, Lady when I get my net up every fish I catch outside of mullet you can have. So she stayed there and he didn't catch anything but mullet. He caught two or three hundred. And then she invited him in. She said, I'm sorry. And he went in the house with her and had a cup of coffee. And she says, well I've only been down here about two weeks and these people who live here tell me that these commercial fishermen catch everything. They run their nets everywhere and catch everything. So that's the way it goes. A lot of people don't know what they're talkin' about. They just hear from other people. That's the way, from ear to ear to ear. They don't know the fishermen or nothin' about him.

I 1: That's something that I wonder about because it seems to me that in the early days there was a different relation- ship between the fishermen and the people who came down here from other places. Much more congenial, open. It seems to have changed.

R: Coral Shores over there. When they first dug the fingers in there and built homes, didn't nobody go in there to fish except Rusty Taylor and myself. I don't think they knew anything about it. And everybody along that whole seawall, there must have been ten or 15 homes, we was good friends with all of 'em. We'd give 'em fish. Never did have a bad word. Then finally, some man and woman moved in a house around the finger and they came out there one day. We had our nets overboard. We left plenty of room for 'em to get in and out and they just come up there and started cussin' and raisin' sand. The people in the seawall come out and sat there and listened to 'em and they finally said, well that man's crazy. We told them it wasn't against the law. You got plenty of room to get in and out. I don't know what he knew. Somebody told him about fishermen bein' bad or if he just wanted to raise hell. That's all I know.

Finally, you can't hardly go up in them anymore. These fishermen now, they go in there and goin' right on up in the finger parts. Of course, a lot of this stuff is brought on yourself and they don't want you in there no more. I don't even know if you can fish in there any more.

I 1: I don't think so.

R: But before that we fished in there. They'd give us coffee and we'd give 'em fish.

I 1: After you were married did you live in Cortez?

R: Yeah. We built a house on 99th Street near that little Baptist Church on Cortez Road. We rented there in Cortez for a couple of years till we got us a house built.

I 1: Did you spend time in Cortez? Would you go down and ...

R: Oh, yeah. I'd leave the house and go down to fish and a lot of times in bad weather I'd go down on the docks.

I 1: Cortez is always said to be real close-knit. Do you remember it as being that?

R: As what?

I 1: As a real close-knit community.

R: Oh, yeah.

I 1: And that people did things together.

R: Yeah, years ago if somebody got sick Tink Fulford, my Uncle, would go around and get everybody to take up a collection. Wouldn't be very much. Might take up \$8.00 or \$10.00, but back in them days \$8.00 or \$10.00 was a lot of money.

R 2: Pig Guthrie's boat burned up one time and it was just within a few hours and they had \$700 raised to get another boat for him. They all worked together.

R: Now if I go down to the dock I don't know half the people that's down there. These grouper boats come in there and you've got all different kinds of 'em. But back in them days Cortez, just family, and everybody knew each other.

I 1: What would you do for entertainment?

R 2: Go to Todd's on the beach!

R: When I was single we'd go to the beach on Saturday night and stay till Monday mornin' a lot of times. Stay over there drinkin'.

I 1: Todd's was one of the more famous watering holes over there. What were some of the others?

R: Oh, there was the Cove, the Drift Inn, Miramar. The Cove and the Miramar and Todd's was the best. Todd's was there the longest though. Man started it off and after he died his son took it over. Then finally these other juke joints started. Seemed like everybody gathered up at Todd's. He was an old boy. He was born around the beach I think and everybody knew him.

I 1: So a lot of fishermen would frequent Todd's.

R: Oh, yeah. Back in them days you'd have that closed season and couldn't make any money so we'd go over there and he'd let ya have all the drinks ya wanted on credit. In about six or seven weeks you'd owe him \$500 or \$600. And as soon as we started back fishin' we'd pay him up. I know a lot of times I've been over there and I'd be drunk and run out of money and say, Todd I'm broke. He'd say, what ya want? I'd say, oh \$75 or \$100 and he'd loan it to ya. And the next time he'd see ya he'd say, you remember me lendin' ya \$100? I'd say yep. And that's all he'd say. Never asked no more. And I'd pay him whenever I got ready.

