

Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage 4/13/93

Mr. Vernon Mora Oral History Vanishing Culture Project  
Funded in part by the Florida Humanities Council

Interviewers: Mike Jepson/Wayne Nield

Location: Mr. Mora's Stepdaughter's home, Gerri Culbreath

I 1: We start these interviews Vernon, by asking you to state your full name and date of birth.

R: My full name is Vernon Phillip Mora and I was born in 1922, December the 17th.

I 1: Are you married?

R: Yeah.

I 1: What's your wife's name?

R: Mildred Mora now. It was Mildred Roberts before we got married.

I 1: Was this your first marriage?

R: Yeah.

I 1: Do you have children?

R: I have three step children, yes.

I 1: And their names are?

R: The oldest one is John Earl Patrissi and the daughter is Geraldine Bernice Culbreath. And Bobby is the youngest boy and his name is Bobby Perdman.

I 1: What were your parents' names?

R: My mother's name was Laura Adelle Eastman and Daddy's name was Julius Eugene Mora.

I 1: I'd like to start by having you talk a little bit about your father. Was he born here in Cortez?

R: No, I think he was born in Stark, Florida. My Grandfather went over there and met his wife over there. I think they got married over there and I'm pretty sure he was born in Stark and right after he was born they moved over on the island. Anna Maria Island. They lived over there for several years and then come over here to Cortez.

I 1: Do you know when they did come to Cortez? Approximately what year?

R: I'm not sure. It was right around 1900 when they come here.

I 1: What did he do? What was his occupation?

R: My father was a commercial fisherman. He never done anything but fish as long as I know. Whenever him and Mama got married he was fishin'.

I 1: What about your grandfather, was he a fisherman also?

R: He fished some, but he was a carpenter and he done quite a bit of carpenter work.

I 1: And you Grandfather's name was what?

R: I'll think of it in a minute.

I 1: Was is Jose?

R: Yeah. Jose Mora.

I 1: Did they call him Jose?

R: Yep. I don't know what his middle name was but Jose was his first name.

I 1: And where was he from originally?

R: He was from the Canary Islands. He was Spaniard. He fished over there some and he was a carpenter over in the Canary Islands.

I 1: Did he do any carpentry work here in Cortez?

R: He did some. He built the house over there that my sister is livin' in now. Before that he built another one and the first one burned down. Then he built this one up and he did build a few around here. Not too many. I think the one right across the street where Junie Mora is now. He helped build it. Junie Mora is my cousin and his Daddy and my Daddy were brothers.

I 1: And Junie's father's name was what?

R: Albert Mora.

I 1: Do you remember your father or any of your uncles talking about Jose?

R: No, I don't remember too much about that. The only thing I remember about him is he was pretty old. I guess arthritis had got him and he was kinda hump backed and he liked that Cuban coffee. He'd grind it. He had a coffee grinder there and I could sit on his lap and grind that coffee. That's about all I remember about him. He did play a guitar though. I heard him play some. I don't know if Richard heard him or not. But Richard's Daddy did. Richard's Daddy knew him real good. In fact, his Daddy learned how to play some of the Spanish tunes that Grandpa used to play. I think Richard plays two or three of 'em now.

I 1: Tell me about your father. He fished here.

R: He fished here all his life until he died in 1950. He was 50 years old when he died. He was always sick. Ever since I remember him, I guess he was about 35. I don't know what it was, something wrong with his stomach. But he could walk with his hand behind him. Every time you'd see him walk down the road you'd never see him swing his hands. He'd eat, but he couldn't keep it on his stomach. And he took a lot of soda. Regular old bakin' soda. He'd put a handful in his hand and take it with a little bit of water.

I 1: Did it ever bother him when he was fishing? Did it bother his capability to fish?

R: No. He fished all the time. He hurt all the time. I fished with him a lot. I'd go out there with him when I was just a kid. When I first started fishin' I was still goin' to school. Maybe 8 years old, but I'd go out there with him. I can remember him hurtin'. He'd take a jar of soda with him every time he went out there.

I 1: Did he teach you how to fish?

R: Yeah.

I 1: What kind of fishing did you do as a child?

R: Gill-net mostly for mullet. He had a stop-net rig and we'd stop-net. He'd put out a lot of net and put it out on the high tide and take in hole at one end where it was

deeper and when the tide went out all the fish would go down and settle in that hole and you had one shorter net to put out. That was called stop-nettin'.

I 1: There were a lot of stop-net crews in Cortez when you were young weren't there?

R: Yeah. There was probably six or eight.

I 1: And how many on each crew?

R: Anywhere from three to six. Sometimes seven. Probably about six.

I 1: Do you remember stop-netting with your father?

R: Yeah.

I 1: Who was on his crew? Who would you work with?

R: There was Mr. Pringle. He was right down by the ship supply. He lived in that house right there. And there was my Uncle. They called him Gator. His name was Albert, but they called him Gator. Marvin Carver and my sister's husband Hal. His name was Marvin too but they called him Hal. Hal Culbreath. They wasn't all at one time. My brother used to fish with him too but sometimes some of 'em would fish with him and they'd quit and somebody else would get a job with him.

I 1: I forgot to ask you about your brothers and sisters. Could you name your brothers and sisters for me?

R: My oldest sister's name is Ruth. Ruth Culbreath. My oldest brother is Gilbert. He passed away when he was 68. Dan was next to go and I believe he was 67 when he passed away. Then Jack just passed away a few months back. He was just older than me. And my younger brother Johnny passed away 27 years ago. He lived in Maniken, Washington and he had a heart attack. He had just turned 40 when he had a heart attack. My other two sisters are Eleanor. They call her Polly Stagerwalt. And the youngest one is Bessie Lou. Two names.

I 1: That's a large family.

R: Yep. Nine of us.

I 1: Was it crowded in the house when you were growing up?

R: Not too much. Had a great big old table out there on the screen porch and a bunch of benches around it. No chairs. We'd go eat and Mama would set the food right around that big table. It was pretty good. And we had the upstairs part and all the kids would sleep up there.

I 1: Where was the house that you lived in when you were growing up here in Cortez?

R: 124th Street. Right on the corner of 124th Street and Cortez Road. That two story house.

I 1: So, that's quite a bunch to feed. Did you have plenty of food to eat when you were young?

R: Yeah. Fish and grits. Fish and grits and biscuits. We had plenty but that's about it. Oh, Daddy'd go out to a farm in East Manatee and trade fish for vegetables and there was always plenty to eat on the table. It wasn't steak or somethin' like that, but it was always good.

I 1: When you say fish and grits, what type of fish was it?

R: Mullet mostly.

I 1: Do you still enjoy eating mullet?

R: Yes I do. As good as I do that mackerel.

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

R: My Mother was just a regular housewife. Ever since I can remember she was kind of heavy set and she was always wantin' to do somethin' for somebody else. If you was to walk in the door and we was sittin' down to eat, you couldn't get out of there without eatin'. She always helped somebody. Everybody called her Aunt Laura. All the boys around here that I grew up with, they'd go in there just like they was born and raised right there in that house. They'd walk in and holler at Mama, Hi Aunt Laura.

I 1: She had sort of an open door policy?

R: Right.

I 1: Kids would always come in and stuff?

R: Yep. She was really a nice woman. Of course, all of the older women around here was. Every one of 'em that I knew, all the older women, was real nice. Just like them goin' in our house, I would go in them other boys' houses the same way.

