Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage 2/3/93

Sigma International Fish House Cortez, FloridaMr. Stargill Pringle Oral History Vanishing Culture Project

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Interviewers: Mr. Mike Jepson/Mr. Wayne Nield

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

R: Raymond Stargill Pringle.

I 1: And what's your date of birth?

R: October 22, 1921.

I 1: And where were you born?

R: Right here in Cortez. 123rd Street.

I 1: What was your father's name?

R: William Nash Pringle.

I 1: And your mother's name:

R: Leona.

I 1: What was her maiden name?

R: Gardner. Leona Gardner.

I 1: And are your parents alive today?

R: No, they've been dead for quite awhile.

I 1: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

R: Yeah, one named Henry. He was the older brother. And the elder sister was Alice. And the younger sister was named Evelyn.

I 1: Are they all alive today?

R: No. Only one. Evelyn remains alive.

I 1: And where does she live today?

R: Madison, Wisconsin.

I 1: What were your grandparents' names?

R: Kay Gardner was my mother's father. My grandfather on my mother's side. And the other, I just know he was Pringle. I think it was Zed. I'm not sure. I never knew him. He died before I was born. I never knew both grand parents. Or grandmothers either.

I 1: You were married?

R: I was married on Anna Maria Island January 11, 1943.

I 1: What was your wife's name?

R: Naomi Cook before she was married.

I 1: How many children do you have?

R: We have four and two adopted, makes six.

I 1: Can you tell me their names?

R: Ray Pringle, Jr., William Pringle, Naomi Fay Pringle. She's deceased. Amber Pringle. She's Amber Ward now. And Noel Pringle-Gaynor. And Chris Pringle. And they're all alive except one.

I 1: I see. Tell me a little bit about your father. What was his occupation?

R: Well, he was a carpenter mostly. He fished a lot of times just because there wasn't enough carpenter work to do. He never did like commercial fishing much. But he did a lot of it because carpenter work was very little in demand around here back in his days. In the '20s, '30s and even '40s. So he did more fishing than he did carpenter work.

I 1: Now, he lived in North Carolina and moved to Cortez, is that correct?

R: Yes, 1918.

I 1: In 1918 he moved to Cortez. Do you remember him talking about fishing in North Carolina or working in North Carolina much?

R: Oh, I heard it but I never paid much attention because my interest was zero. I'd just hear that he'd go down to Broad Creek and Bogue Sound and gettin' with some of the older men there that he knew before he moved and they'd go up in the fall of the year and fish for a month when no mullet was running. And he'd return home and that's all I knew. I never knew much about the success or anything. Because that was about the time I was lookin' at girls. They interested me more than fishing.

I 1: Did you fish with your father?

R: Yes. When I was young and then just before I was drafted in the Army, 1943. We fished together quite a bit, for several years, ya know? But when I was a kid I went with him quite a bit.

I 1: Are there any particular experiences that you remember from fishing with your father?

R: Oh, I remember him getting sting ray stung more than anything else. It almost killed him. Never seen a fella get sting ray stung because he was careless when he'd get overboard, pulling on his nets trying to catch some mullet we had.

Of course, I got stung too. That was a tormenting experience. But I remember him as a child going around Anna Maria Island, over at Perico Bayou, down at Crane's Bayou when there was no condominiums and very few houses and hardly any people. And these old people that lived on the islands, like Perico Bayou, Mr. and Mrs. Priest, or Price we called 'em, were from Germany. Up in Anna Maria Bayou was an old fella named Mr. Swenson, he was from Sweden, could barely talk english. And the Prices couldn't hardly talk. Then over about the middle of Anna Maria Island was an old fella we called him the wild Irishman, cause he'd get drunk and raise cane. But he was nice otherwise.

Then down in Crane's Bayou was an old fella lived there who was an immigrant from Spain. His name was Rodriguez. All of 'em were friendly and always tried to help ya if could you offer you water or cup a tea as Mr. Swenson'd say, would you like a "coop" of tea? And so forth. It was really some experience getting out and going around Longboat Key, Anna Maria Island, Perico Island and these places. And even down the shore, south of Cortez, just north of the Sarasota City limits. The Ringling's were there. There home that's still there. Pal Crossley lived there in what we called the haunted house. It's beginning to be renovated into a little museum. We knew them.

