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Raymond Guthrie - Oral History "Vanishing Culture Project"
Funded in part by the Florida Humanities Council

Interviewers: Mike Jepson and Wayne Nield

I 1: Mr. Guthrie, we usually start these interviews by asking to state your full name and date of birth.

R: Raymond L. Guthrie. Raymond Luther Guthrie. I was born August 16, 1921.

I 1: August 16, 1921. Was that before or after the hurricane?

R: Just before. I was born in August and the hurricane came in October. Mom waited at the house with me in waist-deep water.

I 1: She did?

R: Yeah.

I 1: First, I'd like to ask you also ... what were your parents' names?

R: Juanita Mae Guthrie and James Leslie Guthrie.

I 1: Juanita Mae Guthrie?

R: Yes.

I 1: Was Mae her maiden name?

R: No, her maiden name was MacDonald.

I 1: And your father's name again was ...

R: James Leslie.

I 1: And he was known as Les?

R: Yes.

I 1: What do you remember about your father? Was he a commercial fisherman?

R: Oh, yeah. He was a commercial fisherman all his life until

the latter part whenever he was gettin' kind of old he started guide-fishin'. Then he did a little deep sea fishin' too. He run a boat for a doctor from up north, I think from Michigan. He'd go over to Boyington Beach and take the doctor out fishin'. That's after he quit fishin' when he got a little old for that kinda work.

I 1: Do you remember him as a commercial fisherman? Were you young enough to fish with him?

R: Oh, yeah. I fished with him whenever I was a little feller. I remember goin' fishin' with him and sleepin' on the

gunnel of the boat. He was scared of me fallin' overboard. Had a fella fishin' with us, John Harris. There was just two of 'em, pompano fishin'. And I'd go to sleep there and he'd keep his eye on me all the time. I'd just lay one arm over the gunnel and lay up there on the deck asleep.

I 1: You'd be on the gunnel when the boat was running down the Bay.

R: Oh, yeah. Everytime I went to sleep I'd get up there.

I 1: Was your father a stop-netter, a gill-netter, or did he do both?

R: Well, he did it all. I don't remember him doin' too much gill-nettin' in this area. Well, in fact, I think most of his fishin' was stop-nettin' and seine-fishin'. Pompano too, of course. But I think he was the first with the new type of fishin'. All the fishermen around here used to be gill-netters. He started seine-fishin' and they all got mad at him 'cause he was seine-fishin', poured ashes onto his seine and ruined it. Then they started stop-nettin'and they started raisin' sand about that too. Didn't like that. But then after everybody switched over and started doin' these type of things then everything was alright. I couldn't recall, Fulford. I don't remember his first name. He lived up there Dutch lives now. He was a hook and liner and he was all the time fussin' about stop-netters and about everybody in general was hook and line-fishin'. And somebody took a stick of dynamite and put it onto a fishin' pole, shoved it under his bed one night and made a wreck out of the room but it didn't hurt him. Shortly after that he moved back to Carolina.

I 1: Gave him good reason to move.

R: Yeah. I wouldn't have cared for somethin' like that.

I 1: Why do you suppose they didn't like seine-fishing? Why were the other fishermen opposed to that?

R: I don't know, unless you catch so many fish. I really don't know. Just somethin' that they wasn't doin' and if you was catchin' fish, well then that does away with what they could catch. Competition was pretty stiff, although everybody got along alright along the shore. But whenever they got fishin', the competition was somethin' else. They used to turn loose from the dock a lot of times and drift away from the dock a good way so people couldn't hear 'em crank up and

go fishin'. They would take some other fella's area for fishin' ya know. Like stop-nettin'. Used to take a skiff and anchor it to the stop. Every stop had a given area you'd take in and you'd just put your skiff there for that area. That gave you the right to fish that area provided you was there on the high water. If you were there after the high water, somebody else would probably take it. But they'd drift off so nobody'd hear 'em go and try to take somebody else's stop and save his skiff for some other time.

I 1: So there was sort of a code of ethics about reserving spots for fishing, but there was also an attempt to kind of overlook that code.

R: Oh, yeah.

I 1: What type of seine-fishing was your father taking part in? Was it haul-seine on the beach?

R: Yes. Mostly along the beach.

I 1: And what type of fish was he fishing for?

R: Mullet mostly.

I 1: Do you remember what fish house he fished for primarily?

R: Well, he fished for all of 'em. He fished for Green for awhile, then he fished for Williams. I don't know if he fished for Williams or Judge Millis. That was Star. Williams, it seems to me like his fish house was called Cortez Fisheries or Cortez Fish Company or something like that. I can't remember exactly. But then he done a lot of fishin' for Sabareze and fished a lot down south, Dickson Fish Company there. Hog Creek is there where the Coast Guard Station is there in Sarasota just this side of the big purple building.

I 1: You say it was the Dickson or Dixie Fish Company down there?

R: Dickson.

I 1: Do you remember some of the boats that he had? Some of the first boats that he fished?

R: Yeah, he had one he called the Barngap and he had another one he called the Needlefish. Then he had a flat-bottom boat with a raised deck onto it that he fished for awhile. Seemed to me like Tommy Fulford owned that boat. But I don't know if it had a name or not. But when he first started fishin' they used sailboats. They had all those named. That's a funny thing. They'd take these sailboats and go fishin' and a lot of times the wind would die out on 'em and they'd have to pole back to the dock. Sometimes they'd be several miles away from the dock. But they didn't carry ice. They had a lot of boards across the boat that you walked on to keep ya off of the fish. And they were pretty much solid along there, shade for the fish.

I remember whenever I started fishin' we didn't carry any ice. We'd just use a burlap bag and we'd wet it every once in awhile and throw it over the boards we were walkin' on

and help shade the fish. Seemed like they were alright cause we'd eat 'em every time we'd come in. And we didn't have no trouble with it. But then we fished just on the high water. You'd plan on bein' somewhere about high water and make a strike and keep runnin' till you'd find a decent strike and it'd be the only one you'd make. From there you'd come on it. That's after they used power boats.

