

**Richard L. Braasch Interview**

Sturgeon Fishing in Oshkosh

December 1, 2006

Conducted by Mr. Richard Ristow

*(R: identifies the interviewer, Dick Ristow. B: identifies the subject, Dick Braasch. Open brackets [ ] or bracketed words indicate that either a word or phrase is not understood, or that proper spelling for a word is unclear, in that order)*

**R: It's December 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 and I'm at Dick Braasch's house in Oshkosh, Wisconsin [ and we're going to be talking about his activities in sturgeon fishing for the] booklet that is being published. So here we go.**

**Dick, why don't you tell me about your family and your activities as a young guy along the lake here.**

B: Okay. You want to know when I was born? I was born in 1935. And I come from a family of five kids. And my mother and father were farmers but they got off the farm and my father worked at the Winnebago State Hospital. And he was also kind of a handy man, mechanic. And I think that's where I got a lot of my knowledge about building stuff and fixing stuff, and got into spearing with him.

My mother was like a home lady, housekeeper. And she worked part-time at Fernau's Roadside Market in the summertime.

**R: Is [ ]**

B: They are both of German descent. My mother was a Luepke from south of Oshkosh and her relatives were all fishermen and hunters.

**R: You always lived north of town here, near the lake?**

B: I've always lived north of town near Lake Winnebago. It's right off of the street by the State Hospital. We used to back there during the summertime and also wintertime fishing, hunting and swimming. And we used to fish off the shore, the high banks back there. And we also had a fish shanty that we ah, my dad, when we were kids would take down to the lake for us. And then we'd push it out and go fishing.

And I got into sturgeon fishing with my dad when I was, I used to tell the kids at school, nine years old. Anyway he was a sturgeon spearer but then he got out of it for awhile. And as I got older then I started, I worked at Fernau's Roadside Market as a kid. And I used to go out sturgeon fishing with them on weekends when they went. Charlie and Chuck Fernau, they were both big sturgeon spearers. They're both passed on now but I got most of my knowledge from them.

And as I grew older I built my own shanty. Now I can't remember exactly what year it was. But it was in the fifties. I think I went over to Poygan to the first spearing season they had over there. And we built the shanty out of two-by-twos and a wood floor. It had runners on, no wheels. And the sides were made out of cardboard and black roofing paper and then we put slats on to keep the paper on. And it was light enough, four of us could have lifted it up on, - Teddy Furman, he was a kid that I

fished with, or started fishing with – on his dad's pick-up truck. And they were farmers north of Oshkosh. And we took it over there on Poygan on the back of the pick-up truck.

And we cut the hole by hand which was natural. We chopped the holes in the corner by hand and then we had like an old hand wood saw that my dad sharpened and converted into an ice saw. We used that until I got a little bit older. Then I started fishing with Fernaus' and they had a group of maybe six, seven, eight guys. And Charlie Fernau made the shanties all on runners. And we had a trailer that we'd have to winch em on and then take em down to the lake. And they were made so that you could hook em all together and pull em. They bought a 1943 surplus Army Jeep for the farm and they used that in the wintertime. We pulled the shanties. It was small and light and they had their own bridge across the crack. And they used to start by the island, the big island, and go east. And I would fish with them on weekends when I was off school.

**R: You were still in high school then?**

B: I was still in high school, yeah.

**R: So how did it go from there then? Did there used to be a lot of fish back then?**

B: Well my first fish was a sixty-pounder with them. And when we went to Poygan we never got a fish over there. We never saw one. There weren't that many speared that I can recall. But then I was one of the guys that never saw that many fish. I probably got twenty sturgeon in my life. That's about it. Like I say, got a fish every year. I was never that lucky.

**R: How long have you been spearing?**

B: I've been spearing ever since I was, well you go back, I was seventeen when I had my own shanty.

**R: How old are you now?**

B: I'm seventy-one now. So it's got over fifty-five years, sixty years.