I 1: You didn't keep books. It was always ...

R: No, there wasn't no books. Back in them days if somebody loaned ya money they'd pay ya back. Not like now. Sometimes you loan somebody money now and never see it again. Had an old feller down there called Talkin' Charlie. I don't know where he came from but he stayed up over Bell Fish Company and every time he'd see me he'd try to give me \$10.00. I'd say Charlie, you don't owe me \$10.00. He'd say, yes you loaned me \$10.00 and I'm gonna pay you back. I'd say no Charlie. Finally my brother Snoots, he'd get mixed up when he'd see us. Finally, he said that was your brother Snoots I borrowed that money from. About two or three weeks after that I was up there at the old juke joint in Cortez, I forgot the name, and Charlie walked in there and says Jap, you got any money? I had a little bit but I didn't have enough to loan him so I said, no I don't have any Charlie. He said, well here take this \$20.00. That man could be drunk. He'd be so drunk he couldn't even sit up but if you loaned him money he knew it and he'd never forget it.

I 1: There was one on Cortez Road, Sailor's Haven? Wasn't that it?

R: There was two right together at the end of the street that goes down to Bub's Fish House. There was a beer joint there and then there was one right across the street from it. I don't ... Edith who works at Bub's, her and her husband run it for a long time.

I 1: I didn't know that.

R: Yeah, right across the street from Walter's Fish House. If you leave Walter's Fish House and go to Cortez Road there's a two story buildin' right there. At the time it was a fillin' station and a pool room and a bar altogether there. Edith and them didn't build that place, somebody else did. I don't remember who it was, but then Edith and her husband had it for awhile.

R 2: Wasn't it called Lisa Inn at one time?

R: I think that's what it was.

I 1: What about the Cortez Grand Ole Opry, did you ever get together and listen to the Culbreath's play?

R: No, I never have except just what time they had that old feast at the school house and festival

down in Cortez. That's the only time I've heard 'em. Of course, I'd quit my runnin' around before Goose and his band ever got started. They didn't have that at the time.

I 1: Cortez has always had a little bit of tourism. They had the trailer park and seasonal visitors and the Albion Inn. It's not as if they have ever not liked tourism or been against it because you probably made friends with several of the people who used to come down.

R: Oh, yeah. All the people there in the Trailer Park there at Cortez Trailer Park ... the one at the end of the bridge. At one time John Guthrie I think it was, run it. Of course, I think they came down from Carolina. But he run the bridge. Had an old draw bridge there. He'd have to take a big bar and open the draw. He had that trailer park for a long time and quit. Then Waylon and his sister we all went to school together and we all knew them. We knew a lot of people in the trailer park. We didn't have no trouble. If we ever had anything goin' on at Cortez, they'd always come. Of course, like these fish fries we put on in the winter time, people from Paradise Trailer Park and the other trailer park would come ... Sunny Shores. They all come and we never had no trouble.

I 1: That's a pretty good deal they get for that fish dinner.

R: Most of your trouble was around where they got a home built on the water with the seawalls and of course in the fingers. They don't want you in there.

R 2: When they built all these fingers they destroyed a lot of the natural feeding and breeding ground for the fish. And that hurt fishermen a lot.

R: Well, you could go up Palma Sola Bay before they put those fingers in there and if there was any mullet there, they'd be along there where you could catch 'em. When they put those fingers in there you can't go in there and catch 'em. That hurt fishin' too.

I 1: It changed the fish behavior in a way, because now they can swim in these smaller canals.

