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Home of Orie Williams Oral History - Vanishing Cultures Project
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Interviewers: M. Jepson (I1)/W. Nield (I2)

I 1: What is your full name?

R: Orie Lee Williams.

I 1: And you were born in Cortez.

R: I was born in Cortez, Florida January 4, 1910.

I 1: What is your father's name?

R: Jesse Lee Williams.

I 1: And your mother's name?

R: Nellie Myers-Williams.

I 1: And was Myers her maiden name?

R: Yes. My mother came from West Virginia and was over in St. Petersburg and that's where she and my father met. And they were married there and shortly thereafter they moved to Cortez.

I 1: Do you know approximately what year that was?

R: That was in 1905.

I 1: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

R: Yes. I have a sister whose older than I but deceased I'm sorry to say. And I have a sister younger than I who is still living and resides in Bradenton.

I 1: Your younger sister's name?

R: Nellie Taylor.

I 1: Your older sister's name was?

R: Elta Williams-Keller. Her married name was Keller.

I 1: Do you have any children?

R: No sir.

I 1: Can you tell us your wife's name?

R: Barbara C. Williams.

I 1: What was her maiden name?

R: Curry. She is a native of Manatee County as well.

I 1: We just more or less would like for you to talk a little bit about your parents starting with your father. You said your parents moved to Cortez in 1905, but what did your father do?

R: He was a commercial fisherman. What induced him to come to Cortez I don't know because there wasn't much to offer in Cortez at that time. My youngest sister Nellie has said that over a period of years that she has heard them say that, different people, that my father and mother were the third family to move into Cortez. But I can't say for sure that it's official. I don't know.

I 2: Was your father a fisherman in St. Pete before he came here?

R: No. My father was involved over there ... he and a friend started to go into the transfer business. But this was a few years after my mother and father were married because my father purchased some property over there. And had a home over there. He would go from time to time to see about the property. Back then he either had to go by boat or he had to go all the way around Tampa Bay through Tampa, Dunedin and so forth, Clearwater, and work his way on around motorized to St. Petersburg. Because his property was on the south portion of the city at that time which has expanded greatly since then.

I 1: Tell us a little about ... you said he was a commercial fisherman. Do you remember him talking about Cortez and fishing in Cortez in the early days? What it was like?

R: Oh, yes indeed. When my father first went to Cortez boats weren't motorized. The relied upon sails. And in the summer time when the wind would die down they would have to use an oar to push the boat. But things are quite different now, modernization in every respect. Boats and motors and netting. Everything has improved greatly

towards the production of fish.

It varies with the different kinds of fish that are running at that particular time. I recall when I was a young boy that it was rare to catch mackerel during the day. That was a night operation. And I recall distinctly that they would have a tub with an old fashioned lantern in it so that when they would see the fish and would want to put their nets out, they would throw a weight attached to the end of the netting and then a tug to the rope so that would be a landmark for making a circle to come back to the end of the net after they made the circumference.

I 1: They'd leave the lantern in the tub so you could see?

R: Yes, it would be bobbin' and weaving in the water and they could see it. But now they have all different devices. Battery-electrified to where there's no danger to the tub because the tub would flop occasionally and that would upset the apple cart somethin' fierce. Ya'd have to stop the boat and pull the net back in unless they wanted to try to guess to find the end of the net. Things have changed drastically.

I 1: You said that your father started one of the first fish houses in Cortez. Can you tell us a little bit about that? What was the name of the fish house?

R: Well, it was referred to as The Fish House because my father had the house built but he leased it to a Mr. Salvorez that was in the seafood business in Sarasota. The building was not attached to the dry land in Cortez. It was out at the end of what was referred to as the sluice, the deeper water. There was another fish house in Cortez at that time on Mr. Joe Guthrie's property which was out from the Albion Inn, the hotel. So there were two fish houses there, each of 'em manned, and the fishermen would bring in their catches and then later they were put on what we called run boats. A run boat going to St. Petersburg to the Hibbs Fish Company. And then the other, where my father's fish house would store the fish, went to Mr. Salvorez in Sarasota.

The purpose of this, or the necessity of the transportation, was due to railway facilities. And so it worked a little hardship at times because the run boats would be delayed on account of bad weather and couldn't come in. But that was rare. But different things you can imagine curtailed the production. Or if the run of fish was quite heavy and they had more than the run boat could

take care of, they had to suppress their catches some.

I 2: What period of time are we talking about now?

R: I don't know the exact year that my father had this fish house built. But I know of an incident that happened if I can hit it fairly close, I would say 1910 or '12, right in that neighborhood. Because I was old enough, I'm not very big now, but I was large enough that my father would allow me to get in one of these pole boats and I was poling from his fish house to the shoreline and the oar got stuck in the bay bottom. When I tried to pull it up I didn't release so it pulled me overboard. Some fella saw me and started hollering to my daddy ... your boy's out there in the bay. And he rushed in another boat and as I went down, he grabbed me by the top of my hair. When I was young I had a lot of hair. And he pulled me up with such pressure out of the water, he lifted me right on up and stood me up in the boat.

I know I got a good tongue lashin'. But my father was smooth-tempered. Never heard him use vulgarity in my life. He had a smooth way of teaching you a dear lesson without raising his voice.

I 1: So, at that time the railways ran to Sarasota and to St. Pete. So the run boats had to go to those two places to off-load those fish to send them to the markets.

R: That's correct.

I 2: And the run boats ... do you remember any of the side wheel boats coming in there?

R: Oh, yes.

I 2: There was a boat called the Mistletoe that used to come to Cortez. Do you remember hearing of it?

R: Yes. That was a freight and passenger steamer.

I 2: That wouldn't be a run boat?

R: No.

I 2: What was a run boat like and how did it operate?

R: The run boats had a large storage space where they could put the fish iced down in this compartment. And I recall that the one over for the Hibbs Fish Company, Mr. Gus

MacDonald was captain of that and it had a two-cylinder diesel motor and it had iron rods so to speak, sticking out of the head of the motor. There was a torch. He would light those torches and heat those rods real hot to where they would penetrate over into the cylinder of the motor in order to get it started.

That reminds me of an incident when I was young. Mr. Joe Guthrie had, as I previously stated, had this dock and one little section of it he did a little repair work. Like machine shop work, shall I use the expression. And one of the gas tanks got a leak, off of one of those large boats. They took it out and let it air out for several days and they thought that had arrested the fumes and had gotten rid of 'em to where there was no danger with his torch. So I was sitting on some cased goods with my feet up on that tank trying to assist Mr. Guthrie to keep the tank from rolling while he was using the torch. Then it blew up. It blew Mr. Guthrie towards the bay and the only thing that kept him from not going into the bay, he hit up against the side of the door and broke his leg. If I recall correctly, it broke in two different places. So he was bedridden for some time. But here I'm still up on these case goods, didn't bother me a bit. Didn't disturb me at all because the ends went out and so I was above and I was safe. But I'll never forget that. Never forget goin' to see Mr. Guthrie, visiting, when he had the weights attached to him by the doctor to try to straighten things out so things could heal.

I 1: Were you down at the fish house a lot? You say your father leased that fish house to Mr. Salvorez. Was he still fishing at that time? Did he go out and fish and he would bring his fish there?

R: Yes.

I 1: Did you work down at the fish house much? Were you there a lot?

R: I was too young for that. This was prior to the storm or hurricane in 1921. So that brings up a different subject or a different part of the story.

I 2: Where did your father's fish house stand in relation to anything that you know today? Was it near Kurt's Camp? Fulford's Fish House?

R: It was west of Fulford's and west of Star. Where Star is

currently. I believe that's 124th Street. My father's building was on the lot just east of 124th Street. It had a rather long dock due to the shoreline at that time. It was not improved. No seawalls. Everything had to be on piles ... roadway or dockway out to the fish house because then the fish were packed in barrels and there'd be some ice in the bottom of the barrel and generally speaking there would be 100 pounds of fish and then there'd be more ice and another 100 pounds of fish, more ice on top. Then in the early days, the wooden solid head was put in. Generally three pieces. What I mean, it constituted a solid head when established. Then those were put upon the truck and hauled from Cortez to Bradenton to the railway there and dispatched northward.

I 1: Can you describe the walkway, the boardwalk out to the fish house? What was it constructed of?

R: Used a lot of cabbage palmettos for piles and then we'd try to get the hard pine. It had a lot of resin in it. And then heavy timbers to support the trucks that would come in loaded with ice, or dispatching loaded with barrels of fish going to the market.

I 1: So it was wide enough they could back the truck out to the fish house?

R: Yes sir.

I 1: Tell us a little bit about the first house that you remember in Cortez where you lived. Where was it located?

R: That would be on the southeast corner, I'd better rephrase that. That would be on the northwest corner of 123rd Street Court West and 45th Avenue. My father had it built as a single story initially and then some years later, I was too young to recall, the second story was added making it a two story home. And the living quarters were upstairs and downstairs was for cooking, dining and social or religious activities or what might be.

That existed until 1960. Then I deemed it advisable to take the second story off, which I did, and enlarged the ground floor a little. Modernized the building because the roof was made out of pine timber, very thin pine timber and upon getting dry it was almost impossible to reuse it because it was so brittle and tough.

I 1: Why was it brittle?

R: It was the nature of the tree, the pine tree. And that hard pine would dry and get virtually as hard as a rock. You couldn't drive a nail in it to make it secure to some other timber. You would have to drill holes for the nails and then drive the nails in. So, the building was covered with cypress shingles and over that goodly number of years they had dried out and warped and what have you. You could see daylight through them and I figured it advisable to do something before it did start leaking and damaging the interior of the house and furnishings therein.

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

R: My mother came from Clarksburg, West Virginia down to St. Petersburg because of her health. She was on the frail side and that's where she and my father met and were married there. Then they moved to Cortez, which I previously related. I was just a young boy when an Indian doctor was coming north from Sarasota Bay and when he got near Cortez the tide was low and the boat ran aground.