**R: So a little less than half the time you've been getting a fish.**

B: Yeah. Probably about fifty percent. But you hear guys that have gone twenty years or eighteen years and haven't got a fish.

**R: Tell me about some of the activities that you had, experiences on the lake that maybe are humorous or of interest to people that are going to be reading this book.**

B: In the early years we never got together and had a cookout like we do now. And I can remember having trouble crossing the crack. At those times we had our own bridge and it wasn't anything elaborate. Just a couple planks, blah, blah, blah, once in awhile the Jeep would slide off the planks.

One year, went in the crack. We always had a block and tackle and ropes and stuff along to pull it out. They were pretty self-sustaining. They pulled it out by themselves. And other than that it was just joking around, you know, razzing guys when they missed one.

Now when we get together we have a cookout right on the ice. And we got one of our guys, Ricky Bohnert, in the bunch that he's the comedian of the bunch. You know he does a lot of jokes on guys, razzing and anything humorous. I can't remember anything really humorous.

**R: What's the biggest fish that you ever speared?**

B: Sixty pounder.

**R: That was out...?**

B: That was on Winnebago.

**R: On the island, by the island here?**

B: Yeah. That year the water was gin clear. You could see, I'll bet you could see a dime, we were in eighteen feet of water. Charlie got a fish that day, Chuck got a fish and I got a fish. They were all in the sixty-pound range. The one I got was like, I'd say maybe couple feet off the bottom and we always had corncobs. We had two corncobs on a rod that we'd let down. That was our decoy. And they'd be comin along and you could see em, it felt like they were a mile away and they'd start comin up to that decoy. They'd come just like a submarine right to the decoy and then kind of level off. And you'd let em get about in the middle of the hole and spear em.

**R: How far did you have these corncobs off the bottom?**

B: Well we put em down maybe eight feet at the most maybe. Sometimes ten.

**R: So your strategy was to bring the fish up?**

B: To bring the fish up off the bottom, yeah. Most of the time. Lotta times they wouldn't even come off the bottom. They would stay, wouldn't even look at the decoys. I've seen em go through way on the bottom and just keep right on going.

**R: You still use the same strategy?**

B: Basically, yeah.

**R: But now you [ ] the decoy [ ] in the corncob.**

B: Right. Yeah.

**R: So what kind of a spear do you use?**

B: I have a flying barb now but years ago I used a, my dad said, "If you want to spear, you build one." He was handy. He built em out of pitchforks, five-tine pitchfork. And so I got me a pitchfork and he says, "Go at 'er." And I built my first spear out of a pitchfork and I still have it. It's a long time ago.

**R: I think I used it one year.**

B: Yeah, you used it as a spare.

**R: It didn't bring me any luck though. Probably all speared out.**

B: And the decoys, like I say my first decoys were cobs of corn on a rod. And then one year I made one out of a baseball bat, like a little two-foot baseball bat I found somewhere. I put fins on it, painted it yellow, blah, blah, blah.

**R: What's your favorite color?**

B: My favorite color probably is yellow. I would say yellow.

**R: Because it's the brightest or most attractive to the fish?**

B: I think it's brighter and they seem to, that's the one that seems to work for me. I got different colors that I put down. Green is good sometimes. Sometimes white, red with, red fins on it.

**R: Do you ever use more than one decoy?**

B: Yeah, I sometimes I use a big one and then I put a small one down. And once in awhile I use that as a jig, a swimming decoy. You yank it and then let it down and it kinda goes around in a circle. There's all kinds of different decoys that they use. I got a collection of some old ones

**R: Were you in the good old days part of the activity that guys would throw stuff on the bottom?**

B: Oh yeah.

**R: What was your favorite attractant then?**

B: We started out with noodles and eggshells and potato peels, er potatoes. You peel em and they show up in the water.

**R: Did the fish eat em?**

B: No, I think they were just for an, not an attraction but they were just so that you could see from the bottom.

**R: Reflection up.**

B: Then we went to that mill paper after awhile, that white mill paper? It came in rolls and you'd put it down with a stick. And now I have a PVC pipe. I've got like a big X. I got a joint in the middle and when I let it down I open it up with my gaff hook and then I just let it down on the bottom.