I mean we knew them casually. We'd speak to them and they were friendly. John and Mabel Ringling. I remember seeing them get off that yacht in their uniforms. We'd call them their costumes. And the captain would help them up the steps and all that. I'd look at 'em with awe. That's like the King and Queen of England to me. We never had any envy of them and they never were anywise trying to infer that we were no good because we caught fish and were nasty as some of these present northern people indicate and accuse us of. And other people, right on up the shore. We'd always offer them fish. A few would accept them and some would once in awhile offer to pay. And our rapport with the natives from the North is not like it is now.

They want to run everybody out of the water and take the seashore and the bays for themselves. So my

experience was quite unlike it is today. You going around here having to fight for your life.

I 1: So you fished in a lot of these areas, not just close to Cortez. You were going clear up to Perico and all the way down to Sarasota and you fished all of those areas in those days. And there were very few people around then.

R: Very few. We even went down as far as Blackman's Bay and Lemon Bay and Midnight Pass. That was the extent of my fishing experience. And then up north as far as Pasa Grille and sometimes up to where Port Manatee is now. There was a ferry landing there and we used to fish up to that point. And it was quite, I think, inspiring to be able to think back of how this place used to be 50 or 60 years ago or more. And I remember it well.

I 1: Tell me a little bit about Cortez, the community itself. What was it like when you were growing up?

R: Well, they had dirt streets and no electricity in the '20s when I was small. We had kerosene lamps and there was sand roads that'd burn your feet. We'd go to school barefooted right here in Cortez. Then sometime before the '30s they did run a light wire out to Cortez and we got little old 25 watt bulbs. You couldn't see much better. But it was very primitive out here. You had outside rest rooms. You had no bathroom whatsoever. You had wood stoves or kerosene stoves. You didn't have any central air or heat, I'll tell ya that. Didn't even have a fan.

And mosquitoes, oh Lord! And rattlesnakes. You'd walk down the road at night to go fishing, there was not one light. No area lights, no lights of any kind. Didn't even have a flashlight. And many's a fisherman would get struck at by rattlesnakes going down to the dock. Their teeth would leave a print in the britches leg, ya know? Fortunately, I don't remember any casualties and I walked over many a one. And somehow or other divine providence kept me from gettin' bit and a lot of other folks.

I 1: Do you think life was hard back then?

R: No. I didn't look at wealthy people like the Ringling's, the Crossley's or some of the others here. My mother took in washings to send us to school. Because mullet was 3/4 of a cent, a penny and even up to the war, World War II, 3 cents was the highest. And daddy couldn't make a living. My mother took in washings for these rich Yankees that came down here and I'd look at them with awe. I mean almost admiration, you know. Well, I can't be like them, but I don't expect us to be like them. They're in a different class. But now, oh my. We ought to have what they have and a little more too. But we were never envious of people that had something.

Even the fish dealers that were here at the time, there was four or five of 'em. They had some money. The fishermen didn't have any. And they virtually owned ya. Your boats, your nets and they'd just give ya out a little bit.

I 1: Who were some of the fish dealers who were here at that time?

R: A.D. Millis of the Star Fish Company. B.E. Taylor was his partner. That was the Star Fish

Company. And there was a fella named Snodgrass came down from New York and opened up a fish business, along with Mr. Gus MacDonald. And at first it was MacDonald Fish Company and then they renamed it. I forgot. Then there was Tink Fulford. That's Ralph Fulford's father. Opened up the Dixie Fish Company. And the building's not there anymore. I think it burned like the Star Fish Company building burned and some of the rest. And the storms destroyed several. But Tink Fulford had a very thriving business.

And when I was a little boy my daddy was in business in the early '20s with a fella named Shreck from up north and when the stock market crash came October 29, 1929 my dad had $800 in the bank. And immediately the next morning we were broke. And we stayed broke until well up in the '40s. Wiped out.

I 1: You don't think life was hard then, so did you have plenty of food?

R: Oh, yeah. We had plenty of food because we fished and we had a garden. We always had a cow and we had a pig and we had chickens.