R: Yeah, you got several places in Palma Sola Bay and Flamingo Key with fingers in there and you can't fish. Then you can't fish up at the head of the Bays, you have to be a hundred or two hundred yards away from all the docks. Can't fish there, so pretty well got Palma Sola Bay closed.

I 1: Closed to fishing. But historically you fished those waters quite a bit.

R: Oh, yeah. Then way up in the head of it you'd fish up in there. Then there was Bird Key. Several places you can still fish around there.

I 1: What's changed about Cortez that you see? What are some of the changes in Cortez itself that you've seen?

R: Well, I don't know as much has changed in Cortez except Walter Bell's Fish House. That's quite a bit different than it was. And the Coast Guard Station. They put that big place in there. Outside of that I don't know that there's too much changed.

I 1: The waterfront has remained the same. There's still fish houses there.

R: Year's ago the fish houses was built way out in the water and you run out on the runway and ya had all shoreline there, which now is about all seawall. Then there was a lot of fiddler crabs. Just worlds of them at times along that shoreline. That's all changed, all been pumped in just like Walter's Fish House. Now there's no water line at all back of his fish house. Of course, you've got waterfront but there's no beach along there. Used to be beach all the way around. There was beach all around Cortez Bridge right around the whole pass there. It was all beach at one time. Everybody used to take their little old skiffs and they'd pull 'em up on the beach and turn 'em over there and clean 'em off. Clean the barnacles off and paint 'em, put 'em back overboard. No place for that anymore.

R 2: Biggest change is all the old generation, every year there's so many more of 'em dying off.

I 1: And like you said, when you go into Cortez a lot of people say they don't know the people living in the community any longer.

R: Oh, yeah. There's people livin' in Cortez that I don't even know.

I 1: Historically, was property kept within the family?

R: Yeah, all they had was the home and lot and a house built. That was about the only property there was there, ya know.

I 1: But did they try to keep the family in the community?

R: Yeah everybody, just like my family, we all lived together until they got married and they all lived around Cortez or in Bradenton Beach. One of my brothers, after he got out of the Navy, he stayed in California. He still lives in California. My oldest sister married a boy and they live in Texas. The rest of us live right around home here. Well, my youngest brother lives over on the East Coast. Everybody stayed at home pretty well. My youngest brother lived in Cortez for a long time and finally he got a job on the East Coast so he moved over there. Retired over there. He's been over there for years.

R 2: He's always said whenever anything new starts, that's not gonna amount to anything. I said why not? He says, it's too far from Cortez.

I 1: Growing up as children, you weren't encouraged to seek jobs elsewhere or to move or anything like that.

R: No, there wasn't any jobs to get anywhere no way.

R 2: There wasn't any way to get there. His sister did work and some of the girls in Cortez worked in town like at the Dixie Grand Hotel. The baseball teams used to be here. And a lot of the girls, not the boys because the boys stayed close to Cortez fishin'. But a lot of the girls did go in and work at the

hotels and Manatee River Hotel and Dixie Grand Hotel. That was seasonal when the ball players were here.

R: There was no job to get anyway. A fillin' station or a grocery store or garages. There was no factories of any kind that you could work in.

I 1: And those jobs probably didn't pay as well as fishing.

R: No, you'd probably make just about as much. Those boys from Bradenton would come out Saturday night and see us over there. We'd spend twice as much money as them boys would. They didn't have any money. Then after our son got out of school he worked for Miller's Trailer and there was several people from Cortez who worked there for quit awhile.

I 1: Was there a lot of antagonism or rivalry between the boys in Cortez and the boys in Bradenton?

R: Not too much. Mostly Palmetto. See, Palmetto was a little town of it's own at the time which is Bradenton now. But they never did get along too good. But they never would run into each other too much cause they stayed well in their neck of the woods and we stayed in ours. But once in awhile they'd tangle.

I 1: A few of them have said that you used to have some football games that you'd play with some of the rivalries that formed between Bradenton and Palmetto. Maybe they'd come out and play sand lot football.