That's another thing. Everything I had, just about, is hand made. Even the gaff hooks I made years ago. Like I say, I made my spears. I made shanties. I built my own shanties.

**R: How many shanties have you built now?**

B: Um, it's in the forties. Now like we've graduated to the wheels.

**R: Is the wheels something that you guys have created or is that something that you've seen and...?**

B: We saw it on the lake, different versions of it and we just perfected it, made it a little bit better. And each year we've improved it. I think the best that we've ever had is we used to have a pipe goin through there with a coupling. And some of those couplings would get tight, blah, blah, blah. And guys would complain. And anyway we got it now so we just slide the arm where the wheels are attached to and that can be removed if you have to fix it, you know. I built I think, well I've built shanties for our sturgeon banquet, eighteen shanties for our sturgeon banquet. Plus I built two for Fond du Lac's banquet. And I built one, I think, for the Appleton banquet one year.

So I've been in it a long time and built a lot of shanties.

**R: What is the size of your shanties?**

B: The shanty now is about five-foot by eight foot. And the reason we built em like that is so we could get em across the Otter Street's bridge. Sometime we don't use the bridge. We go this side of the crack over here back of the State Hospital where we spear, or down south. But if you go on the big lake, you used to cross the bridges by Otter Street and we made em so they'd just fit on the bridge.

**R: What is your favorite area to spear, rock, mud?**

B: Mud is my favorite area.

**R: Is there a certain depth that you like stay with?**

B: Well I like to stay, I've, most of the years I've fished behind the State Hospital and up by the big island. I'd like to stay in that eleven or twelve feet. The years when it's clear water we move to deeper water but I still think I got most of my fish in eleven to twelve feet.

**R: And mud or rock?**

B: Mud. Mostly mud.

**R: Are most of them on the north end here?**

B: Yeah.

**R: When you refer to the island, you are referring to?**

B: Garlick Island? It's up north of the State Hospital there.

**R: Have you had any foolish activities or known of any illegal things you've heard of over the years?**

B: Yeah, you hear, like the biggest one was the year they were fishing em. The water was, you couldn't see down two or three feet. And guys were getting fishin. You didn't know how in the heck they were getting em. And they were hookin em, you know, fishin and then they'd bring em up and spear em. And I know it went on before that even. Years ago I can remember a shanty out by the island. The

guys I knew well and they did that same thing. They hook and bring em up and spear em. I never was that lucky; I could never hook one! *(Laughter)*.

**R: You don't have to worry about it. [This is a one-year] reprieve.**

B: Limitations, yeah.

**R: Other activities and things you do? You hang around with these guys that you spear with? Is this kind of a club?**

B: Yeah, we hang around. The guys like... I'm president of the Sturgeon for Tomorrow Chapter in Oshkosh. And like I say we built a shanty every year. And then I have a shop down from my house and the guys get together when we built the shanty and we'd have a feed down there. And they'd come out and help and it's guys that I know and I fish with. I've built shanties for just about every one of the guys that I fish with. They all have the shanties with the wheels. I think, yeah, they all have wheels on.

**R: Well your shanty's got a tip down floor over the hole so guys use it for perch fishing too.**

B: Yeah, you can use it for perch fishing too. Not tip down, the wheels just let it down like a cantilever.

**R: We'll be taking a picture of that in the shop. That's kind of a hangout for the Sturgeon for Tomorrow guys that I think he hangs around with. What are some of the other things that you have made, like, you said you made spears. How did you make your spears?**

B: I was a tool and die maker at Triangle Manufacturing Company so I had access to all the machines and I made some flying barbs, flying barb spears. I made a few out of pitchforks but that was years back. Nowadays most of the people like a flying barb so I've made I don't know how many.

**R: Why do they like a flying barb?**

B: Well, it's easier to get out. In other words when they spear the fish the barbs, you can take em apart and slide em through the fish. Where the other ones, you gotta cut a bigger hole and yank it back out. They are more convenient I guess, to use.