I 1: What was it like growing up in Cortez in those days?

R: Just a lot of fun.

I 1: You thought it was fun?

R: Oh, yeah. Ya didn't have nothin' to play with or anything. If ya wanted to play somethin' you'd go out and find a hard road and play hop scotch or play marbles. Most of the time we played marbles. But it always ended up in a fight.

I 1: Why would you end up in fights?

R: Cause somebody'd say you were cheatin' me. Wyman and a lot of 'em. Robin used to play and Kenneth and Alcee. Anytime you get a bunch of kids together they're gonna argue about somethin'. Especially then. It wasn't nothin' though. You'd just go up and get in a fight and go back and start

playin' again. Now you get in a fight and somebody'll shoot ya. Back then they didn't. There wasn't nothin' to it.

I 1: Did any girls play marbles?

R: Yeah. They did. There was a lot of 'em. Junior's sister, Beatrice. And my sister played. I can't remember half of 'em.

I 1: But it wasn't just a boy's game?

R: No, they was all comin' out to play.

I 1: Did you ever play team sports like baseball?

R: Yeah, had a baseball team just across the street where the trailer park's at now.

I 1: That was your baseball field?

R: Yeah. It was just a big field out there. It was lower than it is now. They built it up. They called it a sand flat. We'd go there and play baseball and we'd play Anna Maria. Once in awhile they'd come over and play. Some people from Bradenton would come down.

I 1: Oh, really. Was there a big rivalry between the Island bunches and the Cortez bunches and the town?

R: Not too much. There was some, but not too much.

I 1: You said that you were fishing when you were 8 years old. You'd go out with your father when you were that young. Were most of the boys doing that?

R: Yeah. Most of 'em that's the same age as me now, they would go out. All of 'em.

I 1: What would you do on the boat? Would you do everything?

R: Anything. You'd get on board and if they started to do somethin' you'd get in the skiff and pole it around and help 'em pick up net. Whatever you could do. When I first started fishin' with my Daddy I didn't know what to



do and I was just standin' around there with my hands in my pockets and he come up there to me. He says, take your hands out of your pockets. I took 'em out. And he said now I'm gonna tell ya one thing now and I'm not gonna tell ya no more. This is the only time I'm gonna tell ya. I don't care what you do out here if it's right or wrong. But do somethin'. Don't stand around with your hands in your pockets. And I remember that ever since. That's the only time he told me. I don't think I've had my hands in my pockets since then.

I 1: Have you ever had to tell anyone else that?

R: No, the only time I ever got on anybody was when we was fishin' I got onto Buddy's brother there. He was fishin' with me one time and we went down to Sarasota and whenever you stop the boat you've got to be quiet so you can hear the mullet. Joe had bubblegum in his mouth and he kept poppin' that bubblegum. I thought he was gonna quit but he would never quit. I started up the boat and he come back and said what are we gonna do now? Where are we goin' now? I said we're gonna go to the dock and I pulled up to the dock way down by the radio tower in Sarasota. He said what are we gonna do now? I said, we're gonna get up on this dock and we're gonna sit here and chew this bubblegum and we're gonna pop it all we want to. And when we get through we're gonna go back fishin'. I said give me a piece of that bubblegum. We got up there and chewed that bubblegum for about 20 minutes and said to him, are you through now? He said yeah. I said ok, get in the boat. We're goin' back to fishin'.

We went back there and the next day he said why did you do that? I said, you will never forget that will you. He said no. I said well, that's just why I done it 'cause you will never forget that lesson you learned last night. And he hasn't. He's never forgot it.

I 1: He's probably told a few folks about that one?

R: Yeah. But just like me or anybody else. You say somethin' to somebody and it's kinda important. Well, they don't pay much attention to it. But if you kinda do like I did then, they'll remember it.

I 1: Makes an impression.

R: Yeah.

I 1: What are some of the things you remember most about fishing other than that one lesson your father taught you?

R: The way he would run nets out. He would take a polin' oar and put it down in the water when he was runnin' out at night. No lights around. Didn't have no lights like they do now. You'd put it down and when you come out to the edge of the deep water well, he'd put that polin' oar down there to see how deep it was. Well, he'd follow that reef right on down the edge of the deep water and I noticed him do that. I learned that. That was a good lesson. You couldn't get your net, when you was runnin' down the edge of the reef, you couldn't get it behind the reef in deep water. If you did the fish, instead of goin' down to settle where they was supposed to, they'd settle in that deep water out there.

I 1: You want to be sure that you have enough so your net isn't too far down in the water but it's deep enough, right?

R: Right. He'd be goin' along like that and he'd come off there like this and then you'd come to deep water. You had to have it either in there or right on top of the reef because if it got out here there'd be too much deep water and the fish wouldn't settle in down there. All them old people used to do that. They'd know just where to go. I guess all of 'em that fished around here could pick up a polin' oar and just about tell where they was at. Just but punchin' on the bottom.

I 1: They knew that bay bottom that well?

R: Yep.

I 1: Do you remember any names they had for certain areas out there in the bay that were different?

R: Oh, yeah. This one right out here was called the Kitchen. I guess they called it that 'cause it's right there in your back door. When you leave here you go out there. And down there they had Tidy Island and Coon Key, Long Bar,

Cabbage Point, Bowlees Creek and there's two placed down there. I can't think of 'em now, but on down from Bowlees Creek.

I 1: Would they set stop-nets there?

R: Stop-nets, yeah. When they put the stop-nets over they'd just say I'm gonna stop this place. And years ago if a guy was gonna stop a place or put his nets out, he would take the boat and his skiffs and he'd take it down there. He'd anchor it right there so that everybody would know that this was his stop for that night. And nobody would mess with it. But if he didn't come in there after high water then somebody could run their nets out.

I 1: So there was sort of an honor system.

R: But before high water, nobody would mess with it. They would go in there and see the boat tied or anchored and they would just leave and go somewhere else. Over at Finley's Bayou there used to be a place where you'd run your net out and Bishop's Bayou. Leffis Key, you could stop-net too. But it's all changed in there now. You can't run no net out. And on down to Blackpoint, Crane's Bayou, Riggins' Cut and Crosley's Cut. Bowlees Creek is on the East side and Crane's Bayou and Blackpoint is on the West side.

I 1: How far down would they go?

R: Before they stopped fishin' in Sarasota Bay, you'd go on around to the Hole in the Wall. It's right there where Ringling's Mansion is at. We'd go down there stop-nettin' all along there. But you go down past Sarasota for gill-nettin'.

I 1: You said that the put a law that you couldn't fish in Sarasota Bay or stop-net in Sarasota Bay?

R: No fishin' at all in Sarasota Bay. I believe that started in 1940. Maybe a little bit before 1940 and it kept on till I guess 1970.

I 1: Why was that?

R: All I know is they just didn't want nobody fishin' in there.

I 1: So where did you fish then? Out on the Gulf?

R: It wasn't all the Bay. It was just Sarasota County. Right about where Ringling Museum is at across to the radio tower and that was the line to cross. And from there back that way you couldn't fish nowhere down there. All down in Sarasota Bay you could fish.

I 1: What did the fishermen of this area think of that when they put that law into effect?

R: Well, they didn't like it too much right then but I think the fish really gathered up in there whenever we couldn't go there to fish. There's a lot of fishermen that went in there. Even the ones in Sarasota fished in there. But there's a lot of 'em been caught.

