

Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage 4/1/93

Fulford Fish House with Julian "Goose" Culbreath Oral History - Vanishing Cultures Project Funded in part by the Florida Humanities Council

Interviewers: M. Jepson/W. Nield

I 1: Goose, we start these interviews just by asking you first to state your full name.

R: Julian Haverel Culbreath. C U L B R E A T H. It's Culbreath. A lot of 'em call it Calvert.

I 1: What's your address?

R: You mean here in Cortez?

I 1: Yes.

R: It's ... you've asked me somethin' I don't even know. I don't know the number on the house. I live on 121st Street Court West. It's the first house on the right as you come across 45th Avenue. We put the old house on the back of lot there thinkin' someday we'd build us a new one up there where it belongs. We never got around to it. That's the same old house we had movin' in there and we bought it from Bub Bell, Walter Bell from Bell Fish Company over there. How come him to get rid of the house, they surveyed his land and the survey line was right through the middle of the house.

I 1: Right through the middle?

R: Right through the front door. He had a for sale sign on it and Madis says Bubba, I'll give a \$150 for that old house. He says it's yours. So she paid him cash and got it and we got a fella from out in West Bradenton to move it for us, Garrett I believe was his name. He moved it down there for \$175 and set it back where it's at.

I 1: More than the house was worth.

R: It's been there ever since. We only paid \$175 for that corner lot. So, finally got that paid off. I'll tell ya times were rough back then tryin' to make it. Three cents a pound for mullet and then it'd drop back down to two and two and a half. Just fluctuate, back and to. There was plenty of fish but you could not sell 'em.

I 1: Before you go on with that, I wanted to ask you first of all to tell us your parents' names.

R: My mother's name was Ella Susan Culbreath. She was a Hearst. Her maiden name was Hearst. Her mother's name was Boyet. Her dad's name of course, was Hearst. And my father ... now I don't know my Grandfather Culbreath's name. It seems to me like it was Obida but I'm not sure. But my dad

was James Charles Culbreath.

I 1: Was he a commercial fisherman?

R: He trout-fished commercial, yes. He had a crippled finger. He got bit when he was young by a cottonmouth moccasin. He shot a rabbit in an ole hollow tree up there in either Suwanee County or Hamilton. He lived in both counties at times. I was born in Suwanee. Me and Clark was born in Suwanee, the two youngest. The rest of 'em was born in Hamilton County. He reached in there to get that rabbit to get him out of there and that snake bit him. It almost killed him. It took him a long time to get over it. He had a little bitty finger. He could hold that fiddle bow. He was a good fiddle player. Real light bow. Won a lot of contests playin' that fiddle up there around Suwanee and Hamilton.

I 1: When did he move to Cortez?

R: They moved to Perico Island to start with. They was livin' at Gardner and they moved from Gardner over to Perico Island. And there was no bridge over there. It was before the old wooden bridge was put across there. If you go across Manatee Avenue goin' West you'll see the old stubs out there where that old bridge was. When we moved over there, there was no bridge there. We had to go across that bayou when it was shallow. On the big tide, spring tide, if you went to town, when you come back from town if that tide was up it would just about float ya out of that wagon and you'd have to stand up on the seat and put all the groceries up there. The old horse just could make it across there. The water'd be lappin' over her back. We lived there till '21. Had what they call the '21 storm.

I know you've seen some pictures of it, what it did to Cortez here. But we were over there and had no way off of it and we rode it out. We stayed there.

I 1: You remember that storm?

R: I certainly do. I still do. I wasn't but about four and a half. I might have been closer to five. I was born in 1916, the 29th of August. So, I couldn't have been very big in '21, see? But anyway after that, it washed everything my dad hadn't batted down. He had tomatoes and beans and everything else and it washed all that stuff out. My sister was goin' with Albert Carver, Melvin Carver the one that's here now, his brother. She was goin' with him and he come over to see us and says well, why don't we get the boys a job fishin' over there. And that's what they did. They got 'em a job fishin' and one of 'em fished with Albert Fugh and one I think fished with Jule Morey, Vernon's dad, which was a very good fisherman. One of the best.

That's been a lot of years back but I can remember it all. We moved to what they call the old Perry House, I believe it's on 124th. 45th, it runs right by it and 123rd and 124th. I believe it was right on the corner of 123rd. But anyhow, the old house has been burnt down since then.

I 1: Was that a two story house?

R: No, it was a one-story. The one we moved into over here, the old Augustine Willis house, is a two story house. His son got to be a lawyer and he bought it back for taxes. My brother bought it for

taxes, it belonged to my brother. It was his all clear. But during that time, during the depression, nobody could make no money to pay no taxes so when Robert Willis got old enough he went to school and studied to be a lawyer and he come back and bought it back for taxes just like Bud did. Then we had to move when that happened.

But that same house I've got there was on one of the lots that Robert had when he paid the taxes and got it back. But it was his dad's property to start with. He owned all that.

I 1: What was Cortez like when ... what do you remember about Cortez in those early days when you first came? You were pretty young, but do you have any ...?

R: Oh, yes. I remember very well what it looked like. All this shoreline didn't look like it is now. It wasn't pumped in, it was all sand fiddler flats out there in front of Boogie's. That was about the highest spot there was. From his house on over there to where the road comes down to Bell Fish Company, that was all sand fiddler flats. The tide would raise and fall on it, is what I'm tryin' to tell ya. On the spring tide, the tide would come up on them flats, up on that shore. Where Boogie's \_\_\_\_\_ was, they had a high spot there and they had a smokehouse out there in front of his house that the fella built.

I can't remember what the man's name is, Boogie probably can tell ya. But he built that smokehouse and it was a pretty good size house and he would smoke mullet and sell it to different people. Then he finally went out of business and left the old buildin' there. It stayed there for a long time before it was ever tore down. It was right about where they've got that place fenced in over there, across from Boogie's. That road there was sooty alright, but it was kind of a sand fiddler road across there. In fact, all the roads in Cortez was sand.