And some of the guys use a spear with a wood handle. They say they fly better. I have both. I have one with a wood handle on it and I also have one with a pipe handle on it. It's hollow and I got it weighted with lead. It doesn't fly too bad. You get pros and cons, you know.

**R: You target your spear, like putting a plate down on the bottom and throw at the...?**

B: Yeah, we used to take and...

**R: See how they fly?**

B: Throw a milk jug down there. Fill it with water and put em down there and see how they fly.

**R: What's the object of that? Is there something...?**

B: Well it gives you some idea of what your spear does. You know what I mean? I haven't done it for a long time.

**R: Once you know how it flies...**

B: Once you know how it flies you don't have to, you know. You guess. But it doesn't fly the same every time you throw it. Because you're throwing it different each time you throw it. You're not throwing it the same way. You know you got variations. You might throw it a little harder or you might throw it a little softer. You might throw it on an angle.

**R: What has been your experience, have most of your fish been speared straight up and down?**

B: Straight down. Straight up and down.

**R: Which you prefer for accuracy?**

B: Yeah.

**R: How do you keep your shanty warm?**

B: We got a gas heater. Years ago the first ones we had were kerosene. I'll take that back. The first one was wood heater. But they were messy, big and heavy and blah, blah, blah. To move the shanty we used to take the stove out and blah, blah, blah. And then we had a kerosene heater. Well some days it would work and some days it wouldn't work. And so then we graduated to these little gas milkhouse heaters. And I used that for awhile. Now I have a ... The modern one, its got a thermostat on it and the whole ball of wax. They're much better.

**R: After you get done spearing what do you guys, do you guys meet at a tavern or something?**

B: Yeah, we go to the tavern and get in all the contests before. The day before, we cut usually on Thursday. You can cut Thursday.

**R: When you say cut, you have a certain kind of way you make the hole or what?**

B: I built a sled saw of my own.

**R: So you also make sled saws.**

B: I built my own sled saw and I would dare say you could cut a hole in about five to seven minutes with it. And there's no chopping. You just go and put the chain down and it cuts through the ice and you just shove it like a snow blower. And you back up and go around the four sides. And it's on an angle. I have it on a twelve-degree angle so that when you cut the ice you can shove the block under. It doesn't wedge. If you cut em straight then sometimes they'll freeze back as fast as you...

**R: I imagine you can also see further out with an angle cut rather than an edge, the bottom edge of the ice.**

B: Right. You got an angle in that hole and if you set your shanty on there just right and cut the hole right, you don't see any ice inside the shanty at all, you know. That's a plus too.

**R: You must be cutting the ice hole a little bigger than the hole that's in the shanty.**

B: Right, that's in the shanty. Well my shanty's got a little border on the sides and then on the ends you got quite a bit of leeway there. You can adjust the shanty over the hole so that you don't even see the ice.

**R: Are your shanties all rubber roofed?**

B: They're all rubber roofed. They are all aluminum sheeted.

**R: No maintenance on the outside.**

B: No maintenance on the outside at all.

**R: Do you, before the spearing activity actually starts do you go out and scout too?**

B: Yeah. Sometimes we've gone out and scouted the water clarity mostly.

**R: How do you check for water clarity?**

B: We drill a hole and we got a plastic cup. Some guys got a little saucer or whatever they put down. And we lay on the ice and put a blanket over your head and you let it down until you can't see it. Then you bring it up and measure on the string how far down you could see. I can remember years you couldn't see down two feet. It was terrible.

**R: So you think the water clarity has been better?**

B: Oh, water clarity is one hundred percent better than in some years.

**R: What's the deepest that you could see the bottom that you can recall?**

B: Like I said when I got my first fish, one of the first years I was fishing, eighteen feet you could see the bottom. It was off the big island.

**R: Was it clear?**

B: It was real clear. It was gin clear.