I 1: They still would fish even though the law said they couldn't?

R: Yeah. They would go in there again. In fact, I know more fish got in there when it was closed than they do now.

I 1: But it wasn't closed to recreational fishing?

R: No.

I 1: So there was a little bit of bias against commercial fishermen.

R: Right.

I 1: Growing up here, did you feel there was sort of a prejudice toward commercial fishermen in this area?

R: Not for awhile. Not till the last few years, 15 or 20 years. Then I did, yeah. But before that ya didn't. I never did hear 'em talk much about it.

I 1: In your father's days they didn't feel any prejudice toward Cortez fishermen did they?

R: No, about the only ones that would do any hook and line fishin' then, they would go out and do it for a living, was trout fishin'. They wouldn't go out and just do it recreational. Very few would go out recreational. Most of it then was for tarpon.

I 1: Oh, I see. But there were tourists that would come down and fish. Where would they fish mostly, off the bridge?

R: Yeah. There were very few boats. Once in awhile somebody would have a boat. Maybe half a dozen in the whole county. But then it got thicker and thicker all the time.

I 1: Let's go back to your early days working with your father. When did you start fishing on your own?

R: I was 15 when I started fishin'. Daddy died when I was 15 and when he died I quit school and went to work. Mama was left with all them younguns. Well, all of 'em was married but my two younger sisters and three boys. Me and Jack and Johnny. And I quit school and went fishin'. I fished a lot and then I went in the Navy.

I went in the Navy when I was 17 and I stayed in there for four years and when I come out I started fishin' again. Then fishin' wasn't really too good so I got a job on a dredge boat. I worked on there for I believe 18 years off and on. I'd work on it awhile and quit and then I'd go back to fishin'. Back and forth. Then I bought a shrimp boat, a little shrimp boat. A bait boat.

I 1: Did the first boat you fished with have a name?

R: Hob-Nob.

I 1: Is the boat still around here?

R: No, it's not. I've had four or five boats and every time I'd get out of one and get in another they just got used to callin' 'em Hob-Nob.

I 1: So all your boats were named Hob-Nob?

R: Yeah.

I 1: Were they locally built?

R: Yeah. Sometimes I'd just pick up an old boat and rebuild it and put a motor in it.

I 1: When you started fishing when you were 15, were those hard times after your father passed away?

R: Yeah. I remember whenever Daddy was fishin', when I remember back like that, he was fishin' for half a cent a pound for mullet. Then it come up to a cent and when they got roe in 'em he'd get three cents. Every summer they'd go back down. When I started fishin' about the lowest I fished for was three cent. Then when roe would get in 'em they'd go to six cent. In the summer it was three.

It was pretty hard to make a livin' but it was real good. I mean, I just loved it. Loved bein' out on the water. I went up to New Jersey a couple times and tried it up there but I didn't like it. So I quit and come back.

I 1: What type of fishing did you do up there?

R: I didn't fish up there. I just went and got a job up there. I worked in the telephone company up there for awhile. I didn't like it so I just quit and came back. Then I'd get disgusted here and go back up there.

I 1: What was it about Cortez that brought you back?

R: I don't know. Just the fishin' and the outdoors. Even when I was in the Navy I couldn't hardly wait to get out of the Navy and get back to Cortez. In fact, a lot of 'em done that. A whole lot of 'em. They wanted to get back to Cortez. But then a lot of 'em when they did get back they left again. Some of 'em went back in the service and some of 'em just went somewhere and got jobs.

I 1: You were in the Navy during the War?

R: Yeah.

I 1: When did you get out?

R: 1946.

I 1: At that time there weren't very many fishermen that stayed in Cortez. A lot of them did go into the service.

R: A lot of 'em did, yeah. There was quite a few here though. Some of 'em were too young to go into the service that was old enough to fish. A lot of 'em around here, Earl Taylor and a lot of 'em started when they was 14 or 15 years old.

I 1: There was a period though, and I think that might be when you got on the dredge boat. But there was a period when the mullet just left didn't they?

R: They did. They left. I don't know what it was. I remember a long time ago my Daddy used to tell me that there's a cycle just like anything else, for fish. They'll get real scarce and every seven years they get good and then they'll go back down again. I've noticed that. Not right now so much. But a few years back you could notice it. When so many of these kicker boats got around. The outboard motor boats. You could notice it then. That's what he used to tell me though all the time about the cycle. Kind of like the moon cycle, I don't know what it was.

I 1: More long-term though, every seven years.

R: Yeah.

I 1: You mentioned kicker boats. That was quite a change when they came in don't you think?

R: It was, yeah. Used to use little boats. You'd have one big boat with a motor in it and you'd have small boats pullin' behind the big boat. You'd have net in each one of those little skiffs. Then when you got out there you didn't go 30 miles an hour like you do in these kicker boats. You'd just go slow and you'd pole along and push your boat along slow and you'd listen for fish. When you heard 'em there was anywhere from four to six boats out there at one time. And when the captain would holler to let go, they would throw the net overboard and make a big circle. Then they would run some net in the center.

But then kicker boats come along and where you'd fish with the skiffs, the kicker boats would go right up there where you were shovin' your boat along and they'd come right by ya and run the fish away. And it just got to where you couldn't catch no fish with a skiff.

I 1: So it was sort of a matter of survival that you almost had to switch to the kicker boats.

R: Right. Yep. Me and Billy was talkin' about that last night. We believe if we could get rid of them kicker boats within five or six years you'd see a lot of difference in the fishin' around here. A lot of difference. Cause there wouldn't be so many of 'em goin' up on the flats and scarin' the fish. It really made a lot of difference.

I 1: When did you get a kicker boat?

R: I had one. I built one I believe it was in 1970. And I kept it a little while. But the motors kept messin' up. I bought I think three 70-horse motors in about two years so I filled the well up where the kicker motor was at and I put a little inboard in it. And I haven't had a kicker motor since. I just don't like 'em. I fish with Kenny now, my step granddaughter's husband. I fish with him a little bit, but not too much. But up until then I used the inboard motor.

I 1: I want to get back to when you were fishing early on. Who did you fish for, what fish house?

R: Jim Guthrie used to have a fish company and I fished with him. And then there was A.P. Bell, that's Walter Bell's Daddy. He had one right about where his office is at now. I fished with them. I fished with Fulford. I fished mostly with Fulford ever since the War. In fact, he had a fish house stickin' out in the water before he put this one in there.

I 1: And this was Tink Fulford?

R: Yeah. I fished with them. I done most of my fishin' right there at Fulford's.



I 1: Was Cortez changed any from the time you came back from the service?

R: Not a whole lot. Not much. It's changed a lot now since then. All the buildings that was there, like the old fish houses, they're all pulled down now. Bell's, Jim Guthrie used to have that one. And then on down where the Coast Guard Station is at, just the other side of it, there used to be a fish house out there that my Daddy and Mr. Green used to own.

I 1: Mr. Green?

R: Woodrow Green. Doris Green's husband's dad. Mr. Green died and Daddy got out of it and he started fishin' for Mr. Fulford, Tink Fulford. And the building stayed there for quite awhile and then they made a beer joint out of it. After that the Coast Guard got it and they tore it down.

I 1: Did the Albion Inn used to have a bar?

R: No, I don't think the Albion Inn had one in it, but right beside it now, the fish house that was out there used to be a bar.