R: Oh, yeah. They'd do that. They always got along fair.

R 2: Quite a few of the Cortez boys were on the Manatee football team. They got along well.

R: Never did have too much trouble with the Bradenton boys. Everybody tried to get along together.

I 1: Was the beach, when you were growing up and young men, was it something ... what was out there then and did people come out to go to the beach a lot? Was it a destination that a lot of tourists were coming to?

R: There was a lot of the Bradenton people who come to the beaches.

I 1: It was more local.

R: Yeah. There weren't too many tourists at that time.

R 2: There was an old bowlin' alley out there and a bath house.

R: That beach way years ago, where the old Cortez Bridge was, and you'd come off of that and hit the beach. Well, that thing must have been five or six hundred yards wide. And there was a big bath house built on it. They just pumped it in recently. Until it was pumped in there was water practically

right up to the road. But there was a big bath house built there at one time. That's where one of the girls, this Waylon Guthrie I was talkin' about, his sister got run over there. They used to let cars run up and down the beach.

I 1: Oh, they did?

R: Yeah. I think the girl that got run over, her and her girlfriend was playin' and they buried her up in sand and a car come right over her and killed her. Then they stopped that drivin' on the beach. But they used to let cars run up and down the beach. Like I say, the beach was real wide. It was probably five or six hundred yards wide in places.

I 1: You've told this story once, but I want you to tell it again. There was a certain accident when the molasses barge sank. Could you tell us a little about what happened that day? What you were doing and how you got involved.

R: Well, the best I can remember it was on a Saturday mornin' and there was a hard northwester blowin'. It had been blowin' for several days. I left the house and went down to the dock and ran into Stanley Guthrie and he says, lets go over to the beach and see what's happened to that ship. I said, ship? He says, yeah a ship come ashore over there. So, I don't remember how we got over, somebody took us over. When I got there the beach was lined with people.

They said there was a man and his dog jumped off the boat and they drowned. So while I was standin' there two more men jumped overboard and the seas was about ten foot high. Pretty rough. It looked as though they weren't gonna make it. So I took a rope. I don't know where the rope come from. I think the Coast Guard or somethin' had brought rope there and was tryin' to shoot it out there with a gun to the ship. Of course, the wind was blowin' so hard it never did make it.

So when them two men jumped overboard I tied the rope around my waist and went off there too 'em. Got ahold of one of the boys and another one got the rope and they pulled us ashore safe. It was cold water. A sheriff or a cop over on the beach, he brought me home. Stopped by Todd's and had a drink and went on home. Got me a shower and got some dry clothes on and then later that's when the Junior Chamber of Commerce put on a little ... they invited us up to have dinner. There was another boy, Firman Smith from Palma Sola. I didn't know him. But he came over after I left and they got a little thing of some kind and he rode out and got the captain.

So the two of us went up. They put on a little floor show for us and had a big dinner. Had drinks.

I 1: What made you jump in?

R: I don't know, just looked like they wasn't gonna make it and somethin' says, go get 'em.

I 1: That barge is still out there.

R: Yeah, I haven't been over there since they pumped the beach in. They say it's pretty well covered up. Not much left to it. I got a picture of it in the paper there, where it showed the whole barge there

before it sunk on down. There's a story of it in there.

I 1: Are there any other stories that you remember about Cortez that you would like to tell us for the record? Anything in particular that ...

R: Well, there's several stories of things. A Chief of Police on Bradenton Beach, Silverthorn and I ... well, before he was Chief, Les Guthrie and myself was fishin' together and we run down the Bay and we found a feller hung in the deep water right along the shore. It was on April Fools Day, it was in Sarasota County and we went to a little marina there and called the sheriff and told him there was somebody hung.

He says, well it's April Fools Day. Are you sure it's not a dummy? I said, I don't think so. He wouldn't even come down. He said to call the Longboat cop and we got him down there and he called the sheriff and he came down. The feller was a plumber and I guess he just didn't ... he had his thermos bottle with him with coffee and had his lunch. And he just didn't want to go to work one day I guess, and ...