My father went out to assist in one of his boats and being late in the afternoon he prevailed upon the doctor to spend the night and continue his trip to Tampa the next day. During his visit, naturally he questioned my mother because she was on the frail side. The next day he informed my father that he wanted him to bring my mother into Tampa to his office. And it so happened ... now just what all the doctor told my mother, that's beyond me ... however, whether this applies 100 percent I can't verify. But she became a vegetarian and the remainder of her life I could hold in my hand all the fish or chicken or steak or anything else that she ate.

She did gain health and got plump. She lacked three years of being 90 when she passed away. So I'm inclined to be a vegetarian on the strength of that. I'm 83 now, I want to catch up with my mother's age hopefully.

I 2: When you say that the doctor was an Indian? You mean he came from India?

R: No, he was an American Indian. Dr. Mohawk.

I 1: Dr. Mohawk and he had a practice in Tampa?

R: In Tampa, yes sir.

I 2: I have a photograph here that you've handed me. Is this

the same house before your father made it a two story house?

R: Yes sir.

I 2: Who is in the photograph here?

R: That's my mother and father and my oldest sister standing next to my mother. My father is holding me with his left arm and hand, about shoulder high.

I 2: How old would you say you are in that photograph?

R: A year, maybe a year and a half. Somethin' like that.

I 2: And that's the house on the corner of 123rd Street Court and 45th Avenue that we call the Jess Williams house.

R: Yes sir. Yes sir.

I 1: Tell us a little bit about family life back then. What was it like growing up there and did you eat together as a family?

R: Oh, yes. Yes. My mother was known for being a wonderful cook. And she really was. So we would all sit at the table and the various foods that were prepared were in large dishes and we served ourselves. She saw to it that we were well fed. I have nothing but praise there. She was a religious person and she detested alcohol and tobacco and it was not allowed in the house. She was highly sensitive to cigarette smoke. When my father, say in the winter time where some fellas would be smokin' nearby or in a closed room or something, when he came home she'd say please go outside and take that jacket off. Her smell was highly sensitive to cigarette smoke.

After I got grown I smoked for some years and then I quit. And I'm as bad as my mother was about cigarette smoke now. I give 'em room where they're smokin'. They take precedence over me. I move over. I give 'em room. I'm not the pot callin' the kettle black. But if that's what they choose, that's their prerogative. To me it's a filthy, expensive habit.

I 1: Did your mother attend church in Cortez?

R: Yes sir.

I 1: What church did she attend?

R: The first church in Cortez was a community church. Then later some of the members pulled away and started the Church of God down there. The original church is the Church of God but it has been modified, modernized and so forth and so on. So there are two churches there and there has been for several years.

I 2: The church that's called the Cortez Church of God today on 124th Street. Do you believe that to be the first church building there?

R: No, that was the second church. The first church was what I refer to as the community church. That's the only way I can recall it. It was on 45th Avenue on the north side. Down towards the school building. The Church of God building was built in ... I made a research for the dating on some of that for the benefit of a friend of mine who was a member of the church some years back. There were three trustees listed in the deeding. My father, Jess Williams and M.F. Brown and A.F. Taylor. And so they erected that building there, a small building, but over a period of years and as everything else so to speak advanced, it advanced as well. As of today it's a right nice building. The only bad feature about it, highly restrictive, was the narrow lots in Cortez. But that prevails throughout the entire planning of the community. Narrow lots.

I 1: You said that your mother was a religious person. Was your father also a religious person would you say?

R: No. He was religious in belief and I repeat he didn't drink, he didn't smoke, didn't use profanity. But back in the early ages of the church they had peculiar rules or beliefs and their rituals. And my father was criticized for buying my mother a silk dress. And so when they mentioned that, it didn't set well with my father so he walked out of the church and didn't go back anymore.

I 1: Do you think your mother liked that silk dress?

R: She continued to wear it.

I 1: Was your mother active in the church.

R: Yes.

I 1: When you talk about the community church, can you tell us a little bit about that? What do you remember about that

church?

R: I recall that it was small, but yet it was commensurate with the population of the Village. They would switch their meeting dates according to their belief. In other words, they had to work out their schedule for that. It may seem disrespectful, but I don't mean it that way ... I don't recall the parties who died, a man, and they had him on a coolin' board across some of the pews. It was quite humped and they had to tie him down to try to straighten him out. Something slipped and he raised up and when he did they took off and left him.

I firmly believe that's authentic. But I was too young to be involved in it actually.

I 1: When you say a cooling board, can you tell us what it is?

R: When people did die back in that age they would put 'em on a coolin' board. In other words, put 'em in there to form 'em in order to go into a casket. And back then there were caskets built out in Cortez especially for infants. So, due to this man's physical incapacitation, that had caused him to be humped they wanted to straighten him out in order for him to fit into the casket properly. So when that rope broke or the knot gave way or something, he raised up. I can appreciate their vanishment.

I 1: You said that your mother was a good cook and you always had plenty of food to eat. Some people described that it was hard growing up in Cortez in those days. Do you remember that? They said there were some hard times.

R: Yes. But fortunately for the people in Cortez they had plenty of food to eat from the sea, a variety. Some had gardens or vegetables because they could have a garden year-round. It was a little tough because the men were not paid very much for their production of fish. The price was cheap but so was everything else. You could take a few dollars and go to town and get a week's supply of groceries. However, there were grocery stores in Cortez. Prior to the storm in '21 there were two. Mr. Brown had a grocery and it was a two story building. And the living quarters were on the second floor. And Mr. Guthrie had a grocery out on the dock. So canned goods were available and back then I recall this small fella, small stature. The Phantom, which was the freight boat. Not immense, not a paddle boat or anything of that kind. Small, motorized and sail. He would haul

supplies from Tampa into Cortez and to Sarasota. And he would come periodically. I can recall when I was a young boy that the boat would come in and tie up and that small fella would handle those heavy bags of feed. In Cortez they had chickens and cows. And to see that small fella handle those heavy bags of things to get 'em out of the hole of the vessel up on to the deck, then from the deck to the dock ... some would be hauled to Mr. Brown's store. It amazed me.

Getting back to chickens and cattle. I know we had chickens and we had a cow. So we had plenty of milk, buttermilk, homemade butter. Chickens for eggs and every once in awhile a chicken would lose its head ya know? Wind up in the fryin' pan or bein' baked. So we survived. Let's put it that way. My father was a wonderful provider.

I 1: He was?

R: Yes. I give him credit for that. And my mother was a home maker!

I 1: Was your mother ever employed outside of the home? Or did she do anything other than just being a homemaker?

R: My understanding is when my mother and father first came to Cortez, they stayed in Captain Jim Guthrie's home because Aunt Eunice was expecting a child. And my mother helped there and I assume that they stayed there until the house was erected. As soon as the house was erected, no my mother didn't do any outside work after that.

I 2: You mentioned Mr. Brown's store and Mr. Guthrie's store. Was Mr. Guthrie's store in the hotel or was it out on dock?

R: Out on the dock.

I 2: You know that building there that we have moved, called Jesse Burton's Store. Do you remember when that was a store?

R: Just vaguely. I know that it was on the west end of the building. But it wasn't there very long before Mr. Guthrie had it. Because the supplies arriving and so forth and so on, out by boat. Instead of having to transport all of that. And then, secondly, the Albion Inn was a hotel and he wanted that away from the hotel. The post office was out there too in that building. It was, shall I say, a combination building. The grocery store was on

the west end. The post office was in the southwest corner of that building and then in a room between the grocery ... because the fishery was on the east side ... there was this room that I referred to a few minutes ago. A storage room for supplies and working equipment tools, and so forth and so on. And then that's where the larger boats would come up. The steamers. Because buildings east of there could not accommodate a vessel of that dimension. With that much draft.

I 1: Where was Mr. Brown's grocery located?

R: Mr. Brown's store was located just west of 123rd Street Court West. And the front portion of his building was connected to the land by a dock, say maybe 20 feet long. Because we had what we call spring tides. Spring tides in the summer time, full moon time, and his store and home was elevated on piles and water was underneath unless the tide was extremely low. I repeat, the living quarters were upstairs. So his building and Mr. Guthrie's building, along with the other buildings disappeared in the hurricane in '21.

I 1: Let's talk a little bit about the '21 hurricane and what you remember or have heard about that hurricane. Can you talk a little bit about that?

R: Yes sir. I recall distinctly that our home place was two story at that time and it faced south which was facing the bay. My father and I were right around the southwest corner of the building and he was observing the destruction that was going on. There was fishin' that was takin' place. When he saw his fish house come off of the piles and was drifting with the wind and the waves going west, he looked at me and said son, I think it's time we leave.

So we went downstairs and he told my mother to get the kids ready, we're goin'. And he had two men who worked for him outside with one of the smaller boats. One of those little net boats. Back in those days we had oil cloth on the kitchen table. That was more or less a necessity like the stove. It was an adopted fact that you had to have oil cloth. So we took the oil cloth from the kitchen table and my mother and two sisters and I tried to shield ourselves from the rain and sit on the back end of the boat. And these two men were pulling like a team with a bow rope of the boat. My father was on the inside with a poling oar to assist in that capacity.

We went up the highway. The water was all over the town

and goin' like an ebb tide across the streets. We went up the highway for two miles in that boat. Upon returning, fortunately, the home was not damaged and my father in the meantime had taken care of most of his boats by puttin' 'em in safer harborage. His loss was minimal other than the loss of the fish house. But it cleaned the waterfront in Cortez. There was nothing left but the piles where buildings had been erected or net racks.

Because back in those days the nets were cotton and they had to be dried religiously in order to preserve 'em. So they all disappeared. Then salvaging went into effect. In a short time the people from Bradenton responded beautifully by sending food out to Cortez to be dispatched. Because the two stores were gone and all the contents therein. Then the production of fish was naturally curtailed until things could get back in shape again, the catching of fish and dispatchin' of fish, docks built and so forth and so on to accommodate the requirements.

I 2: Did people have insurance in those days?

R: I don't think I ever heard of it in those days. I really don't.

I 1: What about water. Was it hard to find fresh water after the storm? Do you remember?