I 1: Who had that, do you know?

R: I don't know who it was. It was some people from up North come down and put it in there. The shrimp boats used to tie up there. Two or three of 'em would come down and they'd tie up there.

I 1: Would Cortez fishermen hang out at that bar?

R: Yeah, quite a bit.

I 1: Was it a rough place?

R: Not too bad. Once in awhile they had some fights on a Saturday night, but it wasn't really bad. The worst place was over on the island. It would get kind of rough at times.

I 1: Was that Todd's?

R: Todd's was. And then they had one there at the Pine's Trailer Park. There used to be a beer joint right there. And that got real rough. That was just about the time I got old enough to remember all that. And I've seen it get real rough in there. I never did go in it, but I'd be on the island over there. And there was a beer joint called the Sailor's Haven right beside my sister's house where I was born and raised.

I 1: Right on Cortez?

R: Yeah. And it wasn't too rough either. Once in awhile it would get rough. Had pool tables in there. They'd go in there and shoot pool all day.

I 1: When did you get married?

R: I got married in 1951.

I 1: So you came back from the War and fished for awhile and you got on the dredge boat. Where was the dredge boat working out of?

R: It was workin' out of Palmetto. It would go to St. Petersburg and down as far as Ft. Myers, back to different places.

I 1: So, were you working on that boat or fishing here in Cortez when you got married?

R: I was fishin' when I first got married. Then I couldn't quite make a livin' fishin' so I went on the dredge boat. I think I was married about 2 years.

I 1: How did you meet your wife?

R: I believe I met her in a bar. In fact, I know I did. I was over at the beach. We was in there, just sittin' there drinkin' a couple of beers and got acquainted. I went with her for about three months I guess and then we decided to get married. We just quit drinkin' after that. I said if I get married I'm not gonna drink no more and if you marry me you're not gonna drink no more. She said ok, so we quit. She had been married twice

before that. Once to Jerry's father and once to Bobby's father. Patrissi and Perdman. I think she was born in Cincinnati, Ohio and they come down here. Her and Daddy and three kids come down here and they stayed in that trailer park right up there. Paradise Bay Trailer Park before I met her and got married.

I 1: They were just seasonal visitors at that time?

R: Yeah, they just come down and visited and I think there was some people they knew down here in Sarasota and they'd just visit. When we got married she never did go back. We went up there just to visit once or twice. She had a lot of people up there. But she didn't want to live up there. Too much snow. She just liked it when she come down here.

I 1: Where did you first live then after you were married?

R: I lived in the house with my Mother for a couple months. Then we bought a lot out here for \$350 and built a little ole shack on there, enough to live in. We built it off to one side and then we started buildin' a block house. Her Daddy built it to start with. It was 20 x 30 foot. We lived in it and when the old man died we put some more on the East side of it, about twice that much. It's a big house now.

I 1: So this is where you live now, the lot that you bought?

R: Yeah, we been livin' there about 40 years.

I 1: So you went on the dredge boat after you got married. You were married two years and then you worked on the dredge boat. Then you came back to fishing again?

R: Yeah. I would quit. I would work on a dredge boat maybe for a year. But I wasn't never gone from home. Most of the time I was right around here local where I could come back home about every night. When they'd get to one job I'd go back to fishin' and when they got another job I'd go back on the dredge boat. I wasn't on there too long when I built a shrimp boat. I bought a boat that was a commercial fishing boat and made a shrimp boat out of it, a bait boat. Me and my wife would go out there.

I 1: So she would work with you then?

R: Yeah, we worked a long time together.

I 1: Would she go out on your net boat?

R: Very little. She'd go out some. We'd go out pompano fishin' and she'd go out there with me. She liked to hook and line fish. And she loved shrimp. She could pick them shrimp faster than I could.

I 1: There weren't very many women who did fish in Cortez were there?

R: Not too many. Goose's wife used to fish.

I 1: Mada?

R: Yeah. She was a good fisherman.

I 1: Why is that? Why do you think there weren't very many women who fished?

R: Back when I was a kid most of the women would get a job in the cannin' plant, Ross's, up in Bradenton. What's now Tropicana. My wife worked up there. She worked there when we first got married for awhile. My sister. There must have been a dozen women from around here who worked there. I guess they just never got interested in fishin' too much.

I 1: Did your wife have any other jobs other than working at the cannery?

R: She worked there for a few years and then they had a place down by the airport makin' rubber rafts for the government. She worked in there for a few years. I think that's where she caught some of her emphysema. They used benzene, all that liquid stuff in there, and she was breathin' it all day long in there. Right after she quit there she started to where she couldn't breath too good.

I 1: That's a shame. How did she like living in Cortez and

being a fisherman's wife do you think?

R: I guess she must have liked it. We been married 42 years. Seems like she does. She's real happy.

I 1: So you fished for how long? You still fish a little bit now.

R: I fish a little bit now. But about two years ago she got worse and I have to be there and help her get her medicine and I have to do most of the cookin' and house work. She can prepare the meal and get it ready to cook. All I have to do is cook it. And she can wash the dishes. But house work, as far as cleaning the house, she can't do any of that. It's gettin' worse as time goes by. She's got arthritis in her hands too and she has to take \_\_\_\_\_ and put it in her mouth and mash it. I have to do that. But she's still gettin' along fairly good. She can go to the grocery store and walk faster than I can behind one of them carts. But just as soon as she drops that cart, she's had it.

I 1: Do you still have the shrimp boat?

R: No, I sold it about four years ago.

I 1: Do you have any other boats?

R: No, I've got one little ole boat down there but I don't ever use it. The one sittin' there right beside of Ralph's? But I don't never go out in it.

I 1: What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in Cortez?

R: The biggest thing I've seen as far as fishin' is them outboard kicker boats.

I 1: What about nylon nets?

R: They're a lot different. We had the cotton nets and the flax nets and then you'd have to pull them out and dry 'em out every day when you used 'em and dry 'em. Then when they come along with nylon, you didn't never have to pull 'em out. You could leave 'em right on that boat

and they'd never rot. The only thing that bothered them was acid. If you put acid on it and it would get eat up. I guess the sun would if you leave it right out in it, but usually when you bring it in you put a blanket or a piece of canvas over it. Then they got the monofilament net and they really made a difference. I guess if you had them back there when old timers were fishin' they would have caught all the mullet. There's all kinds of difference in that.

I 1: Do you think the fish act differently in relation to the different types of boats and nets?

R: Yeah, they don't act near like they did. Used to, if you was to see some fish one day you could plan on goin' back there that night and catchin' 'em. Well now, you can't. Either some boats have caught 'em, other fishermen, or they just aren't there. They don't act near like they did.

BREAK

Tape 2 with Vernon Mora - April 13, 1993

I 1: Vernon, you were telling me a story. We were talking about changes in Cortez and you mentioned in fishing the biggest change was the kicker boats. But you told me a story about a game that you and your brother used to play that's sort of indicative of changes that you've seen in Cortez. Tell me again.

R: Me and Jack used to get out and sit by the road by my Mama's house and we'd wait for cars to come by. And Jack would say that one's comin' there and about an hour later there was another comin'. I'd say, that one's mine comin' there. By the time another car would come we'd forget which car was ours.

I 1: And today if you did that you'd be counting into the hundreds and thousands.