I 1: All sand back then?

R: All of 'em. Even 45th. Nothing but just sand fiddler, well it wasn't sand fiddler, it was just regular sand roads is what it was. I remember one day this Miss \_\_\_\_\_ Green was out there, they lived right catty corner across from that white house on the right side across from Bell's. That's where she was livin'. Her and her sister Eva. In fact, both of 'em taught school up there. We had what we called and old Model T Skeeter. My brother Tony was drivin' it. We would go the school house, we had to haul our water or tow it. I'll tell ya about that in a minute.

We'd go up there with them two five-gallon gas cans is what they really was, but we bought 'em new and we carried enough water for the house. Because when the rain water tank would go dry, we had to have water to drink. It took a lot of it because there was a bunch of us. There was anywheres from 8 to 9 of us at all times.

I 1: Kids in the household?

R: Well, there was grown people and all. Just me and Clark was the young ones. And Charlie. Let's see, Charlie was about 6 years older than me. Clark was 2 years older, no Charlie was about 4 years older than me. Anyway we was goin' out there one day and we went around and come up to 45th

and we headed over toward the school house and when we did, Clark fell off. There wasn't nothin' to hold on to and he fell off and the back wheel run right over him. Of course, it was light. Didn't have nothin' but just the rear end. It run over him and of course, the teacher come runnin' out there. He was cryin' and she said, is he hurt? I said, no god dog teacher, but it run right over the middle of him. I remember that very well.

Another time my brother had an old Chevrolet with runnin' boards on it. We went out there to get some more water and I was drivin'. He usually drove, he was 2 years older than me, and we got to comin' down that old road there and he wanted me to hook it up. Well, I wouldn't do it and he reached over there and put his foot on top of mine and hooked it up and when we got to that corner I went around it. Seemed to me like the roads might have had some tar on it then. Shell is what it was. When we come up to that road I went around it and liked to turn it over, sent those 5-gallon cans down that road. He didn't know when he put his foot on top of mine, when I got to that corner I was goin' around it. Back then the cars aren't like they are now.

I 1: What did you call that car? It was a ...?

R: A Model T Skeeter we called 'em. Everything was tore off of it. Took all the old body off it and then they built a little ole frame thing with a back, looked like a \_\_\_\_\_ hull back there out of wood. That's what we had on it. That's where he was sittin' when he fell off and the thing run over him, the back wheel. All such stuff as that.

I 1: What fish houses do you remember in the early days of Cortez?

R: Star Fish Company and the one that Burton Green run. I don't know who all had it, but it changed hands quite often. But I remember old man Burton Green real good.

I 1: Where was that fish house?

R: Where the Coast Guard station is. That was a dock and they had a fish house there. Had a ramp made so they could roll the barrels up that ramp and put 'em on the truck after they got 'em loaded. You know what I'm talkin' about, barrels? They shipped the fish to New York, I guess that's where they shipped 'em. Different places. They would put 25 pounds of ice in the bottom of it and they'd ... they had a packer ... and they'd pack that ice. Back then they had to chip their own ice from blocks. Then they'd put 100 pound of mullet in and then put 50 pounds of ice, they'd pack that down and then they'd put another 100 pounds and pack it down and then put 50 pounds of ice on top. Then they'd put the heads in it, nail it in and ship it to New York.

They had that old ramp. Most of 'em had a ramp so they could roll the barrels up it, see? Jess Williams had a fish house just on this side of Bell's, where it's at now. Bell's got the big fish house in there. Jess's fish house was about like from this house to that shrimp box over there. That's how far they were apart. There was just a small place in between them. One on the west end was the Star Fish Company and the one on over there was Burton Green's Fish House. That was when I was just a young kid growin' up.

Finally, Aaron Bell rented it after Old Man Burton got out. Aaron started off over there. In fact, I think he was in business maybe a couple, three times over there. Then he finally turned his, Aaron finally turned his net camp into a fish house. That's when Bell's really started, got their big start.

I 1: The Bell's now got their start from the net camp?

R: Yeah. All them boys. He got his fish house and had it there till they bought Royal Fish out, Jim Guthrie had it. Anyway, they bought that and ... that's the old fish house right there ... and it was finally tore down when they pumped it all across there. In fact, all that was pumped in. That was sand fiddler flats from where that seawall is. When ya walked down that shoreline, if it was high tide, you'd be walkin' in water. But there've been a lot of changes made since I moved in. Boogie too. He can tell ya all about it.

I 2: How long have you been fishing out of this fish house?

R: This fish house here, I started I think the latter part of '42, best I can remember. Of course, I was fishin' for Star Fish Company when they bombed Pearl Harbor. Old man Willis Adams lived right there in that two story house. Sally's daughter owns it now. Old man Willis lived there. It was Captain Billy's home. That was Tink's dad's home. Of course, Tink built this after Mary Francis was born and Mary Francis was born down there at the other house on 121st Street Court West on the left side of the road just before ya hit the water. There was a buildin' there but I can't remember what they called it. It was an old homeplace and Tink rented that till after Mary Francis was born. Then he got him up money enough and he come over here and Old Man Green's Richard and his Richard built the house he's got there. I've got to get to that too.

Had an old porch all around the west side of the house and the south part was all open. He brought one of these Cormorants home, we call 'em ducks. Anyway we called 'em ducks. He brought that thing home and I thought it was the prettiest thing I ever seen. And every time I'd get through school I'd head right out on that porch and play with that thing till dark. Till I had to go home. And they named me Goose after that.

I 1: That's how you got the name?

R: That's how I got the name Goose. After that duck. But I've seen a lot of changes here.

I 1: Where did your father fish when he was fishing?

R: He fished for trout. Hook and line. He did some seine fishin' with Old Man Nate Fulford I believe it was. Aaron Bell's wife's dad. They used what they called splatter poles. Have you ever seen anybody do that?

I 1: I've never seen it, I've heard it explained to me.