R: No. Not to my knowledge because you see, most of the homes had tanks to catch rain water. I know we had a 3,000 gallon tank on the east side of the house and for washing clothes we had a cistern on the northwest corner of the house. The concrete part or the storage part was below ground. And it had a roof over it which was above ground. Back in those days we didn't have washin' machines and so forth and so on. They had a big old iron pot out in the back. That was my job to keep wood supplied.

I 1: Wood for the wash pot?

R: Yes.

I 1: And you'd start a fire underneath that to heat the water?

R: Yes.

I 1: Then how would you wash the clothes?

R: They had different forms. Usually a paddle. Like ya

paddle a boat with. A man-made deal to stir 'em and fool with 'em to take 'em out of the hot water and put 'em in the containers. Various tubs for rinsing and so forth. Then, of course everybody had a clothes line for drying purposes.

I 1: Those were the automatic dryers.

R: Yes. Solar heat took care of that.

I 1: Going back to the storm. What do you remember about peoples' moods after the storm? How did people feel about what had happened and was there a strong sense of community coming together afterwards?

R: Yes. That's one thing I can say about the Village of Cortez. Or bring it down to two people. There may be two people that didn't like each other particularly so. But yet, when there was trouble they were together. Any form of emergency there was immediate response by the entire community. Everybody would dive in to help anybody that was in trouble. I hope and know as far as that's concerned, for the people who were born and raised in Cortez, that's still prevails to a great extent. But there's been a lot of fightin' lately due to the increase in population and people moving in who were not born and raised in Cortez. They have no part in the production of seafood. They maintain their livelihood other ways or have retired. But it's still a community that's thriving nicely right on which I'm happy to say.

I 2: Going back to the pre-1921 harbor. We have a couple of photographs here and I'd like for you to tell us some of the things we're looking at. Do you know whose net camp this was, who these men are or what some of these buildings are?

R: Yes. That's my father at the far left. Who the others are, I can't answer that. I recall this rack, drying rack. That was the last one that was in Cortez if I'm not mistaken. I don't think I am. I can recall that distinctly.

I 2: Would that be Ray Guthrie's net camp?

R: Yes. It should be.

I 2: How would you call that boat we're looking at? What kind of a boat is that?

R: It's motorized. Back in the early ages they were narrow. Round. Seaworthy. That was their conception back in those days. But they found out later that it was more advantageous to have the boats made wider. More buoyancy. More capacity for weight.

I 2: Is that the same kind of boat in this second photograph?

R: It's the same boat.

I 2: Would you call that a skiff?

R: No, that's a launch. They referred to it as a launch. See where you can see the motor there?

I 2: Would that boat have been built in Cortez or would they get it somewhere else?

R: I don't think that that boat was built in Cortez. Now where my father got that boat I'm unable to say.

I 2: You believe this is your father's boat?

R: I know it is. Elta.

I 2: I can just barely see that name. What did you say it was?

R: Elta. E L T A. That was the name of my deceased sister.

I 1: How many men are in that boat?

R: Five there.

I 1: Is that the crew you would need to fish that style of fishing?

R: If you will notice, in relation to the size of the boat, the amount of space that the net is taking up. Now that is a haul net which my father did more than any other type of fishing. In other words, instead of gill-netting, he was relied upon the seine more. But he did have gill nets and gill-net skills. But ya see today, with the nylon and _____ filament, for the length of this netting here, it would be insignificant on the back end of the boat because the _____ filament don't absorb water. It's strong. It's light. Oh, it would have been a masterpiece for them to have had something like that back then.

I 2: It's a black and white photograph. We can see that the

deck is a darker color than the hull. What color do you think that would have been?

R: Generally, green. That was the most prominent color for the decks of the launches. Light green. Not too light. But some of them preferred the real dark green. But the majority of them were always green.

I 1: Let's talk a little bit about when you started fishing in Cortez. What year was that?

R: I would fish with my father during the off season of school. I didn't do any commercial fishing of my own until I got to be pretty good size. Back then , a small fella or inexperienced fella, but particularly so the young fellas, they would call them a half share. Instead of getting a full share, just give them a half share. When I was young we traveled a great deal. My father was from North Carolina but we didn't go to North Carolina much because of the lack of relatives.

But my mother, it was different. We would go to Clarkesburg, West Virginia and it was wonderful making those trips back then. Back then they had runnin' boards on cars. My father would have a wooden container built the full length of the runnin' board and staples for goin' there and pots and pans and dishes for cooking and eating. Back then, you couldn't plan a destination in one day. That was contingent upon the weather and the weather determined the condition of the roads. So we've slept in schools. We've slept in churches, farm houses. But it was exciting and educational and adventurous. We enjoyed immensely. We'd go to West Virginia during harvest time. Plenty of fresh fruit to pick, berries to pick. And we even hauled hay shocks, ride on the horses. We thought we were in heaven.

I 1: Did others from Cortez travel much in those days? Do you remember?

R: No, not when I was that young. I don't recall people traveling like we did, no. I really don't. I know that we traveled like that until I got up good size and then my mother got sick. I was in business in Corneal, Georgia at that time. I came home. She was worried and referred to West Virginia as up home. Son, I don't think I'll ever get to go up home again. No, you'll straighten out and I'll take ya to West Virginia. You get better, we'll go to West Virginia. So we went to West Virginia and it turned out she got alright and I repeat, she lacked three months

of being 90.

I 2: Where in North Carolina did your father come from?

R: Wolford.

I 1: Did he ever talk much about life up there?

R: No. My father didn't like to refer to that. He regretted the circumstances. You know, the loss of his parents. And it was a little tough for him as a boy, trying to do anything to help out to make a nickel. I repeat, as soon as he got old enough to where he figured he could get out on his own, that's what he did.

I can tell a funny story there. He got a job as a cook on a nice yacht. It was out of New York and went to Miami. When they got to Miami, there was no docking facilities. The boat had to anchor away from the shoreline and they had a shuttle boat. So the owner and passengers were escorted to the shoreline and the boat came back. My father was ready to get in and go. There wasn't nothin' left but he and the dog. The boatman told him, no you can't go now. I'll just have to take the dog and come back and get you. Ok, that'll be fine. So while he took the dog to the shoreline and come back my daddy had packed his grip, started gettin' on the boat with his grip. He says what are you doin' with all those clothes? I quit. When I can't ride with a dog, well I'm not good enough to work on this boat.

Then in Miami he rented a bicycle and I don't know just what was wrong but I think it didn't have any brakes on it or something. But here he was goin' down there and he couldn't stop and he hit a sand pile. It threw him over the handlebars and his clothes were infested with these little ole thorny things.

I 1: Sand spurs?

R: Yeah. He picked those things he said for weeks. He got 'em in his clothes. He got 'em in his face, in his arms, his legs and all around him. So he had to pick those little sand spurs out for days. But he'd laugh about it. Then he made his way up to the western seaboard. How I don't recall now. But when he and my mother met he was a skipper of a freight boat. When he and my mother began to get a little serious, she said no I'm not goin' to marry a man that goes to sea in a sailboat and I don't know when he's comin' back. So that's when my father quit

the sailboat.

I 1: So he was on his own in North Carolina. His parents had passed way? Who was he staying with as a young man?

R: An aunt.

I 1: When he came to Cortez was he familiar with any of the fisherfolk that were there at that time? Did he know anyone there?

R: Not to my knowledge. Now whether or not he had heard something I just don't know.

I 2: Why do you think so many people from that part of North Carolina wound up in Cortez, Florida?

R: Due to the fact that they were born and raised near the water. No doubt they participated in some capacity, some of 'em, maybe for eating purposes. I can't answer that question completely. But I know that when, so to speak, when one goes and thinks they've got a good deal. They notify kinfolk, then they have company. And so, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it just developed from that standpoint. The two Fulford brothers came into Cortez and then Captain Jim Guthrie came into Cortez. And it just gradually expanded.

I 2: Did you ever hear of any of the older fishermen talking about either the Cuban fishermen that might have been there or the Bahamian fishermen?

R: Yes. They referred to 'em. But from a standpoint of not too much knowledge. The best I recall, they knew that these things had existed and more or less got stalemated for awhile. That's the way I understand it. But there was a lot of production for these boats to come in and pick up the salty cargo. They drifted from that to being able to sell their production locally. So therefore, that subject more or less was not stressed. I didn't hear much about it because there was no need to bring that back up. They were talking about current things today and what's gonna happen tomorrow. What are we going to do tomorrow. How can we do this, what can we do to improve ourselves.

They were concentrating on the production of fish in order to look after their families. That was the main issue. So, for them to sit around and talk where us kids could hear things of that nature didn't exist much. In small

communities, the fathers were mostly at home with family when they weren't out fishing. Social features in Cortez were not extreme. In other words, they were somewhat lax. I don't mean that people didn't have a good time. Because a few friends would get together this way and enjoy this form of entertainment. Some another form of entertainment and what have you. All of 'em loved music. My daddy, I give him credit for having a nice voice. They would get out in the evenings and get together and sing.

Music that existed from what they had heard. In other words, they didn't have any written music to go by or songs to go by. They would just sing from ear and enjoy it. I know Papa got us a Victrola. You'd crank it up and put records on. Oftentimes on a weekend I've seen him go into the living room, lift the lid, put on a record, crank it up and sit there and listen. When that record was finished, turn it over, play the other side. Get another record. An hour, two hours at a time just listening to the music. No conversation. Just listen to the music. Us kids out playin', mother around about the house doin' her bit.

I 1: Did your father play any instrument?

R: No sir.

I 1: And your mother?

R: No. My father got us, mainly my older sister, a big upright piano. When she got on the keyboard I cleared the house. I was highly entertained somewhere else. There was a music instructor that came by boat from over on the island. Mrs. Jones. I think that was once a week, if I recall correctly, to give my sister music lessons.

I 1: I wanted to go back to the other types of fishermen. You don't remember then, seeing any Bahamian fishermen in Cortez or Cuban fishermen visiting or coming through do you?

R: I remember seeing boats out in the Gulf.

I 1: Cubans or Bahamians out there fishing?

R: Yeah. That existed until not too long back. When they put that 12 mile limit that ran 'em offshore. Now I think it's a little stronger than that.