**R: And that's all muck?**

B: That was mud bottom. Yup.

**R: Do you see other species when you're fishing?**

B: Oh yeah. You see everything, you know. Walleyes, perch. I've seen carp, big northerns. You see all the species. A lot of shad now.



**R: Now that you got this fish, what do you do with the fish?**

B: Well, I smoke my own fish. And I smoke, well I smoke all the fish that we get in our group. I got into smokin fish oh, a long time back. And I got my own little smokehouse and I experimented years and years with different brines and I have my brine down now. Everybody likes it. I smoke chickens, turkeys, ducks and you name it. Salmon, and I smoke our sturgeon when we get em.

**R: How do you prepare a fish for smoking?**

B: Well you cut it in pieces crossways like steak and that. About two inches wide I cut em. And you wash em good. And we cut em up before we put em in the freezer. And I freeze mine in water because I don't like that dry freezing because I think it takes away from the quality of the fish. Then when I get em out of the freezer I thaw em out and when you thaw em out it takes all that black stuff on the outside off. They're squeaky clean when you get em done. Then I brine em.

**R: What is brine?**

B: Well the brine is a salt. I put brown sugar in my brine and molasses. And I put a curing agent, [prog] one or two powder in there to kill the bacteria. And also it helps the shelf life on the fish. You can keep it a little bit longer. And I soak it twelve to fourteen hours.

**R: When you make your brine do you float an egg in it?**

B: No.

**R: How do you determine how much...?**

B: I determine, I have a salt meter I used to use. And now I just measure it. It's all measured right the same brine every time I smoke.

**R: Now how long do you soak this?**

B: Twelve to fourteen hours. You mentioned the egg thing. I don't like the egg thing because some eggs don't float the same. They don't all float the same. It comes close for some guys but you can also get it too salty.

**R: Your history has proven that the amount that you measure...**

B: I measure the same amount each time I do it. The same brine. It has never changed.

**R: I understand you also make caviar.**

B: Yes I do.

**R: Explain the process of making caviar.**

B: It's a lengthy process. You also have to have the utensils to make it with. You know what I mean; the screens. I made a box with a plastic screen on it. It's the eighth inch mesh. I also have a screen that is a quarter-inch mesh.

And I take the eggs and I separate the big part of the membrane out of there. You pull it out of there you know and get it so that the eggs are separated so you can run it through the screen. Then I put it in the screen and I take my hand and I kinda swish em back and forth lightly and the eggs will go through the screen and all the membrane will stay on the screen. So then I take and...

**R: How many times do you do that?**

B: I do that twice so that I make sure I get all the stuff out of em. And then I got this sixteenth inch screen. I put em in there and I run em through there and that takes out the real fine stuff. Then I wash em.

**R: Well, are all the eggs, when you get em out of the fish, are they the same circumference?**

B: No, I don't think so. Out of the fish when you get em, fish for fish they are but not that much that you could notice it.

**R: They'll all fit through that...?**

B: They will all fit through that screen.

**R: The quarter inch mesh screen. This is just like a box with a screen on the bottom?**

B: Screen on the bottom, yeah. And then I take and wash em. I clean the screen off and I put em in another colander that I have. It's got little slots and holes in it. And I run it through there. And I rinse em all off and I let em drain. And then I put my salt to em. Weigh my salt and weigh the eggs. And then I mix em and let em stand about ten, fifteen minutes. Then I mix em again and they're done. I put em in pint jars and I put em in the freezer. I like em better fresh. But freezing keeps em because the shelf life on those isn't that long. You know what I mean?

**R: Because there's not enough what, preservative in em?**

B: Well I don't think that – the salt preserves them but you have a chance of getting mold on em. I noticed – I kept some in the refrigerator in the basement to find out what would happen to them if you kept them – you know how long – they get moldy after awhile so you gotta throw em away.

And if you put em in the freezer, they don't taste as good, the quality isn't there but they're not bad. You know what I mean? It keeps em from getting moldy.