R: They had pretty long poles, it would reach way out past the boats. He always kept a long one so he could fish further away from the boat. He had the line just where he could hook the hook in the

bottom of the pole. And he would throw it out and he had a popper cork on it. What we called a popper cork. It was cut out at the top where it would make a noise and you'd be surprised how them trout would hear that when you'd pop it. Just like fish astrikin'. He'd pop that old cork and that fish would ... I've been out there fishing with him and I had my own little boat, and we'd be goin' along like that and he'd throw it out and jerk it and I've jerked it like that I've had 'em take the line right back before I was done jerkin'. That's hard to believe, but I've seen it done.

I 2: Was there bait on that hook?

R: Yes. We used what a lot of people called buckeye. We called 'em little sand brim that he used. I've used 'em too when I've fished with him. We'd get out there with that old popper cork and what you did ... on that boat he had he had a barn door rudder, what we called a barn door rudder on the back of the boat. And he'd cut it over there and tie it so it would float kind of sideways. It'd drift off and he'd drift whichever way he wanted to go and then he'd drift back. That's the way he'd fish. That's the way he'd fish. Got across the flat he wanted to fish in and then he'd go back over there and do it again. Just keep driftin' back and to. That's how they caught their fish.

He had an anchor there. If he caught fish, he would drop that anchor and catch 'em just as quick as he could and he'd get those fish to bitin'. I've seen him sit right there and catch 100 pound of trout just that fast. And my wife could do the same thing.

I 2: How long would a splatter pole be?

R: Really, I don't remember just how long it was. It was as long as he could get one. I think it would be about 16 foot, 18 or I guess around 20 foot. The ones he had, cause he had a long one. He got the longest one he could find.

I 2: Did he make the poles?

R: No, it was bamboo. Bamboo pole. You could buy them at any of these old stores like Tommy Fulford, Blue's dad. He had a store here. He kept fishin' poles there all the time. And a lot of people liked the shorter ones. But my dad wanted the big ones. I've seen him have to go to town to get 'em long enough for him. Cause he used the long poles.

I 1: How long was the fishing line?

R: The same length as the pole. He would tie it right on the end of that thing. Of course, he'd cut that limber part off. He'd have it back to where it would be a little stiff. That's the reason he'd want a long one. He'd cut that limber part off and he'd tie onto the end of that and then he'd run it down to where he could hook it at the bottom of the bamboo pole. That's how long it was. It would be about the same length as that pole. And he would throw it off out there and he'd jerk that cork and jerk it. You'd be surprised back then them trout would bite. I don't know what they'd do now. But they used to do that.

I 1: Before you go any further, I want to ask you about your wife, Mada. But first of all, tell us a

little bit about your marriage. You were married to Mada for how long?

R: Right at 45 years. We married in '38. December 17, 1938. And that youngest boy of mine was born the 19th. We didn't wait long did we. That's really true.

I 1: How many children did you have?

R: Three. I've got J.C. He's the oldest one, the night watchman for Bell over there. Then Lloyd is the next one and Loreal is the youngest. The girl that cut roe out here? You remember her. She was caesarean, Loreal was.

I 1: They were all born here in Cortez?

R: No, J.C. was born in Ft. Myers. We were fishin' for Old Man Bradley down in Ft. Myers when J.C. was born. He was born in the old hospital there in Ft. Myers. I don't know whether it still exists or not, but that's where he was born, in the old hospital. Loreal and Lloyd was both born in the old hospital here in Manatee. Used to be Manatee, now it's East Bradenton. But it was in the old hospital where they was born. Of course, Loreal was caesarean. Lloyd was natural birth. I never will forget when Loreal was born. They had to put her to sleep and they come rollin' her down the hall and I said well Mada, we've got us a girl. She wanted another boy. I says we got us a little girl. She says, well you can have her I don't want her. That's the reason I always call her my girl. Yeah, Mada says you can have her, I don't want her.

I 1: Tell us a little bit about Mada.

R: She was the best old gal you ever seen. I got a good one there too. But Mada was really good to me. She could talk about me all she wanted to, but nobody else said nothin'. She'd just jump right down your throat. And she was a Bickford. She was born in Alva, Florida, east of Ft. Myers. They moved here I think when she was around 14 or 15, I'm not just sure what age. Might have been 14. Anyway, they moved from Naples to here. No, they lived in Naples then they moved back to Ft. Myers, and then moved from Ft. Myers to here.

I got to knowin' her brothers real good and the old man, Grandpa Bickford. He was a good old man. Him and his wife both, Mada's mother.

I 1: Was he a fisherman?

R: Grandpa didn't do much fishin' at that time, but he had fished. In fact, I want to tell you a story about Grandpa Bickford when him and Grandma Gracie got married. They moved to Tidy Island down here. They lived right there where they've got the little dock built out there now. Right inshore of that. They got married in Bradenton and they come down in a sailboat and that's where they lived at.

I 1: Did Mada live on Tidy Island for awhile?

R: No. She was born down in Ft. Myers. I think Beatrice and Merton were the only two they had

born in Manatee County. The rest of 'em was born down there.

I 1: Was there anyone else on Tidy Island when they lived there?

R: Yes, I think Old Man Gus Cole lived there. And Grandpa Bickford used to fish with Gus Cole some. But when Gus Cole moved, he wanted Grandpa to go with him. He wanted him to go down to Gasparilla with him. He said no, he was gonna go down further south. So he went down to Ft. Myers and back then you could homestead property. So that's what he did. Old Man Gus Cole went to Gasparilla and he finally got to own that whole island out there. All but the south end of it. I don't know what they called it. Well, there was the Gasparilla part. Old Man Gus Cole owned it all. That's accordin' to what they tell me. He lived right there on Tidy Island with my Grandpa and them when they first got married.

On the east end of Tidy Island there was some of the women there that had babies that didn't live, ya know? And they buried them back on the east end, so Grandpa told me. I don't know just exactly where it was at, but it was down in that lower part back there.