I 1: So, you had animals?

R: Without the chickens you'd have had no eggs. Without the cow you had no milk. Without the pig you had no ham. And that's just the way it was. And without the nets you had no fish. But we ate fairly good, but that's about all we had. And with my mother washing and what my dad made fishing they would combine their resources and we made it. They had a twenty-eight dollar a year interest on the mortgage of their home. They couldn't even pay the payments. So Charlie and Susie Guthrie, they were really related to my mother as first cousins, they loaned the money to build our house. Just frame it in and for about 10 years all they paid was $28 a year on interest. And they deferred the payments until later. And after the War came along, the economy revived and we began to make payments and finally paid it off.

But people were gracious about things like that. They weren't always talking about foreclosing, putting you in jail or something. They'd come around and find out if there was some way they could help ya. Whoa! What a difference from now.

I 1: Where was that first house that they built?

R: It's on 123rd Street. I don't even know the number. We sold it when my mother died. I sold the house and now we live in a house that my son and his wife owns when we come to Cortez. It was one that O.K. Drymond owned and she's dead and he's living in Texas. He used to be a fisherman and a boat builder. He's the one I'd like to get this interview with you. He lived back about ten years before me. That's nice to pick up that 1921 storm and its devastation of the water- front was awful. I was 3 days old and they hauled me in a skiff up here to where the Shell Filling Station is up on Cortez Road, my mother and I, with nothing but a mattress thrown over us. I don't remember it, but she did. She told me about it. That was quite an escape from a savage storm.

It was blowing up over 120 miles an hour and it devastated the waterfront. And things wasn't the same

when I grew up like it was about 7, 8 years before. But O.K. Drymond and some of these other fellas can tell you about the '21 storm. It was terrible.

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

R: Well, she was a devout Christian and she believed that women should stay home and obey their husbands, you know? And not create problems and she was very kind and she was instructive to me. She was very careful to teach me. Of course, she taught me the Bible. That was her main source book. And they lived by the discipline of the Bible. You know, you say reading, writing and arithmetic. The old school teachers at this white school, it was red when I was here. We had teachers that they had limbs off of oak trees there and they'd tan out hides when we'd misbehave. And when I got home I got another one. But my mother was kind. She'd says I'm gonna tell you daddy and then daddy would take care of the execution when he got home. And it didn't hurt me a bit. It just made a better fella out of me. Because it taught me to know when they said no, that's what they meant. And that what we lived by here. You'd hear kids ahollaring all over town in the afternoon late. But it made them behave themselves. We had very few criminals ever come out of Cortez. I mean boys and girls were mischievous. I was mischievous. We'd do a lot of things on Halloween and pull pranks and things that you don't even hear about now days.

But we wasn't all that destructive of people's property. We'd just hide it from 'em or something or other. But not steal it. People would leave their doors open. Leave everything laying around. Didn't worry about it. You lay something around now and come back looking for it! Whoa! These boats and nets and all down here. Nobody ever had a boat, a motor, a net or a battery or something like that stolen. Now you've got to be very careful. Like they do monitoring here with video.

I 1: Was there a lot for you to do in Cortez when you were growing up?

R: Oh, yeah. Fishing was a lot different that it is now. They had stop-netting and a lot of mackerel fishing more than they do now. Practically the year round. Blue fish, mackerel, trout. And we young boys could always come down at night and just sleep at the fish house and when they'd come in, they'd wake us up and we'd gut those fish for 10 cents a hundred. And we'd make money. And there was always these lawns around here to mow because the fishermen didn't want to mow the lawn. And the fish houses gave each fisherman that fished at that dock 25 pounds of ice a day, free, a block.

And us boys, before we'd go to school in the morning, we'd get up early and get them blocks of ice and run 'em around to these houses and we'd get paid maybe 25 cents for that week of delivering that ice. And I had a little old buggy. And a knife we'd sharpen to gut fish and an old lawn mower. It didn't have a motor either. You pushed and grunt. And mow lawns. And oh, yeah. One of our main sources of revenue was cleaning out outhouses. 35 cents apiece. And my dad always furnished me and the other their daddy's likewise, with a sack full of lime. We'd get in there and clean and keep throwing lime so it didn't run everybody out of the community. It was a pretty sanitary job because we used a lot of lime. And you didn't smell it and when we got through it was clean and sanitary as such a project could be.