I 2: Were there any black fishermen in Cortez?

R: No, wouldn't allow 'em. No, mackerel fishing as I relate it, was primarily at night. So when the mackerel run was on every able bodied seaman went to sea. And that left the women and children at the mercy of only a few men for protection. And so they chose to have it that way.

I 2: There was one Cuban man we heard about. Do you remember Jose Mora?

R: Well, he lived in Cortez.

I 2: What do you remember about him?

R: He was small and he made coffee that was so thick you could hardly drink it. But I never did drink coffee. All the members of my family did, but not me. I remember Mr. Joe Mora. That draining system, put the coffee in there and pour hot water over it and forget it for awhile, let it filtrate. And it would turn sledge black. I remember him.

I 2: Did he speak with a Spanish accent?

R: Not too bad. The way I feel about it.

I 2: But you could tell he was ...?

R: Yeah, he had the accent. But he was a nice, easy-goin' man. I was young but I can still remember him.

I 2: Did you ever hear him play music?

R: No, I don't recall that. I'm sorry. If I did, I've forgotten it. I don't know what form of instrument he might have played unless it was a guitar. Ya know, Mexico and Latin American counties and Cuba. They love their string instruments.

I 1: Did he have a beard?

R: Yes sir, he did.

I 1: Let's go back and talk a little bit about your young days in Cortez. What was life like in Cortez when you were a young person? What did you do to play in Cortez?

R: I repeat, the shoreline was unimproved other than walkways

going through the net racks or the buildings. And so as young boys we'd play around the shoreline and in the summer time we were worse than a bunch of ducks out there in what we called the sluice. We'd get in that sluice and play for hours. Swim around out there. And some of the teenage boys or young grown fellas they would find our clothes and tie 'em in knots and sprinkle water all over 'em to tantalize us. Make us have to go through an ordeal to get 'em untied so we could put 'em on.

I recall that I had a board about two feet long and somewhere, maybe from my father, I got to make it pointed like the bow of a boat and we'd pull it with a string. And we made kites and flew kites.

I 1: Who were some of the children you remember growing up with in Cortez?

R: There's only one lady out there now that I went to school with out there and that's Mrs. Ruth Culbreath. She was a Mora before marriage. Then the others are deceased.

I 1: What were their names though?

R: Well, there was Gray Fulford, Buddy Adams, Man Adams, Macie Guthrie, Audrey Guthrie, Leslie Guthrie. There was a Lowe family that lived there for awhile and then the Culbreaths. The Green boys.

I 1: As a group, did you do things together most of the time as kids? Did you have activities where you would get together with a bunch of other kids?

R: Yes. Somebody would have a birthday. No elaborate deal but a get together and whoop it up. Play baseball. Get twine from our fathers and make a baseball out of it.

I 1: That was your baseball?

R: Yeah. That was a baseball. Get an old board someplace for a bat.

I 1: But there were enough kids to have baseball games?

R: Yes. However, unfortunately they weren't all the same age. So you had some young sprouts and you had some teenagers. So there was quite a span there age wise.

I 1: Did the girls play baseball also?

R: Yeah. I remember one person. She's deceased now. Macie Guthrie. You've heard the expression tomboy. Well, she was a regular tomboy. She'd play marbles, she'd play baseball, she'd build kites. I can reminisce beautifully about those things. I didn't always have it my way, but my oldest sister was the first girl from Cortez to go to high school. And my father bought her a Model T Ford. She was two years older than I. So I went to Ballard School here in Bradenton through the eighth grade because my father thought it advisable for me to go on even though I wasn't very big, just in case some form of trouble. Because the road was non-paved. Of course, the roads were just ruts. But it wasn't long before it was paved.

Then a little later, I can recall Audrey Guthrie went to high school and rode in with my sister and I. Then went over, in high school, to where the old administrative building is now, and I was in the first class to graduate from high school on the west side, Manatee High School. I've got my yearbook. I still have it.

I 1: Were you treated any different being from Cortez? Did they view people from Cortez as being different?

R: You mean the people in town?

I 1: Yes.

R: I'll have to say yes. They viewed us as a little bit on the negative side. Social wise they didn't think or feel that we were on their level. But that finally vanished. But I don't think completely. I think there's still a little thread of it here and there. But I know when I first started to school it prevailed pretty strong. But I repeat, I got in with the crowd in town and wound up with some good friends in town. There's only one person that I can think of that he and I were friends, that's Carl Chilson. We fraternized together late years in high school. Sam Murphy, son of Judge Murphy. He and I were runnin' buddies for awhile.

I 1: Well, after you graduated from high school, is that when you started fishing in Cortez?

R: No. At that time I went into the fish house with my father. I regretfully announce that my father had no formal education and he relied upon someone else to do his figuring and bookkeeping. So I did that and it makes me recall an incident when Captain Nate Fulford chose to

drown himself.

It came to light for very small reasons. So, I was over and diving. We were trying to find his body and then my father called me. This was on a Saturday. I don't recall the date, but I recall the day. It was on a Saturday and my father called me because it was just a short distance. Not quite as far as that house over there from his fish house. I went over there to figure up and Edgar Green was the person who located the body and it scared him nearly to death. He came up and nearly tore the side off the boat getting in. I can appreciate that fact because I've never experienced it once but of course, I was grown then.

My father was paid a lefthanded compliment. That's kind of a crude expression, lefthanded compliment. But it was referred like that. That if my father had had an education, that he would have ruled Cortez. Well, my father had a pretty sharp brain, I'll give him credit and he could figure but not with figures. Mainly he could figure. He had a foresight. Regrettably, I'd be a lot better off if I had listened to my father in some of the advice he tried to give me.

But in so many cases young people, their parents are not as smart as they. And I guess that applied to me at that particular time, for which I regret. Things finally turned out alright.

I 1: This is when you came in then and started working at the fish house? You started working the books and everything?

R: And there's another first I can mention about our family. My father started the first fishery in Cortez to ship to northern markets. He had the first Model T Ford that was in Cortez to transport fish and ice and other general things. My sister was first to go to high school, the first girl. I was the first boy. And I was the first person to drive a truck from Cortez, Florida to northern markets to deliver fish.

I 1: And where did you deliver that fish?

R: Savannah, Georgia.

I 1: Clear to Savannah.

R: Yes sir.

I 1: How did your father establish that connection with

Savannah? Do you remember?

R: Well, back prior to the delivery by truck, there was correspondence and telegrams. The telegraph system was relied upon considerably because the telephone service at that time is nothing like it is today. So, the names of these people who would desire seafood, naturally worked its way to him through various channels and vice versa. We had been shipping fish there in barrels and back at that time no vans, no boxes. The fish were packed systematically with ice in a, shall I say, three-fourths of a box. The tail section was left open and then filled in with boards, like 2 x 8s. Then you had a tarp to go over the top. But no vans like now.

Naturally, the roads back then are nothing like they are now.

I 1: How long did it take you to make that trip? Do you remember?

R: About 10 hours.

I 1: Ten hours. Did you have to re-ice on the way up there?

R: Generally, no. Because this was overnight. They'd load the fish late in the afternoon.

I 1: What type of fish were they?

R: Primarily mullet.

I 1: So then you started working in the fish house with your father. In what year was that?

R: I finished school in '30. So it was '30.

I 1: In 1930. And this was still the fish house he had originally ...?

R: See, I had been helping prior to that. Mr. Willis Adams was the manager of my father's business for several years. And something happened and my father dismissed his services. But in the meantime, I was workin' down there on weekends helpin' out. Getting familiar with the operation.

I 1: Did your father pay you a wage at that time?

R: Oh, yeah.

I 1: This is not the original fish house that he started.

R: This is the one after the hurricane.

I 1: Where was this fish house located?

R: I thought I answered that question earlier.

I 2: There was one destroyed in the storm, right?

R: Yes, but the one that one was destroyed in the storm of '21 that's when I stated that the fish prior to that were either dispatched to St. Petersburg or Sarasota. But it was after the storm of '21 that my father built a fish house on the shoreline, or connected to the shoreline by dock. But the original one, or his first one, was not connected to the dry land. It was across the sluice, out in front of Fulford's over there. Did I make myself clearly now?

I 1: Yes.

R: So Denver and I was in command of the company, if I may use that expression. I told my father, this was in the summer time when sales were slow and production was slow too because the good God above governs that ... and I told my father I thought it would be a good idea if I made a good will tour up in Georgia and talked with the current customers and maybe promote a little more business with new customers. He said if you think it'll help, go ahead. So I made the trip. And that's when I made my connections to go in business in Corneal, Georgia. And so I came home and told my father what I had found and I thought the potentialities were there and he said, take it. He said, if you think it's advisable, go ahead. So I opened Corneal Fish and Oyster Company's doors on the 15th day of July, 1933. And I operated it for 18 years and then sold out and came back to Cortez. Then I got involved down there. I was semi-retired, not doin' anything. Lookin' for something. In no hurry to do anything. I go talkin' to the fellas down there and I told 'em, ya know they seemed to be just satisfied with the price of this, the price of that. Something about this or something about that.

And so I said why don't you fellas get together and go in business. Well, then fortunately I got so wrapped up in it until we decided to form a co-op and we did. The Cortez Fisheries, Inc. The majority of the fellas wantin' to go into the Co-op didn't have any money to

put in the till and I wound up financing most of it. Where I made a big, big blunder was not freezing all assets for a minimum of two years.

So, the first thing ya know some of 'em got to sayin' they could do better elsewhere. I still contend to this day that that's one of the best things that ever happened in Cortez. If they would have just stuck to it. I'm gonna put in another plug about the conservation and preservation of the commercial fishin'.

Years ago, held a meeting out in that old schoolhouse building and they had these various organizations payin' dues here and this, and this, and this. But no concrete foundation, if I may use that expression. And I advocated to them and presented ... look, you're spending money this way and you've paid dues this way. Why don't you do this on somewhat of a benevolent basis? Pay the dues, put it in the bank, invest it in various ways to where it'll accrue money, accrue interest. Then some of the people that pay in it for years and years die and are not in much of a financial state to pay their funeral expenses. There's where the benevolent factor would come in.