I 1: So there were children that were buried there?

R: On Tidy Island. I'll tell ya who can tell ya is Bessie Figbin and she lived there with Jeff Figbin. Yes, I think at the same time that Grandpa Bickford lived there. I think she's still livin'. She lives up there in West Bradenton. Not West Bradenton, but right close to 9th I believe it is. Between 9th and 14th.

I 1: So did you know the Bickford boys when they were living on Tidy Island?

R: No. I met Mada and Mr. Bickford after they come back here. Jule Morey knew them real good and they got in back circumstances down there so Jule went down there to see them and he brought the old man back with him. He liked to got killed. I forget what it was. He was doin' somethin' and hurt his hand real bad. And he brought the old man back here and he fixed my sister-in-laws and my brother's home. They had moved the old fish camp up to shore there, they called it the mendin' hole run, it was Washington's Camp. They moved it ashore and he built, Grandpa Bickford did a lot of rebuildin' on that house so they could have a house to live in. I'm talkin' about Ruth and my brother Marvin.

Marvin was fishin' with Ruth's dad, Jule. Like I said he was one of the best fishermen we ever had here. Him and Tink ... we had a lot of good ones. A lot of good fishermen. In fact, all of 'em were good when I was growin' up. They all knew how to fish.

But they moved back here like I said, and that's where I got to know Mada from. Travis says, I want you to meet my sister. So back then I wouldn't say no. You wouldn't believe it now. But we went over there that night and we sat around and I never did say nothin' ya know? And Grandpa Bickford says, you've got to meet Clark. Now he was talkin' about my brother, two years older. Says, you've got to meet Clark. So when I left, she told me later, I says, well if that was Mr. Clark you can have him, I wouldn't have him. But after she got to know me it was altogether different. We finally



got married. And we lived right there were Ruby Newman's place is now, Warren Newman and Ruby. And the old house that was there, that's were we moved when we got married.

We moved after we got married and we lived there for almost five months and then my Uncle Jim wrote us a letter tellin' us about comin' down there and fishin' for Ed Henry at Ft. Myers. Well, it's down below Ft. Myers. Go to Beneva Springs and just north of Beneva Springs you go out to the bay out there. That's where Ed had his little fish camp. So we went down there and fished for him, I guess over a year. Pretty near a year and a half I guess it was, before we moved to Ft. Myers Beach. We did real good there for Ed. And I'm talkin' about the Henry's now, they own the dredging company up here. That was Ed's brother. Ed had pictures of the dredge that he run of his brothers. And he said, my brother said anytime that I want to bring his dredge down ... he was always talkin' about pumpin' the place in, makin' a nice place along there. He never did get around to it. He died before he got it pumped in. But he said his brother told him, bring it down here and it won't cost you a penny for none of it. All you've got to do is \_\_\_\_\_ the boat. But he never did get around to doin' it.

I 1: Mada was a little bit different than most of the women in Cortez because she fished.

R: She was. Now let me tell ya somethin'. She was a good fisherman and she could do anything. It didn't matter what it was, she could do anything that she set her head to do. She was a smart gal.

I 1: Did she net fish?

R: She net-fished with me, sure. Yeah. She spent many a day on that beach pompano fishin' with me. And I mean, it would be rough too in that old boat I call the float boat. Back then we didn't have sense enough to put a transmission on that boat. We just had a straight drive. Had an Oldsmobile engine in it and we'd go out there and run that net out and if that wind broke out of the northwest, we had to pull it back. Man, strength. I'll tell ya. Whether she had an old lead line or cork line and I'd get the lead line and we'd pull her back there and get it up. She did that with me for 7 or 8 years or longer. Maybe 10. Quite a long time with pompano fishin'.

She fixed her own boat and me and her got trout fishin' there one summer and she liked it good. She got to watchin' everybody trout fishin' and I showed her what we knew about the splatter pole fishin' and all that. And she went from that and got to watchin' everybody down around the Pass, how they fished. And that's where she fished mostly. She couldn't swim a lick. She could dog-paddle, what they call dog-paddlin', but she couldn't swim. But she didn't mind gettin' in that boat. She made her own fish chum to catch her bait with and she would go out there and catch her own bait. I fixed her a bait box after she got the bigger boat. The boat she's got there now.

But the first boat she had, she had a little well into it. She had my brother's boat is what it was, and she put her a live well in it and she'd catch her bait and put it in that. But after she got the boat, this boat over there, the one I've been fishin' with, I put her a live well in the bottom of the boat. Me and Boogie tore it out last year I think it was. Or year before last. Then I built her a big box to set up on top of the net table. Then she built her own box to put her fish in, trout. She had one that would hold about 150 pounds of trout, I think around that.

But that big bait box she had there, we put a pump down on the other box and it would pump the water from that box up in the big one. Then when it got so much water in it, it flowed back down in that well to keep the water circulatin' to keep the bait alive. I've seen her get down there on the south side of the bridge that Longboat's on when it had big water in it. Now it's got closed off. It just keeps closin' in. Back then the Pass went on out but it was closed up. Them trout would get back in that deep water back in there and I've seen her with a balsam wood cork. Like I said, she made it to where it make a racket ya know? A popper cork. She come in there one day and says, I want to show you somethin'. That balsam wood cork, them trout had eat the whole side out of it. I mean it was gone. She said the trout did it, strikin' at it. She used two hooks. She had one just a little longer than the other one. She'd use two hooks. She'd bait them two hooks and throw them out there and that's the way she'd catch fish.

I've seen her catch two at a time a lot of times. Two trout at a time. One of the wardens, back then when they got pretty stick ya know? Had one of the wardens come down to her and seen Mada catchin' them trout. She was east of what we called the swimmin' hole out there, east of Sister Keys. She was anchored there and she wasn't payin no attention to him. She was catchin' them trout, two at a time as fast as she could pull 'em in. And she said when she looked up the warden was right there at the boat. She told him not to touch the boat, just to hang on and not make any racket. He said that beat anything he ever seen. He'd never seen anybody catch fish like that. He says, I'm gonna bring my wife back down here and let her watch you fish some of these days. She said he never did do it.