I 2: There's only one outhouse left that I'm aware of and Mrs. Jones said that it had a cleanout in the

back?

R: Yep.

I 2: Were most of them like that?

R: Yep. You got in the back. I'd dig holes and you'd try to remember where you had the other hole and dig another hole next to it and just keep digging and after several years you'd come back to the original hole and it would be integrated with the earth and all and you could dig in it again.

I 2: Did the building always stay in the same spot?

R: Yes. Yep, it stayed right there with a hole down in it. And of course your main, oh Lord, your main fear was spiders and snakes that'd be around that place. Boy, there were big old spiders and roaches and rats and snakes. We'd always have a Sears & Roebuck Catalog or a phone book and light up one page and shoo 'em out.

I 1: Smoke them out!

R: I tell ya, I never did resent not having what other people had. I always enjoyed what I did have.

I 1: What did you do with the money you made?

R: We went to school on a bus, after we left this little school out here. I think we went out here till the sixth grade and then in junior high and senior high we rode a bus. We had to get up real early and get home real late. And we had to buy our lunches, of course. And most parents would make their kids have a bank and you'd put your quarters and dimes in that bank and they'd save it up for some project. I know my mother wanted to fix the floors and varnish 'em and all. And she had a little ole bank and I'd just put that money in there and keep enough to have a little spending money.

I 1: So you helped with the family income?

R: Oh, yeah. And another thing, we'd go fishing on the weekends a lot of times, even though my parents were very strict church goers and I am too. But because of necessity. You know necessity comes first. The Lord recognized that, so she let me go fishing on the weekends. And some of the boys who could borrow their dad's boats and nets, we'd go run a stop or go gill netting or whatever in season. There was the kind of fish that you could catch with certain nets. And we'd borrow a net and go fishing and sometimes we' make $40 or $50. And that was a lot of money on a weekend. Catch 3,000, 4,000 or 5,000 pounds of fish. That was really something worth while. That'd be more than my daddy would make in a month. I had to help the family with their financial problems, which was no more than right.

So we survived. All of us cooperated and all of us in the family would get little odd jobs and get our dimes and nickels and quarters and once in awhile a dollar. But those dollars were scarce. Never made many of them.

I 1: You said that your mother took in laundry. Did she ever work at the fish house or help your father with fishing at all?

R: No. She stayed at home. She had plenty of work to do. Cooking and cleaning house, besides putting out those washings. She didn't have a washing machine. She had a big black wash pot out in the yard and we had to go out and get wood. Had to go out in the woods and cut a tree and bring it in. This light wood they call it, a fat pine. And you could go anywhere you wanted to then. You didn't worry about getting shot or fenced out. You'd just go out there and cut some wood. And my daddy had a Model T Ford. I'd load that thing down. I could always get two or three boys to go with me just to get a ride. Because were rides were unique almost.

We'd bring that wood and cut it up. And mama would boil that washpot and get it on the rub board. I've still got a rub board. When she died she had a brass rub board from North Carolina made with very special wood. Somebody had sent it to her. She rubbed out many a piece of clothes, shirts and pants and things on that rub board and I've got it in my office. It means a lot to me cause she worked hard. Then you had to wring them out by hand, and hang 'em on a clothes line. And it was my job too to help shoo the birds off the clothes line. There was always something to do.

Feed the chickens, feed the cow, milking the cow, feeding the pigs, picking up the eggs, mowing the lawn, taking out the garbage. We'd burn it in those days and bury the cans. Of course that's taboo now. But there was never a dull moment.

I 1: You didn't have much time for mischief.

R: Sunday was the only day I even got to play. They didn't believe in working on Sunday. So Sunday was the day we could play and we had a big time. When Monday came, back to work. School and work.

I 1: Tell me what a typical Sunday was like. Did you have a big meal?