I 1: Where was that?

R: That was over on Longboat. He hung himself in a tree. And another time I was over on a little Island here called Passage Key. I was over there fishin' and I pulled my net up on the beach and I seen a jar there with a note in it, or a paper in it. I just threw it in the boat and caught my fish and got home. Threw 'em out. Tied my boat up. Got up on the dock and I thought about the bottle. So I went back and got it and Sue that works there opened it up and it was in a Cuban coffee jar and had a note in there callin' for help. Told the name of the boat. It had been captured. I called Silverthorn, or Sue did, and he come over and says, I don't know if there's anything to it or not. But he said he'd check. So he got over to the Coast Guard and that boat had come out of the Mississippi River and they'd been lookin' for it for a week or so.

They had wrote on a Cuban check stub book. Put their names, the name of the ship. But I never did hear anymore about it. So, I don't know. Some Cuban attacked 'em. I guess they wanted the boat. I never did hear anymore about it.

I 1: That's something.

R: And then one day, Rusty Taylor and myself were down in what's called Long Bar down in Sarasota Bay. We had stopped there lookin' for fish. We heard a real loud noise and looked around. By that time there was a big explosion and an Air Force plane had fell. We thought the passenger plane would run down there. By the time we looked up, there was two men comin' down in parachutes. So we run over there and one landed on the Island. He come out. But one of 'em, the Captain, his chute ripped on him. Had about a six foot rip in his plane and he fell in the water. When he came down, well they have a raft right in there that he could blow up. But he had hurt his back and he couldn't get in there.

So, I got overboard and helped him in there and he said there was a helicopter comin' to pick him

up. He was talkin' to his base all the time he was goin' down. So Silverthorn, the Air Force called him and wanted to get that equipment. I had the raft and his parachute and a little walky talky radio. He come over and he says, seems like you get in on everything don't ya. I said, yeah I just happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

And it wasn't no time after that I was goin' down the Bay. It was pompano season and I was goin' down the beach and before I got to Longboat Pass there was the old Chief wavin' to me. I went ashore and said what's goin' on now? He says, there's a feller out there drowned. His buddy had said it was his first divin' trip. They were divin' there with a tank and he said he'd been out for too long. So he got ahold of the Chief and he wanted me to get the boat and go out and see if there's any bubbles comin' up. But we never found any. Then they got ahold of the Longboat Police. They had divin' equipment and they come down and found him.

I told old Silverthorn, don't bother me no more. If you see me comin' just wave me off.

I 1: You did get caught up in a lot of those things.

R: I got caught up in quite a bit of stuff. And one day I was comin' into the Pass and I looked up and thought I saw a porpoise and I turned around and went back and there was a seal. I didn't have any fish in my boat and I run into the dock there and got some fish and Stanley got in the boat with me. He's cuttin' the fish up as we're goin' down there. I found him again and we kept feedin' him fish and brought him right up to the dock. He stayed around the dock there for about two hours. They were feedin' him fish and the next day it was in the paper about a seal showed up in Tampa Bay there. I don't know where he came from.

I 1: He must have been way off course.

R: I found him. I was the first one to see him.

I 1: I'm looking at this picture in the paper of the molasses barge. That thing was pretty large.

R: I think it was about three hundred feet, the best I remember.

I 1: It says, "The vessel was laden with 350,000 gallons of molasses". Did that leak out into the water?

R: Yeah, after it busted open it all leaked in the water. There was a heavy northwester that day and a tug was pullin the barge. And they think the tug had to cut it loose because it was pullin' it back and they were afraid it would pull the tug over. So they had to cut it loose.

I 1: And then it just beached itself in the wave action.

R: I don't know how long it had been out in the Gulf before it came ashore.