Anyway, she said she told him, now when you start to leave turn loose and drift off out yonder before you start up. If you start up you'll run all my trout off. So he did. He drifted quite away before he started his engine up. But she was catchin' 'em two at a time as fast as she could throw it out there. She'd do that till she ran out of bait. A lot of times when she got 'em bitin' like that she'd catch anywhere from 100 to 150. Sometimes 200. She was a real good fisherman.

I 2: Your son showed us a box of lures.

R: I got 'em up to the house. She made every one of them by hand. She's got a lot of dudes and all kinda stuff. She made some for Scott Mora, that guides fishermen around here. In fact, I used to mend Scott's nets, his cast nets for him when he'd get holes in 'em. I'd mend 'em up for him. And he'd come over to the house and he told Mada he wanted her to make him some dudes. He showed her what he wanted and I can't remember whether she used polyethylene and rope or what it was. But she made some for Scott. And he went out there mackerel fishin' on the outside there, and he come back in and told her to make him some more. They were the best he ever used.

She's got fresh water plugs. They're up at the house. We'll let ya look at 'em there one day. She made her a little box to take down to the swamp buggy track where she could sell some of 'em. She sold quite a few.

I 2: Did she carve them out?

R: She used cedar. A lot of them plugs she would carve out of cedar and she would put a 90 pound test leader on it and cut it out I guess with a saw. I don't know just how she did that. But she'd carve

all that out just like a man. Painted it and everything. It didn't have no eyes. Then she would glue it in. We'll show 'em to you one day.

She'd have a hook in the back and one up in the middle part. Anyway, I've got 'em up there. That's how she made them and she painted 'em all and did all that. She also made net needles.

I 1: Net mending needles?

R: Yeah. Regular net needles and she made a hangin' needle. She had kind of a shuttle-built needle that she made. I believe I've got one left that she made of the shuttle- needles.

I 2: Is that carved out of wood?

R: Yes. Carved out of red Mango. The Mango root that comes from the tree down to the water? That's the part I would cut off for her and she would take it with her skillsaw. In fact, she made her a saw to cut them on each side of the tongue. She would cut it with that saw. I'm talkin' about she made it! She took a file and a regular big ole cross cut saw. I know you've seen them where you use two people. She took a piece of that saw and she cut it out, made it round and cut all the teeth on it. And I think that thing's up there at the house yet. She put it on a little board and she put an electric motor to pull it. And she'd turn that thing on and she had that needle just so .. she had it pointed. She already had the point cut on it. And she would put it on that board and it would go zip. Zip. And all she had to do was take a pocket knife and cut the rest of it out. And she would cut the back out with a pocket knife.

Boy, she was real smart. She did all that stuff. She didn't ask nobody to do nothin'. She did it all. But I got a good lady too now. Rosalie Myer. You can't beat her. But I sure hated losin' Mada. It really made it hard on me. I stayed home for a year ... I used to go to school with Rosalie out her. Her and Alice both. And Fred, her brother. They used to live out there where Coral Shores is now. Out there Mt. Vernon is? Right about where the opening is before there, their dad lived there and he was a farmer.

I 1: That's Rosalie's father?

R: Yeah. Rosalie's dad, \_\_\_\_\_. They lived there and of course the had the two girls and the boy. He was the oldest. He was a \_\_\_\_\_. I got to know them back then, but they moved away and she got married to Dewey Myers and Alice married a Wright and then she married a Hodges. Alice's last husband was a Hodges. The middle one was Bryan. But she was married to a Wright to start with. He was a good fiddle player. He used to come to the house all the time and play the fiddle with us.

I 1: When did Mada pass away?

R: In '84 I believe. June of '84. Best I can remember it was. We would have been married 45 years if she had lived from June till December the 17th. That's how much we lacked bein' married 45 years.

I 1: I want you to go back a little bit Goose, because we didn't talk much about your mother. Could you tell us a little bit about your mother? What type of woman was she?

R: Oh, she was the best ole thing in the world. I had two good parents. You couldn't beat her and you couldn't beat him either. They was always good to all of us and my mother ... we had an old kerosene stove and she cooked four times a day on a kerosene stove.

I 1: Four times?

R: Four times a day. She'd cook breakfast, dinner and what we call supper. Most people call it dinner, but we called it supper. Then she would be in that kitchen till 9:00, 10:00 bakin' biscuits and cookin' and makin' us a bucket to take fishin' with us the next mornin'. And that was every day. Every day she would do that. We always had a house full cause we were playin' music and everybody was in and out. And they just thought the world of Mama. She didn't go nowhere. Nowhere but to sit at the back of the house.

I 1: Was she ever employed outside of the house? Or was she basically just a homemaker?

R: Not as long as I ever knew, Mama wasn't. All she did was just like I said, cook and take care of the house and take care of us boys and tear us up if we done somethin' wrong. She would do that. My mother weighed around 200 pounds and when she promised you a whippin' you got it. I never will forget. She ordered a doggone washin' machine thing from Sears and Roebuck. Back then that's the only way you could get it. Or Montgomery Wards or Sears and Roebuck.

She got tradin' with Sears and Roebuck. She'd order stuff. And she ordered this thing and it was just a regular ole wash tub with a gear on the outside with a handle on it, like you'd have on cross cut saw I was talkin' about awhile ago? When she first got it we got to fightin' over who was gonna push it. Well, that was fun for the first 30 minutes. But that got old in a little bit. Then had to whip us to get us to do it.

One night my brother Ted come in with a little bit too much sauce and fell over it and broke the handle off of

it. You talk about some tickled kids. We was tickled when he did that. Then she ordered her ... I can't remember what kind of washer it was ... but I think it come from Montgomery Wards. Anyway, it had a gasoline motor on it. And you had a little ole kick starter on it. There wasn't no electricity here then. We didn't have no electricity. That didn't come till later. It was after me and Mada got married before we ever had any electricity.