R: Yeah. Too many cars. You could walk from one end of Cortez Road to the other at times and a car would never pass ya. That was a long time ago. That was 60 years

ago.

I 1: Did you go to the beach much when you were kids?

R: Yeah. We'd go over there, walk over there. Sometimes we'd get somebody goin' over there and we'd ride over. But most of the time we'd either walk or ride a bicycle. Did that quite a bit.

I 1: What was over there?

R: The beach was a lot wider then when we was kids than it is now. Well, it's just about like it is, whenever they just pumped it in.

I 1: Since they renourished it?

R: Yeah. It was a nice beach. You'd get out there and swim and have a good time. Then they had bath houses on the beach. They had one right off from Bridge Street and it was there for years. I don't remember if it burned down or the waves washed it down. Then they had one down about midway on the island. It burned down and then they had one down by Anna Maria Island and it burned down. They had a lot of places you could go. Anywhere you wanted to go on the beach you'd just stop your car and go. Now, you've got so many of these condominium buildings, they won't let you go out on the beach.

I 1: So you had a lot of access points where you would just walk onto the beach wherever you wanted to.

R: Yep. You could run down that beach for miles and you would never see a jetty like they've got ... the piers stickin' out there. You wouldn't see none of them. In fact, it was just a whole long beach. Then the beach got washin' away so bad they started puttin' them \_\_\_\_\_ out where they would try to save the beach. I guess they did some, but not too much.

I 1: Now, fishermen from Cortez fished off that beach a lot.

R: Yeah. Used to they fished more right on the beach. They'd run a net, they'd get overboard with the end of it on the beach and circle about a half moon and pull 'em up on the

beach.

I 1: That's called what?

R: That's seine fishing. Now most of them gill-net 'em. They just circle. But still we done some seinin' this past year, the Fall. And people helped. Tourist that were comin' down. They never saw that before and they'd get ahold of that net and help ya pull it ashore.

I 1: They do that today still?

R: Yeah.

I 1: I remember stories in the older days that people would get out there and help you pull it in.

R: They will now. There's a lot of 'em that hollers more about it than back then. But there's a lot more now that does it. Back there when I was a kid there was just a few come up there. You didn't see as many people on the beach as you do now. There'll be three or four hundred come up there and gather around ya now and watch it, where there wouldn't be but 15 or 20 before. But there was a lot of 'em come out, but half of 'em be hollering about ya catchin' all the fish or somethin' like that. Pay attention to 'em, you'd shoot 'em all I guess.

I 1: What do you think of the tourists? There were tourists here in Cortez when you were growing up. There were people who would come here to visit.

R: Yeah, there were some. I got along with all the boys. I used to holler about the Yankees comin' down. I don't know why I did. Just because everybody else did, I guess. But I hollered at 'em so much that I married one of 'em. And that's what I tell my wife all the time. I said, I used to cuss these Yankees out now I have to turn around and marry one.

I 1: What do you remember about the early days about the tourists that used to come to Cortez? There's a trailer park over here at the end of the Village and they'd come there for years and years.



R: When I was a kid though, they didn't have no trailer park right there. I don't know how old I was. I was probably 14 I guess, when they built that trailer park. Blue's Trailer Park I think it was to start with. But that used to be all woods down there. We used to go all out through there and hunt birds and rabbits with a little ole sling shot or stick or somethin'. They got a recreation buildin' right there where the Cortez Trailer Park's at. That buildin' was back in the woods there, probably five or six hundred feet from what it is now and they moved it up there. That's a nice trailer park. Everybody that goes in there is friendly. I haven't seen anybody holler at ya too much. You can walk through there and everybody is nice to ya even with your boots on.

I can walk down to that other trailer park and I can walk around with my boots on and won't nobody speak to me. I can go back home and put on my shoes and everybody in there'll speak to me.

I 1: Do you think that's a symbol of the white boots ...

R: It is 'cause even when you fish at night you can go up to Bradenton and somebody'll say well, how's fishin' just 'cause you've got the boots on. They don't know whether I'm fishin' or farmin'.

I 1: What about going into Bradenton with your white boots on. Would fishermen do that when you were young?

R: Yeah. No, you used to go up there barefooted. I hardly didn't wear no boots or nothin' when I was a kid. Not until I was 45 did I ever wear shoes. If I had to go into town I'd go right in there barefoot. A restaurant or anywhere else.

I 1: Do you think people looked down upon you because you were barefoot like that, because of your occupation?

R: Not back then. But they would now. If they saw you barefooted now. But back there 20 years ago or 30 years ago they wouldn't.

I 1: Well, why didn't you wear shoes?

R: They hurt my feet. The first pair of shoes Mama bought me to go to school with out here, the Cortez School, and when I left the house I had 'em on and when I got down here at the corner well I took 'em off. There's a little ole culvert that goes under the road and I'd put 'em in that. When I'd come back from school I'd get 'em out from there and put 'em on. But I would never wear no shoes. Most of the kids around here didn't wear 'em. Just didn't like to wear 'em.

And you'd walk all over these places. Back in here used to be full of sand spurs and briar patches and you walked all over them places barefoot.

I 1: Did you get a lot of sand spurs in the bottom of your foot?

R: Not too many. You could take a needle and you couldn't hardly shove it in the bottom of your foot. It was so tough. I cut my foot on a coke bottle right on the heel one day. I jumped off a boat and landed on that coke bottle and went to the doctor on the beach and he was tryin' to stick it in the hide there with that needle and every time he'd punch that thing the needle would break. He got him another needle and he said I do know how to get it and I looked around there at him and he was holdin' that thing open and he started pushin' that needle in there and I started crawlin' away from him. He said there ain't no use for you to crawl, you ain't gonna go very far.

But when he got that needle in where it was cut, now that hurt. But now I can't even hardly walk on a carpet. I used to wonder, you'd throw a cigarette down and you'd take your foot and stomp on it like that. I used to wonder why people couldn't step on cigarettes. They'd say how do you step on a cigarette like that? I said there ain't nothin' to it. You never would get burned. My feet started to bother me when I was about 45. I got gout in 'em a lot. Had to have 'em operated on and the doctors wouldn't let me walk barefooted no more. Now I wear these boots just about everywhere except to church. Put on a pair of shoes but just as soon as I come back home I take 'em off and put on my boots.

I 1: I want you to tell me a story. There's a story about

Todd's or somewhere over on the beach. I heard you talking about it yesterday. You were over there and I think someone picked you up and brought you back here. Could you tell me that story?

R: Yeah, we was over there drinkin' one night. Me and Earl Taylor and Jack Adams and I don't remember how many there was, about 8 of us. We was in Miramar drinkin' and gettin' kinda rowdy and somebody called the law and Roy Baden come up there and he come up to me and said let's go. I said where are we goin'? He said we're goin' home. I said I don't want to go home. He said well, you're either goin' home or your goin' to jail. I said alright, take me home and I'm gonna be back over here before you are. I'm gonna be sittin' here drinkin' a beer when you get back.

And he did. He put us all in the car. He let me out first right over by Mama's sister's house. And when he did he thought I was goin' in the door and I just stopped right around the corner of the house and run back across over there. When he walked into the Miramar I was sittin' there drinkin' a beer.

I 1: What did he say then?

R: He come up right to me and said alright I'm gonna take you to jail. He said I told ya I was gonna take you to jail if you come back over here. And about the time he did my oldest brother, Gilbert walked up there and said what's the matter? Roy told him he brought me home and I came back over there. Gilbert says oh, leave him here I'll take care of him. So he went off and left me. Roy Baden was the Sheriff in Bradenton.