Then when it came time for these people, the sports fishing element, to start giving trouble in this direction, or that direction, there would be money in the bank to retain an attorney to try to block it. Because you have the two elements, you have the commercial on your left hand, you have the sporting element on your right hand. Then, I don't mean this derogatory-speaking about the northerners that come down here, but I fancy them bein' in the middle. They'll come down here and they'll either bring a little _____ with them, or maybe they'll procure one here, or they'll rent one. They'll go out in the bay and end up not havin' much luck fishin'. A commercial fisherman come by with a net on his boat, they think they're gonna catch all there is in the bay, in the gulf, in nothin' flat. So therefore, they have a tendency to fall to the right and be with the sporting element.

But I'm not saying that the commercial fisherman is 100 percent correct. But he's more correct, in my opinion, than the sporting element. But what leads both fields is mankind himself with pollution.

Break

Tape 2 - Orie Williams

I 1: Orie, we were discussing earlier about the co-op that you helped begin in Cortez. Where exactly was that?

R: You are familiar with the Cortez Trailer Park. Immediately south. In other words, the north border of that and the trailer park, they bordered each other.

I 1: That's near the property that called Natalie Moore's property today?

R: Yes sir.

I 1: Who were members of the co-op at that time?

R: There was Dan Moore, Wilbur Lewis, Leslie Guthrie, Bernard Capo ... I'm sorry, I can't think of any more.

I 1: That's ok. I was wondering, can you explain a little bit about how the co-op worked? And how it was different from another fish house? And why you decided to start the co-op?

R: Well, in reality it was not a co-op. It was incorporated and was supposed to function accordingly. However, the reason, I assume that the reason for it's being referred to as the co-op was because there were units north of us and south of us where co-ops were instituted. But with us, it was a share-holding deal. However, the entire membership other than myself, was a commercial fisherman.

So, we got our heads together and my having had years of experience born and raised in Cortez, ran my father's fish house there for awhile, and I had a similar business in Corneal, Georgia for 18 years ... and they knew that I was pretty well abreast of the business and I knew that I was. I don't mean that egotistically please. I proved that I did know the business before that and after that. A little dissension came up for various reasons and ...

I 1: This is dissension among the fishermen that joined the co-op?

R: Yes. Their belief I guess was that I was overly anxious maybe in expanding. But I was building the company all the time and I knew it. I just don't actually know what was in their minds other than that they finally decided that they wanted to pull away and go someplace else.

Which was regrettable because even to this day I contend that it would have been wonderful had they stuck with me and stuck together. I know that it certainly cost me financially.

I 1: On principle then, the fishermen were to put in money to start the co-op. They would fish and sell their fish to the co-op. Were they to get a better price or was it that they would get money from the sale of the fish and the co-op would help them?

R: The price for the fishermen went up immediately.

I 1: Not only there, but at other fish houses?

R: Which constituted the other fish houses having to raise their price as well. From a monetary standpoint, it helped the entire village, all fishermen in Cortez.

I 1: Was there resentment from other fish houses?

R: Well, that couldn't help but exist. It was expressed, but couldn't help but be, naturally. When you have something going along smoothly and someone else sees that you're doin' good in friends or doin' the same thing and cut your hand comin' down, then naturally it has an ill effect. We all are prone to love that almighty dollar. Competition is competition irregardless of what field it may be in and competition in many cases is a life saver so to speak to the consumer.

Therefore, things balance themselves off and so it's unfortunate. I repeat, that the organization couldn't carry on.

I 1: What were some of the other fish houses in Cortez at that time?

R: There was A.P. Bell Fish Company, Fulford Fish Company, Star Fish Company and Bayshore Seafoods. That was why Mr. _____ Guthrie _____.

I 1: Was Bayshore then at the end of 119th where it is today?

R: That was Mr. Guthrie's Bayshore Seafood was sold out and the name changed. Mr. Lewis, Wilbur Lewis, opened the fish house and that was Bayshore Seafood on 119th.

I 1: So where was Mr. Guthrie's Bayshore Fish located?

R: In the building that was started as Star Fish Company initially was built, immediately west of my father's fish house which was at the bay end of 124th Street. Then years later Mr. Millis moved over to where the current Star Fish Company is located. The place finally wound up part of A.P. Bell Fish Company.

I 1: Let's go back and talk a little bit about the co-op. Because as I was mentioning to you earlier, there's been a problem that I read in literature with co-ops forming among fishermen. Why do you think co-ops have such a difficult time succeeding with commercial fishermen?

R: To explain it in one word, express it in a blanket fashion, jealousy. I hate to use that term, but it's quite difficult for me to explain what my thoughts are because I want to be correct in my thinking and in my expression, particularly so. There seems to be a tendency among fishermen to be a little bit jealous of each other, one who out caught the person for the week or the day or the night, variation of catches pound-wise.

And that could go on and on, so to speak because jealousy can cover quite a broad field. But I certainly don't mean to hurt any of their feelings in any way when I say that because it applies to me as well. I'm not the pot callin' the kettle black. I know that for awhile when I commercial-fished, I did it for a living and I wanted everything I could get from it. So, I tried to work hard and I tried to produce my end of the line in order that the paycheck would be larger which was the basic thought, finances to live, to survive.

It is unfortunate that these organizations are tryin' to work their way out and in to begin with, because it is a proven fact in many fields that you can't have multi-managers. And that applies particularly so to small businesses I'll say. Not large, mammoth corporations. But where some members get dissatisfied because of something that the manager did or said and they feel as if he or she ... back in those days it was all hes, no shes ... and they thought they could do better, or thought he did wrong this way or that way. But no one is perfect. All of us are prone to make mistakes now and then. That's a true statement, not a hearsay. I've made mistakes. I made a mistake when I got involved in that. I cost me heavily financially.

But I went to work and tried to re-establish, on my way

back in.

I 1: So this co-op failed. It didn't work. So, what did you do after that time?

R: I commercial-fished some. I got some equipment and built docks. I built a steel barge and went into the hydraulic dredging business. I built a railway system in Cortez at the Cortez fisheries site, operated that for awhile.

I 1: There was a railway system for what purpose?

R: It was to drydock boats for repairs, or painting the bottoms or repairing the hulls.

I 1: Were you doing the repairs and painting?

R: No, I didn't do that. That was up to the boat owner. But generally speaking, they captain of the boat, or the owner of the boat, had crew members and the crew members would do the cleaning of the hull and painting of the hull. But if there was woodwork to do, they generally had to call in someone ... help from someplace.

I 1: So this was about the late '40s?

R: No, this was in '52, '53.

I 1: How much would you charge a fisherman to haul his boat out at that time, do you remember?

R: It was based upon the length. So much a foot.

I 1: How did you haul them out?

R: The railway ran down into the water, railroad rails. And then a powered winch to pull 'em up. What they called a cradle. The boat would sit on a cradle and the cradle naturally was on wheels and you'd just roll it right on up onto dry land. But I ventured into various things, trying to get back on my feet again. I finally decided that with my knowledge of seafood was where I belonged and I should never had stopped. I should never have deviated at all.

I opened up Suncoast Seafoods and I was a purveyor primarily to restaurants. I continued to buy some seafood from dealers in Cortez and elsewhere depending upon the demand and the possibility of procurement. With the restaurant traffic I sold an awful lot of imported seafood.

I 1: At that time you did?

R: Yes. Back then there was supposed to be statistics that 4/5 of the seafood consumption in the United States was imported. I know that I handled a lot of imported products, particularly so shrimp and lobster tails and Seoul. Dover Seoul, Danish lobster tails, South African lobster tails, a lot of scallops were imported as well. Mammoth amount of shrimp. I even got involved with some fresh water shrimp, but they didn't go to the consumers. People didn't like 'em. But I understand there's been better development since then. Different species of shrimp. But when I was in business and handled some of them they were shorter than the saltwater shrimp and more blunt. Their bodies were larger, but they just didn't have the taste, it wasn't there.

I 1: What year was this approximately?

R: Say, '63.

I 1: This is in '63 when you opened up Suncoast ...?

R: No, I opened it up before that.

I 1: About '63 when you started handling a lot of imported seafoods?

R: Yes.

I 1: And where was Suncoast located?

R: Right at the end of the bridge, going across Cortez Bridge on the north side where there's a small marina-like place there now.

I 1: Annie's Bait and Tackle? Right near there?

R: Yes. When I was there Herbert Taylor had a bait and tackle place. I don't know who owns it now. I got to the point where ... the economy of our country was in good shape. Hopefully, I am correct by that term. But things had begun to change particularly so with employment. People began to change and seemingly not appreciate their jobs. Dependability began to wane. They would show if they wanted to and if they didn't want to they wouldn't show. I don't know, the good God has always looked after me beautifully for 83 years. I give Him credit for giving me the forethought that it was time to throw in the white towels. I put my business up for sale. Nobody could come

up with the necessary amount of money for me to be protected. They wanted to buy on a shoestring and sell my inventory and pay me in order to finance the deal. So I wouldn't do that. So I liquidated.

Thought I was gonna retire. And so to speak, I did. But yet some of my beautiful accounts, restaurant owners, called me saying we need this, we need this bad. Help us out. Stories like that. Three different times I went back into business briefly because they had been wonderful to me with their accounts and I appreciated it and I just felt as if I should reciprocate in that fashion and help 'em out. So I just gradually weaned myself away. Then I got in it deeper again.

I went to Cortez one day just to say hello and maybe pick up some fish to take home for dinner. I got in a conversation with Wilbur Lewis, referred to by everybody in that neighborhood as Bur, and he asked me if I thought a retail place at his place would be profitable. I informed him that I definitely thought so because the people love seafoods, the local people and the people in town and the visiting northerners who come down. So I said I don't know how in the world you can go wrong.

And the story wound up, or the visitation rather, that I would draft a floor plan for his building. And when I submitted that floor plan to him he approved it and then in a nice way he threw it in my lap to look after having the building built. But we were friends and I didn't mind. I wanted to help people in Cortez and help in general and I wanted the village to prosper. Then, about the time the building was finished and ready for occupancy, Mr. Lewis went for a physical checkup and they put him in the hospital then and there. He wound up being diabetic and so I stayed. I wouldn't run off and leave him. I kept trying to get him to get someone to take over since I wasn't lookin' for a job. And it wound up, tryin' to be a good Samaritan, that I worked for him for 18 months.