R: Yes sir. That was the only real big meal we had in a week. My daddy would smoke fish and take 'em to Bradenton to the Friendly City Market. It's out of business now, but there was a fella there named Mr. Binnyhall. He owned the market and his son-in-law was brought into ownership. But he was helping to run it. His name was Swafford. My dad would smoke mullet and carry 'em to the Friendly City Market. No money, but he'd carry 'em a great big pile of smoked mullet and he'd give him two or three packages of meat and write x x x on 'em. He'd go through the cash register and they were free, you know? He'd come home with those big old packages of beef, especially steak. And boy, my mother would cook that on Sunday morning with hot biscuits and onion gravy. Whoa! We ate then before we went to church. We come home and we had it again. That was the highlight of the week. And she could cook them biscuits like I never seen. That was a wonderful occasion in our life.

And of course, Christmas. She'd always save up for that and have a turkey. That was a big deal too.

I 1: Someone was telling me that they would actually raise turkeys for Christmas and Thanksgiving.

Did you ever have turkeys that you would raise?

R: Yes. Well, the prospects were not always good. We figured we'd get one or two out of 'em. The things always had the sore head in the summertime and they'd die. You'd try to put sulfur and grease on their heads to try to save their lives. My mother would pray for some of 'em. We'd come out with several of them alive. Most of them would die. But anyway, she would get through and when Christmas came or some holiday and we'd wind up with a turkey.

They'd be running around out there and we'd play with 'em. They was hard to eat because we played with them. Kinda like rabbits. We wouldn't eat rabbits because we'd play with the rabbits and they were like pets, then we couldn't eat 'em.

I 1: Who would have to butcher those animals?

R: We did. I'd cut their heads off, hang 'em on the clothes line. My mother'd come along with a pot of hot water and souse 'em in it, pluck the feathers and do the lacerating of the entrails and all, prepare them and everything. My daddy, he didn't lay around and let mama just do it. If she did anything it was because he was so busy he didn't get to it. Because he sure wasn't any slacker and he didn't back off from anything.

I 1: Well, he built several houses around here didn't he?

R: Yes.

I 1: Do you know some of the homes that he did build?

R: The thing of it is, some of them have changed ownerships and it would be hard for me to tell ya. There's one that Johnny Austin owned, it was on 126th Street. He built that one. I am just not positive. I'm pretty sure he helped with Mrs. Jones' house there. Helped Mr. Jones. And there was a number of houses he helped build but I just can't recollect all that information.

I 1: Did you ever help him with his carpentry?

R: No sir. I never was much of a carpenter. I could maybe nail a board but I wasn't interested in it. I'd rather do something else. So he took care of that obligation.

I 1: Tell me about when you first started fishing on your own.

R: Well, it was just before the War. I got a boat. Of course, my dad went with me cause he was 65 at the time and we fished together, but I was the captain. We caught an awful lot of fish in the summer of 1943 before I was drafted in the Army in World War II. But we sold out and then I came back and I just fished with somebody for a period of time. Then I turned to ministry which I've been in ever since. But fishing has always been a part of my life because I was born and raised here. I love Cortez and you can't hardly love Cortez without loving what it stands for and what epitomizes its history is fishing. And I just love fishing. My dad never did really love it, but I loved it. I just loved to be out there on

that water.

Chasing those fish was just something I really ... I mean if I couldn't catch a load, I'd catch some. I'd run that net out and catch some fish when I'd go fishing. And I still have always done it part time when I had a vacation or lived close enough that I could drive back and forth to Cortez as a minister, pastoring churches and so forth. I've always kept up with fishing and had a boat and net. And if I wasn't here someone else would take care of it for me. That way I've been able to keep up with the development of the bays, the estuaries and the canals and the channels. Because you're not safe unless you know where every broke off post and every rock pile is, you're in danger with one of these fishing boats. You'd kill yourself or tear up your equipment.

So, I've been able to keep up with things. And we kept a residence here so we could always have a place to stay and have a place to park by boat, and have good nets and good boats. But it's been piecemeal since 1946 when I got out of the Army. It's just been part time.

I 1: Tell me something. What does it take to become a successful fisherman?