But we'd start that thing and it wasn't no problem once ya got it started. But boy, I was so tickled when that other thing got broke.

I 1: So that was the first automatic washer, it had a gasoline engine in it?

R: The best I can remember, that ... we had wringer on it. But the other was that thing you had to push back and forth.

I 1: Tell me about your brothers and sisters.

R: I have two sisters. Vera married first. She married Walter Mathis and she had three girls and a boy, Vera did. And the oldest one, named Louise, Louise Mathis ... or was she's married to a Reynolds now. Then the next one is Enid Mathis and she married Smokey Smith. He used to carry ice around Bradenton all the time. She's got two boys, Enid has. And then Denise, the youngest girl of Vera's and I think ... I'm not sure whether she's got two or three girls. And Enid's got two boys. And Denise has either two girls or three. But the one we call Bugs is the boy, the youngest one. He moved out to Louisiana. He was in the Coast Guard and he got out there and married one of them girls from out in Louisiana. They've got some grown kids out there but I could not tell ya ... I know it was Mathis. I think they were girls.

But Bugs passed away. And my sister \_\_\_\_\_ had \_\_\_\_\_ which he called himself Ed Carver now. They live over on the east coast. I can't remember just what town. But I think \_\_\_\_\_'s got a boy ... seems like he's got a boy. I think he's got a boy and a girl. Anyway, Peck, the younger one. He was married twice, might have been three times. Anyway he had two or three kids by his first wife. Then they separated, he'd drink so much. Then we got \_\_\_\_\_ we just lost her. She lived over on the east coast. They had two or three girls. And \_\_\_\_\_'s got one girl that can really sing. She is good. They call her Louise. I thought there one time she was really gonna make it big. I think she would have but she got married and you know what happens ... kids. But she has really got a voice.

I've got grandkids too. Of course I've got two boys and the boys have kids of their own. Lloyd, he's got two boys who are good musicians. The girl, I think the youngest one, might eventually start playin' somethin'. Dwayne is gettin' to be a good singer. He's the one playin' his drums with us now. Nolan is the oldest boy and he's got a good voice. I mean, a good singer. But he wanted to go rock 'n roll and that's what he's doin'. Playin' rock 'n roll. I sure hated it. But that's what he wanted to do so that's what he's doin'.

But anyway, I'm gonna get you all a tape from that last job we did if they can get me one. They said they were gonna try to cut some more off the one they got down there. And boy, that's the best we

ever sounded. I thought so myself. I come home tellin' Rosalie how good we sounded.

I 1: I guess we have to talk about the Cortez Grand Ole Opry. You are quite a musical family. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

R: Back when I was growin' up I didn't know how to play the fiddle. My dad and them come over and ask 'em if they'd play at St. Petersburg at the old pier. That's the one on the bay. They had a radio station over there, WSUN I think it was at the time. Anyway, they went over there and Boogie and them's the only ones who had a radio. So me and my mother come down and stayed that night till they got through playin' on the radio. Boy, they did sound good. They didn't win nothin' but they sounded real good.

And the boys got to tellin' stories about that. They asked my dad what he was gonna play. Well, they'd had two or three drinks before they got up there and he called off some tune he was gonna play and they played everything else but. So after they got through, he said what was that you was playin'? He said I don't know. But they didn't win over there, but they still did sound good.

What happened was they had a bunch callin' in and the ones that won, of course people called in from over there and they got it. But to me, they was the best there was on there. They were good. But I couldn't even play a fiddle then.

I started when I was about 8 and I bought that fiddle I've got when I was 10 years old. I bought it for \$12.00 and I \_\_\_\_\_ to get that. My brother said he knew where there was a fiddle he could get for me. So that's how come me with that. I give him the money and he brought it back to me and I've had it ever since.

Anyway, gettin' back to our family. We didn't go nowhere. Most of us stayed right there at home. The first that got home might get anxious to play a little bit so he'd pick up an ole guitar. I think it was \_\_\_\_\_ they had. My older brother Shelt, could play the guitar and sing a little bit. Not much, but he can sing. He used to sing somethin' about a girl friend. My brother Charlie was a good rhythm man, one of the best. He didn't pick, he just used kind of a hammer style. I had two brothers who were good mouth harp players and Richard could play the fiddle and he could play the guitar, either one. I think he played the banjo some. Anyway, one day they asked my brother if he could play One Eyed Gopher, that's an old fiddle tune. And someone spoke up and said, you're damn right he can play it. He's had six weeks to practice.

You know back then we had closed season and he said ya, he can play it because he's had six weeks to learn it. So he jumped in there and played it for them. And we had an old self-player piano. I know you've seen 'em. And we kept that thing while I was growin' up till the hoses went bad and I didn't have sense to know that I could have bought more hoses to put on it. So I got to talkin to Mama one day and she says, well take it out. So I did. It made it a lot lighter. But I threw it away like a fool.

But me and my brother Charlie ... I couldn't use my left hand. I can use it on the fiddle, but I couldn't use it on the piano. And we'd play old fiddle tunes like Lazy Bones, Five Foot Two, and all them. I mean, I could eat that up on that right hand and Charlie was over there on the left. And

everybody got a kick out of it. What was funny. We played on the black notes. We didn't know that's what they call sharps. We didn't know what we was doin'. We were just playin' the piano. We learned how to play on the black notes and that's how we played. There was people comin' from everywhere to listen to my Dad play.

One day this fella come from Bradenton, Willis was his name. And Dad and them knew him from north Florida. He said to my Dad ... they always called my dad Dick. He said, Dick why don't you play me a fiddle tune. He had a habit of sayin' I can't play nothin' and sure enough he couldn't. They blamed me for it. But Clark's the one who did it. He took a piece of wax Mama had and waxed that bow up. And Mama like to never got that wax off of that fiddle bow. She washed it and washed it and washed it. Back then we didn't have soap like we have today. They had the old P & G soap. And that's all they had if they didn't make it themselves. They made most of the soap themselves out of lye. I come up the hard way, I'll tell ya.