I 2: Do you remember seeing work boats with sails on them?

R: No. That's just a little ahead of me. I remember him tellin' about it. They used to have races all the time in 'em. He had a plank in his boat that he'd stick under the

gunnel on one side and over the gunnel on the other side stickin' up in the air and he had him a sand bag whenever they'd race. He'd push the sand bag up there under that board to help level his boat up to sail. He said he won a lot of races and had a lot of fun during the races.

I 1: Do you remember him mentioning other captains that he would race?

R: No. I can't recall any of their names.

I 2: Where did they hold those races?

R: Right here locally around the Bay. I remember Aunt Molly tellin' me that they would always want her to go with 'em racin' and all. She was a regular tomboy and she went with 'em sailin'. She told me about the time they asked her if she wanted some fish. She said yeah, she wanted some fish. So, come on let's go and they'd get in their sailboat and sail up here to Palma Sola Bay where it used to be good for pompano and they would sail up the Bay and the pompano would skip, hit the sail and fall in the boat. She has even told me about knittin' nets for 'em to fish with. But that was before my time too. I don't know how long they were, how deep they were, or anything about it. Couldn't have been too long of a net if you'd sit there and hand-knit it. Cause it takes awhile to make a cast net.

I 1: Were there any superstitions about women being on boats?

R: No. No. A lot of 'em would have liked the women to go with 'em to help 'em out.

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

R: She was a very carin' woman. She even, in the latter part of her life, worked up here at the hospital. Started off as an Aide and I think they finally hired her and gave her a little wage. Wasn't too much. But she was a very carin' person. Anybody get in an argument, her sister and her husband ... well, he wouldn't argue. He'd just walk off and go back down to the dock. But seems like every time he'd come to the house she'd have somethin' to hollar at him about. She got onto her about hollerin' at Charlie. Charlie Lewis and Pearl. And she would would get onto Pearl about fussin' at him so much so he seemed like such a good person. And he was. And she just couldn't take

her fussin' at him all the while. She got onto her about it and Charlie got mad and told her to tend to her own business.

I 1: Can you give me your brothers' and sisters' names?

R: Yeah, my older brother was Stanley Kenneth and next to the oldest was James Leslie and my sister, she was the youngest, she was named Charlotte Marie.

I 1: So there was the four of you kids?

R: Yes.

R: All of us was in the service at the same time.

I 1: All four of you, even your sister?

R: Yes.

I 1: What did she go into?

R: She was in the Navy. All of us was in the Navy.

I 1: When you were growing up did you have meals in the house all together? Did you sit down as a family to eat?

R: Oh, yeah. I remember Grandma lived over on the corner, Eunice Guthrie. She used to have a bell she'd ring and her boys would be down there messin' around at the docks mendin' net or somethin'. She'd ring the bell and in a little while you'd see 'em goin' to the house. Cooked on an old wooden stove. Biscuits every day. They'd start that thing at daylight and it wouldn't shut down hardly a couple of hours at night. How they stood it, I don't know.

I 1: Pretty hot in the summer I would imagine.

R: Yeah. I used to go over there all the time. Red Guthrie, a cousin, he'd hollar at me. My nickname was Pig. He'd say Pig come on over, we got some biscuits. I'd go over and eat biscuits. I loved those biscuits she'd make.

I 1: This was your grandmother?

R: Yeah. My step-grandmother.

I 1: What did you usually have for meals? What are some of the more common foods that you would eat growing up?

R: Grits and fish and collard greens, mustard. Oatmeal. Bacon and eggs. And once in awhile we'd get a steak. But that wasn't too often. A pretty staple diet. Plenty of potatos. But whenever you got through eatin' you could put out a day's work. And I mean a day's work.

I 1: And you put in quite a few days' work.

R: Yeah. I fished with my Uncle Luther. Luther MacDonald. We were stop-nettin'. He was kind of a sleepy-head. We'd go out there and run our net, lay down and go to sleep and he'd just let the clock run down. An old big ben clock that

made plenty of racket. But we'd lay there and after awhile we'd get up. It was too late to fix any breakfast. We cooked aboard the boat, had a little box with a Coleman Stove in it, a few groceries. He'd say let's get up and get to work. Cut that net around to keep them fish from goin' back out on the flats. The tide was down then. We'd make a pot of coffee and eat peanut butter and guava jelly. And sometimes we'd start before day and heck, it would be 2:00 before we'd get back to the boat. Then nobody felt like cookin' so we'd make another pot of coffee and eat some more jelly and bread and peanut butter comin' home. That was somethin'.

I 1: Would your mother prepare lunches or things to take out on the boat for you at times?

R: Oh, yeah. Everybody carried a lunch. Had a little ole lunch pail. Some of 'em had black ones. Some people were just strictly against black on their boat.

I 1: Oh, they were?

R: Yeah. I remember Jess Williams throwin' Callie's lunch box overboard and he had his watch in it. He said that's a black cat. We won't catch no fish. So he picked it up and threw it overboard and it had his watch in it.

I 2: Are there any other superstitions? Any other feelings like that about bad luck?

R: No. There was a feller, Drew Mora, he'd be comin' down to go fishin' and if a black cat run across the road in front of him he'd turn around and go back to the house. Yeah, they was superstitious about a cat. But I can't recall any other thing they was superstitious about.

As far a pollution, it's worse now. It has to be for fish not to stand up no longer than they do now. You have to have ice with ya now.

I 1: So, you think it's pollution that's making them spoil.