R: Most of the time you've got to be raised up and grow up with it. I've seen a few come in here that was not a native and they devoted themselves to learning the bays; learning how to run out a net; learning how fish feed and where they feed; the weather and the tides and all the relationship to fishing; and associating themselves with the best captains. Now that's the secret of it. It's not going out and just fishing with anybody. Go with somebody that knows how to fish and don't necessarily ask him, just be alert and watch. Because they aren't gonna tell you nothing if they think you're going to be a rival. You've got to pick it up. Just like the son I have with me. I don't tell him a great deal, but that fella's picked up everything around here. He knows where every rock and post is broke off and where there's shoals, and where there are channels and everything. He knows the names of all these places that we call funny names. And they are funny names.

Like Tyler's Bend. They're not so funny here as they are when you get up to the mouth of the Manatee River and around. Bowlee's Creek and Crane's Bayou and Whale Key and Wild Irishman's Cut and Humbugs and things like that. And then you go on a little further north and it's Cream and Honey and Critical's Hole and Moses Hole, Scratch Ankle, Hell's Half Acre and such as that you know. And it's unique. He's picked that all up. How you gonna tell somebody where there's fish if you don't even know where you're pointing to. You could say Longboat Key. Well that don't mean a thing. But if you know it's Whale Key or Crane's Bayou or Bishop's Bayou or Sleepy Lagoon or Buccaneer or Portamind's Bend or New Pass Scholl or the Farms and all them names, Sister Keys and this, that and the other, you've got to know that. You've got to know almost within an acre, at least, of what you are referring to when you say that's the place those fish are. You can go down there and look for them fish all day and not find 'em if you don't know the name of the spot. The bayou or Grass Flat or something you're looking for.

I 1: Who are some of the captains you learned from?

R: Oh, Charlie Guthrie. He was one of the best. He's the one I fished with most. Lord, he taught me how to pole a skiff. My daddy taught me something, but daddy was interested enough in me fishing or

him either to teach me much. But I fished with Charlie Guthrie about eight different times. He's very difficult to get along with, but I went with him because he knew how to fish and he had good equipment. And he taught me a great deal and I picked up a lot.

And then Farmer Capo was the other one I guess I fished with more and learned a lot from. And then there was different ones like Blue Fulford and different ones I'd go with off and on and off and on. Harry Taylor and different ones that you'd always learn something. If you are teachable, you're gonna learn something. And they don't want to tell ya. You're just gonna watch 'em and ... I'm gonna remember this. I'm gonna know it as good as you do now. They wouldn't want you to learn the spots where fish would get together on a certain tide and a certain wind and all like that. But I watched those things and I'd put it up there in my memory bank. Hey bud, I know how them fish act too. That's the way you learn how to fish. Not to get out there main strength and awkwardness as my daddy said, just run that net out. You've got to know where to run that net out and when to run it out and a lot of things more than just running a net out there because you see a fish or a few fish.

And of course, with the type fishing we do today, these kicker boats we call 'em, outboard motors in a well with a net on the back and the motor in the front which is reversed from what you see. Learning how to fish in one of those things is so much different than an inboard motor. You can run through a school of fish with an inboard motor, over 'em, and look down in the water and see 'em and all they do is wiggle their tails. But you go with a kicker boat, man he panics. That thing goes and you'll never see 'em again. And a lot of folks who've been used to a skiff or an inboard motor and then they get a kicker boat and get out there and they can't catch enough to eat. Why? You scare 'em to death before you ever get to 'em. They can hear you a half a mile off. You've got to look and you've got to stop so that you don't panic those fish before you get to striking them.

I 2: When did the kicker boats come along?

R: Oh, it's been about 25 years ago. The Toupins introduced 'em here. There's Frank Toupin and Joe Toupin and they had a brother who's dead. I can't think of his name right now. But there were three sons of old Mr. Toupin. And they brought those kicker boats in here from somewhere up around Ruskin. And these fishermen like to went crazy . They was used to inboard motors and skiffs. They were mad. They called them maniacs and everything else. I remember that well. Oh, Lord. Need to run 'em off, sink their boats, get 'em out of here. But they were tough and kept prevailing. They kept goin'. They kept goin'. Finally, the Cortez fishermen, a native would get one, and then another one. And finally they broke the old line of history that said you can't do it that way. And these old captains were jealous of their traditions. They didn't want nobody to break their traditions. It was sacred. Boy, that's something. Them guys come from out of town and broke the tradition of fishing of inboard motors and skiffs.