I 2: There's a photograph of ya'll standing in front of a microphone. It's got the radio station numbers on it.

R: That's WDHL. It was WTRL when we played there. No, WDHL when we played there, it's WTRL now.

I 2: Was that something you did one time or did you play regularly there?

R: No, we did that for one summer during ... when they started back with football, they'd pick a time that we had. Shorty Wilson went up there and got the time for us. We didn't get no money for it. We had sponsors like Pete Brown and them. They'd sponsor us. All that was just for the radio station to put it on. We didn't make nothin' but we had a lot of fun. It was just a little bitty studio. And there was so many in there that wasn't room to sit down. And that fella would point to me. He was in the glass room there. And he would point to us when he wanted us to start playin' as soon as he got ready to put us on the air. He'd throw the switch and point to us and we'd start. And Shorty Wilson was the one got the time and he did the announcin' for us. He'd step up to that mike and we wouldn't even be playin'. He say, uh uh uh, don't touch that dial, it's the Country Cracker's Jubilee. And boy, we'd start playin' that fiddle. I never will forget it. I'd kick it off. I can't remember what it was we played. I would kick it off with the fiddle, of course they'd chime in with the guitar. We didn't have nobody who could sing. But we had the Caldon girls from out around Parrish and on out further, kind of a duet. He'd bring them over there and they'd sing for us.

Finally, Shorty quit and left me and my nephew Peck to do the talkin'. Peck, he was I'll do the announcin'. I says alright, that'll be fine. I don't want to talk. So we got up there and that fella pointed to the thing and we was supposed to wait until he said, uh uh uh don't touch that dial, it's the Country Cracker Jubilee, but Peck didn't say nothin'. He just stood there and of course then we went to playin' and then we pushed him and he says, uh uh uh don't touch that dial, it's the Country Cracker Jubilee. We took off and they said it went over better like that than it did before.

After that, the first time I ever played on radio was down there at WSPB on City Island. Joe Asher and them come up ... the Buckley Twins ... they wanted me to go down there and play fiddle for

'em. I says, well I don't know. Joe was awful young lookin' to me. I says, I don't know, I'm gonna have to listen to ya. He come on the air and I couldn't believe it was him singin'. He come back up there and says what do you think. I says, yeah I'll go down there with ya. I couldn't believe it was him, he did so good.

Well, I went down there and they put me on a hangin' mike. And old Joe got up there and he always kicked off with a guitar tune, a boogie or somethin'. He kicked it off and he says, we got one of the finest fiddle players you'll ever listen to. Of course, that scared me right there. I'd never played on the air before. And then he said, he's gonna play you a fiddle tune now. And I can't remember what it was, but I just got up there and they said it sounded real good. And I was scared the whole time.

Well, after awhile Peck quit goin' up there with us to the station and I had to do the announcin'. So Joe Asher and them ... it was nothin' for him to talk. He'd get right up in front of that mike and just talk all day. It come my time to do the talkin' and I fell apart. But I didn't want nobody knowin' so I just walked up there and said don't touch that dial, it's the Country Cracker Jubilee and we started off playin' and nobody ever knew the difference. Boy, I was scared.

I 1: How did you get the name Cortez Grand Ole Opry?

R: Well, Gray Fulford is the one who named us that. He got talkin' there one day down at the fish house and he says, who in the world cares about the Grand Ole Opry to start with? He said, we don't care whether we listen to it or not. He says, we've got one right here in Cortez. We've got the Cortez Grand Ole Opry. And that's the way we got the name. Gray Fulford did it. That was \_\_\_\_\_ Fulford's oldest boy.

I 2: I have a story I'd like you to tell.

R: Do you want me to tell it now? I'm good at stories. The Cortez Rag. I got thinkin' one day, I'm gonna make me a tune up that I've never heard nobody play. So I got to foolin' around with the fiddle and I come up with that. And I named it the Cortez Rag cause we never had nothin' when I was growin' up but patches upon top of patches. When a hole come in the pants, Mama sewed another patch on. So I said, well I'll just call it the Cortez Rag.

I 2: You and I were talking one time about changes that you've seen around here in your time and you had something to say about lights out on the water at night.

R: Yeah. That does. I think it interferes even with the turtles comin' ashore layin'. Them strong lights they have on the outside there? They have some all up and down Longboat there, especially where the Harbor House is. They got some that shines out there on that water and you'd be surprised. We used to mackerel fish out there and there ain't no way you're gonna see nothin' fire in that water with that light on. And it's shinin' out there on the gulf. Right out in the gulf.

I 2: What do you mean you won't see anything fire?

R: Because the water fires when you've got a dark night. That's the way we used to find mackerel



by the water firin'. You could see the fishin' runnin' and that's how they mackerel fished. I'm talkin' about years ago. And that's how they found the fish. They could see the schools of fish and they knew what it was. They could tell the difference between the jacks, the bone fish. Most of 'em could, some of 'em couldn't.

I 2: So, the night lights ruin that?

R: Oh, it does. How ya gonna have any phosphorus in the water, or in your fire, if that light's out there.

I 2: Does it make it difficult for you to find your way?

R: No, you can see as far as comin' up that beach. It doesn't bother you like that. You knew about how far you was off the beach anyway. But as far as seein' the water fire and stuff like that, you ain't gonna see it. And I believe it interferes with the turtles comin' ashore to lay their eggs. Some say it don't make no difference but I think it does.

I 2: So, you'd rather see less lights on shore?

R: Yeah. I sure would. And I think everybody'd be better off if they didn't have it shinin' out in the gulf like that, or in the bay either. We used to go down that bay there and we had to have a lantern or somethin' to pick a net up with. I guarantee you can go down there now on a dark night and you could pick up that net without even a light. Because it's all lit up, the whole doggone bay. All the way around. If you don't believe it, you take a boat and go down there. You'll see what I'm talkin' about. The whole bay is practically lit up.