R: Oh, I know it. It's the only thing it could be. I remember we had pollution back then but it wasn't as severe as it is now. Take whenever I was fishin' with Daddy. We sold a lot of fish over in Tampa. We were there one night, well early that afternoon, sold the fish and it rained so hard that someone who was fishin' with us had to get up two or three times in his shorts and pump the boat out. And there was a pipe runnin' up right next to us that must have been two feet in diameter with a solid flow comin' out and anything you wanted to mention was comin' out of it. Raw sewerage, and all. And they tell me now there are still spots like that. These subdivisions they have up here have their own sewer system and if it got overloaded it went into the Bay. It's a much better system we've got now, but they claim it's causin' certain types of moss to grow and smother out the bottom down here in Sarasota Bay. We used to call it green moss. I don't know the proper name for it.

I 1: There wasn't that much when you were young. You didn't see as much in the early years of your fishing.

R: Oh, no. As kids we'd pole out there in the skiffs behind the Key here and at that time range light there. And around that there was pot holes. Now, I don't know what caused 'em. They seemed to be perfectly round when they first developed and then later they'd change shape a little. But we used to go out there and go swimmin'. We'd all strip off all our clothes and go in swimmin' in the raw. That's the reason we'd go behind the Key. Get a little privacy. But I don't know what made those holes and they are still around. Could be like fresh water bass. Fish get up there and wallow it out to lay their eggs.

That could have been what started 'em originally, because it would be just a little deeper there sometimes. It would be six inches deeper than it was around it and sometimes it would be a foot or so.

I 1: Tell us a little more about growing up in Cortez when you were younger. What was it like?

R: Oh, it was wonderful. We had slingshots. When we got old enough we had air rifles. Then you'd get a little older they'd give ya a single-shot 22. We used to go out here and we called it the sand flat out here. Where the Sea and Sea is. There was a big pond there.

I 1: On the other side of Cortez Road?

R: Yeah. And there was one up to the West there called Bradley's Pond. Then there was smaller ponds on up to the East. And we'd go up there and hunt birds. We'd build a playhouse. Try to build one without usin' nails. We'd cut us some branches and small trees and tie 'em together and make squares out of 'em. Houses made all the way around into squares, about foot squared. Then we'd cut down sawgrass and we would get in there just like the natives do, or so we thought. But we made some good ones. Then we'd come home, try to get a fryin' pan from Mom and get a little bit of lard. We had lard then. It wasn't vegetable oil. Go to the store and you'd have a big old tub of lard. If you wanted a pound of lard you'd have to scoop it and put it into a little pasteboard carton and take it home.

Then we'd get mostly sweet potatos. Had trucks from Georgia comin' down here and they'd get fish and bring a load of sweet potatos with 'em. Then the same way with peaches. Most of the fish at that time ... well, I say most of 'em ... they sold some to New York. But a lot of our fish was sold in Georgia. I think that's the reason we never did get much money for 'em because they were just as poor as we were. You have to find somebody with some money to buy fish if you expect to make any money out of it.

But anyhow, he'd bring a load of peaches down here. I mean in bulk, in that truck. And we'd get on the truck with him and help him deliver them. We'd go down the road and people would stop and want a bushel of peaches and we'd help him put them in the bushel baskets.

Another thing, when I was a teenager. We used to ship a lot

of fish by freight car. They'd take a bunch of us kids to town and put us in the car to stack the mullet. They were hauled in bulk then, not boxed up. And we'd stand 'em on their tails and heads lookin' up. And there was just row after row and you'd get so far along and then we'd put ice on them in between. Had ice on the bottom, of course. But then we'd lay a board on their heads and that would hold ya up. We'd stack 'em up until we got the car loaded. They'd probably give us 50 cents.

I 1: 50 cents for a day's work?

R: Yeah. It was hard to get money.

I 1: Were there other jobs that you would do as children in the village?

R: No. Mowin' yards and haulin' ice. The fish houses used to furnish everybody with ice. I remember Willis Adams, when I was a kid he used to pull the ice out there and he had an ice chisel that was just as sharp as a razor. Always kept it that way. He'd chop the ice up in little 25-pound chunks. Well, a cake of ice then was marked right straight down and they'd cut it across in 25-pound chunks. We used to make our carts out of old scale wheels. When the scales went bad they'd junk 'em and we'd get the wheels off of 'em and make carts to haul ice.

We started off gettin' 25 cents a week haulin' ice. Each person that ya had. Finally, it went to 50 cents and that was about the time I quit that. I was doin' a little mowin' too about that time and we had these swing blades that ya called lazy boys. Most of the grass around here, or a lot of it, we'd call saltwater grass. Awful tough. We'd have to use a swing blade and knock it down and then you would have to rake it out of the way and use these reel-type hand mowers and you could push that mower and it would go about six inches at a time through that stuff. I used to mow Aunt Molly's yard and she was the highest payin' customer that I had. She'd give me 50 cents and it would take all day to do it. And Aunt Francis. I'd mow hers once in awhile whenever she didn't feel like it. I'd get an over-ripe banana from her.

I 1: That was your pay?

R: Yeah. She said that's the only way to eat a banana.

I 2: Mr. Guthrie, I've heard stories about boys building boats out of tin.

R: Yeah. We used to do that. We felt we was somethin' special if we could get a 10 foot piece of metal. We would get a bow stem, take a two by four, and sharpen it on one edge. Stand it upright into the center of the tin. Then we'd bend each side up and nail it to this two by four and for the stern we'd have apple boxes that we used to get at the store. They made a good stern. Just take the ends of the apple box and bend it up and make the stern with. That was kinda square. I guess maybe a foot or 14 inches and that's the way _____ ruined one of his eyes. He was down there and we used hatchets a lot. And he had this board onto another board and he hit it on the low side of

the board he had it restin' on and the end of it flew up and hit him in the eye. He had trouble with that eye for a long while.

I 2: Did you need to caulk those boats?