**R: Do you eat all of em? I mean are they rich?**

B: Well they're rich, yeah. I mean I eat em. People come over, I have caviar. And then I give em, most of the time I give em back to the guy, I keep half, maybe even sometimes less than half for doin em for the guy. But then I give em away. Ron Brooks, I give him some and I give the guys that come, you know, a jar here and there. And it doesn't take long and all of a sudden they're gone.

**R: Have you made all these old, these screens on your own?**

B: Yeah. I have a couple boughten ones but the boxes with the big screen on, I made my own. I got a pan that I put em on and I made the screen and the box to fit on this stainless steel pan that I have and it works pretty good.

**R: How many pounds do you normally get out of a fish?**

B: You probably get eighteen to twenty pounds out of a big fish. Sometimes more, like twenty-five.

**R: Like how many million eggs is that?**

B: Well I don't even have a clue. It's got to be millions and millions of eggs.

**R: Do they come out of a sac or what?**

B: They're kinda like in membrane, yeah. They're in a sac in the fish. There's a membrane that they get their blood or whatever from the female. And they're all attached to this membrane by the millions, you know.

**R: Do they have to be a certain color?**

B: Well, yeah. The best ones are the black. The blacker they are, the better they are. That means that they're ripe to spawn. There's sometimes that you get some that are gray. If you get some that are a real light gray or on the yellowish-white side you can't do those. I've never done em but I imagine somebody's tried it, you know. But the best are the black ones.

**R: Later on we'll go out to the shop and take pictures of all these things that you made because Dick is a rather clever fellow. He likes to make it on his own. As you go through this here sturgeon spearing business, how did you you get involved with Sturgeon For Tomorrow?**

B: They started Sturgeon for Tomorrow across the lake over at Pike or Malone area. And then they branched off from there and the Fond du Lac group started down at Fond du Lac. And I went to their banquet and Appleton started and I went to their banquet. Anyway one day we're sitting somewhere having a beer or whatever it was and I was talking to this other guy and I said, "You know, I think we need a Sturgeon For Tomorrow chapter in Oshkosh. We got enough people and they're goin to these other banquets. Why don't we start a chapter?"

So we went to a meeting across the lake. We call it the main chapter. They were the ones that started it back in '76 or something, I can't remember exactly when it was. Well thirty years ago, what would that be? Yeah, it'd be '76, about there. Anyway a couple of us went over there, three of us went over to the meeting and we mentioned that we would like to start a chapter in Oshkosh. And they said, "Fine. We're behind you 100%." And we asked em how they got started and the main chapter across the lake, they got started from a donation from a guy that owned [Blaine's] Supper club. And I said, "Well, we'd have to go out and [solicit support] from somebody." Well they said, "Tell you what we'll do. We'll give you twelve hundred bucks to start and you could pay us back." So I said, "Okay." So we got twelve hundred dollars from em and we started our banquet. We didn't know how many people we were gonna have. We didn't have a clue. And we sent out applications to sports clubs and blah, blah blah. And I daresay we had almost seven hundred the first year, down at the Convention Center in Oshkosh. And I never in my wildest dreams thought it would be that big. And the then the next year we had the same or maybe a little more people, you know. And it grew

from seven hundred people but now it's fallen off. It's kinda, most banquets are backing down. People don't have the money and I think the area is saturated with banquets. And people are getting sick of it.

**R: Sports banquets.**

B: Sports banquets are a dime a dozen these days.

**R: You raised all this money, these chapters. What do you do for money?**

B: The four chapters raise well, the money that we raise we donate to the DNR for projects. Now the projects can be fish projects, they can be habitat projects, it can be projects on the river like riprapping projects.

**R: Sturgeon related?**

B: All sturgeon related. But also the other fish species benefit by what we do. We're also in research with Fred [Benkowski] who runs the lab down at the Great Lakes Water Institute in Milwaukee. He's a professor down there and he raises fish in his lab. And we got hooked up with Fred and he's raising sturgeon down there for us.