I'm happy to relate that the business thrived. Of all the thousands of dollars of seafoods that I sold for him, which was a restaurant purveying deal that I had retired from, when I left there, there was only one account that I was concerned about and it was minor. Only $75.00. So I don't know whether he ever collected that or not. But I was quite elated over that record and I will have to admit that I was.

I 1: You seem to express a lot of concern for the fishermen of

Cortez and the people of the community, and have tried in various ways to help them. Why is that?

R: I can't help but say that I feel as if the commercial fishermen are being exploited. There are various viewpoints by various people and I do not mean this in any ill-malice to the visiting northerners, whether they come for a short time or have come and located here. They have a tendency to feel that when they go out in a boat to fish with hook and line and they see a commercial fisherman come along with a net upon his boat, they think they're gonna catch 'em all, or have caught nearly all of 'em.

They disapprove and speak negatively. Then there is the sport element. Each is against the other and as of today it's like a ping pong ball. It is batted back and forth, back and forth, each accusing the other of various things and believing that the other is responsible. In my personal opinion, both parties have the right conception at times and both are responsible for some things at times. But basically it's mankind. The waterfronts have been developed to destroy the habitat for marine life. The fluids that are goin' into the bay and into the rivers, various bodies of water, you'll have to admit are highly polluted today. And the commercial fisherman cannot catch 'em all. The sporting fisherman can't catch 'em all. But the pollution can destroy a large percentage of them.

I know places in the bay where fishermen won't even go because of wastewater. The bay bottom has been ruined. The commercial fisherman didn't do that. The sport fisherman didn't do that. I go back to mankind. All of the herbicides, sewerage plants has brought devastation to a great extent in the waters that produces the smaller marine life. And they're destroying the bay bottoms, acres upon acres. So therefore, this is a debatable issue that I'm dwelling upon and I realize it fully. Some people who may hear this will agree, some may condemn it. And they have their own way of thinkin'. That's their prerogative, to let them think what they may but don't feel ill towards me. I just express one man's opinion.

I 1: You know that commercial fishermen are being portrayed in the media at times as being resource abusers. How do you feel about commercial fishermen and their relationship to the environment? Do you think they abuse their environment?

R: There are many barrels of apples and as the expression

goes, every now and then you'll find a bad apple in a barrel. I can't help but say that this applies a little bit to the commercial fishing phase. But, the majority try to adhere, they try to do what's right, they know that their livin' is based upon their production. And if they don't produce, they don't get a paycheck. So, consequently it's a forced issue with them in one sense of the word. But knowing them as I have for all these years I still contend that the commercial fisherman is not trying to down the recreational phase of it, and the sporting element can have their fun, yes. So it's a question now, I guess, of the teams debating and seeing who's gonna win. But I can't help but feel that the commercial fisherman is headed for the exit at a slow walk because he's out numbered. And so, what's gonna keep him surviving is the fact that the State of Florida, in my opinion, cannot close the door to the commercial fishermen. It means too much to the people for food, to say nothing of the man making a living for he and his wife and children. Maintaining a home. So I don't know what form of education it might take, but the sporting element should be a little bit more flexible in degree. But generally speakin' it's more of an element. There's a million programs, ya read it in the newspapers, various articles and they're up to date. Commercial fishermen are up to date by modern communication. So they're just gonna have to bend a little here and bend a little there on either side and keep the ball rolling.

Because I am perterbed and I will admit it, that they have put such restrictions upon the production or catchin' of mullet. Why, having been born and raise din Cortez, I love mullet. That's the number one fish for me. I still have two small gill nets, but they've put such fines and restrictions and regulations upon the catchin' till I'm afraid to go in a boat. Afraid of gettin' caught, fined, this, that and the other.

When I'm not out there to make a living, I'm going out to get something to go on my table for food. So I will admit freely that I'm a little preterbed about it, but since I'm retired ... for the fellas who are tryin' to make a livin' in that direction, let them carry the ball.

I 1: Let's go back a little bit and talk about Cortez when you were young and growing up there, or in your later life. You mentioned that you had a reputation for being pretty mean. What did you mean by that?

R: Little minor things. I don't mean any criminal offense or

federal cases or anything of that nature. I was just all boy. I repeat, the good God's been good to me. I've been healthy all of my life until I had that little accident with that column and right today the doctor tells me I'm in good shape.

I 1: I just wondered if that was kind of your disposition when you were a young man and if you had a mean streak in you at times, or if it was just something that you said?

R: That was just an expression that's not a glorified expression, and not a polished expression, but an everyday expression that was used around Cortez. No, just to show you an illustration. I had two friends out at Cortez and we each had a car. One of the fellas was someplace out here in the County and said he saw a watermelon patch. Said, let's go steal some watermelon. And so it wound up that we went in my Ford. He led us out into the woods, this trail road, goin' between trees and so forth and said stop here. I got cold feet, I wouldn't go in because that wasn't my cup of tea. My parents taught me better than that. And so I wouldn't go in. So they left me there in the car by myself. Every pine tree that I looked at there was a police officer right behind it. So they came back in a little while and one of them had his hand wrapped up with this handkerchief. And the other said Orie, let's get him to the doctor right fast. He got in a bear trap. Well, I started that Ford and was weavin' out of there at as rapid rate as I possibly could to get him to the doctor and when we got out of the wooded area and got on the pavement, they started laughing. They had just pulled a trick on me. But it scared the fire out of me, I'll tell ya. But we didn't get any watermelon.

I 1: You said earlier while we were eating that the fish houses when you were young, not only provided ice to the fishermen, but they provided ice to the households of the fishermen that worked there. Is that true?

R: I'm gonna modify that statement some please. Before I go way back, let me go more currently. The laws in the State of Florida now governing the commercial fisherman, they have to take ice with them when they go fishing. When I was a young boy, no such thing was ever thought of or heard of. They'd go out fishing, and naturally they tried to protect it from the sunshine, but they would go fishin', they'd come back in and the fish house would accept their fish. Now they can't do that. The fish will spoil hurriedly. That's the reason for the State

imposing that law about fish _____, so the fish can be put upon ice immediately after being pulled out of the water.

Now, to me. I refer back to pollution. Something is causing that, but I can't say for sure that I'm correct. I just surmise it.

I 1: When you were young and fishing, you would never ice those fish down. They didn't spoil?

R: No. No. That has developed in recent years where the pollution has taken over so badly. Now, I'll go back to the earlier part of your question. Yes, the fish house that accepted say John Doe's fish, his home was supplied with ice free of charge. Whoever wanted to go get the ice, got it. Some member of the family, maybe he or some child or something. But that was before electric current and everyone had ice boxes in their homes. But they didn't have any ice bill to pay. An ice truck peddled ice to all the fish houses.

That existed until after the storm in '21 and just when that died I can't tell you. I assume that it died with the electric boxes takin' places of the ice boxes.

I 1: Talk a little bit about the fish house and the agreements with fishermen. Did fishermen fish for a particular fish house all the time? And what did the fish house provide to the fisherman?

R: A particular fish house maybe would have five, six, eight captains. I'll refer to them as captains. The heads of the crews. If I may, I'll go into detail a little bit there. The captain had the boat, he had the nets, and the fish that they caught, dollar value, would be divided percentage-wise among them. So, going directly to the dealer, the various captains could and some did, deal directly with fishing supply dealers such as the netting, the lids, the floats, the lines, the mending twine, etc. But generally speaking, the captain would tell the fish house operator, I would like so and so. I would like so and so. Give him an order. He in turn, would order and then that billing would be charged to this captain's account.

When I was young I know that it existed for many years, that a percentage was paid on that account based upon the production of fish that was caught by that captain and his crew during the week. Give ya a hypothetical case:

we will just say this captain and his crew produced monetarily $300.00 worth of fish. One third or $100.00 would go to the captain for his equipment. Then the other two thirds or $200.00, the remaining $200.00 ... sometimes the gas would be taken off before even the captain got his one third. Or some would figure it to come off of the two thirds. Irregardless of that, we'll just say the expenses ran $20.00 so we can have round figures to work with.

That would leave $180.00. Well say, there was a captain and two members. That would be divided three way. That would be $60.00 for each of the crew members and $60.00 more for the captain. Now, that was the way they figured. They called 'em settlement sheets. There would be the various catches during the week notated, the amount and what kind of fish. And the price is all figured up and summarized in the corner for a total of X number of dollars and divided on the basis of which I just related.

I 1: So, you'd fish all week and then you'd settle up at the end of the week?

R: Saturday was generally payday.

I 1: Did fishermen stay with one fish house then?

R: Pretty much. Now, the way that generally worked ... if John Doe was fishing for this particular fish house, and he had the fish house operator to buy him X number of dollars worth of supplies, well maybe those supplies weren't paid for, the percentage of deduction did not pay for those supplies to that man's account. Well, if he wanted to change and go to another fish house for some reason, the fish house that was takin' him on was supposed to pay his bill off and put it on their books.

I 1: Did that happen most of the time?

R: Yes. That really was adhered to so far as I know.

I 1: About how many crews do you remember being in Cortez at the height of when you had fishing crews?

R: I would say 15 would take care of the major and the minors. And the minors, maybe I could explain that. Every once in awhile you would have someone that thought they knew more about the production or catching of fish. And they would get jealous. Go back to the word jealous. He's getting so and so. If I buy a net and get me a boat,

I get it all. They would try, but they would never make a shinin' light. Make a dim light. Production, according to his ability because there's more knowledge involved in the habit of the various fishes and the catchin' thereof than might appear on the screen.

Those fish are pretty smart. So the captain had to outsmart 'em with his crew.

I 1: What's it take to be a successful fisherman?

R: Knowledge of the fishing habits. Knowledge of the bay bottom, the gulf shorelines. Numerous things. Working with the tide and the moon. There's an unlimited number of things that depends upon the grading of a commercial fisherman. What I mean by the grade is, what his knowledge is and the way he produces. There's much to know.