R: Yeah. We had to caulk the stem and stern of 'em. If you got a used piece of metal of course you had a few holes where nails was in and you had to caulk them. But we didn't have anything like they have now. We had old hard tar and we'd melt it down and pour it. Get burnt every once in awhile too. Splatter on ya.

I 1: Would you then go out into the Bay and just pole around?

R: Oh, yeah. We'd go all over the Bay. We used our hands for paddles. You could reach the water easy on each side. I can remember the one I had that I wanted a sail to go on it. Mom and Dad wouldn't give me no money for a sail. Didn't have money to give really. And so I was all the time messin' around the shoreline. We had a good beach along here before they filled it all in and put seawalls up. And the Fiddlers they were just plentiful. Hoot Gibson did away with most of the Fiddlers. Of course, us kids killed a lot of 'em. But he would scoop 'em up, put 'em in boxes with a little seaweed and ship 'em up to Michigan. I don't know how many boxes he sold, but he was all the time doin' it. Finally, they thinned out here and he had to go other places. But there used to be millions of them along the shoreline.

Anyway, I was messin' along the shoreline there and there was a lot of blade grass that had drifted up and I was just pokin' around in that and I found 5 dollars. I come runnin' home, told Mom next time you go to town here's 5 dollars, get me some canvas so I can make a sail. And so she did. I went down to what was Green Fish House then, Woodrow Green run it mostly. Anyhow, Frank Smith spent a lot of time down there. He run a pleasure boat for Miss Eddy who lived over on the beach or had a boat there. I don't know how much she lived over there. But Frank Smith took the canvas and laid it all out there and cut it out for a sloop-rig sail and so I brought it home and Mom sewed it up for me and I put it on that tin boat and you'd take a little bit of wind to hit the sail. I'd be dippin' water on one side and I'd be leanin' on the other side. So I'd be dippin' water off two sides. You could sail so long and you'd definitely have to come up in the wind so the boat wouldn't be givin', bail her out and go again.

_____Robin used to sail with me. We'd sail up there at the head of the Kitchen. We'd get these sandpaper conks and bust 'em open and eat 'em. We'd get hungry.

I 1: You called them sandpaper conks?

R: Yeah, those rough, spiny-lookin' conks. They weren't very big. We'd bust them open and eat 'em raw. Then scallop season we'd be up that way and we'd go ashore and build us a little fire. We'd eat a lot of 'em raw but then we'd roast some of 'em on the fire and eat 'em. Pretty good

eatin'.

I 1: Sounds like a pretty good life.

R: It was. And it wasn't so hectic. Everybody would just take their time. Now you see people you know and you can't even make a left turn on a road. They'll be passin' ya 90 to nothin' across the white line on the shoulder of the road. It must cost millions to keep the road up. But they don't seem to mind. But everything was more peaceful. Take a group of people and we'd get in front of the dock in a shaded area. In the winter time you'd get in a sunny area.

Everybody had them a piece of cedar and we had some good pocket knives back then. Iron knives. You could sharpen them and they'd hold an edge and you could whittle all day long without sharpenin' them. The knives you have now you can't whittle ten minutes without sharpenin' it again. Good knives as far as openin' and closin' and looks. But no good for whittlin'.

But they'd just take a piece of cedar, maybe a foot long and they'd start at the top of that thing and run that knife down there and it would just make little ole curls. The dock would be covered with whittlin'. A lot of 'em chewed tobacco and spittin' out every time us kids would come by. It was a wonderful time. A poor time, but wonderful.

I 1: Was life hard do you think?

R: Oh, yeah. I know it was hard. I know that Mom raised us using an old boilin' pot out in the yard. She'd have to build a fire around it, put the water in it. Didn't have a hose. Carried the water in a bucket. Filled the pot up with water, build a fire and whenever it started boilin' put her clothes in it. Then she had a scrub board and tub out there. She'd get on the scrub board and scrub up and down till you about wore 'em out to get 'em clean. Then they had a clothesline to put 'em on.

I 1: Would you as children help her with the washing?

R: Yeah, whenever I could. And we had outdoor privies. Everybody had them. I think the first indoor toilet and all was over at the hotel. The first one around here. But you'd have to clean them out and that was my job. There wasn't nobody else who would clean the thing out. I'd take a shovel and dig a hole. Try to miss a spot where you dug a couple weeks ago. Clean out the toilet and then put lime in it. Daddy always brought a bag of lime to the house. So, ya had a scoop there and you'd take some lime and just scatter it all around underneath the toilet after you got through cleanin' it out. Then while you was usin' it, up until the next time ya cleaned it out, you'd always sprinkle lime around. It seemed to work pretty good.

Then W.P.A. come around and they wanted to build one for everybody. They just kind of built a kind of cistern and they built a house onto it and you went in that thing and it stunk to high heaven. Whenever you come out you

smelled just like it stunk.

I 1: Wasn't much of an improvement.

R: No improvement. Of course, it might have kept a few flies down or somethin'. But I know my neighbor in front of the school house, they come there and kind of coerced him into puttin' one there. He called me Pork. He says Pork, how do you get by without them buildin' one of these things over at your place. I told him if they had come over here and told me they wanted to build somethin' like that on my place I'd run 'em off. He was mad about that. They were horrible things.

Grandma, when we was first married we stayed over there upstairs. She had one of those that W.P.A. put in there and I pitied her for havin' to use somethin' like that. We had a pot at night and I think she used that whenever she had to and then go in there and dump it. But I'd always go down to the dock if I had to use it.

I 1: You said that the first indoor toilet was at the Albion Inn?

R: Yes.

I 1: Do you remember much about the Albion?

R: As a kid I used to go over there and play around. Joe used to bust coconuts for us. That was somethin'. He had all that property up to the front of the church, across the road from the church where Bill Guthrie built his house. From there on back he had all that fenced in and had chickens, ducks, guinea hens, turkeys. Anything that they wanted at the hotel, he raised right there. And as far as stone crabs, he had him a float out there in the water. If they were gonna fix stone crabs, it wasn't this frozen stuff. He'd go down there and dip 'em out alive. He'd break the claws off and serve 'em.