I 1: You were talking about a heavy northwestern. Are those common in this area?

R: Yeah, in the winter time. They're just fronts that come down. They leave out of Canada sometimes or form in California and come across Texas. You hear about hard northwesterns in Texas. Well, they'll get several of 'em before they hit over here. Usually they blow out before they get here. But back in them days you'd get a northwestern and it'd last for five or six days. Just blow 35, 40 mile winds right out northwest and the Gulf would get ... of course, offshore way off where that thing was there's no tellin' how high the seas were.

I 1: Does that effect the fishing at all?

R: Well, yeah. Ya can't fish when they blow. Right ahead of 'em the fish will start movin' so you catch a lot of fish right ahead of 'em. That's where we used to make those big seine hauls. Go down to Anna Maria and head for the Gulf. Then when the northwester come out they go in the Gulf to spawn and that's where you'd get those big catches. Then there'd be several days where you can't fish. You can't fish at all while they're blowin' and it would be several days after that you wouldn't find any fish, ya know. They'd disappear.

I 1: What's your favorite fish to eat?

R: Oh, I'd just as soon have an old mullet as anything in the summertime after it gets fat. He's good. But a lot of people like snook. I like snook too and grouper. But year-round I'd just as soon have an old mullet as anything. A lot of people don't like mullet. They think it's a trash fish to start with. But just about all the people in Florida know. They've got little delivery trucks where they peddle fish. Take 'em to market. Just about all the Florida people eat mullet and they like it.

I 1: My introduction to mullet was in Alabama and I walked up to a serving table and a young kid was in front of me and he looked down and he just said it's just mullet.

R: Yeah, a lot of people think it's just a trash fish. They don't know what a mullet is. Of course, you've got your tourists down in the winter time and that's when the mullet are the worst. That's when they have the roe in 'em and they're strong then. As a matter of fact, most Cortez people don't even eat 'em cause they're so strong. Then of course, they spawned out and there's a couple of months there where they're real skinny and there's nothin' but head and backbone so they're not hardly fit to eat then.

I 1: What's the best time to eat mullet then?

R: About June they get a little fat in 'em. May, June. About June they get a lot of fat in 'em and they're good then till about October when they get roe back in 'em.

I 1: So that's about the time they're about the hardest to catch too though.

R: Yeah.

I 1: Well, I'm running out of questions unless there's anything else you'd like to say. Although, I will ask you this. If you had to describe Cortez briefly what would you say about it?

R: Oh, as far as myself I don't think there's any place to live except Cortez. Of course, that's the way a lot of people think about their hometown. Don't make no difference where they're from. But I'd just as soon live in Cortez as anyplace.

I 1: Is there anything about it that makes it special or unique that you can think of?

R: Well, like I say. I was born and raised there and I know everybody. Outside of that I don't know. Everybody's friendly. Like now that I'm retired, I can go down and get me a mess of fish at Bell Fish Company and it don't cost me anything. That helps a lots too.

I 1: Maybe that's because you already put your dues in.

R: I'll give away about as many fish or more than I'll ever take as far as that goes. Of course, like now I can go down to any fisherman if he's throwin' out fish. I'll get a mess of fish from him rather than the fish house. Any of 'em will give ya a mess of fish, which I've done many times. Somebody'd come down and I'd say help yourself. All of 'em feel about the same way.

I 1: And it's always been that way.

R: Oh, yeah. We used, here back, make a seine haul on the beach in the winter time. The tourists would come down there and as you haul your nets ashore there'd be a lot of fish in 'em. I know times when they'd take 1,500 or 2,000 pound of fish out of your nets. Of course, it would be three or four hundred people there and we'd just let 'em have 'em.

I 1: Would they help pull in the nets?

R: Sometimes a lot of 'em would help. They'd get a kick out of it.

I 1: Well, we thank you for taking time to do this Clayton. We appreciate it and we'll keep you informed as to the progress and when we'll have the exhibit.