I went down there one night and got lost after they put this ... Tidy Island ... started buildin' that up. Well, they got the first houses they built there around where drag line dug the thing up there. And they built them big buildings right around the east end of Tidy Island. Well, I hadn't been fishin' at night so I went off one night and I didn't know they had turned them lights on. And I was comin' back up and I thought I was seein' the lights from over here at the end of the bridge. The beach side. Come to find out, I was up there where them bright lights was on the east end of Tidy Island. When they turned them lights on it made all the difference in the world.

I 1: Who did you fish with when you were coming up?

R: I fished with Jim Guthrie back when I was about around 17, I'm not sure. 16 or 17, somewhere along in there. In fact, I fished with several different ones but I fished with him. I remember that very well. We'd go over across the bay to Mullet Key and we'd anchor the boat back of that reef out there and we would pole across the reef around Scratch Ankle Key. We'd pole across there, leave the boat on the outside there in Tampa Bay. Go back of the reef, and pole all around that \_\_\_\_\_ Basin all the way around through muddy bottom, Adams' Shore on the other side and clean over to Bunches Pass, around the Grass Keys and on down around Rattlesnake Key. We'd pole up around the edge of that. Anyway, we'd pole over around by Jackass Key, Butler's Hole, across to Tarpon Key. Then we would pole back, paddle across that channel and go back to the boat. We'd leave the boat at sundown

that evenin' and we'd get back at sunrise the next mornin'.

I 1: That's a lot of polin'.

R: That's what we did. I did that quite a few times with Jim Guthrie. He was a hard fisherman. In fact, all them Guthrie's were hard fishermen and Fulford's too. Tink just didn't sleep much. He stayed awake.

I 1: They say he was quite a coffee drinker.

R: He was. I think one pound of Maxwell House might make two pots. I think when they first started off, they'd take a whole pound and put it in that coffee pot. Of course, they had a kettle they made it in. He would come off of that boat, Tink would, and he would come up to that boat and that fire would be lappin' out around that pot. He'd take that old kettle up and you could hear that water when he did that.

I 1: And he'd pour it right down?

R: Yes. Drink it right out of that thing. He was tough. He'd stay up all week long. All day, all night. Boogie can tell ya about him.

I 1: When you were fishing with Mr. Guthrie, were you fishing on a net crew?

R: Oh, yeah. I think he fished four or five skiffs. I was in one of 'em. And like I say, we'd pole all night. We were fishin' for old man Burton at the time. We was gettin 3 cents a pound. It finally dropped to 2 and a half to 2 cents and finally I went down to Stump Pass with my brother with Albert Fugh's other boat. He had two boats. We went down there and was fishin' that Fall and Chadwick Fish House was the one we fished for. He sent word down there that he couldn't take no mullet. If he did, it would be on consignment, so we wouldn't go. His son went out there and caught about 6,000 mullet on consignment. Of course, he got paid for it. But if we had caught 'em we wouldn't have got a dime. So we didn't fish. We come on back home. It was rough back then. You couldn't sell fish like you can now. Nobody wanted 'em.

I 1: Was life hard in Cortez in those days?

R: It was because there was a bunch of us. The reason we could get along was if anybody made money it all went to Mama. And she'd go to town and buy groceries. And that's the only place she could do it. I've seen a lot of times I'd come in there with what little bit of money I'd made and I'd give it all to Mama, about a dollar and a half. I'd put some gas in the old car. Me and Mada would go to town and buy us a bag of popcorn. I think it cost about twenty five, thirty cents to go to a movie. The old Palace Theater. We'd go in there and watch the show and come back. We'd have some popcorn.

I 1: That was your entertainment.

R: That was our entertainment. That's right.

I 1: Well, let's go back to some other types of entertainment. You said you used to play at the house and you used to have people over all the time. Tell us about that.

R: Well, there was different ones. Like Boogie. Jack got listenin' to us and he wanted us to come play for a square dance. Well, my Dad and them at that time. That was before I started to play. Then most of the people in town would go over to the square dance. They'd dance out there and Dad and them would play. Yeah, I've seen an awful lot of changes here. I mean, all the way around. And every time ... you ain't gonna believe this ... but every time they take a dredge and dredge somethin' up along the bay it changes the way them fish act. You ain't gonna believe what difference it makes in how them fish do. It changes their way of movin' around the bay and everything.

I 1: They're really sensitive to that.

R: Yeah, they are.

I 1: And that would mean you would have to change the way you fish.

R: Sure. You've got to learn all over again. You've got to learn how them fish act. Because they'll probably run towards the hole that they've got dug in there and all kind of stuff like that. These fellas know. They're fishermen too.

I 1: Well, let's take that break and you can bring your instruments out and we want to hear the Cortez Rag.

R: Alrighty. I think we can play it.

The following excerpt is Goose and Leo Gayle playing fiddle and guitar.

I 1: Before you start again Goose, you were recently awarded Florida's Folklife Award. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

R: Well, they give me the award at White Springs. I had to go up there and get it. And Governor Lawton Chiles signed it and Betty Castor and oh, several different ones. I can't remember all the names. Secretary of State Smith, I believe it was. And Butterworth I think. They also give me the plaque. I was proud of that, I'll tell ya. I was really tickled with it.

I 1: That's quite an honor.

R: It sure was, for me. I call myself an old scrub player. That's what I am. I learned it myself and I learned from listenin' to other people play. My Dad and Tommy Jackson. I used to love to listen to him. Curly \_\_\_\_\_ and Chubby Wise and all them. You can learn somethin' from any fiddle player. He'll have some turn in his playin' that you like and you put it in there.

I 1: Tell us a little bit about this fiddle.

R: I bought it when I was 10 years old for \$12.00. And I'm 76 goin' on 77 now. So you can figure from that how long I've had it. It's a good fiddle. It's gone around the block a time or two.