I 1: Who were some of the better fishermen in Cortez?

R: Way back when I was nothin' but a small boy, Captain Jim Guthrie was successful. Captain Nate Fulford, Captain Billy Fulford, and I'll bring my father in. I know my father was in there. Those people were replaced by younger, due to death or what have you, mostly death. Different ones would take over in that field.

I 1: How did they learn to become a good fisherman?

R: By experience. By going and seeing and learning first-hand. You cannot be told how to handle a gill net for instance. You can learn and be pointed out some principles, but to apply that you have to have actual experience. I repeat, there's an art to it. There's an art to it. Where to stand in your boat under certain conditions to retrieve a net on account of the wind, on account of the tide. All of those factors have to be taken into consideration unconsciously. But they know it from experience. They learn it from application, being involved.

I 1: Is it dangerous out there?

R: Not unless you make it so. Good fishermen know their boats. They know the weather. They know what they're supposed to do and not supposed to do. And they try to go that avenue of not doing what they shouldn't do. And that's what constitutes their life. In many cases these

people get destroyed in the gulf or in the bay. It is because they don't know enough about the water and the boats and so they get capsized and drown.

However, once in a great while, even a good fisherman or good captain can be caught and get in trouble. But that is rare anymore due to communications. The boats are equipped with radios and the marine forecasts they listen to religiously and govern themselves accordingly. However, even with the modern communication that we have today, look at this recent blow. It caught people napping because they weren't advised of the severity. So that hurt. Even our Governor has wondered why that happened. So you can't blame the individual when he didn't anticipate it.

But when I was a young boy, they had barometers but they didn't have telephones and radios and televisions and all that ... bad weather's comin' and this and this and this. Experience, and watching and studying the conditions year after year put them on the alert.

I 1: Do you think they were on the alert for the '21 hurricane?

R: In a minor way, yes. I know my father didn't lose any boats.

I 1: I know that you said they had already tied them up and had prepared for it.

R: Yeah. Some of them did and some of them didn't.

I 1: Going back to that hurricane, you said that after the devastation the salvage began. Could you tell us a little bit about what you mean when the salvage began?

R: The shoreline, generally speaking, was covered with net racks for drying the nets after being used. Then they had what they called camps. That was where off season nets would be stored, or general supplies pertaining to the operation. So those houses for storage had netting, various size nets and various kinds of nets to keep 'em away from the weather until such time they were called into service again.

Those were all blown down and washed down. And so, there was a lot of nets of various descriptions all in an entanglement around the posts that survived, just stickin' up. The buildings didn't survive, but numerous posts they were resting upon were still there with all this

entanglement. They had to get in there and salvage ... yes I know this net, I know it's mine because of so and so. No, that isn't mine because mine had so and so. They worked together and salvaged what they could and the best they could. Some boats were hurtin' pretty bad.

But generally speaking, the fishermen in Cortez didn't suffer much with their boats, as an all over picture, because they so to speak, smelled it comin'. So they took precautionary measures with their boats. Some of the flat bottom boat types, they would sink 'em so the waves would wash over 'em and wouldn't bother 'em. But in the storm of '21 there was hardly any flat bottom boats. Prior to the motorization of those fishing boats, it was sail. They called them skip jacks. They had a certain amount of round bottom. Naturally, they had a center board in the center. You understand what I mean by a center board?

I 1: Yes.

R: So they could pull that up when they didn't need it. They only used it when they were sailing to stabilized the direction and driftage.

I 1: How did they steer a skip jack?

R: By oar.

I 1: They didn't have a rudder in the back?

R: No. The rudder would jeopardize their operation because their gill net would be on the very back of the boat. The way that they would put the net out would be by poling oar. They'd pole the net out. They had what they called a staff which was attached to the end of the net. A round stick, say inch and a half to two inches in diameter and say five feet long, maybe six at the outside. And on the lead-line end of this staff, they had quite a bit of lead wrapped around it naturally to hold it down, the staff would float as best as it could. Naturally, the weighted end would stay to the bottom but the upper end would stay like that. They would take the cork end or the top end of the staff and press it down on the net so that the lead end would come up above the end of the boat and give it a pitch.

I 1: So that was let-go.

R: That was a let-go. Then they would go in their respective

directions. I go back to your question again. About the only way a fisherman can be taught to be a good fisherman is experience. I emphasize that strongly. You've got to get in there and do it yourself and get the feel of it. Like on a canvas. When I was painting you've got to get the feel of the brush. You've got to get the texture of the paint the way you want it. You can't become a good painter without a lot of practice, a lot of thought. The greatest thing in painting so far as my knowledge is concerned is being able to mix the various colors together to come out with the color you want. But it's a lot of fun.

I 1: Do you remember seeing skip jacks in Cortez Harbor?

R: Yes. But sailboats I don't recall too much because they were almost extinct by the time that I got up big enough to run around the docks. But I remember seeing a few of them, yes. I'd hear my father talk about 'em and one of the greatest sports in Cortez for the grown men in the early ages was racing sailboats.

I 1: They would race the skip jacks?

R: Yeah. They had a starting point right in front of Cortez and they would cross the bay towards the island. They had a marker to go around on the island side and they would race. Twenty five cents.

I 1: Twenty five cents was the prize?

R: Yeah.

I 1: That's interesting. I haven't heard that story about racing skip jacks before.

R: My father told me that they had two fellas that were hard to beat. But I'm happy to say that my daddy was considered the top notch in racing. Maybe because of his size. He never was very big. Never weighed over 145 pounds in his life wet. But that was Mr. Alvee Taylor and Mr. Willis Adams. He said they were heavy contenders.

I 1: Big racers?

R: I remember him telling about racing Mr. Adams one time and won. When they got back ... Mr. Adams was excitable like, getting all heated up and his voice would raise up and he'd throw in quite a bit of profanity ... so he was complainin' about this race. Well, Willis let's trade

boats. So they traded boats and my daddy still beat him.

I 1: So it wasn't necessarily the boat the won, just the captain.

R: There's an art to that too. That's been proven time and time again. But the Village of Cortez, frankly I regret selling out. Not that I'm displeased with where I'm living because my wife and I are happy here. We're surrounded by comforts that the good Lord has allowed us to accrue. But I miss the water. I miss Cortez and I'll admit it. I'm a pretty good ways from Cortez, that is road-wise. However, modern convenience is not too disturbing. There's nothing like being able to walk out of your house and in two minutes be down at the shoreline.

In a minute and a half be across to a neighbor that you've known for years and years. But we can't have everything.

I 1: You've lived elsewhere in the United States, in Georgia, and you've traveled a lot. As a young child you remember taking trips to West Virginia. Do you think Cortez is different from other places?

R: Well, I'll have to say yes in a major way.

I 1: In what way?

R: A lot of it is in the culture and a lot of it is the life of the fisherman. They dress different because years ago you couldn't see a fisherman with a pair of shoes on. It was too dangerous in a boat. But now that they have new forms of deck shoes they can get around in a boat with shoes on and they do. But when I was a boy you didn't see a fisherman with shoes on unless it was on Sunday.

I 1: Was it because the soles would get wet and they would get too slippery?

R: Well, let's face it. Shoes back in those days were large and bulky to get around in a boat. And then in those days a fisherman went overboard a lot. And to be overboard with those leather shoes and get back in the boat ... and sand and little shells would get in the shoes, so goin' barefoot was self preservation so to speak. I don't know, traveling educated me, yes. But years ago when you walked into the Village of Cortez as a stranger, you were not looked upon as something from outer space. People were friendly to ya, they would speak to ya and they trusted everybody. We didn't know what it was to lock the doors. We didn't lock

the doors. We didn't worry about somebody comin' in and takin' anything. Regretfully, that does not exist today.

There was one reason I left Cortez. Fella came into the house. Just lucky I had hid my money bag. Had five or six hundred dollars in it. Just hadn't gotten around to puttin' it all in one of my delivery trucks to send to the bank. I didn't like to send cash to the bank. So I just kept it around. Sent checks by the drivers as they were goin' by the bank, stop and make a deposit. Not that way anymore. But we traveled. I repeat, we could not set a destination to reach in any one day. You'd just start off and you traveled and you traveled and say 11:00, 11:30 we'd go into some town that was large enough to have a marketing place and stop. Whatever my mother wanted my father to get to prepare, then we'd get on the highway and travel until we found a place we could park, build a fire, cook and eat with water available and take off again.

At night, ya didn't know where ya was gonna sleep. I repeat, we slept in barns and churches and schools and you name it. One time we got stranded in bad weather and a farmer's house was big enough that he could accommodate us with bedrooms. No motels. No such thing as motels.

I 1: What would you sleep on if you slept in a barn.

R: On hay.

I 1: Did you have a blanket and a pillow?

R: Yes.

I 1: That was it?

R: Yeah, mostly. We carried pillows. We carried blankets and we carried cooking and eating utensils and staples in jars. We would buy as we would go along. I still have a scar on my finger right here where we came to a stream and this black fella was across the stream with a horse and buggy. He pulled the horse and buggy to one side so we could cross this stream and as we were goin' across the stream my father saw this muskmelon there by him. Pulled up alongside, ya want to sell that melon. Yes sir! I think my father gave him a quarter, the best I remember. This was in mid-morning. Came time for lunch and my mother sliced the melon around and here I take the rind, takin' a knife like that and chippin' it. She took it away from me one time. So when she turned her back I picked it up again. The only thing that saved the corner of my finger

there was the nail. But I turned it back. I got a verbal dressing down.

We would come to streams up in the mountainous country. Beautiful, cold, clear water. Stop and get something to drink, you know. It was wonderful. I enjoyed West Virginia. I talked with a cousin of mine a couple of nights ago who's still up in West Virginia and we used to enjoy so much goin' up there because there were two of my mother's sisters who married brothers. And there were four children in one family and three in the other. So when we went up there we had kids to play with, ya know. And harvesting time, they'd cut the hay and let it dry. They'd put it in shocks. They called them shocks, little mounds and then take a horse and drag it over to a given point where they were going to make a haystack. Us kids thought that was something else, riding the horse in those days. The horse knew more than we did. They knew where they were goin' and what it was all about. It was a lot of fun.