**R: What do they do with these sturgeon?**

B: The sturgeon are put in the Fox and the Wolf River. Now the Fox River, we have a project going on the Fox where they're putting radio tags in em and they're monitoring their movements. And their habitat; where they move from and how they move to.

**R: How do they monitor them? Is something implanted in the fish?**

B: They have a radio implant in the fish and it sends off a signal and they have these scanners that pick it up along the river. And they're also doing it from the air. They have a DNR plane and they have a monitor in the DNR plane and they fly over the lake and they can pick up those radio-tagged fish. It's worked out pretty good. They get a lot of results like how far this fish travels, where they stay, do they stay in one place, blah, blah blah. How long does it take em to go from the river to the lake.

**R: How long do these monitors last in a fish?**

B: Now some of em I think are good for two or three years. The first ones out were for maybe only a year or so if they were lucky.

**R: How big are these fish when they install the monitors?**

B: The fish are probably twelve to fourteen inches, the small ones. But some of em are up to two feet long maybe, thirty inches. He has some down there that are larger that he's also put tags in but most of em are the smaller, I would say below three feet. Around the three foot area. And they also put a lot of fish in without the tags. Now we're into the raising fish at the hatchery at Wild Rose also. We give em \$5,000.00, we've been giving em \$5,000.00 a year for the food to feed the sturgeon. And those sturgeon are sent all over the United States for their projects. Some are sent for rehabilitation

of lakes and streams that the sturgeon is non-existent. Some of em are new, put in lakes and rivers for experimental purposes to see if they'll take.

**R: The DNR is doing a lot of stuff up in Green Bay in the bay. Are the sturgeon being used up there too, the planting of em?**

B: They are also planting em in the Great Lakes, yeah. They put some in Green Bay, they put some up by Lake Superior in the river up there. I think it was the St. Louis River. They put em in there so those fish go into Lake Superior.

They just started a program in Milwaukee that they're puttin em in the Milwaukee River. They cleaned up the Milwaukee River and I think they dumped some in there that are going to go into Lake Michigan. So it's an ongoing project.

**R: These fish are, there's no spearing season.**

B: Yet, in those areas. No.

**R: How big will they grow to?**

B: Well I imagine they would grow as big as they get in Winnebago. Up to two hundred pounds. There are some in the lake that they say are over two hundred pounds.

**R: In Lake Winnebago?**

B: In Lake Winnebago, yeah. Now getting back to our money. Our money is also used for riprapping.

**R: What is riprapping?**

B: Rip rapping is the rebuilding the shorelines and keeping the water from scouring out holes and washing away riverbanks.

**R: It actually keeps the water cleaner.**

B: It keeps the water cleaner also. We put some big projects like the one at Shiocton on what do the call it, the bend up there. It's right on Highway 54. It's just right in Shiocton. That was a big project. We were in there with the state and the county and federal I think, and Sturgeon For Tomorrow donated a lot of money.

**R: Were you involved in any of this international activity that they had the big pow-wow here years ago?**

B: Yeah, you mean here in Oshkosh? They had the national symposium, sturgeon symposium. We were involved. We were like hosts. And we attended some of the meetings. And we had a fish fry out to the fish camp. There was about a hundred and twenty – thirty people that we fried fish for em.

**R: Fried sturgeon?**

B: No, perch. No they were walleyes, I'll take that back. Walleye fry we had for em. And we donated some of the money for that. I think we're into about five or six hundred thousand that we've donated over thirty years.

**R: That's quite a large amount of money.**

B: Yes it is.

**R: In conclusion Dick, what have you gained by all this spearing and the activity with Sturgeon for Tomorrow? Personally what has it meant to you?**

B: Well I think the biggest thing is the satisfaction that I get seeing that they are controlling the sturgeon population by re-propagation and laws that they've made and whatever. And it's satisfying to see that we are doing something. Now we've helped the state out where they can't fund some of these projects so I mean it makes you feel good to do it. You know what I'm saying? And I don't have any regrets that I spent hours, and hours and years on workin with the state on Sturgeon for Tomorrow. It's been a lengthy thing but it's been enjoyable.