They done it up right. I mean to say everything they got was fresh. And whenever they were gonna have fish, he would go to the docks when the boats came in and he would get his fresh fish then, clean 'em up and take 'em over to the hotel. That was somethin' wonderful the way they run that place.

I 1: Did you ever work at the hotel?

R: No, I never did.

I 2: Mr. Guthrie, what can you tell me about Raymond Guthrie and Francis Guthrie.

R: Well, he was a hard fisherman and she was very conservative with what they made. Good housekeeper and very faithful with the church. Every Sunday they was at church.

I 2: Is that the Church of God?

R: No, it was the Church of Christ. I was there several times. I liked to hear him sing. He had an old rough voice. But boy he could really beller it out. They were good people.

Both of 'em were.

I 2: Did he have a camp here at the end of the road?

R: Yeah, down just a little off to the side of 123rd Street Court. Had a camp there for ... well, I think it was built just after the '21 storm. It wasn't a very big camp but we'd even hang gill net in that thing. About nine yards was all you'd hang at a stretch and you had to keep puttin' it up. Of course, the gill nets then weren't used as long as they use them now. Use about 600 yards now, some of 'em more. But whenever I first started gill-nettin',

our nets were only about 300 yards long. I used to fish with Alvee Taylor. We had skip jacks. It was a deeper boat than the flat-bottom boat. Sam Cobb down here, and I think A.C. Pillsbury, used to build those boats. They had natural crooks cut from cedar. They could get cypress then and one board would be wide enough to fix a side. Later on they used a couple of boards. But I remember Daddy talkin' about it. But the first boats they built, like I say, was natural crooks and they were about two foot apart all the way down the length of the boat. About 18 foot. Built those things for 40 dollars and finally went to 50 dollars.

But that was some workmanship. Those old timers would put a board up there and it looked like it had growed there. They had a caulkin' iron, but they would have to force it into that crack to caulk it. They made their own putty. They'd take white lead and beeswax and mix it together, heat it, and make their own putty. Somehow they'd fix it where it would be soft or hard, whichever they wanted. But usually it was pretty pliable and fairly soft and that would take a week or so for it to cure out. But they done a good job.

Same way with paint. We used to use paint with linseed oil, turpentine and stuff in it. Now you use this mineral spirits and stuff. It don't seem to be as good.

I 2: A lot of the boats in the harbour now are painted blue and green. What colors were the boats painted when you were a boy?

R: Mostly white. We'd paint the inside of 'em a gray color or somethin' like that. But they were mostly white. I was grown before they started usin' different colors.

I 2: On those white boats, did they put copper on the bottom or lead paint?

R: We called it copper paint. It was usually red. In fact, that's the only color I ever seen back then, red. It got its name from the copper that was in the paint. A lot of 'em would start runnin' shy of paint and they'd put kerosene in it to mix up the sediment some more. There was one fella around here who used to go around and people would let their sediment go. They'd stir it up once and probably wouldn't stir it anymore. And this particular guy would get all this sediment and put it in another can, put some kerosene in it, and paint his boat anytime he needed

paint.

I 1: Who were some of the boat builders in Cortez that you remember?

R: Neery Taylor was a professional and then his son Little Neery we called him. And his brother Leo Taylor. That was from the Taylor family down at the end of the road. And then there as Old Man Sam Andrews. He was a good boat builder. Earl Guthrie did it for awhile. He built boats.

I 2: Did Earl Guthrie build them at Ball's or did he have his own place?

R: No, at Ball's. He was rentin' the bottom part of it. I worked down there with him for awhile. We remodeled some boats. I remember Southern Cross. He built a cabin onto it and petitioned a bathroom and toilet for it.

I 1: What type of boat was that?

R: It was a V-bottom boat, square knuckle. That's somethin' that come into bein' after they were here for awhile. The first boats they had was round-bottom more or less and awful tricky in the water when ya rowed around. And the old timers from Carolina used to call 'em a C-boat. But that's the first boat I know of turned bottom side up out here on the beach.

I 1: They called them C-boats?

R: They called 'em good C-boats. They wasn't fast. You couldn't put enough power in 'em to push 'em like they do nowadays. Got boats now that are fairly flat. These factory-built boats now, well they draw a lot of water. We used to step out of the boat you'd get wet just above your knees a little ways to get ashore with the seine. Now with these factory-built boats, you might as well figure on wet all over most of the time. Although if you're careful in the winter time you can use waders that come up about to your tit and you could get overboard and get ashore without gettin' wet. They draw a little water.

I 1: I didn't ask you much about where you lived growing up in Cortez. Can you tell us about the house you grew up in?

R: More or less like the rest of these older buildings here. I can remember a wood stove for heat. But then one winter it was so cold we had to all move into the front room onto a bed and sleep crossways on it. The bedrooms was kind of cold.

I 2: Was that the house that was in the snapshots you loaned me?

R: Yeah. That was something.

I 1: How many rooms were in that house?

R: Well, there was a front room, a dining room, a kitchen and three bedrooms. The bedroom in the front was onto a screened-in porch. But we had plenty of room.

I 2: Where did that house stand?

R: Right there where this one is now.

I 1: Where you're living today?

R: Yes. Termites got in the other one so bad. I wanted to repair it because it belonged to Mom and she gave it to me. But they said the termites was so bad in it that they'd rather build another one.

I 1: When did they tear that house down and build this one?

R: Well, this one was built in '78. As soon as they tore the other one down they started buildin' this one. We had a garage apartment there that got in the same shape and they tore that down earlier, dug a hole right there off to the side and buried that. When they tore down the main house they towed it away to the dump. When I went to get a permit for the house they give me hell for tearin' it down. I was supposed to have a permit for that. So I fussed right back at 'em and got the permit for this one.