Once in awhile they'd send a Deputy over there for us. It wasn't nothin' like it is now. No shootin' or anything. Just somebody'd hit ya or you'd hit somebody else or pour beer on top of somebody's head. But that was about all it was back then.

I 1: Where was the Miramar?

R: It was North of the Cortez Road right on the beach and it was a buildin' that burned down a few years ago. It used

to be Trader Jack's. It was the Miramar before that. Right there where the Harbor House is at used to be the Cove. That was a beer joint. Then on back where Bridge Street's at there was a small bait and tackle shop there and that used to be a beer joint and pool hall. And down on Beach Street there used to be I think three down there. But there was plenty of beer joints on the beach.

I 1: Did the Cortez fishermen have a reputation for frequenting those joints or did they have a reputation of being sort of tough?

R: Yeah, they did. But they really wasn't. They just didn't want nobody botherin' 'em. Like somebody from up in Bradenton come down there and start pickin' on 'em. They'd throw 'em through a window or somethin'. They wouldn't come back.

I 1: What do you think about what's happening today with fishing? You know that the recreational fishermen are trying to ban nets. How does that make you feel?

R: Really it don't bother me too much. I know it does the younger generation that's comin' up because I'm 70 years old and I won't be here too many more years to worry about it. But them other people will, the younger ones. Like Mark Taylor and Kenny Jenkins. Now they got somethin' to worry about cause they don't know anything else to do. Kenny's a firefighter up there but he fishes a lot too. It'll be hard on them. He makes a lot of money out there fishin'. Mark depends on fishin' mostly. He's got that job with O.F.F. but they don't pay him enough to keep him agoin.

I 1: Well, it's been a big part of your life and you guys have struggled a lot. You've had to contend with a lot of different laws. Do you think it's right for them to ban nets?

R: No, not really, I don't. They seem to think that the nets is what's makin' the mullet and other fish extinct. But they had a survey of the trout and red fish where who was catchin' the most and the sports fishermen is catchin' 80% of the red fish and trout where the commercial fishermen's catchin' 20%. But the mullet, you can blame that on

several things. Net fishermen have somethin' to do with that too.

I 1: Do you think there has been a decline in the mullet?

R: Yeah. There's been a decline in it but it's not just the commercial fishermen that do it. What I think it is is the pollution and these kicker motors and the sports fishin' boats. There's too many sports fishin boats. There's too many boats in the water out here for the fish and it's just like a herd of cattle. You start to gettin' an airplane over 'em they're gonna scatter everywhere. It's just like the fish. They're gonna scatter. I don't care where they're at, they're gonna scatter and they're gonna be hard to get back up.

Just like my Dad told me, every 7 years there's a decline in fish. There's a cycle. And that might have somethin' to do with it now, I don't know. But it could be.

I 1: You fished for other types of fish when you were comin' up here and when you were fishing out of Cortez. What types of fish did you fish for other than mullet?

R: Oh, we used to stop-net and catch red fish and trout. Sheephead. That's about it. We'd catch mackerel. Mackerel is caught mostly out in the gulf. You'd catch a few in the bay once in awhile but most of 'em was caught out in the gulf. Used to go grouper fishin' once in awhile. Didn't do too much of it. Don't like to get way off shore. I can't drink all that water.

I 1: Did you fish on a grouper boat?

R: I went out a couple times. I went out on one of them big deep sea shrimp boat. I went on it for about six months. Then we'd fish at night and we'd mess around and try to catch some grouper. Go out on the rocks and catch a few. But I never did too much of that grouper fishin'. Used to when I was about 10 or 12 years old I'd go out with a neighbor of mine, Mr. John Taylor, and he'd go out in a little ole boat about 25 foot long about 15 miles and we'd catch a few grouper. But they weren't worth anything. Three cents a pound.

I 1: Three cents a pound for grouper?

R: Yeah.

I 1: What do you get for it today?

R: Three dollars, somethin' like that. Maybe seven dollars.  
A lot.

I 1: That's a big change too. You get a much better price for your fish today. But at the same time, do you think that fishermen are making a better living today at it?

R: Yeah. They're makin' more money now. Of course, anything you do now you make more money at it. Accordin' to the way it was back there when my Daddy was fishin', he'd make a hundred dollars a week. I imagine that's about like a thousand dollars now. But then it didn't take nothin' to live on. You could take twenty five dollars and he could feed the whole family of nine plus him and Mama for fifteen dollars a week. Now you couldn't even eat yourself for fifteen dollars a week.

I 1: Not hardly. It doesn't work.

R: Daddy used to go to the store. Mama would charge most of the groceries down there when he'd be gone fishin'. She'd go down there and they'd put it all on a bill. Saturday well, he'd go down there and pay for it and he would go in there and buy all us kids some candy. He'd buy a quarter's worth of candy and peanuts. Just a quarter's worth and there'd be enough there for every one of us and the dog. You could get 50 pounds of peanuts for forty cents.

I 1: So that was a Saturday ritual. Pay the grocery bill and come back with candy and peanuts.

R: That's what it was. We'd all meet him halfway down the road when we knew he was comin'. Even that little dog we had. That dog knew when it was Saturday better than I did.

I 1: What kind of a dog was it?

R: Just a little ole dog. Back then you didn't know what

they was, what kind they was.

I 1: Did you have many animals? Pets and things when you were growing up?

R: We had one little ole dog that I was talkin' about awhile ago. I don't know what kind he was. Then we had one German Shepherd and I don't know, I guess he got too old and died. That's all the animals I know of bein' around our house.

I 1: Well, some people said they had cattle and chickens and things like that. Did you raise chickens?

R: Mama and Daddy had some. I can just remember when they had a few there in the yard. And then across the street they had, Miss Nola Taylor, had chickens in there. And there was a few cattle runnin' around in here. I can just remember 'em. Tink Fulford's wife would bring the ole milk cow down there and she'd bring it over on the sand flat over there and tie it up there every day. I remember that. Then there was a few more of them and then you could see some horse and buggies around here once in awhile. But there was more automobiles than there was horse and buggies. Just a few. Once in awhile you'd see a peddler comin' down. Peddler with vegetables.

I 1: Did anyone in Cortez have a horse and buggy?

R: Not when I remember. But I remember my Mother talkin' about that they used to have one when they first got married. They lived on Tidy Island when Mama and Daddy first got married. She'd talk about when they would go to town they'd get the horse and buggy and when the tide was low there was kind of a ditch in there. And they'd get across it when there weren't no water in it and when they'd come back if the tide was high the water would come up just about to the bed.

I 1: There was no way to get to Tidy Island. There was no road over to that Island then was there?

R: Just an old dirt road. That's why they'd go when the water was real low. The water would come in and go out through it. I don't remember how long they lived there. There was

a family over there name of Figpin and they lived on there for quite awhile. Mama and Daddy stayed with them and Mama got pregnant and she had a baby over there that was born dead. It was buried on the Island. It was a boy. I remember her tellin' me about that.

And right after that they moved here and Grandpa built that house over there. Ruth was born in that house and then it burned down. I don't know what happened to it, but it burned down. And they built another one up there. I don't think Gilbert was born in it. But anyhow, all the rest of us was born in it besides Ruth. She's the only one that was born in the other one.