I 1: Speaking of horses. You told us a story about a white horse in Cortez. Could you tell that again?

R: The Culbreath family moved into Cortez not too long after the hurricane in'21. They had a white horse. This was in the summertime and I was gonna go fishin' with my father. And this was before daybreak. At that time they would want their time leaving Cortez to be at a certain place, about daylight. Therefore, oftentimes they would leave awhile before day. My mother had fixed our lunch in a metal bucket that lard had been purchased in. My father left the house a little before I and as I was walkin' from the house down to the dock, every time I'd hit with my right foot, I think it was my right foot, the bottom of that bucket would give a little clunk. Here that horse was stretched wide, wide, wide, sound asleep. But I saw the horse and that didn't frighten me. But when I got right opposite that horse and that bucket gave a clunk, that horse raised its head.

Now, I'm tellin' you I took off for the dock. I was jet-propelled. When I got to the dock I was breathing heavily, trying to catch my breath and my father said what's wrong with you. What are you breathing so hard about. I said, I was afraid you'd leave me. I wouldn't tell him then about that horse scarin' me nearly to death. Back in those days we didn't have much to laugh about, but we'd come up with some lu lu's quite frequently.

People in Cortez were clannish. I'll use the word clannish. I repeat, John Doe may not like Sam Brown over here especially, but they would speak and this and that and the other. But trouble? They would all rush. Fire? Had a bucket brigade in the wind. Sickness? Visitations, bring food in.

I 1: I want to talk a little bit more about that. But before I forget it, I wanted to ask you ... you said that when your parents first moved to Cortez that your mother helped a woman because she was pregnant. And later on while we were eating, you mentioned midwives. I was wondering about the story about your mother and Dr. Mohawk. You said there would midwives in Cortez and you said you remember one. What was her name?

R: Mrs. Nola Taylor. She was good and there's no telling how many births she helped with for years. She had a son, just one son, named Harry. He and I were a month apart in birth. I don't recall now which is the older. I can think of a story there.

I used to beat up on Harry some. And one day Mr. John Taylor was goin' by the house and he saw my mother and he requested that she speak to me about beating up on Harry. My mother told him, Mr. Taylor I've got a better solution than what you just suggested. You catch Orie, take your belt off, and give him a good one then he'll stop. Well, my mother told me that she told Mr. Taylor to catch me. He had been in an accident of some form and one of his legs had been broken and he walked with a limp. I'd see Mr. Taylor comin' or goin', I had business elsewhere. He didn't have a chance to get his belt on me.

I 1: Did Mrs. Nola Taylor assist in other health-related .... ?

R: Yes, sicknesses. When people would get sick Ms. Nola, so to speak, was the Village nurse. I repeat, Mrs. Taylor ... I don't think they were related, that was Alvee Taylor's wife Betty ... but she was good too about visiting and helping out in the house whatever she could do to help some of the younger children when the lady of the house might be sick and couldn't do. I go back and say that that clannism worked. It prevailed, yes.

I 1: You said that Mrs. Taylor assisted with you when you

were a child?

R: I don't know whether or not she was midwife to my mother or not, but I do know as I related a moment ago about Harry and I being just a month apart. But my mother at that time, she was frail and sickly. My mother told me that Ms. Nola nursed me at times.

I 1: Are there any other particular stories about Cortez that you would like to tell us?

R: Well, on the spur of the moment shall I say, I spent all except 18 years of my life mostly in Cortez and a lot of things happened. To relive that many years in a few minutes is rather difficult for me.

I 1: Do you consider Cortez your home?

R: Oh, yeah. I have no hesitancy whatsoever. No, that frequently comes up with me. I have no hesitancy whatsoever to relate that I was born and raised in Cortez, none. I take up for Cortez. Go back to my participation with the co-op. Prior to losing out financially, I was involved with various things. I revert back to Corneal, Georgia. I was a charter member in that Lion's Club up there and then when I came back down here I was a member of the Lion's Club on the island. I was a member of the Chamber of Commerce over there.

Back then, various municipalities, and I was elected as one of the directors over there and served in that capacity. That brings up a point.

The initial bridge across the bay, the Cortez Bridge, it got in bad shape. But I was a director and I brought it out in a meeting that the bridge was in deplorable shape and it wasn't gonna be too much longer before if they wanted it they were gonna have to salvage it out of the bay. I pointed out how the marine life had eaten some of the piles completely in two and then some were eaten upon badly because they eat like this ... near the average water level. So, I told them that I thought it was more severe than people might realize and Mr. Claude Adams was president of the Commerce at that time. He wanted me to serve as Chairman of the Committee and I told him I would appreciate it if he would appoint someone else, since I knew the condition and I was the one who reported to the meeting of the condition. So please relieve me of that and appoint someone else so he could get somebody else's viewpoint.

So he said I appreciate your thought there and will do so. Well, it created a storm in this County so to speak. They would not allow any car on the bridge when the school bus was going to or from. That was the condition of that bridge. It was referred to in the Bradenton Herald not very long ago about that incident ... closing the bridge down for the school buses.

Then I was with the volunteer fire department out in Cortez. I was president of the organization for awhile. I served on the Fire Commission Board for awhile. But when I got involved with the co-op and lost out financially it embarrassed the fire out of me and I withdrew from more or less everything. Number one, I wasn't able to attend and contribute monetarily because I was out there trying to get back on my feet again.

So the next thing I joined on the island ... I got in the Moose Lodge later. In later years.

I 1: Did you ever join the Organized Fishermen of Florida?

R: No sir. That existed later.

I 1: Do you remember any attempt to unionize fishermen in Florida?

R: Yes, but I'm not abreast of that try to elaborate upon it intelligently I don't think. I know that it was proposed to the fellas in Cortez but I had retired by that time. Or if I hadn't, I was planning to and then I was a dealer and not a fisherman. Consequently, I didn't get involved.

I 1: You haven't talked about it much, but how did you meet your wife?

R: Through a friend of mine at a party. Started from there.

I 1: When were you married?

R: We married in '80. She had been married before, so had I. But we get along beautifully. There's some distance between us age-wise, but she didn't want that to stop us, so here we are.

I 1: Did you have children with your first wife?

R: No sir. I regret that. I regret not having children.

I 1: How long were you married to your first wife?

R: I don't remember, to tell you the truth I want to forget it please.

I 1: You mentioned once ... you said something about women ... and you said of course, it used to be fishermen but now there are women. Do you remember any female fishers in Cortez? Women that fished?

R: I can only think of one on the spur of the moment. She's deceased. I'm sure that you know Julian Culbreath ... about his violin playin' and so forth. It was his wife. She had a motorized boat and would go out trout fishing. Madis. Wonderful cook. Boy she could cook up some dishes that wouldn't quit. Especially seafood. She could make a blue fish-type dish. It was basically blue fish and various other ingredients. Delicious. Superb. She did that for a pretty good while I think. But that's the only one that I could think of. See, she went alone. All by herself out there in that boat. But that's the only one I can think of. That reminds me of something.

When I was a boy and I got old enough to push the boat around, I would take my mother and two sisters in one of my father's pole boats. And we'd go out on the flats to gather scallops in the summertime. Scallops were in abundance. No problem. My mother stepped on a gamlet conk or part of a gamlet conk that went in through her foot, through the shoe. Because my mother did not go barefoot. Some of the women used to ... still do as far as that's concerned.

Anyway, that night she complained to my father that is was bothering her. She thought there was something in there. He tried to maneuver around and feel and push with a needle and tried to find something and couldn't. So, it healed over.

Tape 3

It didn't bother her. About a year later, on the opposite side of her foot it began to get sore and turn red, pink rather. And first think ya know, it came to a head. You know what I'm referrin' to, comin' to a head?

I 1: Yes.

R: And they picked that head and out jumped this little piece of _____, about half an inch long.

I 1: It worked its way all the way through her foot?

R: All the way across her foot. And I had a similar incident to happen to me when I had the dredge. I was walkin' the pipeline to go to the shore. I had been out to check on it for some reason. On the way back it was a little rough, pipeline movin' and I misjudged something and the floats were 55 gallon drums. They were latched with quarter inch rods to timbers goin' across, 4 x 4s.

Those rods were stickin' up some. You'd put the nut on there and tighten it down. I had one of these, called 'em then crepe soled shoes, the rubber type stuff. I stepped on one of those rocks and it went through my shoe and into my foot just a little bit. When I got to the shoreline, took my shoe off and just a few drops of blood. Thought nothin' about it and went on about my business. Well, it healed over. Went for a month or so, I don't recall exactly how long. But first thing ya know, it got sore. I go to the doctor, he lances the thing, makes it drain some and says no, I can't find anything in there.

So it healed up. Awhile later the same thing developed again. I go back to him a second time. Nothin'. It heals up again after he drained it. The third time when I went back Dr. Huth was up there. Retired, a very nice doctor, very well liked. Very popular doctor. I don't know how he got wind of it. But he came in there and he looked and he started pokin' and he fished a piece of that styrofoam. Then he apologized. Said if I had known in the beginning it was so deep there, I would have made an incision and gone in from the other side. But when he got that piece of styrofoam out it healed over, no trouble since then.

So, a lot of peculiar and unbelievable things happen in a lifetime. Going and coming.

I 1: Well, we're about done with the tape and I'll let you say something else about Cortez or your life there. If there's anything you'd like to say, now would be the time to say it.

R: I repeat, I have no hesitancy in relating that I was born and raised in Cortez. And the association with the people in Cortez throughout for the most part, has been

on the positive side for which I'm happy to relate. I wish all the people in Cortez that live there now, whether they are native or whether they have moved in and particularly so people like yourselves who are trying to preserve history ... so that the people in years to come will be able to listen and see about these various events that existed out there in my lifetime.

So, it's been a pleasure to sit here and talk with you and answer questions for you. I hope that it'll be of some benefit and the more the merrier. Thank you for your time.

I 1: Thank you Mr. Williams.