We had it built and everything ready to go. We stayed over there with Junior and Judy next door until everything was ready to go. Had the driveway cut out, half of it poured. Called the power company and asked them if they would turn on the electric on because we needed hot water to take a bath and they said we'll send an inspector out to see if it's ok. They sent a fella here who lived in Sarasota with a County job and the County Road Department had to ok it. Half of the driveway was poured, but the other half we lacked another day to get it finished and I called him up here. I asked him where he was from and he said Sarasota. I said you inspect in Manatee County? He said, yeah. So I says well, you see what we've done here and we've got the rest cut out and we have to wait till tomorrow to get the rest of the concrete. He says, I can't ok it. I said what are you talkin' about? You see what we've done and what we've got to do and you won't come turn the power on so we can take a bath in warm water? So we had to go to Junior's to take a bath.

Told Honey about it, Junior's mother-in-law, and she called up there and told them the inspector had been by here and inspected this place and said it was alright, so get out here and turn the power on. She was talkin' to Florida Power and Light. They come on out and turned it on. You take people, give them a little job and it seems like they want to be God. Won't use their common sense for anything. It just makes you so mad to try to do anything. Just like the same trouble with the water.

I went up there to get a permit for the water and asked if there was anyway we could do it. They said if you want to put a deposit down of $700. I said, what are you talkin' about, I'm a poor man. It made me so mad.

I 1: You didn't need permits and deposits in the early days?

R: No. And the thing of it is, when all this was comin' about ... sewer lines, water and all ... they talked about it was

goin' to be so reasonable. Well, hell I paid $61 for utilities last month and it's been runnin' better than $50 every month. But everything's about to dry up out there. I squirt a little water out there and they've got me $1.60 for excessive use. I understand that you can get 'em to install another meter for about $75 more and water's a little cheaper from that, but I don't understand all this kind of stuff.

I 2: Does it seem like it rains less often now than it used to?

R: I think so. Florida used to be almost like a green forest. In fact, they had a sawmill along where Kash 'N' Karry is

on Cortez Road. I think it was just a little to the east of there. And we got lumber from them and they cut an awful lot of trees, pine trees. We called 'em yellow pine. There was an awful lot of yellow pine out here. We used to go huntin' and things kids do. But later on in life you're sorry you ever done anything like that. But we didn't waste.

I 2: There's a house on the corner of 45th and 119th. Did you build that house?

R: I helped build it. That belonged to my brother. You're talkin' about where Doris Schroeder lives now. That belonged to my brother. We had a friend who was a carpenter so we all pitched in and helped him build. The cabinets in the kitchen I built. And the house next to it is the one we lived in. There was six of us lived in there and I was always scared of credit and getting in debt. So at the same time Joe Capo got his lumber from the same place and got him enough to build a larger house and he had plenty of room. Where we had a bigger family with little space.

I 2: When you built that house for yourself, the smaller one behind Doris', do you remember how you chose a plan or why you built it the way that you did?

R: No, we didn't have any plans. Ralph Bonnell was supposed to have been the house builder and I just helped him. But we just figured on 14 by 24 or 26 or whatever it was. And later on I built the room on the back as the family got older and bigger. And I just put a single flat roof cut and later on I was figurin' to double the size of the back room. But never did. My Mom was gettin' in bad health then and we moved down here to help take care of her.

I 2: There were six people using that house. Do you remember how it was laid out inside and who slept where and that kind of thing?

R: At first we had to use double bunks for the kids. Me and Mom slept in the front of the house and then the kids slept in the back. We had a big room in the back for the kids later on and me and Mom slept in the front part. It served as a bedroom and a front room. We had a kitchen there. A little petition between the kitchen and the front room.

I 1: What kind of a stove did you have that your mother cooked on?

R: We had a kerosene stove with a wick. And if you kept your wick clean you would get by without too much smoke. But if you let your wick get out of shape you had a lot of smoke. I can remember Mom usin' these orange skillets to cook in, fryin' and stuff like that. I can remember her when she was washin', building the fire to wash with. A lot of times she'd take those skillets out and put 'em in that fire out there and it'd clean 'em right up.

I 1: I want to talk a little bit about your fishing when you were young. Did you learn to fish from your father?

R: Well, a lot of it yes. But then I fished with other people. Now you take a fella down here who goes fishin' three times and he knows more about it than you do. So he winds up gettin' him a rig and that's how come there's so many fishermen. Used to there wasn't many fishermen around and we'd choose our strike and we had boats that drawed a little bit of water and you had to stay out in deep enough water to run the boat. You'd look toward the beach. Now they've got outboards up forward in their boat and if they get planin' they can run in six inches of water. They run all over everything and most of the time they don't even look for anything to jump. They're lookin' at the water. If he sees one right in the water he'll strike. A lot of 'em will strike and strike. After several strikes you go up there to him and ask him what he's catchin' and he'll probably have 40 pounds or 30 pounds. Just tryin' to catch 'em one at a time and run all over the flats. Cuttin' the seaweed down.

I 1: So fishermen fish differently today than when you started?

R: Yeah. A good crew was a four or five boat crew. And you towed the skiffs. The ones with the poles and nets on 'em. You'd go fishin' on the high water. Now they go day and night, high water, low water, flood tide, ebb tide. It doesn't matter. They're continuously runnin'. What they're not runnin' over, well the pleasure boats are runnin' over. So I don't see why there's any fish at all. They've run 'em off somewhere's else. But it's altogether different.

We'd take a four-boat crew. We had one man ahead offshore and you'd have one feller inshore and you'd have two fellas bringin' up the rear. They'd be in the center about equal distance between the inshore and offshore man. But then you'd keep shovin' down the shoreline. Sometimes you'd shove three or four miles a night fishin'. And lead man offshore, he'd be hearin' the fish and whenever the fish would come on back so you could hear 'em or spy 'em, you'd flip in the center and so everybody would let go.