I 1: What do you remember about your Grandfather, Jose Mora? What did he look like?

R: Well, he looked like an old gnarled up fat loggernot. That's the way he looked. Kinda humped over and he was real dark-skinned and real wrinkled. Just like an old prune. I think he was a hundred years old when he died or right at it. He was real old.

I 1: Did he have a beard?

R: Yeah. He had a beard and my Mother's Daddy had a beard. Yep. Grandpa Jose, he wasn't very tall. But I believe before he got humped over I think he was probably about six foot. But he kind of shrunk up and bent all down and I don't think he was over 5'6" or 5'7", somethin' like that.

I 1: I've seen pictures of him with his guitar and I thought he had a beard. I've seen pictures of him with this hat on, a wide-brimmed hat.

R: He was in Cuba for quite awhile and then he come from Cuba to Key West and he wasn't married to my Daddy's mother then. He got married down in Key West and they had some children down there. I was talkin' to them not long ago. Me and my sister and Richard went down there and talked to 'em. Then he moved up here. I believe he had one boy when he was down there.

I 1: So you've been in touch with some of those relatives.



R: Me and Richard and Gerri, my wife and Ruth went down there several years ago. Four or five years ago and talked to 'em. Since then he died. Jose's oldest boy died.

I 1: Was his name Joe?

R: I think they did call him Joe. Yeah.

I 1: Was he a fisherman also?

R: I think that he was fishin' and lobsterin' down there.

I 1: You said there was another story that you wanted to tell me about Cortez, talking about change.

R: I probably done forgot it.

I 1: I'm trying to think about what it was too. We were talking about your brother and counting cars. I know, tell me a little bit about Jack and what happened to him.

R: Oh, he was 12 years old and they were swimmin'. Mama wasn't too strict on us then. She would let us go out. He was 12, I'd be 9 and my younger brother. We'd go just about anywhere we wanted to if we would go check in with her once in awhile. Well, I think it was a Sunday afternoon and he went swimmin' and he took one of those little boats and went out on the island and they was a post there. He dove off that boat and hit one of them posts with his head and had blood clot on his brain since then. He couldn't remember anything. When he first done it he couldn't remember and then he got to where he could remember pretty good and he was over in that pool hall rackin' balls right across the street from my sister's house.

Somebody pulled a stick back to shoot and hit him in the head again. And it hit right where that blood clot was at and it made him where he couldn't remember. Mama would try to get him to go to the store and get some little thing. She'd tell him to go get some milk and he'd come back with bread or a can of beans. He'd forget that quick. Then awhile after that his legs bothered him.

He'd get cramps in 'em and he'd draw 'em up. He couldn't walk and he got blind and they'd have to put him in a dark room for a couple of years. He couldn't see anything. And finally he got his sight back. Then his hair would stand straight up, just like Gator's.

I guess it was 7 or 8 years like that and finally one day he'd comb his hair and it just fell down. It was still up there but it just went back down like it used to. But he was sick like that. He couldn't remember anything for years and then when Mama died ... Mama used to baby him all the time. He'd go to the store, where the Ship Supply is now. He'd go down there to work and if he'd do one thing enough he'd remember, it'd be in his mind to do the same thing over and over and over.

Well, somebody'd come in and get a little ole basket and tell him what they wanted and he'd go over and get it. Then if there were 15 or 20 or 30 items in that little box he'd put it on the counter and the lady that was at the cash register, he'd call out how much price every one of 'em was. Well, before she'd put that last one down he'd tell her how much it was. Every time he'd call one out he'd add it up in his head. He'd do that every time. There wasn't very many times he'd miss.

He was real smart before he got hurt. He was real smart in school. But then that blood clot on the brain. They took him to a brain specialist and there wasn't nothin' they could do to it then. Even years after that, twenty years ago, they took him up there and tried to get somethin' done and they said there wasn't a thing. They said even if they went in there and got the blood clot off it wouldn't help. It just kept deterioratin' his brain till they put him over in Arcadia for several years, two or three years. When he come out he stayed at my sister's for awhile and finally they had to put him in a nursing home up there in town and he was up there for probably five or six years. Then he got where he couldn't talk.

He would draw up, his feet and his hands, and that's the way he was when he died. He was just like that. They couldn't straighten him out.

I 1: Would you visit him?

R: Yeah.

I 1: Would he recognize you?

R: Yeah. I'd talk to him about when we'd set out there on the road and he'd start cryin'. He'd know what I'd said and when I went in I'd say if you know who I am wink or blink your eye. And he'd blink his eye every time I'd do that. But he wouldn't talk. He had false teeth and he had lost 'em or somethin' when he was over in Arcadia. And Ruth got him some more and he lost them or broke them. But then he got where, after the last set of teeth, he didn't even try to talk.

He would recognize me. He would recognize Ruth. But that's the only way we could get him to show any emotion at all was to blink his eye. But they could talk to him just like I did about somethin' and he'd start cryin'. Even when you'd start to go and somebody'd say somethin' about sayin' a prayer, he would start cryin' then.

I 1: You said his hair stood up like Gator's?

R: My Uncle Gator, Junie Mora's Albert Mora. His stood straight up for years, right on up till he died.

I 1: What do you remember about Gator?

R: Gator, oh man. I remember everything about him. He was a great guy. He didn't look near as tall, he was 6'1", but he looked like he was 5'8". But I would stand up beside him and he'd go right on by me. I don't know. He was just strong. He didn't know how much weight he could pick up. Mostly what I remember about him was whenever he'd go out and hunt alligators over there in that pond. There used to be a pond right out there.

He'd go over there and shoot them alligators. He'd take a twelve gauge shotgun and he'd take the buckshot out of it and he'd put a net lead in it. He'd put the waddin' back in it and he'd shoot the alligator with that net lead. When you'd go in there and look at that shot, and try to find the lead there wouldn't be nothin' but

little ole pellets. The net lead just disintegrated.

I 1: Why would he hunt gators?

R: I don't know. Just 'cause they was over there I guess. He'd go over there and shoot 'em. I've seen him pull I believe a 12 foot one. He'd shot him and he grabbed him by his tail and pull him from that pond over down to the fish house. He was a man. He was strong. And Luke MacDonald is another man that was around here too. He wasn't born here but he was a young fella when he come here. He was strong. He was just about as strong as Gator was.

They used to get over by the Coast Guard dock and they had these big weights that they put down on the buoys. Some of 'em would have the number on 'em, anywhere from three to eight hundred pounds. They'd be around there pickin' 'em up. I don't remember how much they picked up but I know they picked up well over five hundred pounds, each one of 'em.

I 1: So Gator got the nickname Gator because he used to hunt those alligators?

R: Yeah. He drank a lot, whenever he was a young fella. He drank all the time. He was rougher than hell when he drank. Boy, he didn't care. The law got after him one time and he had an old Model T Ford. He was goin' down the road and he turned right by Sunny Shores Trailer Park is now. There was an old dirt road goin' back in there. And he went back in there with that Model T Ford and hit a stump. His car stopped and he couldn't get it started. So he got the battery out of it and he just took off and and waded right across that pond. Took the battery with him, left the car out there.

He fished for my Daddy a lot and he fished with Albert, Jr., his son, after Daddy died. He never had a rig of his own, but he always fished with either my Daddy or he fished with his son. But then whenever he would want to go and Daddy didn't want to go, Gator would take the boat. Anytime he wanted to, it was just like his own. He was a good fisherman. Real good.