I 1: Do you remember some of the first Cortez natives to adopt a kicker boat?

R: I can't just off hand tell ya. I don't really remember who were the first ones. I don't even want to make a guess at it because some of 'em like Smiley Guthrie is dead. He had one but he didn't like it. He said, I just got it because them other maniacs got 'em. He had one way back there but he used an inboard motor a whole lot if he could catch fish with it. But then he'd despair because he didn't catch

nothing so he'd get in his kicker and take off. I don't like this thing, but these maniacs have drove me to it! It's kind of odd the way folks have been able to be pushed around down here when fishermen have been kind of ornery you know, and protective of their traditions and rights here. And they just let some strange guys come in and prevail.

But if it had been back when I was a kid, they'd never have done it. They would have sunk their boats or burned 'em or something. They wouldn't have put up with it, no way. Because they had some strange guys in here with nets that wasn't supposed to be around here fishing they thought, and they took battery acid and poured it all over their nets when they wanted to run 'em out. All they had was lines and cords. They just said we don't want ya here. Does that tell ya the way we feel about ya? They got away with it, but now you couldn't. Boy, that's the good old days.

I 1: Do you remember the first kicker that you worked with?

R: Yeah. Ray Pringle, Jr. and I got a little one about 16 feet long and we put a 40 horse kicker in it. We bought it from somebody. We fished for Fulford Fish Company at the time and we used that thing and we had one more time. Because we were used to inboard motors and skiffs too. But we plundered around with it for a year and then we got a little bit bigger one. We got our nerve up. Because we were afraid of 'em. Them things can throw you for a loop if you don't know what you're doing. And in about three years we finally graduated up till we got a 22 foot one. We got a 90 horse motor and then three or four years later we got a 110, then we come up to 130, then to 150. And now I've got one 75.

But I'll tell ya. You've got to be careful. Them things can kill ya. I know a fella over at the cut off near here, a very close friend of mine, he just lost his respect for 'em. He retired for a short time, two or three years. He come back, grabbed it and took off like he was used to it. He hit a post and they found him dead out there in his boat. They're very hard to control. Almost like an airplane. You'd better hang on, that is when you're going fast. Of course, if you go slow anybody's safe. But you've got to go fast to be able to keep up with things now. Because you're in Cortez and you think about something at New Pass, you can be down there in 10 minutes. Used to be an hour. There's a lot of difference. You'd better know what you're doing or you'll wreck.

I 2: What does the Bible tell us about fishermen?

R: Well, there's a lot in there about fishermen. Jesus Christ called the first of his disciples, the first four of 'em were fishermen. And he loved fish. Because even after he was crucified and raised from the dead, the first thing he did was appear to his disciples after his resurrection and they were eating fish and honeycomb. He said, give me a piece. They were scared of him. I'm not of a spirit. Because he could being seen. He said give me a piece of fish and then he came and ate it in their presence.

The next time they saw him he was out on the shore of Galilee and they had been fishing all night and they caught nothing. He said, put your net back out again. They threw it out and caught 153 big fishes. And he said, bring some up here and let's cook them. And then when they got up there on the shore he done had some on the fire and had 'em cooked and had bread fixed. All that was his creative divination to show 'em but still he had a lot of respect for fishermen. And even in the prophesy of old Ezechial. He was a prophet of God in the Old Testament. And he talks about the Mediterranean Sea and how the

cities that have been destroyed there were typically ... the were prehistoric as far as being affluent and almost as modern as we are today. Like Tyre. They had fairs and they had world trade and ships and everything that plied the oceans almost as great as we are. But they were destroyed in a war and the Lord said all them rocks that's left will be for fishermen to hang their nets on.

Then there is another prophesy in Revelations. It talks about in the end time which Christ is gonna return to this World, that the seas are gonna be full of good fish. There's gonna be plenty of fish everywhere. Whoa! He's gonna heal the pollution and everything has created the lack of fish is gonna be healed. And he said the waters are gonna bring forth good fish abundantly. And fish is a primary source of life to most of the people, the early people of this earth. Fish was a source of proteins and all kinda elements that they needed in their bodies to give them good health. It's a lot healthier than meat and they knew it. For some reason or another.