Usually the center men, the two in the back, would let go. We'd cross our staff. We used to use a staff in the net. You could spring it down over the cork line and it had a lead on the bottom of it and shoot it off the back of your boat and you could throw it 20 feet. So, the two center men would cross their nets like that and they'd start shovin', one towards the inshore man and one towards the offshore man. They'd let you get all situated and

they'd hollar here! You could find the end of his net by the sound of his voice. You'd remember where you'd heard it from and so you'd keep shovin' and he'd already be gone then. He'd let go and go around to meet the lead man.

I 1: So this is at night in the dark and you're listening to hear the fish and also to hear where your partners are?

R: Yeah. They'd hollar here! whenever they'd let go and then you would just judge where he is by the sound and you'd keep polin' till you'd get to his net and you'd cross it. Then

you'd wait until these lead men would come together and then start shovin' your center net out. That's the net you'd have left over.

I 1: How would you know, was there a signal when the lead men came together? Would they call you/

R: You could hear them.

I 1: So once they came together, then you'd put the compass in the center of all that.

R: Yeah, we'd put the net we had left on it. You'd try to run it crossways into the tide and kind of put a bow into it favorin' the tide. You'd run it into the tide but keep goin' back so that your net would be slack on the lead line, but lay over in the tide, and your lead line would be flagged out so the fish would go up under your net.

I 1: So after the net was set, then how long would it be before you started bringing it in?

R: Well, accordin' to how many fish ya had in there. Sometimes you'd just beat the water and scare 'em into the net. But then sometimes you had enough fish in there and you would pick up your center net and work the net up. What we called woofin' it up. We'd keep pullin' the net around. Sometimes now they just take the end of it and go inside the outer edge and corkscrew it. We used to haul the net together. Get up and go to it.

I 1: So when you were bringing the net in you'd have to keep the lead line down. You'd have to hold the lead line down as you brought it in.

R: No, you'd pull 'em both together more or less so you'd have a scoop. Sometimes the fish would be in there and you'd just have his nose into it. Big fish in a smaller mash net. So, you'd pull both lines in at the same time to make kind of a bag out of it to hold 'em if they fall loose from the net. Scoop 'em up.

I 1: Was it hard work fishing that way?

R: If you was in a good crew it was hard work. There was a lot of crews kind of sleepy, but a good crew catchin' a lot of fish, it was hard work. We used to ice out the boat Saturday afternoon, get our nets ... well, we'd just mended our nets Saturday mornin' ... I made a mistake, we'd ice up

on Sunday. But that's the time you had home from Saturday noon until Sunday. You had to get your check, if you had one acomin'. Go get your groceries, spend the night at home, next day you was down there pullin' your net back on the boat. After that you iced up. Then sometimes you'd be able to go back home for 30 minutes or an hour or so. Then we'd leave and go, what we called, across the Bay. To Mullet Key or Fort DeSoto where we done a lot of fishin'. And sometimes we wouldn't even come home until Friday.

Of course, this was a time when we was carryin' ice. You had ice boxes filled and so we'd fish a couple days, get

as many as we could into the box, send one feller home with 'em into the launch, and we'd stay there. Had spreads built on the Islands around there. Pull your net up there and be mendin' on it till they got back or the next set of tides, ya know. This was when we were bush wackin' mostly. But then we were gill-nettin' too in between times. And we'd mend net till they got back. Same thing over and over. Week after week.

I 1: Were those net spreads that you built out there on Mullet Key and those areas, were they to be used by anyone or were they only for specific fishermen?

R: They were private.

I 2: Did you sleep on shore or on the boat?

R: On the boat. You'd be surprised how little room five people can sleep in. Now they're gettin' back to smaller boats. But they were somethin'. Take a 26 foot boat and 28 foot boat, little cabin on it, little cook box they called it with a stove in it and all. And as many as five people would sleep on it. The cabin was just more or less bunk to bunk. And besides that you had a big old engine in there.

I 2: Would that have been a boat like the Anna Dean or the Wayne?

R: Yeah. That's the type. Some of 'em smaller than that. We used to call them big boats.

I 2: Back to your description of the four skiffs working the net, once that net was full of fish would the big boat come back to load onto it or did you divie that catch into the four smaller boats first.

R: No, into the small boats. And if you was fishin' around locally why they would stay right into the skiffs till you got to the dock. You'd unload the skiff at the dock. Then when you got through unloadin' it, you usually would take your skiff, net and pole to the net spreads and wait for the captain to gas up the launch. The one they used to tow the skiffs in. As soon as he got through with business he'd come over there where you had started off.

When I first started fishin' we used cotton nets and you had to dry 'em regular. And we used lime to keep 'em from rotting and mildewin'. We'd mix lime and we used a hand-made bellow made out of wood. We'd use a bellow full of lime into about 20 gallons of water. Mix it up and bale

it on the net. Then you got out, pull some of your net out, and if you thought you needed another dose of lime water, then get back down in the boat and pour some more lime water on it, pull some more out. Then from that we went to what we thought was a perfect net. We used what we called flax or linen. But they were the same way as far as takin' care of 'em. But you didn't use as strong a lime water onto 'em. Just light lime water.

When you got through cleanin' out your skiff ... we used to keep 'em clean too ... not like they do nowadays. But we'd have to get on the spreads then and throw 'em back the

opposite way, just overhaul it to keep it from stickin' together. They were hard to mend when they stuck together. Then whichever time you was fishin', night or day, you'd use the short while in between times to come down and do a little mendin' before you'd pull it back on. There was some people who wouldn't get paid if your net wasn't mended.

We kind of helped each other out as far as mendin' goes. Of course, there was some captains who you wouldn't mend his net cause he treated ya too rough.