I 1: Who were some of the other good fishermen that you remember in Cortez?

R: Tink was a good one. Walter Bell, Bill's Daddy. Guy Fulford, Mr. Williams, Orie Williams' Daddy and Bill Fulford. I don't remember all of 'em right now, but every one 'em that fished around here was real good. Alvee Taylor was a good gill-net fisherman.

I 1: Was there a difference in their skills and how one was a better stop-net fisherman and one was a good gill-net fisherman?

R: Not really, cause a fella that stop-netted, he knew how to gill-net too. They didn't just stop-net altogether. They would gill-net and seine fish and mackerel fish. Now, Daddy would go stop-nettin' mostly. He'd gill-net but he didn't like to go out in the gulf. He'd get seasick. He didn't like to go out there and catch mackerel. Now that's where my Uncle Gator would go seine fishin' and Daddy would stay home. And Gator would go seine fishin' and mackerel fishin'. And Gator was a good gill-net fisherman.

In fact, all them old timers. Walter's Daddy. I don't know if he had a stop-net outfit or not. I believe he did. Yeah, I know he did. Then he seine-fished a lot. Guy Fulford done mostly seine fishin'. Bill Fulford would go gill-nettin' and Lem Pringle would go gill-nettin'. All of 'em that would go stop-nettin', they knew how to do all kinds of fishin'. It didn't make no difference what it was. They could do one just as good as the other one.

I 1: What do you have to know to be a good fisherman?

R: Mainly you have to know where to go. If you got some flats that don't come in too high, you've got to know how to get up on that flat. Where the channels are at. And you've got to know where the rocks is or the oyster rocks or whatever. You've got to know when to strike and where to strike.

I 1: When you say you have to know when to strike, what determines when?

R: The tide a lot. If the tide's runnin' real strong, you don't strike there 'cause the tide will just take your net and muddy it all up. But a lot of 'em now, they come down and they don't care whether the tide's runnin' or not. They just see some fish and strike it. I've seen 'em out there strikin' and that tide's runnin' real strong and they have to wait till the tide quits runnin' to get the net in the boat.

I 1: Do you think that's because they don't know or they don't care?

R: Mostly they don't know. Most of them are learnin' now but whenever they'd come down, they'd come out of the woods and come out there and get in a gill-net boat and they didn't know anything. All they'd do is see some mullet jump and they'd strike 'em.

I 1: Do you think it's important to have been raised with it?

R: It helps. It helps a lot. When you're born and raised in and around here you know just about everything. You take somebody just first comes down and start, it don't take him long to learn. But the one that's been here all his life knows more about it. But then the other guy that comes down, it don't take but a few years and he can learn it.

I 1: Do you remember anything about the war between the gill-netters and the stop-netters?

R: Yeah. I do. There was a lot of gill-netters didn't want 'em to stop-net.

I 1: Why didn't they want them to stop-net?

R: 'Cause they thought they was catchin' all the mullet. And if you would put a skiff out so you could stop a place that night, well if the gill-netters would be honest enough, they wouldn't go fish in that area until after they had stopped it. I mean, it wasn't a law but it was just an agreement between the fishermen.

But that, and then I guess they thought they was catchin' all the fish, I don't know. But I've seen a lot of friction in that when I was a kid. A lot of it. In fact, one of the biggest stop-netters that was here, he tried to get all the stop-netters out. I've seen him bring the law right down on 'em and he couldn't stop 'em. So he said well, I can't stop 'em so I'll join 'em. And he did and he was one of the biggest and the best stop-netters around here.

I 1: What was his name?

R: Tink Fulford. He tried to stop it. He liked the people alright, but he just didn't like 'em stop-nettin'. So he tried to stop it and several of 'em did. But then they found out they couldn't stop it so they just got on there with 'em. And he was the best stop-netter that's ever been around here.

I 1: There was a story where it got a little violent one night, I guess. Where Dutch lives now. Do you know the story of that place.

R: All I know is they put some dynamite under it and blowed him out of there. I remember when they done it. I was a young fella when they done it. I believe it was one of the Fulford's, I'm not sure. But he used to live in that house right where Dutch is at now and he was doin' somethin' to 'em. I believe what it was, what it come down to, I don't think it was anything about the fishin'. I think it was moonshine. That's what my Uncle Gator told me.

Anyhow, they took a stick of dynamite and tied it on the end of a fishin' pole and shoved it right under his bedroom and blowed it up. But somehow, he'd got up and went to another room and he was in another room when it went off. He left. Ain't nobody seen him around here since then. Ike Pierce, he fished around here some. He lived on the island. He was a big moonshiner. Gator was mixed up in it somehow but he never did tell me that he was right there on it. But he told me that it was Ike Pierce and somebody else. But he kinda hinted around that it was him but he wouldn't tell me it was for sure.

I 1: So, these moonshiners had stills around this area?

R: Some of 'em, I believe right down on the island just the other side of where Holmes Beach starts, there's a place off there to the right. He had a big still out in there. That's the only I know of. I know there used to be some out in East Bradenton or East Manatee. But that one that I know was here, Ike Pierce had it.

I 1: I remember hearing some stories about people taking trips out to East Manatee to get some moonshine. Did the law ever come down on them?

R: Not too much. A lot of it, the law was mixed up in it.

I 1: That always helps I guess if you're running moonshine. Well, we're getting low on tape again. I try to end this conversation by asking you to tell me about Cortez. What's special about Cortez to you?

R: It's the best place in the world as far as I'm concerned. All the time I was gone, I was always wantin' to come back. Most of the people who were born and raised here in Cortez have come back. They just like it. They just don't like no other job. I wouldn't take anything for Cortez. I wouldn't do any other kind of work. If I was to come back again somehow or other, I'd come back to Cortez, right here. Everybody's real friendly to ya once you get to know all the people around here. There's no better people nowhere. The Cortez people who was born and raised here will help each other out. That's what they are, just real good people.

I 1: What do you think the future is for Cortez, Vernon? With all the changes we've talked about, what do you think is going to happen?

R: Just like Fulfords goin' out of business. If they sell that place down there and then somebody else sells a place, you get two or three of these big high rise buildings in here, there ain't no tellin' what it will be. Maybe they won't. All the Fulfords is kinda wantin' to hold onto Cortez for the Historical Society and I don't think they want to let the property where the fish house is at go to somethin' other than somethin' for



fishin'. But as long as they can hold on to it for the Historical Society they can probably keep it a little fishing village. I hope so.

I 1: You think it's important to have that waterfront remain as a working, fishing waterfront?

R: Yep.

I 1: I thank you for taking this time and we really appreciate your help in cooking those Cortez hot dogs.

R: Well, I'm glad I could help. I wish there was some way we could sell some more of 'em. Get some more money for the Historical Society or whatever, F.I.S.H., or whatever.

I 1: Well, we'll work on it. We'll get you down there to cook some more.

R: Anytime you need me, I'll be there.

I 1: Well, thanks. Is there anything you'd like to say concerning the interview or Cortez or your life here?

R: About the only thing I want to say is that I think you and Wayne have done a real good job down here since you've been here. I haven't been around ya too much, but what I can hear from my daughter and her husband and several people around here, they think a lot of ya. We're real glad to have ya doin' what you're doin'.

I 1: Thank you, we appreciate that.