**R: Has your wife been involved in this?**

B: My wife is just as active as I am. She is very active. She does a lot of the legwork and the paper work and the appointments. You name it, Pat does it. You know she's very helpful.

**R: I can say this with surety that Dick has got the same memory that I have so Pat is his right hand person.**

**What are you planning on doing with all this now? Are you going to pass it on?**

B: Well I'm going to have to pass it on because I'm getting old, let's face it. And my health is changing so I have to pass it on to somebody someday. Sturgeon for Tomorrow and also the projects that I do and work on. And my thinking. I have to find somebody that would carry it on that I'm going to be happy with. I think there's somebody out there. There's always, you're always replaceable. I mean you're not infallible. Somebody's going to take your place.

**R: What would you like to say to people who are interested in getting into spearing? What do they have to do and how much is it going to cost? How should they get started?**

B: I would say, hook up with somebody that's doing it and then go out and do it with em. You know what I mean? Go out in the shanty and spend a weekend out there with em. And start by cutting the hole when you first set up and blah, blah blah. And then talk to them and find out what it costs.

**R: What does it cost? A ball park figure.**

B: I would say, ball park figures? The spear is a hundred to a hundred fifty dollars.

**R: And you have to have one or two?**

B: I would have two. I would have one good one and one back-up. And a saw. Nowadays it's a chain saw.

You have to buy the chain saw to cut the hole. Nobody cuts it by hand anymore unless he's a giant. But I think the chain saw is going to cost you five or six hundred dollars by the time you get set up.

The shanties, you could get a shanty for I would say from two-fifty on up to, the ones that I'm making now I wouldn't sell for less than twelve hundred dollars. It's whatever you want. And then you've got to have a vehicle to pull the shanty and you've got to have... The shanty with the heater and the blah, blah blah; all the equipment in there I would say would be twelve to fourteen hundred dollars if you want one that's on wheels.

**R: What do they sell decoys for?**

B: Decoys are forty, forty-five dollars. Some of em are. You should have two, three decoys different colors.

**R: How do you dress for this?**

B: When you cut the holes and you're out in the elements you have to dress like you're hunting. In other words it's cold. You know what I'm saying? It's cold and, but once you get the shanty set up, you got the heater in there. It's warm enough to sit in your street clothes. But you still gotta be able to dress to go back and forth. If you have to go out and get in your car, you get stuck with your truck or whatever, you still have to dress according to the elements.

**R: And when you are in the shanty I take it, it's warm.**

B: The shanty is warm. If you have a good heating system and it's insulated, the shanties I make are insulated, so it's fairly warm in there.

**R: Is there anything you want to caution people on?**

B: Well the biggest caution is the ice conditions. I think you gotta watch the ice conditions because Lake Winnebago is not friendly. When it comes to safety you have to watch the open holes. I've seen years when its been below zero and cold. And I have a friend that flies an airplane and we used to go up and look the lake over before sturgeon fishing and one year...

**R: Mr. Corbett?**

B: Kenny Corbett. He's the flying warden. He was a flying warden for the DNR. Anyway we went over the lake that one year. There were ten, twelve large open holes and it was below zero weather. So I mean the lake is changing. I haven't seen, I can't remember that we never had ice on Thanksgiving Day. Very seldom. But now we don't get ice until after the first of the year sometimes. If we're lucky. Some years we don't get over six or eight inches on the lake. And you have to go with four-wheelers. So I can see the changes in my sixty years of fishing. I've seen the changes on the Winnebago change. Like right now, I'm sitting here in my kitchen lookin out on the lake and it's December 1<sup>st</sup> and it's wide open. There's not a speck of ice on the lake. I mean years ago when I was a kid we were skating on the lake at Thanksgiving time. So those are the changes.

The lake is the number one thing you have to watch.

**R: Well, we'll see you on the ice.**

B: I'll be there.

**R: Thank you Dick.**

B: You betcha.

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