I 1: Tell me what you see for the future of Cortez and the fishing industry.

R: I believe, I'm a Christian of course and I always believed according to the Bible. And the Lord is on the side of working people. He's got to take sides. He can't be neutral. God has never been neutral. World War II he was not neutral. He was on our side or we wouldn't have won. Because we had some very might adversaries. And we had some determined adversaries. If they'd had the munitions we got now, if they had gotten the atom bomb before us, we wouldn't have won. But that was restrained. Einstein escaped their clutches.

But here in this time we're living in of an exploding population, which is predicted in the Scriptures. God's got to take sides like he always has and He's on the side of the working man. He put them fish out here for people to eat not for playboys to play with. And Ray Jr. and I are two that believe that we're gonna win. We don't have no doubts about it. We have no reservations about it. And we're not afraid to face the future and think we're gonna have to burn our boats and that, or sell 'em or give 'em away. But we're gonna still be fishing when we want to go fishing. And other people's gonna be able to fish and the consumer is gonna have fish and these docks are gonna have fish. And it's gonna be an economic boon to the State of Florida as well as the tourism and everything else. They're gonna co-exist. And these guys might as well get ready to co-exist. They've been co-existing and that's the way God Almighty created this World, for people to live together and share their resources. And that's the way I believe it's gonna be. We're gonna share the resources. Not give them to one old selfish group.

I 1: Is there anything else you'd like to say Stargill?

R: Nope. I love Cortez and Ray, Jr. and I, my son. We're gonna do everything we can to win this fight, I guess you'd call it. Between the haves and have nots. They think they have it and we don't. But I think they're gonna learn how to get along with us and quit being so selfish and get some understanding that Cortez is gonna be a vibrant part of Manatee County and Florida's fishing community. And I don't believe that the fish are gonna quit laying eggs and hatching out and making babies and reproducing. I believe the ecology is gonna be safe from environmental conditions that would kill the resource. I don't believe that's gonna happen.

Regulations aren't necessary. There's too many people to let everybody do what they want to do. But with the proper regulations on the nets, on the length of nets, on the seasons, on the size fish and amount of fish, we can share it all and there'll be plenty of resources here for everybody, the consumer, the commercial guy and the sport fisherman alike. We can do it if we manage the resource properly, not politically. We do it by the scientific method. And science is getting out here and seeing. Not just sitting up there in a swivel chair and reading some kind of tags off of mullet. That is not necessarily scientific.

I 1: You think that you probably have a Ph.D. in Fishery Science?

R: Yes. Sure do.

I 1: Because you've learned a lot out there.

R: Yes sir. Been raised up in it and studied it and I love it. I never have backed off because of rain or cold or heat. And heat's not good for me. I get these old sores on my hands. But somehow or another I've been able to get 'em cleaned up.

I 1: What is it about fishing that you like the most?

R: I like the exercise and the recreation. And I put a hyphen between re and creation. It's not really recreation, it's re-creation to me. Because I get wore out from nervous exhaustion, not from manual labor. But when I come down here and I go fishing for a few days, I can go up there and sleep just like a hard working farmer or fisherman. Instead of a minister that has the burdens and responsibilities of a lot of individuals, hundreds of individuals. Thousands in fact.

I 1: You feel that burden?

R: Yes, I do. And I don't want the YMCA, I don't want to go golfing and all that. I like to get out here where nature has created things and about the only thing that's not created is that boat that's under me. And otherwise, I'm out there with Mother Nature and Father God. It's a great combination. And I'm the little boy trying to survive. 71 years old, I'm in good health, have a lot of strength and have a lot of inspiration ... drive, motivation I call it. And I like to motivate others.

I 1: Well, that's all I've got. And we thank you very much for taking your time to sit down and talk with us.

R: Ok, Mike. I thank you and Wayne very much too. We appreciate what you're doing to try to turn Cortez into a federal historical site to where commercial fishing will be something to be preserved by law.