I 1: So that was a way to get back at him by not mending his net.

R: Yeah.

I 1: Did you learn to mend nets when you were young?

R: Oh, yeah. Very young. There used to be a fella and his son lived in a camp across the slough there and that's where Uncle Luther had his camp and his net spreads. I'd go over there, get in a skiff and push across the slough there, and they taught me how to mend nets. Then I fished with Uncle Luther. We were stop-nettin' and a lot of his nets were old and tender and I used to call 'em rotten. He'd say no, they're not rotten. They're kinda tender. In other words, you used to tie knots and start mendin' his net. If you weren't careful you'd break the mash.

I 1: He called 'em just sort of tender.

R: Yeah.

I 1: There was a lot of maintenance involved in the fishing in those days. Not only with the nets but with the boats too, wasn't there?

R: Oh, yeah. Our boats, whenever I was fishin' with a crew, we'd fish across the Bay all week. When we'd come in they'd let one fella take care of the boat. He'd bring it to the dock, use a hose, soap and water, and scrub her down stem to stern. And they was clean. Awful clean. I fished with Guy Fulford in an open boat and she was so dry that you could eat off the bottom of it. That's how dry and clean it was. Used soap and water on it. Had to use a sponge. When he got down where he couldn't get any more with the baler he'd use a big ole sponge. He'd sponge it

out. She was just as dry as a bone. Nowadays they've got the best kind of equipment and they won't one stay afloat hardly if he don't have a bilge pump in 'em.

I 2: How often did you have to copper the bottom?

R: Well, in the skiffs, we'd turn them over pretty regular. If you come in Friday afternoon and you wasn't gonna use your skiff till Sunday, you'd just flip 'em over and just use net bunt to scrub 'em with. Coarse, hard, cotton net bunt. Get ya a chunk and rub her down with that and you could do that as much as four times and then you'd have to

copper paint. I'd say about every two months or so you'd have to copper paint. And the launches, they'd go usually about three months. You had barnacles and things on 'em. Of course, your skiffs you seldom had any cause you'd flip 'em over pretty regular. And it made 'em lighter. But if you had barnacles, you'd get clam shells and scrub the barnacles off of it.

I 2: So, on the bigger boats you might have to pull that out of the water several times a year?

R: Yes. There was some people that let their boats go longer than others. But the ones that liked to race like Aaron Bell and Guy Fulford ... they was bad about racin' ... their engines were tuned up to a tee. They got the kind of wheel on 'em that would make 'em turn at their best. And they'd take good care of the bottom of 'em. Every time they got together with this race, like comin' from the Pass. They'd see who could get to the spreads first. Spreads were right side by side there.

I can remember a time when we were comin' in there and Bell was offshore of us and we was comin' down the slough there. Guy wouldn't let him cut across his bow comin' to the spread and he kept comin' pretty hard till he got near to Fulford's place and he'd shut her off. Didn't have a clutch like ya have now. Just straight drive. Whenever you wanted to stop you had to stop the engine and then let her coast down. But we run so hard in there that ... I always rode on the bow of her with a leg on each side over the stem ... and the big ring boat there where ya had your cable tied for your anchor. I'd have my hand into the ring boat and we'd come into the dock and I'd have my feet out to catch the dock and I couldn't stop her all together, so she come right on into the dock and that 2 by 6 plank on the dock just split. Guy kept tellin' me don't get your feet in the way. I said, I'm not. I stayed there and held her back as much as I could. But I couldn't hold all of it. But he didn't cut across their bow.

And the time they found the rum out there. Everybody was racin' then. They'd be down at the Pass fishin' and just drinkin' that rum and racin' their motors.

I 1: Where did you find the rum?

R: There was a ship haulin' it into Tampa. I suppose it come from Cuba, I don't know. But anyhow, it run aground and he wanted to lighten his load so he could get off. And he

started throwin' it overboard and they were supposed to knock a hole into it before they discarded it. But a lot of 'em went overboard without knockin' a hole into it. So I guess altogether this whole community had been pickin' it up. They must have had 25 drums. Wasn't drums. It was 55-gallon kegs.

I 1: Wooden kegs of rum?

R: Yeah.

I 1: That was floating out there in the Bay?

R: Yeah. They would roll it ashore there. Somebody had 12 or 15 barrels of it. But anyhow the Revenuers come through and they wanted to collect it up. They thought they was gonna get paid for it. So they told 'em they had it and helped 'em get it. Never did hear from 'em anymore.

I 1: They just came and got it.

R: Yeah. They said the tax hadn't been paid on it and they had to pick it up and there would probably be a reward. I imagine they were, but not whoever picked it up here. And some of 'em never turned it in. It was good. I drank some of it. Take a coke, pour about half of it out and finish fillin' it up with that rum. Pretty good.

I 1: How long did it last then if they had all those kegs of rum around here?

R: Oh, heck. It lasted quite awhile. Some of 'em got kinda sneaky with it. They'd give themselves away. They hid it in the woods and they'd go back and forth so regular that they made a pathway so people was goin' around lookin' for it. Just keep goin' around till you'd see a trail, follow the trail and go right to his catche.

I remember Charlie Lewis had some over there and it had a hole in it and it had salt water in it. So, he was drinkin' it and it was kinda salty and everybody was tellin' him it was gonna make him sick. And so he sent Kit Rowley over to the store. Said, go over there and get a loaf of bread. I think that'll take that salt out. I think it just satisfied his mind that he'd done somethin' to it.

I 1: So he strained the rum through a piece of bread?

R: Yeah. Thought he was gonna get the salt out of it.

I 1: The tape's getting kind of low and so we can take a break.

R: I imagine it's about time.

I 1: Wayne, do you want to continue after lunch?

I 2: It's up to Mr. Guthrie. We can do it again another afternoon if this is enough for awhile.

R: Yeah, might be better.